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BYZANTIUM MATURES

Choices, sensitivities, and modes of expression
(eleventh to fifteenth centuries)



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Ῥορὰμ' ἐρατεινόν
Architecture and rhetoric (eleventh–fifteenth centuries)

La beauté n'est que la promesse d'un bonheur

Stendhal

Architecture and rhetoric are public arts by definition; they address a certain public and their effect depends on composing elements in order to reach specific prescribed purposes.

The public character of ancient rhetoric was defined by its original objective, that is the persuasion of the orator's audience by means of verbal expression. However, already in Late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, the meaning of the term was broadened so much that it eventually enveloped not only the oral delivery but also artful writing. Rhetoric pieces were not necessarily recited before a public; they were also read either before private groups or in isolation.

The art of architecture is public because buildings, once constructed, become part of the landscape or the townscape to which they belong, regardless of whether they are private or public edifices. In all cases, buildings have a function and a form that, like any form, has the faculty to transmit messages. Cultures of all times and places have used architecture to express abstract ideas or to convey specific messages. Like the speech of an orator, the architecture of a building is conceived as a carefully planned system of visual forms, which are loaded with symbolic or ideological content.

Rhetoric and architecture were an important part of the culture which Classical Antiquity bequeathed to the Middle Ages, and the Middle Ages made of both of them tools to serve its own objectives over reality and its perception.¹

¹ On the relation between rhetoric and the visual arts, see: H. Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton N.J., 1981), 9–21; L. James and R. Webb, «To understand ultimate things

Rhetoric itself has been paralleled to architecture because of its dependence on structure.² For example, Nicholas Mesarites defined his ekphrasis of the church of the Holy Apostles thus: «I purpose to build [this house] with words for material and with the skill of my mind, so that I and every lover of the Apostles may be able, through it, to see more clearly and purely the beauty of this house of yours».³ Indeed, like architecture, rhetoric gives to ideas the form of specific figures (*σχήματα*), which are thereafter organized in a coherent entity, in a manner similar to the way in which architecture combines structural elements, which have to have specific forms.

Eastern and Western Christian rhetoric often used architecture as a metaphor for abstract conceptions, or as the perceptible shape of the macrocosm. In the Syriac Hymn on the Cathedral of Edessa, composed in the sixth century, the church is understood as the material form of cosmic elements.⁴ The building represents God's mysteries and dispensation; the waters around it are likened to the ocean surrounding the earth; the ceiling is paralleled to heaven and its golden mosaics to the shining stars in the firmament. In the eighth century, Germanos of Constantinople gave to the mystical interpretation of the sacred space its definitive form,⁵ and Photius followed this tradition when

and enter secret places. Ekphrasis and art in Byzantium», *Art History* 14 (1991); 1–17; H. Saradi, «The *kallos* of the Byzantine city. The development of a rhetorical *tòpos* and historical reality», *Gesta* 34 (1995), 37–56; R. Webb, «The aesthetics of sacred space. Narrative, metaphor, and motion in *ekphraseis* of church buildings», *DOP* 53 (1999), 59–74. On rhetoric and the visual arts in Western Europe during the Middle Ages see: M. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought, Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge, 1998).

² H.-G. Beck, *Das Byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich, 1994), 158. For a broader discussion on the relationship between architecture and rhetoric, see J. Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: the Classical Orders of Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Princeton N.J., 1988); id., «Architecture, metaphor and the mind», *Architectural History* 35 (1992), 192–207. J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman viewer. The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge 1995), 74–85.

³ G. Downey, «Nicholas Mesarites, Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople», *TAPhS* n.s. 47 (1957), XII 4, 900 and transl. p. 867.

⁴ French transl. by A. Dupont-Sommer, «Un hymne syriaque sur la cathédrale d'Édesse», *CahArch* 2 (1947), 29–39; A. Grabar, «Le témoignage d'un hymne syriaque sur l'architecture de la cathédrale d'Édesse au VI^e siècle et sur la symbolique de l'édifice chrétien», *CahArch* 2 (1947), 41 ff.

⁵ Germanos of Constantinople, *Ἱστορία μυστικὴ καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ θεωρία*, PG 98, 384–453; Engl. tr. J. Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople on the Divine Liturgy* (Crestwood N.Y., 1984)

comparing the interior of the church of the Virgin of the Pharos to heaven with gleaming stars seeming as if circling round.⁶

Wall paintings and mosaics that decorated Byzantine churches were bearers of messages reflecting the donors' or the painters' attitudes towards theological or political issues. The iconographic programs spread on the interior surfaces of churches loaded the architectural parts on which they were painted with a symbolism in accordance with their form and position in the building. The dome, a main feature of Byzantine churches, was identified with heaven, and it was accordingly decorated with the depiction of Christ accompanied by angels. The drum below the dome was decorated with the figures of the prophets, mediators between heaven and earth.⁷ The lower zone was dedicated to earthly domains. In the pendentives supporting the dome were depicted the Evangelists, founders of the New Testament; underneath, episodes from the earthly life of Christ and of the Virgin occupied the most distinguished areas, while the rest was covered with saints and persons of the Holy Scriptures. The position occupied by each figure was a conscious choice serving as a comment on qualities attributed to each figure and to relate it to the overall symbolic content of the iconographic program. Therefore, wall painting was an inherent part of the church architecture not only from the technical or «physical» point of view (that is by being part of the rendering) but, more importantly, as a comment on the architectural forms and structure.⁸

⁶ B. Laourdas, *Φωτίου Ὁμιλίαι* (Thessaloniki, 1959), 101.17–21; Engl. transl. by C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge Mass., 1958), 186. Cf. Webb, «The aesthetics of sacred space», 66 ff. In the Western medieval world, architecture and rhetoric were closely intertwined, as shown by Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought* (cit. above, n. 1) *passim*; see also F. Yates, «Architecture and the art of memory», *Architectural Association Quarterly* 12 (1980), 4–13.

⁷ C. Mango, *Byzantium, The Empire of New Rome* (London, 1980), 269ff; Th. F. Mathews, «The transformation symbolism in Byzantine architecture and the meaning of the Pantokrator in the dome», in R. Morris (ed.), *Church and People in Byzantium* (Manchester, 1986), 191–214; A. Cutler and J.-M. Spieser, *Byzance médiévale 700–1204* (Paris, 1996), 105–19. Cf. T. Papamastorakis, *Dome Iconography in Churches of the Palaeologan Period in the Balkan Peninsula and the Balkans* (in Greek with an English summary; Athens, 2001).

⁸ For the iconographical program of Byzantine churches, see: O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (London, 1948); R. Ousterhout, «The holy space: Architecture and the liturgy», in L. Safran (ed.), *Heaven and Earth. Art and the Church in Byzantium* (University Park Pa., 1998), 97–101. For specific examples of the 11th and 14th c. see: H. Maguire, «The cycle of images in the church», in Safran (ed.), *Heaven and Earth*, 121–51, color pls. 3–6; id., «The mosaics of Nea Moni: An imperial reading», *DOP* 46 (1992), 205–14; R. Ousterhout, «Temporal structuring in the Chora parekklesion», *Gesta* 34 (1995), 63–76.

In what follows, I do not intend to deal with all the aspects relating architecture and rhetoric. Instead, I will present a few examples dating from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, which belong either in Byzantine or Western Medieval culture. In the first part, I will discuss buildings conceived and realized as metaphors of ideas initiated by social groups or individuals. In the second part, I will discuss a number of Byzantine ekphraseis of buildings.

1. *Architecture as rhetorical metaphor*

The church of Haghios Eleutherios (or Panaghia Gorgoepikoos) in Athens is a good example of a building that was designed to transmit messages by means of its architectural parts. The sculpted blocks displayed on the exterior surfaces of its walls date from Antiquity to the twelfth century, a fact that led to the dating of the church at about 1200 (figs. 1–2).⁹ Twenty years ago, J. Richer suggested that the sculptures and reliefs on the exterior surfaces were arranged as to invite the beholder to trace the history of the calendar and its symbols from Antiquity and through the Middle Ages to the date of the construction of the church.¹⁰ This suggestion was recently verified by Professor Olga Palagia, who observed that the ancient relief, at the center of the western façade, below the cornice, illustrating originally the ancient Athenian calendar, was cut and rearranged by the builders of the church as to conform to the Byzantine calendar.¹¹ Alternatively, H. Maguire has argued that the lintel of the main entrance and the large square or rectangular reliefs placed on all four sides of the church above the base line represented by the top line of the above mentioned lintel, acted in combination as apotropaic devices. It has also been suggested that the exact placement of the sculptures, their arrangement and, eventually, their function as visual signifiers of abstract concepts were conceived by a sophisticated individual, Michael Choniates, metropolitan of Athens between 1182 and 1204.¹²

⁹ A. Grabar, *Sculpture du Moyen Age, II. XIe–XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1976), 96–9, pl. 55–70.

