

# *The early christian basilica of Agios Stephanos at Agidia, Naxos: architectural observations*

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## **Abstract**

Σκοπός του άρθρου είναι η παρουσίαση των επιτόπιων και διάσπαρτων ευρημάτων που σχετίζονται με το μνημείο της βασιλικής των Αγγιδίων στη Νάξο, τεκμήρια τα οποία οδήγησαν στον καθορισμό των οικοδομικών φάσεων του μνημείου και στη σύνταξη των σχεδίων αποκατάστασης των οικοδομικών φάσεων του. Σχολιάζεται το φαινόμενο της μεταφοράς μαρμάρων από την Πάρο στη Νάξο για τις ανάγκες του έργου και η επίπτωση που είχε αυτή η επιλογή στην εικόνα του εσωτερικού χώρου της Βασιλικής καθώς επίσης, εξετάζεται το ευρύτερο φαινόμενο της ανέγερσης των βασιλικών την περίοδο γύρω στον 6ο αι στη Νάξο.

The Basilica of Agios Stephanos<sup>1</sup> is a unique monument that bridges the ancient and Byzantine history of the island of Naxos (**fig. 1**). It declares emphatically the historical continuity of a place of worship through time under different circumstances. The consecutive constructions reflect, in an impressive way, the continuous adaptation of the religious building to the means of each period, crystallizing the existing cultural, social and economic conditions. Agios Stephanos is located close to Chora, at an altitude of approximately 35 m above sea level. In the immediate vicinity of the ruin are two other important monuments for the history of Naxos, a part of the ancient aqueduct to the east and the church of the medieval Fraro<sup>2</sup> monastery to the west.

The large number of basilicas<sup>3</sup> on the islands of the Aegean Sea<sup>4</sup> generally and in Naxos particularly, date to around the 5th and 6th centuries AD (**fig. 2**), and their architectural quality reflect stability and prosperity. In many cases, these great buildings were initially created by the slight modification

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1. Thanks are due to Professor V. Lambrinouidakis, who has conducted the programme, for his confidence and cooperation. Thanks are also due to the former directors of the 2nd Ephorate of the Ministry of Culture E. Dellaporta and C. Pennas, to our colleague the archaeologist A. Sfyroera, who coordinated the work with admirable conscientiousness as also the archaeologists M. Tsafou and M. Vogli of the 2nd Ephorate for their contribution. This publication constitutes a first and brief presentation of the architectural development of the Basilica.

2. The declaration of Fraro as a historic monument by the Ministry of Culture reveals its historical value: "We declare the Church of the Annunciation, known as Fraro, at Chora, Naxos, in Cyclades Prefecture, on the road to Agidia, and the surrounding area within a radius of 100m, as a historic monument. It is a Catholic monastery of the Franciscan order (known as Annunciata), which was built in the 14th century and played a significant role in the life of the Venetians of Naxos. The coats of arms of Venice are presented in reliefs on the lintel of the entrance to the courtyard while on the lintel of the church's door the coats of arms of Naxos are displayed. As a young monk, Pope Sixtus of Rome was once at the Monastery." ΥΑ ΥΠΠΟ/ΑΡΧ/Β1/Φ27/41279/1167/8-8-1995 - ΦΕΚ 799/Β/14-9-1995 in: [\(http://listedmonuments.culture.gr/fek.php?ID\\_FEKYA=8238\)](http://listedmonuments.culture.gr/fek.php?ID_FEKYA=8238)(16.3.2018).

3. For instance, around 50 basilicas are recorded on Lesvos, 14 on Kos, 38 on Crete. See Bouras (1984), p. 48.

4. Bouras (2003), p. 20 and Korres (2001), p. 21.

of existing ancient temples as at Palatia,<sup>5</sup> Yria,<sup>6</sup> and Gyroulas I. Probably a little later, new ambitious programmes were undertaken and large-scale buildings for the new religion appeared. One of these is Agios Stephanos, as also Agios Matthaïos and Gyroulas II. However, in very few cases can the studies of basilicas be considered satisfactory,<sup>7</sup> since the lack of data complicates the effort.

In 1960, the ancient columns that were still standing at Agidia, visible above the ground, intrigued K. Kalokyris to conduct a small-scale excavation.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, despite the great interest that the site aroused, the place has never been expropriated by the state leaving the monument unprotected until recent years (**fig. 3**). After nearly forty years, G. Gruben studied the monument and published the results of his work in an article<sup>9</sup> focusing on the marble columns. He considered that the columns of the Basilica of Agios Stephanos had been transported from the Sanctuary of Hestia on Paros and that the unfluted column, still standing at Agios Stephanos, was of Proconnesian marble. He also presented a plan in which he distinguished two phases of construction of the church. As for the dating of the second phase, G. Dimitrokallis<sup>10</sup> had expressed reservations. For this research, measurements were taken of some columns, of a few Ionic capitals identified in Naxos Town, and of some marbles on Paros. He considered that all these architectural parts initially belonged to the same complex. Probably this monument, after being dismantled, was exploited as building material for reuse; as happened also at Delos, where the Venetians took advantage of the abundant available marbles.

In 2003, under the project “Conservation and presentation of the ancient aqueduct of Naxos”<sup>11</sup> conducted by the University of Athens,<sup>12</sup> the authors executed a systematic architectural documentation<sup>13</sup> of the basilica. For the first time, the layout and elevations of the monument were executed (**fig. 4**). For the needs of this study, a small-scale excavation took place in 2006, in special collaboration with the Ministry of Culture (2nd Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities), which finally revealed the real extent of the ruin and allowed the creation of a precise plan. The architectural documentation of the excavation illuminated the main architectural features of the Early Christian basilica, such as its general proportions, exact dimensions and the number of internal columns. Meanwhile, the co-examination of all evidence revealed in detail the sequence of different churches that had been erected in the same place, and especially, the existence of a later church, unknown till then. The project was completed in 2008 with a small-scale restoration, to help the understanding of the general plan of the monument.<sup>14</sup>

Although the investigation of 2005-7 uncovered many hitherto unknown features of Agios

5. Welter (1924), pp. 17-25; Kontoleon (1960), pp. 468-69; Gruben (1972), pp. 319-79.

6. Ohnesorg (2012), pp. 98-99 and Abb. 4a.

7. In the case of Gyroulas, a stone-by-stone study and excavation were conducted, taking advantage of the detailed study of the archaic temple, Lambrinouidakis *et al.* (1976), pp. 299-308, pl. 197-98 and Korres (2001), pp. 21-26, fig. 21. Excavation has also taken place at Agios Matthaïos near Plaka, Lambertz (2001), pp. 379-408. We can mention also the research of Lambertz in Palatia, Lambertz (2007), pp. 21-26. Recent archaeological research excluded Fotodotis from the list of Early Christian basilicas in Naxos, Aslanidis (2014), pp. 60-84.

