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Late Byzantine church architecture of Cherson.

The main topic of my dissertation project are late Byzantine churches in the city of Cherson (currently the National Preserve of Tauric Chersonesos, Sevastopol, Ukraine). For 16 years the International Interdisciplinary Archaeological Expedition of A. Mickiewicz University in Poznan (Poland) has been discovering and preserving ancient and medieval relicts of buildings, architectural details and items of everyday use in Chersonesos. During last two excavation seasons research team discovered basilica from the first half of the 6th century. But it is not the only church uncovered at this site- within over 160 years of excavations the number of Byzantine sacred buildings there has risen to over 50.

The Byzantine city of Cherson was situated on the southwest coast of the Crimea peninsula. The origins of the city most probably date back to the 4th century BC, when Greeks from Heraklea Pontica founded there a colony of Chersonesos. During the medieval period, the city was the major Byzantine outpost in the northern Black Sea region. Cherson is also named in ancient Rus' chronicles as the location of Grand Prince Volodymyr's baptism. The city of Cherson used to be an important trade and religious center for centuries until its destruction by Mongol-Tatars in the third quarter of the 13th century. The city never again regained its former scale and importance and was irreversibly destroyed by Tatars in 1399 so only ruins remained. Fortunately those ruins have stayed almost untouched until the beginning of excavations in 19th century and the site gained the fame as "the Russian Pompeii". The excavations have been lasting continuously until now. Last year the National Preserve of Tauric Chersonesos was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

During the Byzantine period of the city of Cherson pagan buildings built by the Greeks and Romans were demolished and in place of them a lot of churches were raised. Most of them are early Christian basilicas, as we can assume from the walls and foundation walls relicts, but there were also central buildings. Unfortunately, there is no full scientific description and analysis of all these objects together.

As far as methodology is concerned, all the buildings should be measured and a complete map of the area should be prepared. The coexistence of all these buildings is crucial while talking about their function and dating. All of them should get a full description containing such data as: the history of excavation, measurements, building materials and construction used, phases, the description of architectural details found on the site, analogous examples of architecture and possible theoretical reconstruction. Collecting the materials on this issue requires both work on site and literature studies. There are few publications on this topic, but only one is in a western language (Alla I. Romančuk: *Studien zur Geschichte und Archäologie des byzantinischen Cherson*) and there is only one attempt at describing in detail Byzantine churches (S. Medeksza, J. Rozpędowski: *The early Byzantine church architecture of Chersonesus Taurica*). In latter publication 13 churches of the early Byzantine period are described and this could be a perfect ground for further research. Especially late Byzantine sacred buildings need more researches to be carried out.

To sum up, the access to knowledge about church architecture in Byzantine Cherson is undoubtedly not sufficient. Huge number of buildings have so far no scientific description and proper analysis. The goal of my studies is to collect the data about sacred architecture in Cherson, what can in the future result in the expand of knowledge about this exceptional site.