

PHD THESIS BOOKLET

CHRISTELLE WEHBE

**THE CHRISTIANISATION OF THE PAGAN TEMPLES OF THE
MODERN TERRITORY OF LEBANON; PATTERNS, TYPOLOGY
AND TRANSFORMATION**

Supervisor: Dr. Habil. József Beszédes

Doctoral School of History

Pázmány Péter Catholic University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Budapest, 2025

AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE THESIS

This thesis, relying on historical contexts and physical evidence, will be one of the first investigations reflecting the converted pagan sites in Lebanon. During this study, there will be a focus on the converted sites with the aim to get into a deeper understanding of the Roman and Christian context and the spatial and structural relation between each transformed site. The main objective of this thesis is to have a general overview of the converted sites that exist in Lebanon and their distribution throughout the districts. A detailed analysis of the conversion types and their structural mechanisms is in order to understand the reasons that led to the usage of each type instead of the other. Whereas the structural and social fate of the converted temples will be as well highlighted relying on the site's structural and religious features. It will eventually lead to a clearer approach of the historical and structural phase that was due between the Pagan past and the Christian future.

METHODOLOGY

The focus in this thesis is mainly on the religious transitional period from Paganism to Christianity and its ramifications on structural and architectural dimensions of the Empire. After the religious transformation of the Empire, the Roman temples were gradually rendered passive until re-used for different purposes, either religious, social, governmental or others. However, the conversion system in this study highlights solely the structural and architectural transformation of a Roman temple into a Christian church.

The Roman structures were transformed while applying different architectural mechanisms. Three main categories of architectural conversion were highlighted in this thesis; the temple church, the temenos church and the spolia church. Around 80 converted sites exist all around the Lebanese territory, 17 temple churches, 7 temenos churches and around 57 spolia churches. The number of converted sites gathered throughout the years for this thesis is an assumingly accurate number. However, many converted sites are unexploited nor discovered. Thus, the number of the converted sites that exist on the Lebanese territory will be an ongoing process. Until nowadays, no detailed studies were fulfilled that collect a list of the converted sites that exist in Lebanon nor any study was executed that summarize the conversion types and their implemented structural mechanisms.

Many documents helped with the categorization of the conversion typologies while others contributed in listing the converted sites that exist on the Lebanese territory. The research

approach that was adopted in this study was a mixed method approach, both qualitative and quantitative. Sites were sifted, roman temples that were converted into Christian churches were the ones used in this study from all of the pagan sites that exist in Lebanon. After gathering the study cases, they were divided and separated between each mechanism separately. Even with the presence of historical resources and reliable documentations, the majority of the converted sites lack materials and database related to their architectural and structural evolution throughout history. Other than ancient and modern documentation, the sites visits were one of the main factors that led to an accurate listing.

This study covers the temples that were structurally converted during the chronological timeframe from the 4th century with the Byzantines until the end of the Ottoman's rule on the Lebanese territory during the end of the 19th century. These 80 existing converted sites are nowadays either religiously passive and in form of ruins or are religiously active and structurally stable. This fate of the converted temples was mainly influenced by the type of transformation implemented during different timeframes. 16 temple churches exist nowadays on the Lebanese territory, highlighting 3 subcategories; the cella, the pronaos and the inverted temple churches, 5 of them are structurally and religiously active whereas the other 11 sites are completely abandoned and in an unstable structural state. All of the temenos churches are currently in form of ruins, whereas, all of the spolia churches are nowadays both religiously and structurally active.

The physical site visits during the thesis' analysis were one of the main features which resulted in the converted site's data collection that mainly included photography, photogrammetry with a 2D documentation highlighted by a general survey with measurements. While working on this thesis, many software were used in order to ensure the rendering of the data needed; AutoCAD, Agisoft Metashape, 3DMax, Sketchup and photoshop. Both historical sources and archaeological documentations will eventually highlight the study needed for an outline of the converted sites and their implemented mechanisms that exist on the Lebanese territory.