8. Kalokyris (1960), p. 264.

9. Gruben (1999), pp. 296-317.

10. Dimitrokallis (2000), p. 11.

11. This project was based on the documentation of the monument, which at first was the detection and location of the remaining parts of the aqueduct on a map of the island, at a scale of 1: 5000, and the gathering of relevant information, by V. Lambrinouidakis, M. Magnisali and T. Bilis. See Bilis (2010), p. 28.

12. 16-18 December 2003 (archaeologist G. Ivou).

13. Sfyroera (2010), p. 27.

14. Today the partial restoration highlights the architectural history of this important monument, see Bilis (2010), p. 28. Restoration must be considered the final phase in scientific research. It is of crucial importance since in this way the monument “returns”, readable to the scientific society but also to the local and even more the global community. With the final presentation of the site, the usual “research for the sake of research” became “research for the sake of the public”, or better yet, “research for the sake of the monument”. The scientific community has to start to pay back the benefits it receives from the monuments to the monuments.

Stephanos, traces from earlier buildings were not found. Some scholars believed that there was an ancient building beneath the foundations of the basilica, but the excavation has confirmed G. Gruben's supposition that no other ancient building existed on the site.<sup>15</sup> During and soon after the end of the excavation, brief descriptions of the monument, unfortunately not always correct, were published<sup>16</sup> by other scholars of Naxian architecture. After the completion of the project, some marbles were detected and identified by T. Bilis in a private house in the Castle of Naxos.<sup>17</sup> These marbles belonged, without question, to the group that had been used in the basilica. This finding makes even more obvious the fact that the church's material scattered and was reused for later constructions on Naxos.

The reuse of the architectural material for other constructions, during an era in which quarry methods were beyond the abilities of medieval communities,<sup>18</sup> was not the only cause for the poor condition of the monument. Intensive soil disturbance had begun in the Middle Byzantine era with numerous burials and radical transformations of the place. Later serious damage was made due to large-scale works for agricultural purposes, and finally by the opening of a private road through the ruins destroying large parts of the masonry. Therefore, inevitably, the investigation focused on details of the very few findings. The careful study of even small fragments of mortar or marks carved on stones offered the new data that allowed the graphic restoration of the building. After the recent research, it is obvious that the Basilica extends four times the area known from Kalokyris' excavation (**fig. 5**).

The Basilica is situated on a smooth rocky slope in an area where the granite meets alluvial deposits.<sup>19</sup> The ruins in general decline towards the southwest where only scattered traces of the walls are visible on the bedrock. A thin layer of soil (10 to 40 cm) was covering the crumbly rock. An area of almost 250 square metres has been excavated south and mainly west of the ruin. Numerous burials were discovered in a zone of 7 m west after the end of the previous excavation. Beyond that, the road had destroyed everything for about 3 meters. Nevertheless, precious evidence has emerged further west and north when the excavation was extended confirming the architectural expectation for the plan.

Briefly, as the excavation has revealed, the first building was an Early Christian three-aisle basilica (I). Then, a smaller cross-in-square church (II) of the Middle Byzantine era was erected that occupied only the northeast part of the earlier basilica. For this building, new apses were constructed. Finally, an even smaller building, a two-aisle vaulted church (III), succeeded the previous one by the conversion of the northern part of Church II. This continuous reuse of materials from the successive buildings is interesting. Except for the use of ancient marbles in the construction of the basilica, an enormous quantity of tuff<sup>20</sup> was also imported from the Cyclades, probably from Melos for the vault construction. Furthermore, partially shaped granite<sup>21</sup>

15. Gruben (1999), p. 312.

16. For example, the published plan of the basilica in Mastoropoulos (2006), fig. 59. See also notes 23, 26 in this article.

17. G. Gruben had already indicated the phenomenon of marble dispersion. See also Ohnesorg (2005), p. 147, fig. 11, 12, pl. 33b, 33c.

18. Korres (2001), p. 22.

19. Higgins and Higgins (1996), pp. 179 and fig. 15.6 p. 178.

20. Tuff is a volcanic rock in various colours (red, black, green). Lambropoulos (1993), pp. 1-2. Its use is associated with the construction of domes and niches. On all the Cycladic islands, such stones were used repeatedly due to the great ease of working because of their negligible hardness and light weight. On Naxos, these stones had already been imported by the Early Christian era for buildings of great importance, such as the Basilica of Gyroulas, mainly for the niche. During the Byzantine period, the use of this material and of elaborate limestone slabs in building construction continued, probably reusing the material (domes of the basilicas at Apalirou, Agios Mamas Potamia, and Agios Akepsimas). The precious material was reused continuously over a long period in humble churches.

21. Granite is an igneous plutonic rock with granular fabric. Misopolinos (1990), p.137. Granite also has been used early, even in the Geometric period on Naxos in a multitude of structures. Granite continued to be used throughout ancient times mainly in the areas around which it abounds (north and west parts of the island). A typical example is the precinct of the Sanctuary of Yria. These stones have been reused in Naxos for centuries in several constructions, such as Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches as well as in rough rural constructions.

and schist<sup>22</sup> stones were collected from the site. More rarely, bricks appear in the mass of the north wall of the church.

The Basilica (**fig. 6**), with general external dimensions measuring almost 13 by 23 m (12.70 x 23.35 m), belongs to the main group of basilicas having a ratio of 3:5 according to its general proportion (width to length). It was a three-aisle basilica (2 x 5)<sup>23</sup> since two rows of five columns divided the aisles. The columns were crowned by Ionic capitals supporting, most probably, a straight entablature. The apse was semicircular, protruding from the eastern wall of the building. There were no pastophoria near the apse or galleries above the rear aisles. The roof was made of timber. Its construction implies an accuracy of execution as far as it can be discerned. No traces of a synthronon, like those of Agios Matthaios and Protothronos, are visible but the apse is preserved to a very low height. Neither were there traces of a synthronon at the Basilica of Gyroulas, while at Yria, the church does not even have a semicircular apse.