¹⁰ J. Richer, *Iconologie et tradition*, Paris (1984), 101–16.

¹¹ Prof. Olga Palagia is preparing a study on this relief; I thank her for communicating to me this original observation of hers and for allowing me to use it in the present study.

¹² H. P. Maguire, «The cage of crosses: Ancient and medieval sculptures on the 'Little Metropolis', in Athens», in *Θυμίαμα στη μνήμη της Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα* (Athens, 1994), 169–72. See also H. Saradi, «The use of ancient spolia in Byzantine monuments: The archaeological and literary evidence», *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3 no. 4 (1997), 406–10; Ch. Bouras, *Η ελληνική ναοδομία κατά τον 10 αιώνα* (Athens, 2002), 44–9. For a general discussion of the use



Fig. 1: Athens, church of Haghios Eleutherios, general view from the South-West (Ch. Bouras and L. Boura, *Ἡ ἑλλαδική ναοδομία κατὰ τὸν 12ο αἰῶνα* (Athens, 2002).

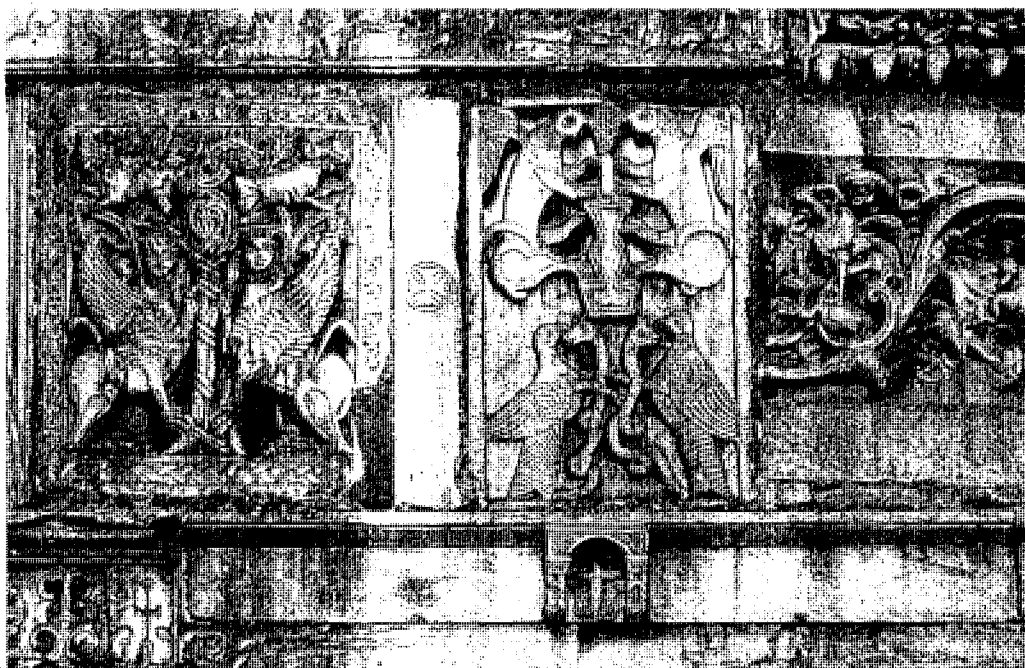


Fig. 2: Athens, church of Haghios Eleutherios: Detail from the west façade, sculptures W17-W23 (Bouras and Boura, *Ἡ ἑλλαδική ναοδομία*).

The interpretation of the sculpture and its arrangement on the outside surface of the «Little Metropolis» is still open for discussion. However, it is obvious that the church represents one of the rare surviving Byzantine examples that can be identified as deliberate bearers of intended messages, which were conceived and realized according to the taste of a specific personality.

My second example is provided by the church of the Dormition at Merbakas (now Haghia Triadha) in Argolis (figs. 3–4). The foundation of the church has been attributed to the Latin bishop of Corinth, William Mörbecke, an attribution long debated.¹³ Recently, Dr. Mary Lee Coulson has suggested that the church was built in the late thirteenth century to serve as a cemeterial church, a mausoleum to honor Mörbecke, and that the ancient and medieval sculpture exposed on the exterior of the church served the same purpose. Furthermore, she suggests that, although the church was dedicated according to the Western rite, the unknown founder chose to build it in the Byzantine style, in order to manifest Mörbecke's wishes for the unification of the Christian Church.¹⁴ Thus, the church of the Dormition at Merbakas would reflect, even if indirectly, the taste and ideological choices of Mörbecke, who was one of the most outstanding Western intellectuals of his time.

In the Medieval West, interaction between architecture and rhetoric can be traced in a number of monuments, in which Western cultural elements and realities of the sacred East were brought together. I am alluding to the religious buildings, which were built as copies of the famous monuments of Palestine.¹⁵ In the city-states of medieval Italy, the desire for identification with the sacred Christian East was paralleled by a pre-eminent will for establishing a Roman identity.

Pisa presents one of the clearest examples of this tendency. After a series of victorious campaigns against the Arabs in the eleventh century, the Pisans started building a cathedral in which they incorporated ancient Roman blocks bearing original Roman inscriptions. Recent research has proved that these

of spolia in Byzantine architecture, see R. Ousterhout, *Masterbuilders of Byzantium* (Princeton N.J., 1999), 136–47.

¹³ Bouras, *Ελληνική ναοδομία*, 332–3.

¹⁴ M.-L. Coulson, *The Church of Merbaka. Cultural Diversity and Integration in the 13th c. Peloponnese* (Doct. Diss.; London, 2002), 328–58.

¹⁵ On this important field of the history of architecture, see: R. Krautheimer, «Introduction to an iconography of Mediaeval Architecture», *JWarb* 4/5 (1940–1942), 1–33.



Fig. 3: Hagia Triada (Merbaka) Argolis, church of the Dormition.
View of the church from the south (photograph by the author).

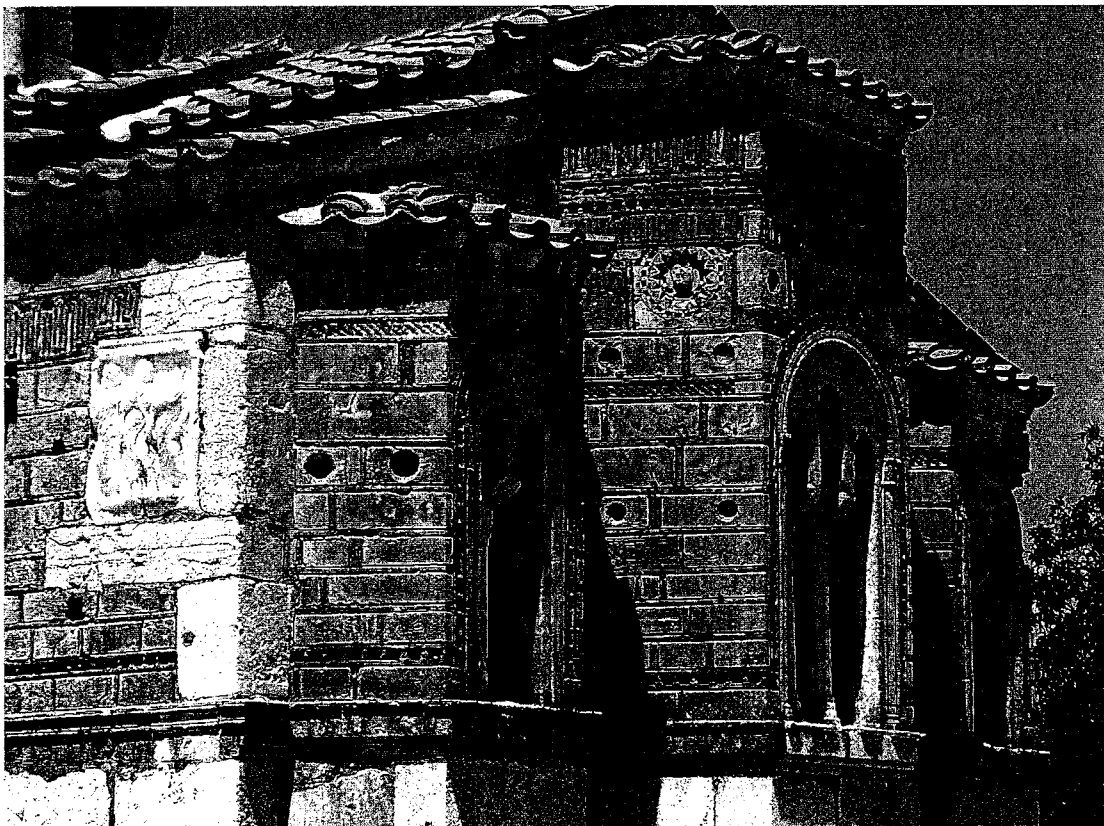


Fig. 4: Hagia Triada (Merbaka) Argolis, church of the Dormition.
View of the East end of the church from the south east (photograph by the author).