CONCLUSION

1. The reasons/purposes of the conversion

The process of conversion was dynamic, with motivations evolving over the centuries. During early Christian times, converting temples into churches led to two main scenarios, deconsecrating and purifying pagan buildings as well as urbanely expanding Christian

structures due to the availability of land and construction materials after the destruction of temples. Whereas during the medieval period, the main aim was to build Christian churches when the availability of construction materials was overflowing and financial funding was lacking.

2. Chronology of execution of each of the types of conversion

The structural conversion of pagan temples occurred at different stages, beginning with the rise of Christianity under the Byzantines, continuing through the medieval period, and even extending into the early modern era. The methods of conversion varied depending on the historical context and timing. Among the earliest types of conversion was the temenos church, implemented at the start of the empire's Christianization. During the medieval period, the temple church, with its various subcategories, became the predominant conversion type. However, the spolia church remained the most widespread across centuries. Initially introduced during the Byzantine period, it reached its peak in modern times, as many abandoned and structurally unstable temples were dismantled and repurposed as building materials for newly constructed churches.

3. The factors that led to the implementation of the most adequate type of conversion

All of the conversion types exist on the Lebanese territory; however, several factors affected the choice of the type structurally executed. The chronology of the conversion, the temple's proportion, the religious traditions established during the transformation period and the shrine's structural state led to the selection of the most adequate type of conversion that differed through each site. All of the mentioned factors that affected the choice of the implemented type of conversion were indirectly linked.

The temenos church was implemented for various reasons, often when the original shrine was in poor structural condition, had an irregular or small floor plan, or when remnants of pagan worship still influenced the site. This type of conversion allowed for a more adaptable approach, particularly in cases where paganism and Christianity coexisted within the same sacred space. In contrast, the temple church was applied when the temple's structural foundations remained intact, enabling a more straightforward transformation into a Christian place of worship. Lastly, the spolia church became prevalent during the medieval period, as many temples, after long periods of abandonment, suffered structural deterioration, leading to their dismantling and reuse as building materials for newly constructed Christian churches.

4. Functional durability of the resultant church

In the East, the majority of the roman temples that once existed were either totally knocked down, with no current physical evidence of its existence, or were architecturally and religiously transformed, which had the biggest chance of endurance. The converted sites that survived until these days have two different architectural categories, these churches are either in form of ruins, due to abandonment, lack of preservation and renovation, or are still physically religiously active. One of the main factors that affected the functional durability of the resultant churches besides the chronology of their conversion is the religious continuity in the area of each converted temple. This difference of fate exists heavily in Lebanon especially in the sites that had a sequence of conversions that began during the period of the Romans, the Byzantines as well as in the medieval times where some new physical modifications occurred. The present general shape of these converted temples is unrecognizable for the majority of the temple churches, *temenos* churches and *spolia* churches, however its *in situ* foundations or its re-used blocks highlight the shrine's original existence.

5. Regional Distribution

The converted sites are spread all over the Lebanese territory, however, the distribution of the structural mechanisms leading to conversion differed through districts, even the temples with proximate localities were differently converted.

Regional characteristics are the reason that led to the large gap between the distribution of the conversion types through districts. 58% of the Lebanese *spolia* churches exist in the region of Mount Lebanon, especially in Jbeil, whereas in the Southern district no *spolia* churches were highlighted. The temple churches are similar to the *spolia* churches in their regional distribution process. Hence, from 17 temple churches that exist in Lebanon, 10 of them are located in the Mount Lebanon district. The same applies to the *temenos* churches which 3 out of 7 sites exist in Mount Lebanon as well.

Several scenarios might have led to a major interval with the regional distribution of the conversion mechanisms. This variation was reflected as being a regional trend throughout each district. However, it could indicate the continuity of religious life that occurred in each region. This hypothesis is directly related to the invasions that happened during early times just after the start of the Empire's conversion. Several scenarios were in order; the people who invaded each area might have had a different religion than the Christians or the areas with the absence of converted structures might have been abandoned for a long period before being re-

established during modern times. The Roman Empire was spread through all sectors of the Lebanese territory, however, this religious continuity, hence the structural one might not have been balanced all over its premises.