Despite the great number of marbles that remained in situ, only a few were found with decoration related directly to their religious character. Most of the estimated large quantity of marbles that once ornamented the church were systematically removed, and must have been incorporated into other buildings, mainly at Chora. Consequently, the quest for a precise chronology based on a comparison of decorative details raises difficulties.

Regarding the design of the Early Christian basilica, research has identified the placement of its columns and walls. Evidence for the foundations of four of the five columns was discovered in areas C4, D4 and E4. At location 1 (square C4), on a thick layer of mortar, there was a circular trace measuring 52 cm in diameter, the footprint of a marble base like that observed at Gyroulas.<sup>24</sup> In locations 2 and 3 (squares C4 - D4), there were found in situ marble column bases, placed on the bedrock with mortar, and in location 4 (square E4) there was the trace of a circular cutting on the bedrock for the placement of another base and column. As also observed at Gyroulas, these bases were not intended to be visible, since they were placed under the floor of the basilica.

Considering the foundations and the axial distance between columns, it is proven that there was no stylobate and that the columns were carrying beams and not arches. The unusually wide distance between columns (3.46 m) confirms this conclusion, since in surviving basilicas, the height of the columns is greater than the axial distance between them. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the extremely wide distance between the columns created an impressively spacious interior, making this basilica a truly outstanding example of its era.

From the first study in 2003, it became quite clear that the north wall was the result of more than one construction phase. A discontinuity observed along the mass of the wall revealed that its thickness<sup>25</sup> of 115 cm was the result of a prosthetic procedure. To the south face of the first wall, which had a thickness of 75 cm (Church I), a later thinner wall of 40 cm had been added, according to the lime plaster of the first wall, still present between the two phases. Some ruins of the wall that were found after the excavation in squares E2, E3, Z3 and H3 (**fig. 4**), have confirmed that the long north wall belongs to the Early Christian

22. The material schist or psaropetra or gneiss is a metamorphic rock, which has the characteristic feature of parallel layers of mineralogical ingredients, thus it can be easily separated in blocks. It has a brownish tint. The rock is found over a large area of the island and it is the most common building material for stonework in both formal and anonymous architecture. On Naxos, small stones of this type are used mainly in walls which are usually coated with mortar, and large slabs in building traditional paths.

23. In the description of the basilica type and in the drawing published by A. Ohnesorg, the idea of the existence of a narthex on the west is introduced. Ohnesorg (2012), n. 51, p. 107 and fig. 4, p. 101. Supporting this supposition are the appearance in the north wall of some traces of plaster masonry as well as traces of floor coating 3.15 m from the inner face of the west wall. These remains, however, are not related to the basilica's walls: excavations show that they are only parts from one of the numerous graves on the site.

24. Perhaps this is indicative of the activity of a specific team. The skill required to found heavy columns on the ground surpasses the construction knowledge of rural communities.

25. Even in a later phase, if we assume the existence of a vaulted Byzantine basilica, such a thickness is excessive. Examples of vaulted basilicas in Naxos: Agios Isidoros Rachis with wall thickness of 0.60 m, Byzantine Basilica of Agios Ioannis at Afikli, Apeiranthos with thickness of existing walls approximately 0.70 m.

basilica (Church I) and that this wall was built on levelled bedrock that formed a step, of 20-30 cm height. Lime plaster also covered the inner face of the wall as also the upper surface of this step. The dimensions of the step, presumably a bench belonging to the basilica (Church I), directly correlate with the increase of the wall thickness for the construction of Church II. It is interesting that this new wall was placed directly on the bench; this is still detectable on the inner face of the north wall close to the apse after careful observation of a faint horizontal mortar joint on the wall. The remains of the wall of Church I discovered in square Z3 confirmed the exact thickness of the wall as 75 cm. In square H3, a part of wall that has been identified extends north for 1.00 m. Two small stones, still in situ, indicate the external line of the north wall. Further south, in square H4 a levelling of the bedrock and a tiny fragment of mortar stuck on it, which fortunately has survived even after the removal of the stone that was covering it gave valuable evidence for the internal line of the west wall. From the correlation of all this new data, the thickness of the west wall was determined to be exactly 60 cm. No other evidence associated with this was found during the examination of the southern part; the machinery used to open the private road had scraped the crumbly bedrock, destroying permanently any traces (Z4) left of the construction.

Evidence for the south wall came to light in squares B4 and C4. There, traces of its foundation made of small stones and thick mortar were discovered. These small stones formed the substructure for large stones that were the first layer of the masonry, long since disappeared. The thickness of the south wall was confirmed to be 60 cm. Also, squares C4 and D4 revealed the trace of a bench, 50 cm wide and almost 2 m long, which, like the one at the north, is in contact with the inner face of the south wall. These traces were preserved in contact with the bedrock surface.<sup>26</sup>

No new data came to light in the apses during the excavation. For a length of 9.50 m, four apses of different sizes are visible (fig. 7). The largest apse belongs to the basilica (Church I) with an inner diameter of 4.20 m. It is constructed of large (weighing up to 700 kg) and small stones<sup>27</sup> with the insertion of mortar. Three much smaller apses are situated in the same area, two partially laid inside the large one. These apses belong to Church II. The one in the middle is slightly larger (inner diameter of 2.00 m) than the other two (inner diameter of 1.40 m). Of these apses, only the northern two have built altars, an element that refers to the later Church III.

In square E3 (fig. 4), between two hypothetical columns of the basilica, a wall measuring 50 cm in width and approximately 3.00 m in length was revealed. This wall, parallel to the main axis of Church I, had plaster on both long sides and can be explained as a barrier separating the central aisle, facilitating also the ceremonial service. It should be noted that its ruin has survived because of its incorporation in a grave of the Middle Byzantine period.

This study allows the following conclusions: From the comparison of the general dimensions as well as of the elements of the building, we conclude that the length of the foot used in its design and construction is equal to 30 cm. This gives an interior width of 37 ½ feet and length of 73 feet. The main structural elements of the building obey an *emvatis* of 3.46<sup>28</sup> (East-West) and 3.00 (North-South), or 11 ½ x 10 feet, which offers the construction grid.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, this conclusion provides the intercolumniation of the internal colonnades, the width of the apse and the axial distance between the walls of the long sides. Additionally, a 1/3 of this module defines the position of the external faces of the

26. According to A. Ohnesorg, the dimensions of the basilica are confirmed by preserved masonry in the southwest and southeast corners of the building, Ohnesorg (2012), p. 107. However, crucial remains of the west wall near the northwest corner and other traces of the southeast corner were only revealed by excavation. As for the southwest masonry on the site, it is clearly the result of recent restoration.