blocks were brought from Ostia and Rome, expressly for this purpose.¹⁶ In 1153, while still working on the cathedral, the Pisans started building, opposite its west façade, the Baptistery which, according to medieval conventions; copied the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem (fig. 5).¹⁷ The complex was enhanced with the addition of the Camposanto, a huge cemetery framed by a rectangular arcade enclosing an open-air court and paved with earth brought, according to tradition, from the Calvary in Jerusalem by the archbishop Ubaldo Lanfranchi expressly for this purpose.¹⁸ The whole complex was inscribed in a broader metaphorical scheme, by which Pisa was to be identified as the New Jerusalem: The metaphor referred to the role Pisa played in the Crusades, and the sacred space was realized as to strengthen it.

I have already noted that architecture is a public art; public buildings in particular represent the image of the community. Beauty, a pre-eminent topos in the city encomia of the Roman, Late Antique and Byzantine literature, depended not only on the natural setting, but also on the city's architectural embellishment. Byzantine texts stress the beauty of the materials and of the sculpted architectural elements, either decorative or representing persons, animals or vegetation.¹⁹ This explains the fact that classical monuments were dismantled and parts of them were transferred to Rome and, later, to Constantinople to add to the capitals of the Roman world beauty and splendor.²⁰ The practice survived in the thirteenth century: after 1204, the Crusaders took from

¹⁶ A. McLean, «Italian architecture of the late Middle Ages», in R. Toman (ed.), *The Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Cologne, 1995), 18; A. Peroni, «Spolia e architettura nel Duomo di Pisa», in J. Poeschke (ed.), *Antike Spolien in der Architektur des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Munich, 1996), 205 ff.; P. Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity* (2nd ed.; New Haven-London, 1996), 8–9.

¹⁷ Krautheimer, «Introduction to an iconography of mediaeval architecture», 7, 31–2. McLean, «Italian architecture», 18, suggests that the Baptistery was also inspired by the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

¹⁸ McLean, «Italian architecture», 16, 18–21; A. Caleca, «Costruzione e decorazione dalle origini al secolo XV», in C. Baracchini and E. Castelnuovo (eds.), *Il Camposanto di Pisa* (Torino, 1996), 13; Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 8–9.

¹⁹ Saradi, «The kallos of the Byzantine city», 40–1, 44, 48; ead., «The use of ancient spolia», 37–8, 40–2.

²⁰ G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale. Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris, 1974), 38–9, 44, 311, 325–7, esp. 326 n. 7; H. Saradi-Mendelovici, «Christian attitudes toward pagan monuments in Late Antiquity and their legacy in later Byzantine centuries», *DOP* 44 (1990), 50–6; S. Guberti Bassett, «The antiquities in the Hippodrome of Constantinople», *DOP* 45 (1991), 87–96, esp. 92 ff.

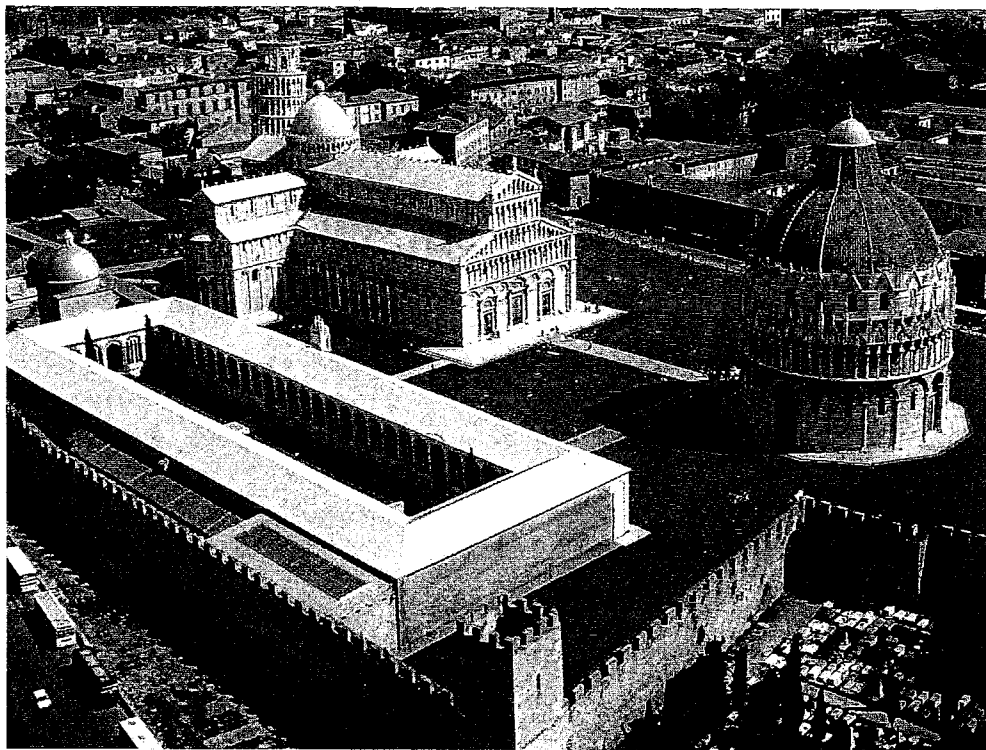


Fig. 5: Pisa. View of the Piazza dei Miracoli including the Baptistery the Basilica and the Camposanto (C. Baracchini and E. Castelnuovo (eds.), *Il Camposanto di Pisa*).

Constantinople decorative elements, statues, and architectural members as booty and transferred them to the West.

A good example of identifying with historical values through art is provided by the cathedral of St. Mark's in Venice, where architectural and sculptural features were grafted in the physical structure of the church and, in combination with precious objects dedicated to it, conferred an ideological content which bestowed on the monument a sought after historical identity.

The identity of St. Mark's was conceived at the same time with its architectural plans, which date in the ninth century. The project followed or, better, copied the Justinian plan of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, a church loaded with imperial symbolism. The Constantinopolitan model was originally conceived by Constantine the Great to serve as his mausoleum, however the project was carried out by his successors and housed relics of the Apostles.²¹ The mausoleum of the Roman-Byzantine emperors was eventually

²¹ Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale*, 401–4; Chr. Angelidi, «Ἡ περιγραφή τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων ἀπὸ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Ρόδιο. Ἀρχιτεκτονική καὶ συμβολισμός», *Σύμμεικτα* 5 (1983), 93–4; Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 8; W. Dorigo, «I mosaici medioevali di San Marco nella storia della basilica», in *San Marco, I mosaici, la storia, l'illuminazione* (Milan, 1991), 32, 39.

built next to the basilica and the complex functioned as a symbol of imperial legitimation.²² It was precisely this symbolism that the Venetians aimed to recreate along with an identity claiming both Roman and Byzantine origins, when building their state cathedral as a replica of the Holy Apostles. The similarities were further established with the deposition of the relics of the Apostle Mark which were translated from Alexandria in 828, thus accomplishing a «fictional» identification of the Venetian copy with the Constantinopolitan archetype.²³

The endeavor of the Venetians to construct a historical past through words and deeds reached an important stage in 1204. From captured Constantinople, the Venetians transferred to their city precious objects and monumental spoils, most of them related to churches, monasteries and establishments of the imperial milieu.²⁴ The low reliefs representing Hercules and St Demetrius (fig. 6), columns and piers from St Polyeuctus were exhibited on the outside of St. Mark's, while the revetment slabs from St Sophia were placed inside the church. The horses from the Hippodrome were displayed in the church's architectural frame. Precious objects, both religious and secular, were dedicated to and deposited in the church. Thus, Constantinople was virtually embodied in Venice's cathedral and invested the city with its own sacred symbolism and imperial power. Venice was on the way to become an alterum Byzantium (fig. 7).²⁵

In most cases discussed above, it is difficult to discern ideological or aesthetic choices of specific individuals; all seems to have emerged from a broader social and cultural environment that created them. However, as much as in the cases of St Eleutherios in Athens and the Dormition at Haghia Triada, one might remark that in the case of St Mark's it was an important personage, Andrea Dandolo, that contributed more than anybody else to the completion of the cathedral as the reflection of the image of the Venetian State. Andrea Dandolo, doge from 1343 to 1354,²⁶ stands between the twilight of the late Middle Ages

²² Ph. Grierson, «The tombs and obits of the Byzantine emperors», *DOP* 16 (1962), 1–63.