27. This construction method has been very common in the Cyclades for centuries.

28. The phenomenon of several sizes of *emvatis* perhaps relates to the reuse of some beams with specific dimensions in the colonnade.

29. Respectively, the very close-size (3.40 m) defines the grid of the plan of a Late Roman building at Epidaurus. See T. Bilis (2007), pp. 72-73.

east and west walls. This organization of the building's design reflects the continuation of the Roman building tradition.

The architectural material (**fig. 8**) from the site, found at Chora by T. Bilis, includes part of an Ionic column and two Ionic capitals, one of which is in fragmentary form.<sup>30</sup> The other Ionic capital is preserved in satisfactory condition and is similar to the two capitals identified by Gruben in the Catholic Archbishop's house.

One of the most interesting marbles from the site (**fig. 9**) is a large fragment decorated on the front with a cross with suffixes in a rectangular frame by simple bands (**fig. 9, A.S.2**). It is probably part of a sarcophagus, the date of which, based on its resemblance to two other marble fragments with an identical type of cross now in the Byzantine Museum of Chora, can be estimated in the 8th-9th century.<sup>31</sup> It is obviously of a much inferior quality than the sarcophagus of the 6th century from Palatia.<sup>32</sup>

Found at the site was a fragment of a marble slab with carved decoration (**fig. 9, A.S.1**) occupying a vertical zone, consisting of three motifs: a Maltese-type cross enclosed in a circle; a smaller cross enclosed in a rhombus frame with tiny ivy leaves; and a partially preserved rosette. The slab belongs to an ambo. The decorative elements are known from the 5th-6th century. Identical crosses are known mainly from the neighbouring island of Paros.<sup>33</sup> The execution reveals a provincial imitation of Parian prototypes.

Another fragment from an ambo with similar decoration was pointed out by C. Pennas (**fig. 9, A.S. square D1**). This piece, found to the south of the site, belongs to the same ambo. The crosses are identical and the only difference appears in the execution of the rosettes, a negligible difference since the two marbles occupied the two opposite sides of the ambo (**fig. 9**). It is worth noting that a curved screen from the central part of an ambo that was discovered in secondary use during the excavations at Grotta<sup>34</sup> presents the same type of cross. Whether this marble screen belongs to the same ensemble is a subject for further study.

Two additional marbles, now located in the remaining part of the marble floor, deserve special mention. A large slab that was once the cover of an ancient sarcophagus (**fig. 9, A.S.3**) has many circular cuttings at the corners of the visible upper surface showing another use. Upside down, it served as the upper part of the altar in the basilica since the cuttings correspond to the system that supported it. Another marble in the same floor seems to be from the ambo or the screen; it is an orthostate, square in section with circular upper suffix (**fig. 9, A.S.4**), with no carving.

In the Middle Byzantine period, as already mentioned, a church of quite smaller dimensions was adapted to the ruins of the basilica. From this Church II (**fig. 10**), only the west wall, columns and the three apses have survived. The south wall has left no trace. This building is estimated to have measured 9 x 9 m. It belongs to the cross-in-square type,<sup>35</sup> a conclusion that arises from the square shape of the plan and the positions of the central columns, which occupy the corners of a square of 3.00 m. The strengthening of the north wall seen above was associated with this phase, probably to reinforce the construction of the vaults. It is not clear whether the entire height of the wall was thickened or whether arches were formed or if there were windows. Another crucial element was found in the excavation, the threshold of this church. It appeared when the Ionic column that was placed at a later phase above the threshold of Church II along the wall has been removed. This column had been dressed to form part of the threshold of the subsequent Church III.

30. The same capitals appeared in a photo and drawing in Ohnesorg (2005), p. 147, fig. 11, 12, pl. 33b and 33c, an article that we discovered later than our documentation.

31. Fragments of screens no. 15-16, Pennas (2000), p. 14.

32. Lambertz (2007), pp. 1-12.

33. Mitsani (2006), pp. 80-81 and Orlandos (1969), pp. 177-206.

34. Lambrinouidakis (1981), p. 293, pl. 200b. For proto-Byzantine ambos in general, Jacobs (1987).

35. Due to its square shape, the church is safely categorised as a cross-in-square church type. See Kappas (2008), pp. 194-95.

Church III (**fig. 11**) was a small church that occupied the two northern aisles of the basilica and had general dimensions of 9 x 6.5 m. The two apses with built altars belong to this phase. The ruined wall to the south and between the central aisle and corner bays of Church II that was formed with marble spolia filling the space between columns might have been part of its south exterior wall. In relation to the central apse of Church II, there is a levelled floor that occupies part of the central aisle and consisted mainly of marbles. Its structure is associated with either Church III or Church II, but it is worth noting that it lies at the same elevation as the threshold of Church III (**fig. 12**).<sup>36</sup>

Conclusively, the Basilica of Agios Stephanos is the largest religious building of the Early Christian era on Naxos after Palatia (**fig. 13**). There are eleven basilicas already known on Naxos, which still have not been studied in great depth. They cover a period between the 5th and 7th centuries, although only for a few of them is the chronology based upon related findings. Some subcategories have been organized, based on certain specific features, to help the connection of this Basilica with the other basilicas in the chart of Byzantine monuments of Naxos.

*Table 1. Basilicas on Naxos (5th-7th centuries)*

Name (date)	Dimensions <sup>1</sup> (m)	Span of central aisle /side aisles	Niche diameter (m)	Axial distance between columns (m)
Palatia (5th-6th c.)	21.00 x 15.90	5.6/3	5.30	(?)
Yria (5th c.)	21.00 x 13.00	3.2/3.2	3.50 (rectangle)	3.96 (post and lintel)
Gyroulas (mid 6th c.)	15.10 x 10.85	3.8/2.3	3.40	3.3 (post and lintel)
Agios Matthaïos (mid 6th c.)	ca.20.50 x 12.00	5.0/2.1	4.50	2.6 (arcade)
Agios Stephanos (mid 6th c.)	23.00 x 13.00	5.5/2.2	5.20	3.46 (post and lintel)
Cheimarros (mid 6th-7th c.)	10.80 x 9.80	3.5/1.8-2.0	3.50	2.30 (arcade)
Protothronos (mid 6th-7th c.)	14.50 x 10.20	4.20/1.5	3.80	3.15 (arcade)
Agios Isidoros Rachis (mid 6th-7th c.)	14.50 x 10.20	3.70/1.7	3.10	3.15 (arcade)
Agios Akepsimas Tripodes (mid 6th-7th c.)	9.50 x 9.10	3.50-3.20 /1.30-1.50	2.60	2.90 (arcade)
Agios Ioannis Kaminos (mid 6th-7th c.)	(?)	3.50-3.20	3.30	(?)
Agios Phokas Apollon <sup>2</sup>				

36. Regarding the indications for the existence of the basilica, Ohnesorg mentioned the remaining part of the marble floor that is preserved in front of it, Ohnesorg (2012), p. 107. However, this marble floor is obviously very hastily constructed and of a very poor quality. It belongs to Church III or to Church II. Furthermore, as we have already mentioned, at least one of the marbles in this floor derives from the dismantled altar.

After this analysis, two Naxian basilicas are situated right on the coast. It is well testified that in many cases, the earlier Christian churches were erected by the sea,<sup>37</sup> such as the basilicas at Palatia, Yria, Tripodes, Agios Phokas, Apollona, and four of them were near the sea as Agios Matthaïos, Yria, Agios Stephanos, Agios Akepsimas. The observed density of churches at Chora (Palatia, Agios Stephanos) and in the area of Tragaia (Protothronos, Agios Isidoros Rachis) indicates that these regions were flourishing during the Early Christian era, although the number and sizes of the churches do not always express the real needs of religious communities. Also noteworthy is the regularity of the dispersion of basilicas in the fertile region of western Naxos at intervals of approximately 3 km;<sup>38</sup> this phenomenon merits future detailed study. It is probable that the spread of basilicas followed a central plan for these religious buildings at least in this part of the island.

Considering the scale of the basilicas, there are four large basilicas (Palatia, Yria, Agios Matthaïos, Agios Stephanos), two of medium size (Protothronos, Gyroulas) while the other three are much smaller (Agios Akepsimas, Agios Isidoros Rachis, Cheimarros). Very few elements are known regarding the other two basilicas (Agios Phokas, Agios Ioannis at Kamino).

Among these Early Christian basilicas, which probably cover a period of two hundred years, three were created by the conversion of ancient religious buildings. It is obvious in all of them that the form and size of the ancient building of worship has affected the design of the new construction. The adaptation to the new religion was executed with limited changes at Yria and Palatia, but in the case of Gyroulas a larger intervention took place. The building was then rebuilt according to the specifications, regular form, and orientation of a Christian church. Nevertheless, the Gyroulas basilica covered almost the same area as the previous temple, with identical proportions, even though a large quantity of marble was available to be used as building material and thus a new larger building could easily have been erected.

The other basilicas on Naxos seem to have been new buildings erected from the start. In these, the original intentions of the architects are more apparent. The convergence of the proportions (3/5) and dimensions of the basilicas of Agios Stephanos with those of Agios Matthaïos and Yria is interesting. Similarly, the proportions (2/3) and dimensions of the basilicas of Gyroulas and Protothronos, both situated in the same region of the island, are also related.<sup>39</sup> Smaller basilicas of the same period have a square proportion in ground plan (1/1: Agios Akepsimas) or approach the square (4/5: Cheimarros, Agios Isidoros) and are in less prosperous places. A connection can be assumed between the scale of a basilica, its location, and the prosperity of its local community. The similarities observed within each group are probably related to the activity of a specific team of builders, or to influences due to imitation. It could also be that some specific plans, provided by the central authorities, were slightly altered according to the population and prosperity of each place. The difference in scale can also be a result of construction limitations: also, smaller churches are mainly vaulted while the larger ones have timber roofs.

Furthermore, a direct influence can be detected from the ancient religious buildings of the island, apparent in the deliberate modification of the previously established holy place and the exploitation of their precious structure and material. At Agios Stephanos, the use of marble from an ancient building located on another island presents the purposeful selection of this specific material for aesthetic reasons. Construction motivation should be excluded because there were plenty of marble columns readily

37. Many examples can be mentioned, such as the basilicas at Sikyon, Hermione Dafnousion Lokridos, Lecheon. On this subject see also Haritonidis (1968), p. 62.

38. The distance between the basilicas of Gyroulas – Agios Akepsimas, Agios Akepsimas – Agios Matthaïos, Agios Matthaïos – Yria, Yria – Agios Stephanos is very close to 3 km. The distance between Palatia – Agios Stephanos is exactly 2.2 km.

39. The similarities between these two monuments are mentioned in Aslanidis (2014), p. 362. For a general overview of the proportions in basilicas, see Orlandos (1952), p. 205.



available in the ancient city of Naxos. It should be noted that these magnificent and lavish Parian marbles impart a sense of luxury, status, and prestige to the building. Such an intentional aesthetic approach expresses an architectural extravagance, where the typically simple and monotonous shell of the basilica is set in contrast to the richness of the marbles. Two features are worth noting: the use of classical, horizontal beams as a kind of entablature, as opposed to an arcade, and the fact that the marble elements (column shafts, capitals and maybe other Classical marble elements) are members of the same ancient building, thus directly conveying the quality of a past glory or a reminiscence of paganism to a new reality in a new place. Therefore, the entire interior of the church can be understood as the manifestation of a deliberate classicism (**fig. 14**). Finally, the use of a great number of materials from many places around the Aegean (Paros, Melos, Proconnesos, etc.) reveals that the Aegean islands were part of an established communication network during the Early Byzantine period, around the 6th century AD, and could organise a very ambitious programme made possible by the growth of a vigorous marble trade between the islands.

Even though this article refers only to the architectural documentation of the excavation, without a parallel description of the archaeological findings, there are many traces that provide a secure chronology for the successive churches on the site. The Basilica of Agios Stephanos is the second largest on Naxos after Palatia. Its great dimensions and the quality of construction (large central span, wide intercolumniation, and great dimension of the apse, imported building materials from Paros and other nearby islands, the use of marble columns instead of pillars) recall a period of prosperity and safety. The basilica belongs to the Hellenistic type<sup>40</sup> that was common in the mid 6th century, when the Byzantine Empire was under the reign of Justinian I. This building signifies the interrelation of Greco-Roman and Christian culture that has marked the identity of the Aegean world until today.

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40. Aslanidis (2014), p. 362.

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Figure 1.  
Agios Stephanos. View from NE.  
After restoration programme.