²³ O. Demus, *The Church of San Marco in Venice: History, Architecture, Sculpture* (Washington D.C., 1960), 7–9, 65–9, 100; G. Perocco, «Venise et le trésor de Saint Marc», in *Le trésor de Saint Marc de Venise* (Milan, 1984), 5–33, esp. 8; Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 8.

²⁴ R. Gallo, *Il tesoro di San Marco e la sua storia* (Venice-Rome, 1967), 9–13; G. Perocco, «Histoire du trésor de Saint Marc», in *Le trésor de Saint Marc de Venise*, 65; Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15–20; J. Poeschke, «Architekturästhetik und Spolienintegration im 13. Jahrhundert», in *id.* (ed.), *Antike Spolien*, 228–31.

²⁶ D. Pinkus, «Andrea Dandolo (1343–1354) and visible history: The San Marco projects», in C. M. Rosenberg (ed.), *Art and Politics in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Italy. 1250–1500* (Notre Dame-London, 1990), 191–206, figs. 1–10.



Fig. 6: Venice, Saint Mark's cathedral, Saint Demetrius. Constantinopolitan bas relief built in the west façade (photograph by O. Böhm, 3303 N).

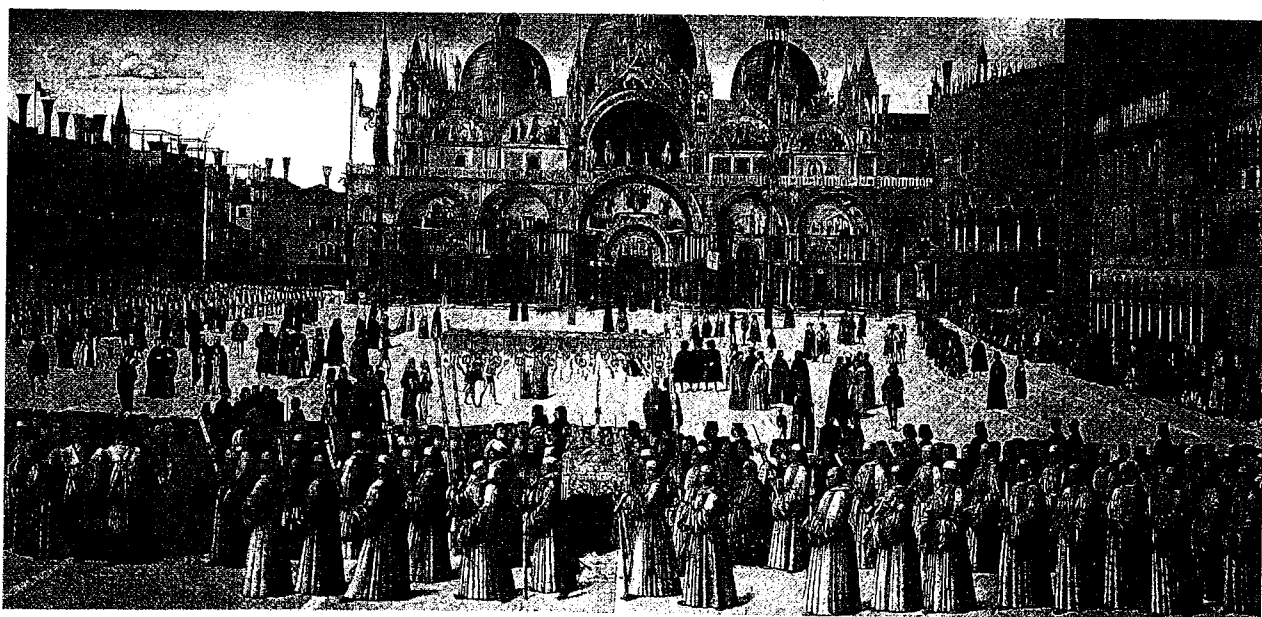


Fig. 7: Venice, Accademia. Gentile Bellini, Procession in the Piazza before Saint Mark's cathedral (1496).

and the dawn of the Italian Renaissance. The last example I shall discuss dates from a century later.

The villa Medicea at Poggio a Caiano near Florence, built for Lorenzo de' Medici «il Magnifico», belongs in the late Florentine Quattrocento, but echoes the medieval conception of architectural copies as the material embodiment of a metaphor with specific ideological content (fig. 8). As I have discussed elsewhere, the villa aimed to represent Lorenzo de' Medici, both as the ruler of Florence and as an individual.²⁷ Surrounded by humanists, himself very much involved in the humanist cause, deeply interested in architecture as to have been counted among the active architects of his time, Lorenzo conceived the building of a new villa on his estate at Poggio a Caiano as a manifesto of humanist ideas. These ideas could be epitomized as follows: Florence was the New Athens and its ruler, Lorenzo, was the ruler of the Platonic State. Therefore, his residence at Poggio a Caiano, the visual embodiment of his reign, was born in the context of neo-Platonist ideals, and accordingly should have been modeled after the residence of the Athenian rulers. The palace of the Acciaiuoli, prominent Florentines and rulers of Athens from 1383 to 1458, located in the Propylaea of the Athenian Acropolis, provided Lorenzo with the perfect archetype. The materialization of his vision was commissioned to Giuliano da Sangallo, the antiquarian architect of Florence *par excellence*. The process of converting the ideological content into material forms is complex, but the initiated humanists of Lorenzo il Magnifico's milieu would be well equipped to decipher it by identifying its specific elements and their subsequent combination (fig. 9).

Beside the architectural loans from the Acciaiuoli palace in the Propylaea, elements in the villa's design were drawn from the Parthenon and Saint Sophia in Constantinople. It is clear that Giuliano da Sangallo knew of the Athenian monuments and of Saint Sophia through the notes and the drawings of Ciriaco dei Pizzicoli, the famous fifteenth century antiquarian from Ancona.²⁸ Ciriaco's original drawings of Saint Sophia are the earliest known depictions of the

²⁷ For a detailed discussion of the topic, see T. Tanoulas, «Through the broken looking glass: The Acciaiuoli palace in the Propylaea reflected in the Villa of Lorenzo il Magnifico at Poggio a Caiano», *Bollettino d'Arte* 100 (1997), 1–32.

²⁸ The Parthenon and Saint Sophia elevation drawings occupy the two faces of the same leaf: *Il libro di Giuliano da Sangallo. Codice Vaticano Barberiniano Latino 4424*, ed. C. Huelsen (Leipzig, 1910), f. 28rv; cf. Tanoulas, «The Acciaiuoli palace in the Propylaea», 18, 20–3, figs. 21–2. There exists no drawing of the Propylaea; only Ciriaco's description survives.