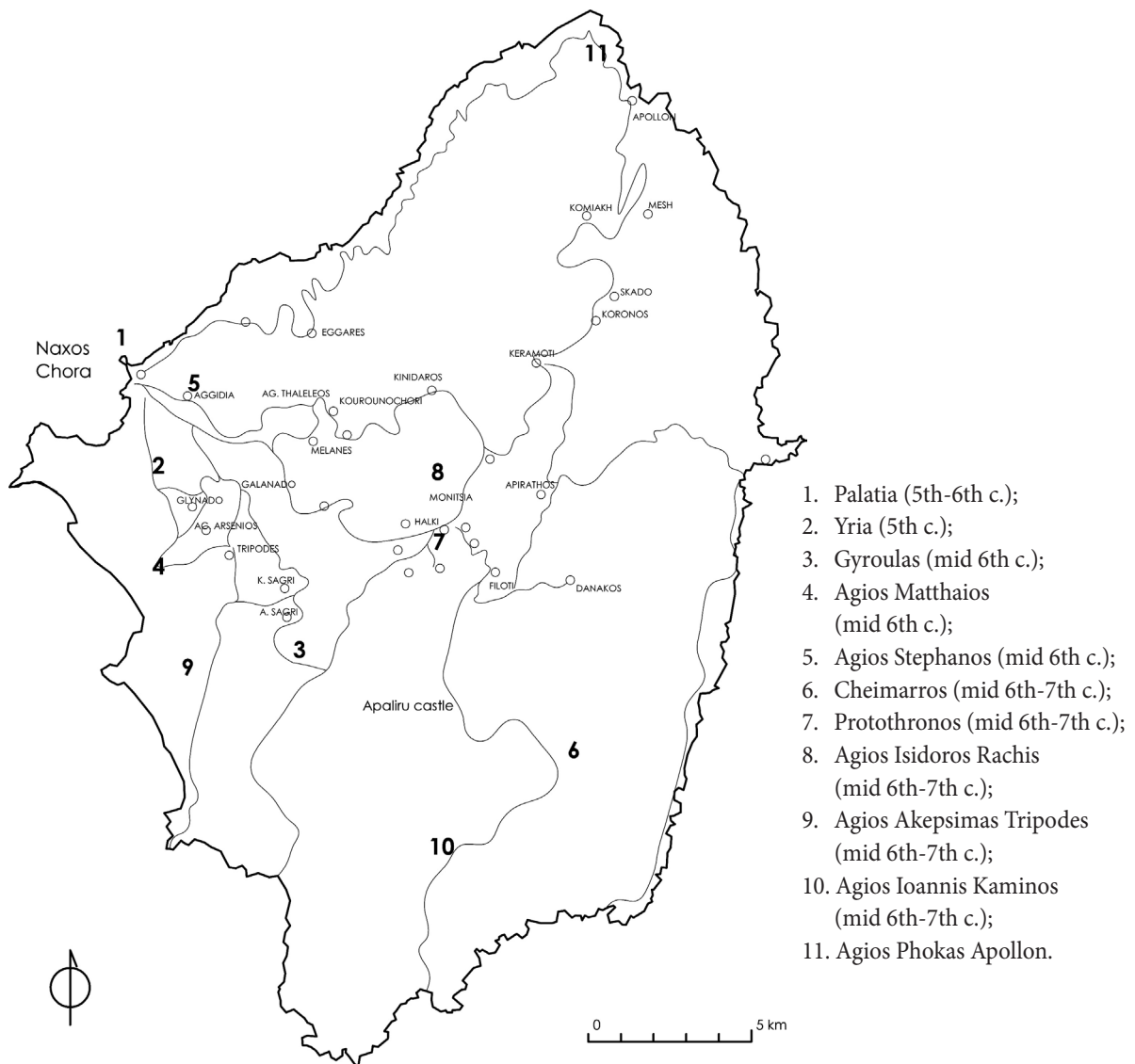


Figure 2. Map of Naxos. Early Christian basilicas (5th-7th c.). Source: Aslanidis (2014), p. 21.



Figure 3.  
Agios Stephanos. View from E.  
Before restoration programme.

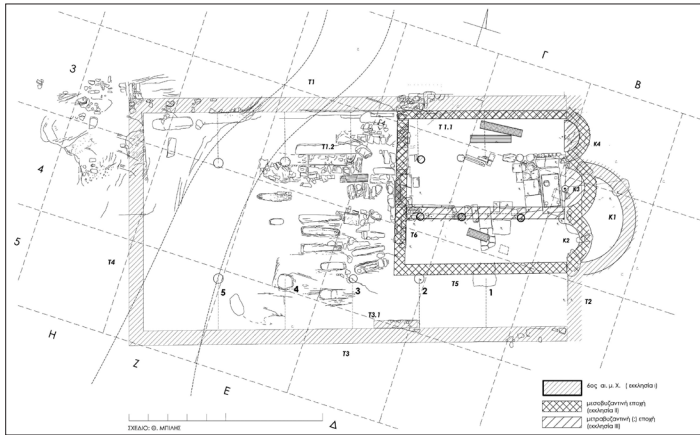


Figure 4.  
Agios Stephanos. Ground plan  
of the excavation.



Figure 5.  
Agios Stephanos. View from SE.

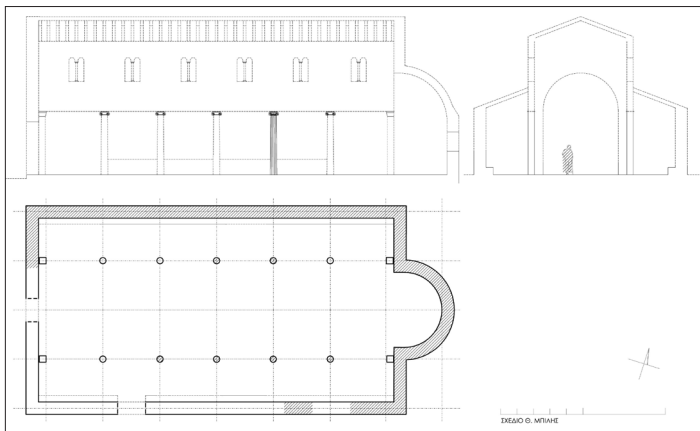


Figure 6.  
Agios Stephanos. Restored plan  
of Church I (basilica).



Figure 7. Agios Stephanos. View from SE. The apses.

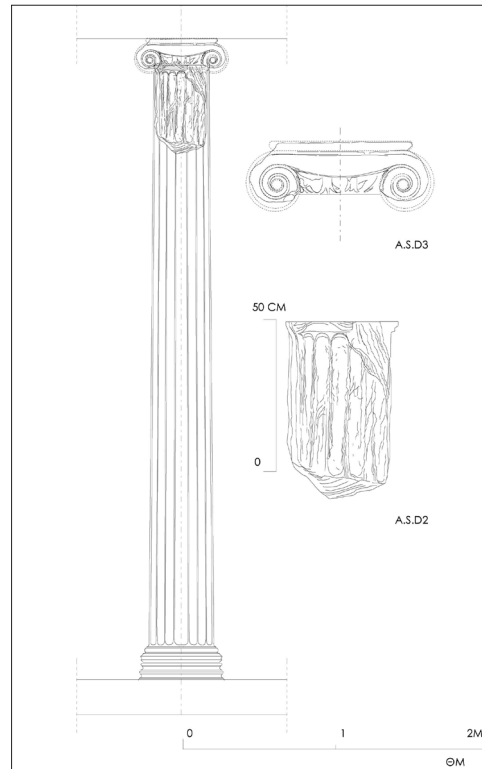


Figure 8. Marbles from the basilica in Chora of Naxos. Restored drawing of the re-used marbles from the Sanctuary of Hestia on Paros (G. Gruben, T. Bilis).

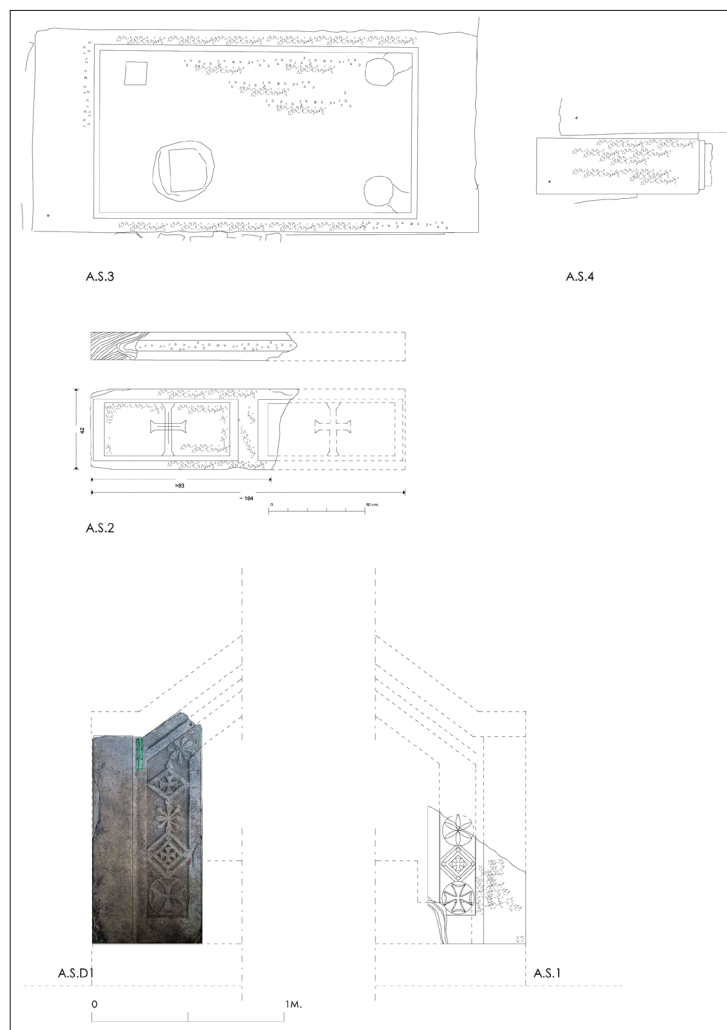


Figure 9. Agios Stephanos. Marbles from the site and nearby area.

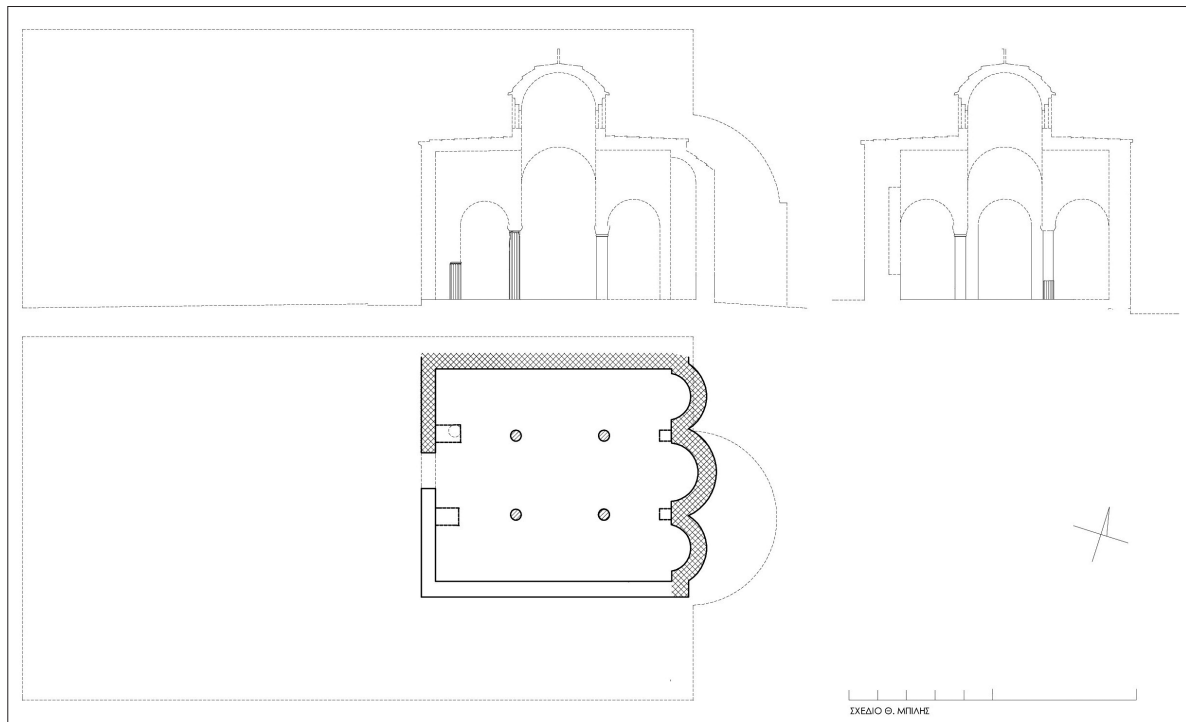


Figure 10. Agios Stephanos. Restored plan of Church II.