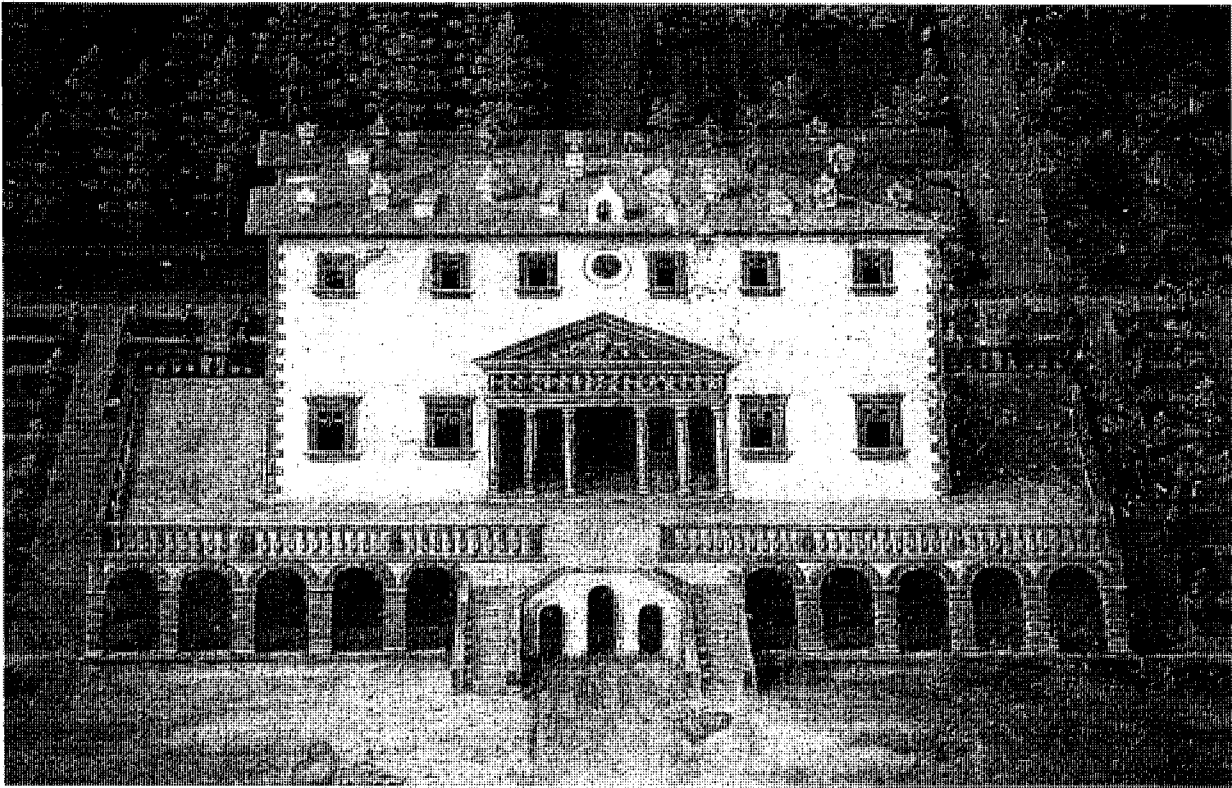


Fig. 8: Florence, Museo di Firenze com' era. Giusto Utens (17th c.), *The Medici Villa at Poggio a Caiano*, detail (photograph by the author).

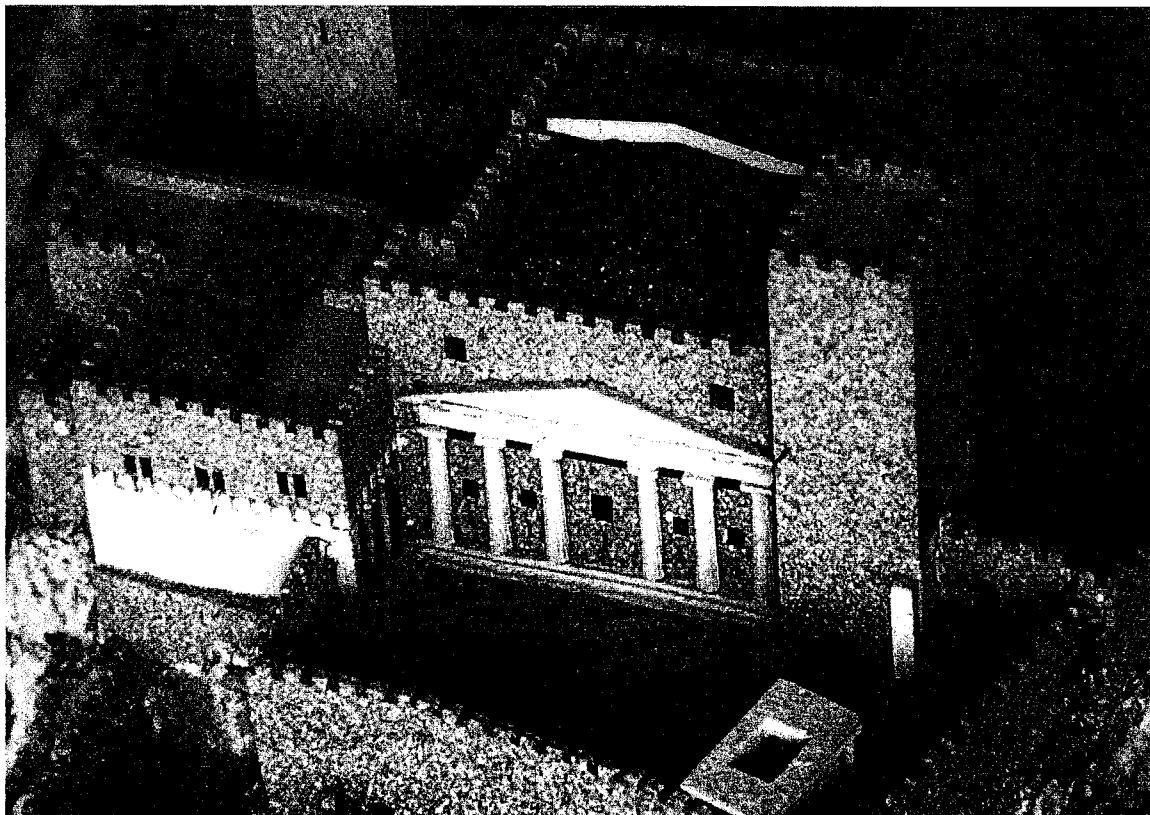


Fig. 9: Athens, Acropolis about 1500. Detail of the Acciaiuoli palace in the Propylaea from the south-west (reconstruction by the author, model made by P. Dimitriadis, photograph by S. Mavromatis).

church, and only three have survived through Sangallo's copies (fig. 10). Christine Smith suggested that Ciriaco de' Pizzicolti's drawings of Saint Sophia were arranged in a set of at least seven drawings and that Ciriaco, while working on them, was inspired by Manuel Chrysoloras' ekphrasis of the church.²⁹

Having in mind that Saint Sophia was one of Sangallo's sources of inspiration for the villa of Lorenzo il Magnifico, we find ourselves before a rare cyclic phenomenon. A famous building became the starting point of a rhetorical description that, in its turn, impelled the creation of a new important building that was conceived as a rhetorical metaphor. In this phenomenon a number of individuals were involved: Manuel Chrysoloras, Ciriaco of Ancona, Lorenzo de' Medici and Giuliano da Sangallo. Although acting in conformity with the cultural framework of their time, all of them expressed at the same time their personal taste and aesthetic or ideological choices.

The drawing for another villa designed by Giuliano da Sangallo for the Medici has survived. The building was to occupy an extensive area inside the walls of Florence, but it was never built (fig. 11).³⁰ The project was conceived as the reconstruction of the ideal Greek house, which makes it clear that it was meant to serve as a metaphor of humanist ideals similar to those involved in the conception of the villa at Poggio a Caiano.

Nikolaos Mesarites defines his ekphrasis of the church of the Holy Apostles as a building, which he is to construct with words and the skill of his intellect.³¹ In this sense ekphraseis are the verbal substitute of the described object. Then this can be the key for the interpretation of buildings which were built as «copies» of other buildings or as rhetorical metaphors of the ideological contents of their archetypes. «Copies» were, in fact, constructed with abstract and concrete elements of the archetype buildings (general scheme, particular characteristics and physical parts, such as sculptural or architectural members), with the skill of the intellect of the copy's patron.³² The fact that architectural copies were a more or less organized accumulation of individual elements

²⁹ Chr. Smith, «Cyriacus of Ancona's seven drawings of Hagia Sophia», *The Art Bulletin* 69 (1987), 16–32. The ekphrasis of Chrysoloras is available only in PG 156, 23–53.

³⁰ L. Pellechia, «Reconstructing the Greek house. Giuliano da Sangallo's villa for the Medici in Florence», *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 52 (1993), 323–338. The drawing was most probably made in the second decade of the 16th century.

³¹ Mesarites, cit. n. 3, above.

³² Krautheimer, «Introduction to an Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture»; Webb, «The aesthetics of sacred space», 64–6.