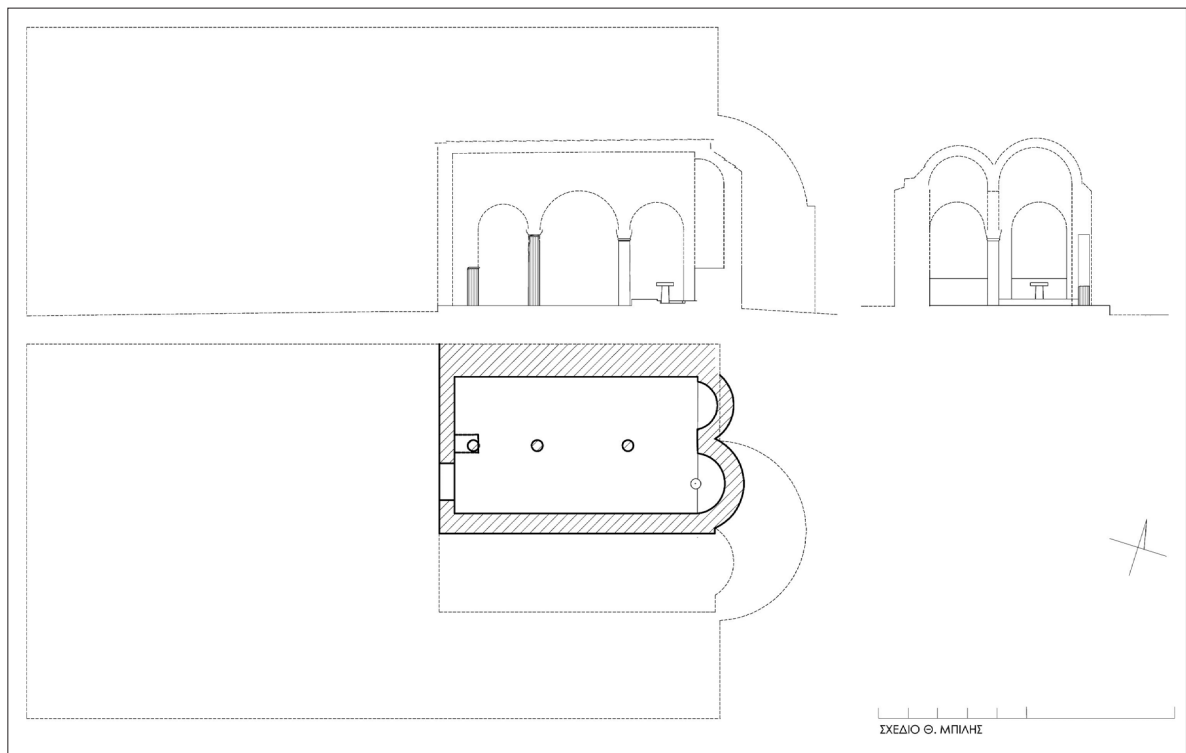


Figure 11. Agios Stephanos. Restored plan of Church III.



Figure 12. Agios Stephanos. Thresholds of churches II (below) and III (above).

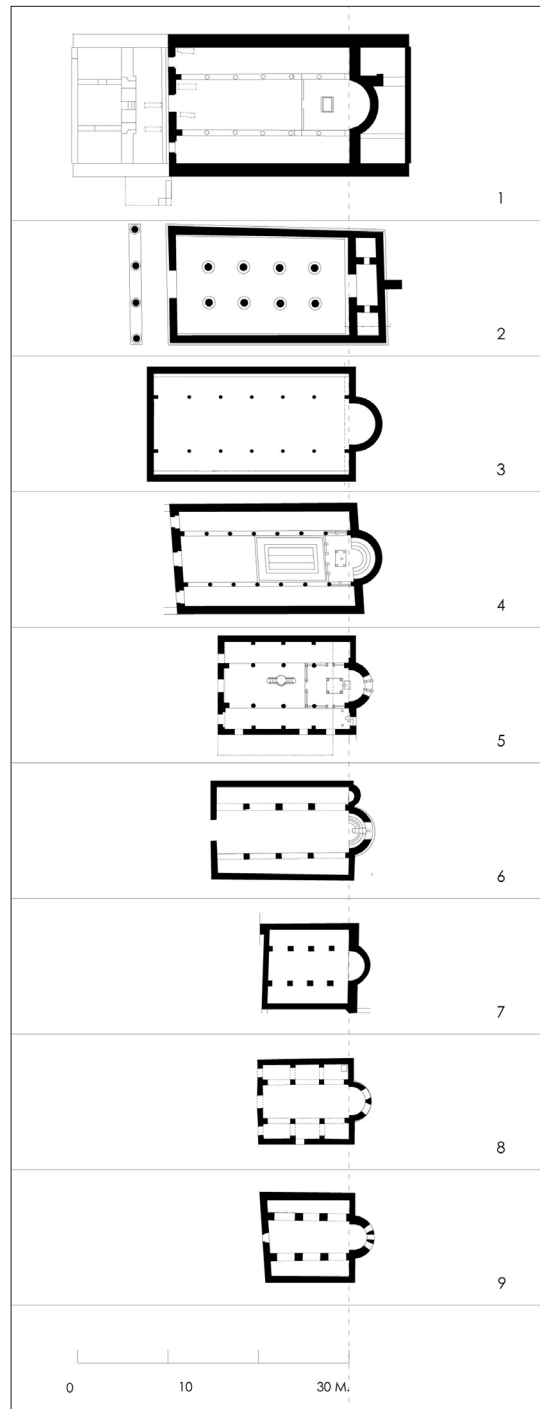


Figure 13.

Early Christian basilicas of Naxos. Comparative table with restored plans. Sources: Aslanides (2014) and Ohnesorg (2012).

1. Palatia (5th-6th c.);
2. Yria (5th c.);
3. Gyroulas (mid 6th c.);
4. Agios Matthaios (mid 6th c.);
5. Agios Stephanos (mid 6th c.);
6. Cheimarros (mid 6th-7th c.);
7. Protothronos (mid 6th-7th c.);
8. Agios Isidoros Rachis (mid 6th-7th c.);
9. Agios Akepsimas Tripodes (mid 6th-7th c.);



*Figure 14.* Agios Stephanos. Perspective view of the interior.