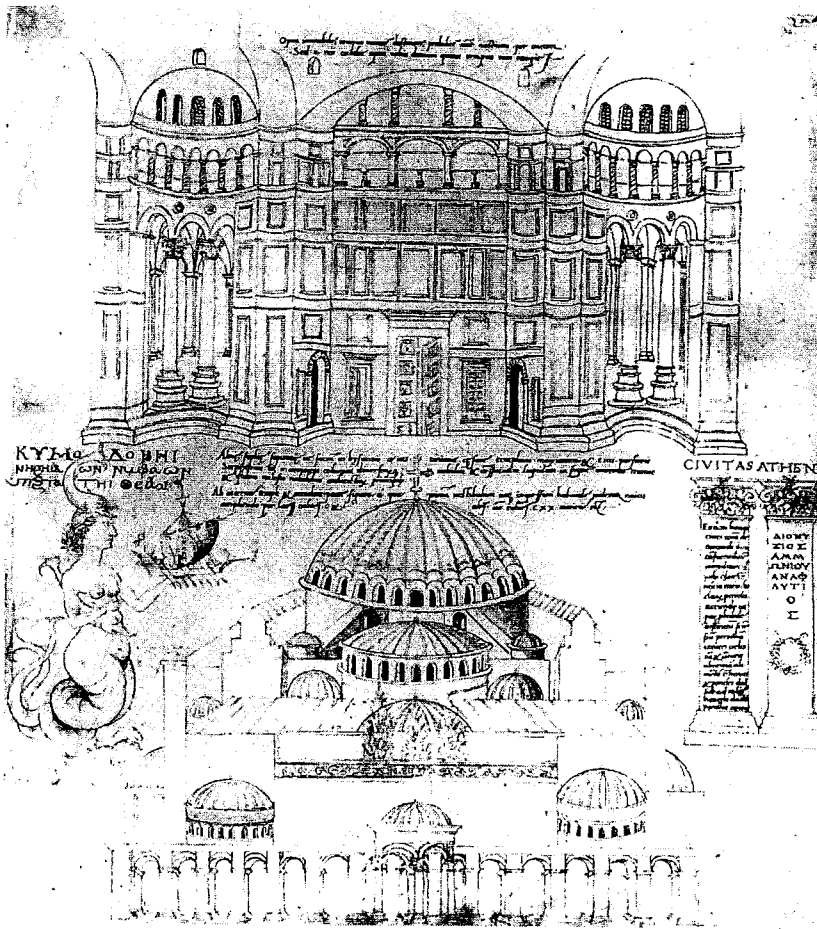


Fig. 10: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticanus Barberinianus latinus 4424, fol. 28r. Giuliano da Sangallo, nave western side and western façade of the church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, after Ciriaco de' Pizzicolti (C. Huelsen, *Il libro de Giuliano da Sangallo. Codice Vaticano Barberiniano latino 4424*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1910), phot. by Deutsches archäologisches Institut Athen).

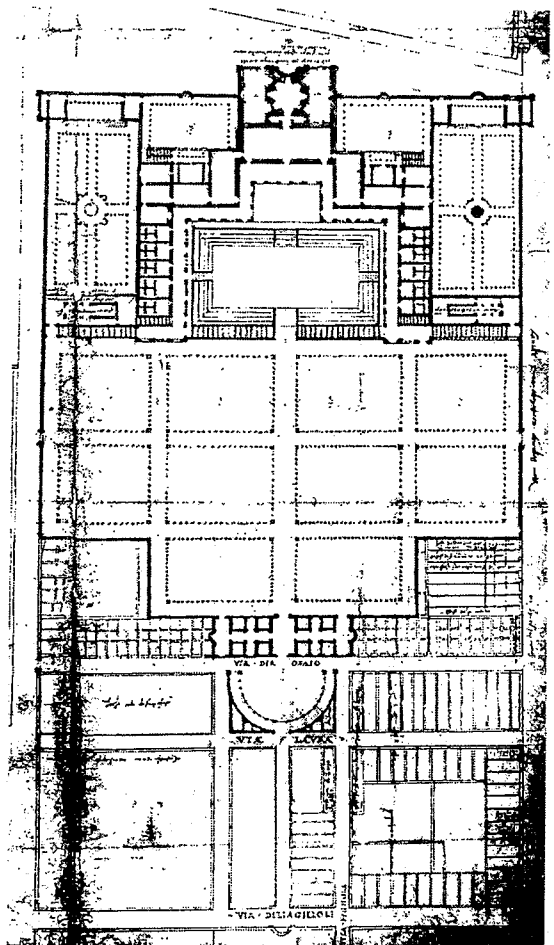


Fig. 11: Giuliano da Sangallo and Antonio da Sangallo the Elder. Plan for a Medici villa on Via Laura, Florence (ca. 1515), detail (L. Pellechia, «Reconstructing the Greek House: Giuliano da Sangallo's Villa for the Medici in Florence», *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 52 [1993]).

(abstract or concrete) reflects the fact that architectural ekphraseis consist of descriptions of individual elements of the buildings. This attitude is well illustrated by Theophanes the Greek's reply to an admirer who asked him for a painted view of St. Sophia: «it is impossible ... for you to obtain this as it is for me to draw it; however ... I shall draw for you a small part, and that not even a part, but, as it were, one hundredth-something small out of something great-so that thanks to this paltry representation of mine you may be able to imagine and understand the rest, great as it is.»³³ In the medieval world, parts were understood as representing or embodying the whole which they originally belonged in. This seems to suggest that medieval architectural copies were considered as substitutes of the archetypes, or that they were completely identified with them.

2. *Architecture described in ekphraseis*

Ekphraseis, either independent or belonging to composite texts, describe visible matters in words, and are often dedicated to the description of architecture. Although this type of rhetoric is considered an accumulation of clichés, recent research has shown that careful reading and sound interpretation may give precise information, which allows the reconstruction of monuments that do not exist any more. For example, the literary descriptions of the Holy Apostles have been the object of study by modern scholars who try to restore the form of this important building that vanished leaving no physical remains. The fact that the Apostoleion was the model for St. Mark's in Venice led scholars to project the ekphraseis of the Constantinopolitan prototype on its Venetian «copy», in an effort the aim of which was to decode rhetorical conventions in the texts.³⁴ In this procedure of decoding the obscure stylistic elements of Byzantine literature, the ekphraseis of Saint Sophia are very useful because the building is still standing and available for comparison with the texts.³⁵

³³ Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 258.

³⁴ For the case of the Holy Apostles, see above p. 00, and n. 23.

³⁵ On Silentiarios' ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia see R. Macrides and P. Magdalino, «The architecture of ekphrasis. Construction and context of Paul Silentiary's poem on Hagia Sophia», *BMGS* 12 (1988), 47–82. On the reading of such a text, see James and Webb, «To understand ultimate things and enter secret places» (cit. n. 1, above); Webb, «The aesthetics of sacred space» (cit. n. 1, above); R. S. Nelson, «To say and to see. Ekphrasis and vision in Byzantium», in id. and N. Bryson (eds.), *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 2000), 143–68. For a

Another set of ekphraseis, dealing with imaginary buildings related to imaginary outdoors spaces, is of particular interest. They derive from some late Byzantine poems or verse romances, and they present a particular case of rhetorical discourse, because in them the perception of reality is closely intermingled with the «emotional-subjective» involvement of the author and the reader. Below, I will attempt to discuss architectural descriptions and I shall try to explore the way they relate to objective realities.

Descriptions of the organized space in Byzantine narrative poetry follow in general the conventions of any description of the extraordinary. The abundant adjectives are in the superlative; the materials mentioned are precious and rare; the craftsmanship is beyond human capacities. Moreover, the first impression is grasped from distance: the hero proceeds through an enchanting landscape where, eventually, the vision of a castle or palace emerges and takes him by surprise because of the outstanding beauty, of the rare and costly materials, of the big size, and of other unusual characteristics. In spite of these conventions, each author tries to invent ways to stress the originality of the described object. Rhodamne's castle is triangular, seems to have been made out of a single block of stone, because there is no joint visible to betray any division between the blocks. The poet does not explain whether this was due to the supreme craftsmanship of the stone masons who made the joints perfectly tight; the ambiguity is obviously intentional, so that the reader retains the impression that the castle is indeed of one solid block. The castle has thirty-three towers, at the top of which stand statues made out of bronze or stone; some of them seem alive and play music.³⁶ Chrysorroë's castle emerged in the landscape shining under the sun, as it was made of bronze, hammered gold, pearls and precious stones.³⁷ Chrysantza's *Erotokastron* dazzled the hero from afar by its being made of sculpted sardonyx, topped with lion and dragon heads, all made of gold; these

discussion of the ekphrases of Hagia Sophia in the frame of the development of architectural theory see H.-W. Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory from Vitruvius to the Present* (London-New York, 1994), 32–4.

³⁶ J.-A. Lambert (née van der Kolf), «Le roman de Libistros et Rodamnè», *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam Afdeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks* 35 (Amsterdam, 1935), 110, 111. Important remarks on space and architecture in *Libistros and Rhodamne* in P. A. Agapitos, «Dreams and the Spatial Aesthetics of Narrative, Presentation in Livistrus and Rhodamne», *DOP* 53 (1999), 111–45.

³⁷ *Τὸ κατὰ Καλλίμαχον καὶ Χρυσορρόην ἐρωτικὸν ποίημα*, in E. Kriaras, *Βυζαντινὰ ἐρωτικὰ μυθιστορήματα* (Athens 1959), 17–83 (for the description of the castle see verses 178 ff.).



Fig. 12: Venice, Procuratoria di San Marco. Incense burner in the shape of a domed building (12th c.), Byzantine, partially gilded (H. C. Evans and W. D. Wixom (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium*, exh. cat. (New York, 1997).

sculpted animals moved and produced sounds giving the impression of being alive.³⁸

The authors' descriptions of castles being of one massive block of precious material, of precious stones and pearls that can be distinguished in the summary image one gets from afar, or of clockwork sculpture (*αὐτόματα*) may render the rhetoric perception of architectural realities: fine masonry, gold mosaic surfaces, polychrome marble revetment, gold plated or bronze decorative architectural elements. I would suggest, though, that in conceiving the image of those mythical castles from afar, the authors had recourse to images of luxury objects with a direct or indirect architectural character — such as gold-plated reliquaries, incense burners, ciboria, crowns, known from still extant examples, or clockwork devices, known only from written accounts³⁹ — than to buildings on a large scale (fig. 12).

³⁸ Διήγησις ἐξαιρέτος Βελλήανδρου τοῦ Ρωμαίου, in Kriaras, op. cit., 85–130; the description of the castle in verses 243 ff.

³⁹ See for example the «Grotto of the Virgin», added on the crown of the emperor Leo VI, the gold-plated silver reliquary and the lamp or incense burner in form of a five-domed building

In the romances discussed above the fortified residence is presented as a mystifying seductive vision, which signifies the yet unknown and for this reason equivocal domain of Eros. It is interesting that in the existing versions* of the Byzantine epic poem of Digenis Akritas, the process of presentation follows a different model. The fortified palace and its surroundings represent the male hero and his personality (while, as it will be shown below, in the romances they represent the heroine). Digenis’ virtues and capacity for taming natural forces are established by explaining on how reasonably he chose the natural setting after careful consideration of several factors, on how he conceived of and studied the plan, on how he carried it out with the application of technology.⁴⁰ The description of Digenis Akritas’ mansion intends to show his merits in doing things correctly, because he represents some generally accepted social values. This explains also the fact that although the palaces described in the Digenis epic and in the love romances reflect similar models, the description of the first is distinguished by its clarity:⁴¹ the hero made his house «big, square, with ashlar blocks, with decent columns and windows above. He adorned the ceilings with mosaics from expensive marbles shining with brightness... inside he built three upper storeys... cruciform rooms, five-domed reception halls».⁴²

now in St Mark’s Treasury: *Le trésor de Saint Marc de Venise* (Milan, 1984), 117–20, 201–3, 237–43 (for the Byzantine provenance of the latter, which had been previously disputed, see I. Kalavrezou, in H. C. Evans and W. D. Wixom (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium*, exh. cat. (New York, 1997), 250–1). See, also, the reliquary of St. Demetrius (now in the Kremlin Museums) in A. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (Leningrad, 1977), 1985, 308, figs. 203–4. On the *αὐτόματα* of the Great Palace, see Breet, «The automata in the Byzantine ‘throne of Solomon’», *Speculum* 29 (1954), 477–87. On the *αὐτόματα* adorning the fountains of literary gardens, see M.-L. Dolezal and M. Mavroudi, «Theodore Hyrtakenos’ description of the garden of St. Anna and the ekphrasis of gardens», in Littlewood and al. (eds.), *Byzantine Garden Culture* (Washington D.C., 2001), 131–2.

⁴⁰ *Βασίλειος Διγενῆς Ἀκρίτης*, ed. St. Alexiou (Athens, 1985), verses 1610 ff.; cf. P. Odorico, *Digenis Akritas, Poema anonimo bizantino* (Florence, 1995), VII, 8 ff.

⁴¹ For an attempt of identification of the models for buildings described in the epic, see A. Xyngopoulos, «Τὸ ἀνάκτορον τοῦ Διγενῆ Ἀκρίτα», *Λαογραφία* 12 (1938–1940), 558–71; id., «Ὁ τάφος τοῦ Διγενῆ», *Ἑλληνικά* 20 (1967), 24–8. On the identification of the epic’s personages and places, see H.-G. Beck, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur* (München 1971), 63–97, and Alexiou, *Βασίλειος Διγενῆς Ἀκρίτης*, νδ’–ξη’. On a possible dependence of the Digenis palace on islamic models, see L.-A. Hunt, «Comnenian aristocratic palace decoration. Descriptions and Islamic connections», in M. Angold (ed.), *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, BAR Int.Ser. 221 (1984), 142–5.

⁴² *Διγενῆς Ἀκρίτας*, ed. Odorico, VII, 43–51.

Byzantine romances describe the progression of the male hero from the outer objective world to the inner subjective world of Eros to whom the male hero is destined to subjugate himself. The confined castles to which the male hero is attracted as by a magnet, are the containers of the heroine, surrounded by symbols of the lust and the affections she is to offer.⁴³ This could explain the subjectivity of the architectural descriptions as well. It is thus significant, that these poems were produced after the eleventh century when personal emotions come to the foreground of artistic and literary expression.⁴⁴

The relation between the fortified palaces and the surrounding countryside that we encounter in the epic and love romances reflect a real element of the life style of Byzantine aristocracy and, more precisely, of the Imperial Court: palaces in suburbs of Constantinople, surrounded by extensive confined countryside beautified by rivers, brooks, pools, grottoes and hills, planted with rare species of plants, enlivened with animals. This countryside was organized for hunting, for hunting was a most popular sport of the Court. Byzantine emperors were proud of these parks which were surrounded by walls in order to keep the game in, but at the same time they were organized to simulate natural open landscape. We know of two suburban palaces with large parks in the vicinity of Constantinople, the palace of Philopation and the palace of *Aretai* (Virtues).⁴⁵

The love romances' male heroes find themselves inside the fortified palaces or castles, where they encounter an absolutely sensuous universe. The enclosed garden is an indispensable feature of this enclosed world, a paradise «full of fruit, charms, flowers and foliage, delightful beyond words because of a breeze» and in the garden, as is the case with Chrysorrhoe's castle, there is «a most delightful and beautifully constructed bath».⁴⁶ Henry Maguire has argued that the passage from the open paradise to the medieval closed garden took place after Iconoclasm.⁴⁷ This might explain why the gardens in late Byzantine romances are enclosed ones.

⁴³ On the garden as a metaphor for woman, see Dolezal and Mavroudi, «Theodore Hyrtakenos' description of the garden of St. Anna», in Littlewood and al. (eds.), *Byzantine Garden Culture*, 139–40 and n. 61.

⁴⁴ A. P. Kazhdan and A. Wharton Epstein, *Changes in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1985), 196 ff.

⁴⁵ H. Maguire, «A description of the *Aretai* palace and its garden», *Journal of Garden History* 10 (1990), 209–13.

⁴⁶ *Τὸ κατὰ Καλλίμαχον καὶ Χρυσορρόην ἐρωτικὸν ποίημα*, in Κριaras, *Βυζαντινὰ ἐρωτικὰ μυθιστορήματα*, verses 275 ff.

⁴⁷ H. Maguire, «Paradise withdrawn», in Littlewood and al. (eds.), *Byzantine Garden Culture*, 31, 34–5.

The highlight of Chrysorrhoe's garden is the sensuous bath, full with «flowers and foliage and plants and fragrance beyond natural measure».48 The luxury of the materials, the craftsmen's skill in sculpting or joining them, devices which reflect an outstandingly developed (though secret) technology producing miraculous effects, they address the senses much more than the intellect. Instead of marble Chrysorrhoe's bath had mirror revetment, which, due to a strange technical device of the maker, do not dim from the vapors of hot water. But what is almost indispensable to these baths that haunt Byzantine poets' imagination is the ζώδια, works of art representing living creatures, that move and/or produce sounds. Rose water is coming out of the mouth of a human head sculpted in gold with such dexterity that one would think that this head is alive.49 Around the pool in Chrysantza's bath «little birds were sitting of all kinds, made of gold, each singing as is usual to its species.... and they flew as if alive».50 The ἀντόματα, by sharing characteristics of animate and inanimate beings, signal the extension of the animate, sensuous world into the world of inanimate, non sensuous objects, producing ambivalent feelings.

Imaginary castles and palaces with their gardens and accessories would reflect real palaces of Byzantium, especially ones at Constantinople. The Great Palace enclosed the Mesokepion, a garden irrigated with abundant water, which fed two fountains and the abounding vegetation. The first was a porphyry fountain, surrounded with dragons carved in stone. In its middle stood a perforated turning pinecone spouting water, surrounded with little white columns. The second was a marble fountain with a marble turning pinecone spouting water, while in its periphery stood bronze cocks, goats and rams that spat water from their mouths; there were also cups into which wine sprang up, to please people who passed by.51 The clock-work animals (ζώδια) that move and produce sounds like living creatures in fountains imagined by poets reflect, not only the

48 *Τὸ κατὰ Καλλίμαχον καὶ Χρυσορρόην ἐρωτικὸν ποίημα*, in Kriaras, *Βυζαντινὰ ἐρωτικὰ μυθιστορήματα*, verse 299.

49 *Op. cit.*, verses 304–316, 325–332.

50 *Διήγησις ἐξαίρετος Βελθάνδρου τοῦ Ρωμαίου*, in Kriaras, *Βυζαντινὰ ἐρωτικὰ μυθιστορήματα*, verses 465–472.

51 Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker (CSHB; Bonn, 1838), 327–9. Cf. Littlewood, «Gardens of the palaces», in Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture*, 22; Maguire, «A description of the Aretai palace», 211. On fountains with pinecone spouts in Byzantium, see Dolezal and Mavroudi, «Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the garden of St. Anna», in Littlewood and al. (eds.), *Byzantine Garden Culture*, 121 and n. 31.

ζώδια of the fountains in the palaces of Constantinople, but also the *αὐτόματα* that were admired by visitors in the Great Palace.⁵²

Mesokepion was confined to the east by a polo ground, to the west by the *Nea* church, and to the north and south by porticoes; one has to remember that, behind these porticoes, the palace comprised public reception and banqueting halls, residential quarters, baths etc., as is the case with the palaces surrounding the gardens in literature.⁵³ Façades with two or three storeys decorated with columns and windows, similar to the ones described in the Digenis epic and the romances, can be seen in ruins of Byzantine palaces or houses. It has already been suggested that the so-called Porphyrogenitos palace in Constantinople or the palace at Mistras provided the model for the palace described in *Callimachus and Chrysorrhoe*.⁵⁴ Façades of buildings in two or three storeys, decorated with columns and windows are surviving in monumental painting; it suffices to mention the mosaic at Daphni representing the prayer of Anne and Joachim or the background of the Annunciation fresco in Panagia of Arakas in Cyprus (fig. 13).⁵⁵ Painting has also preserved depictions of enclosed gardens with water feeding channels, fountains and vegetation, although they are represented in a stylized form in both monumental art and miniatures (fig. 14).⁵⁶

The settings of Meleteniotes' allegorical proem *Eἰς τὴν Σωφροσύνην* (To Temperance) are modeled after love romances.⁵⁷ The narration starts on May Day, when the hero, like Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, walks alone in the countryside and finds himself lost in the wilderness, where he comes across a young and beautiful woman, who later identifies herself as Sophrosyne. She challenges him to enter her domain and from that point begins the journey of

⁵² G. Breet, «The automata in the Byzantine throne of Solomon», *Speculum* 29 (1954), 477–87.

⁵³ Littlewood, «Gardens of the palaces», in Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture*, 22.

⁵⁴ I. Djurić, «La fortune de Théodore Métochite», *CahArch* 44 (1996), 160; A. Orlandos, «Τὰ παλάτια καὶ τὰ σπίτια τοῦ Μυστρῶ», *ABME* 3 (1937), 3 ff.; id., «Quelques notes complémentaires sur les maisons paléologuennes de Mistra», in *Art et société a Byzance sous les Paléologues, Actes du colloque organisé par l'association internationale des études Byzantines à Venise en Septembre 1968* (Venice, 1971), 75–82, pls. 1–22; C. Mango, *Byzantine Architecture* (New York, 1985), 154–5, figs. 221–2 (palace of Porphyrogenitus), 160, fig. 234 (palace of Mistras).

⁵⁵ Cutler and Spieser, *Byzance médiévale* (cit. n.7, above), figs. 206, 230.

⁵⁶ See the remarks of Littlewood, «Gardens of the palaces», in Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture*, 14–15.

⁵⁷ «A love romance without Eros» as Beck, *Volksliteratur*, 125, puts it. The text in E. Miller, «Poème allégorique de Melitèniote», *Notices et extraits de la Bibliothèque Nationale* 19.2 (1858), 1–138; cf. A. M. T[albot], «Meliteniotes Theodore», *ODB*, vol. 2, 1336–7.



Fig. 13: Cyprus, church of the Virgin of Arakas (1192). Angel of the Annunciation (phot. by A. Malekos).



Fig. 14: Sinai, monastery of Saint Catherine, ms gr. 339 (Homelies of Gregory of Nazianzus), f. 4v. Portrait of Gregory of Nazianzus in an architectural complex including gardens (A. Cutler and J.-M. Spieser, *Byzance médiévale 700–1204*, Paris, 1996).

the hero through wondrous places, where he encounters animate or inanimate beings that incarnate abstract ideas.

Many elements of the architectural structures described are, of course, direct or indirect loans from other texts, Achilles Tatius' account of luxuriant natural settings or Digenis' mansion being two of the poet's major models.⁵⁸ However, Meliteniotes achieved originality by combining lent imagery with personal involvement and observation. The meticulous report of construction details renders the architectural practice with unusual precision. The materials are, of course, very rare and costly, although they are sometimes used in the wrong place. Thus, Sophrosyne's enclosed garden is delimited by a wall made out of crystal ashlar blocks carved and joined with such precision that one could not perceive the joints, and the viewer would think the wall to be of solid ice.⁵⁹ The gate in this wall, its locks and levers are made out of (not decorated with) diamond.⁶⁰

Because of its unusual precision, the description of the *κουβούκλεια* (domed rooms) of the palace is particularly interesting.⁶¹ Besides the *κουβούκλεια* of five domes or eight apses (*πεντακούβουκλα, ὀκτώκογχα*), the largest room of the palace had four storeys. The ground-floor had rectangular piers; the upper floors had columns, according to the common architectural practice. The columns were made of porphyry, sardonyx and sapphire with golden ornaments, and the capitals were carved in the shape of elephant or dragon heads. The inner cornices were of silver, gold and onyx sculpted in the forms of eagles and peacocks; the four doors and the stairs of the were made of highly polished iron, the roof tiles of amber with ridge tiles bearing water spouts in the shape of birds with open wings. Columns of crystal working as water-jets surrounded the *κουβούκλειον*.

Unlike Meliteniotes, who described imaginary architecture with astonishing precision, his almost contemporary Theodore Metochites refers in vague terms to the real building in which he spent a considerable part of his life. In 1328,

⁵⁸ The poem echoes late antique and Christian literature as well as Byzantine romances, such as *Digenis Akritas* and *Libistros and Rhodamne*. On Meliteniotes' use of former literature, see V. Tiftixoglu, «Digenis, das Sophrosyne-Gedicht des Meliteniotes und der byzantinische Fünfzehnsilber», *BZ* 67 (1974), 1–63.

⁵⁹ Miller, «Poème allégorique», vv 670–684.

⁶⁰ Miller, «Poème allégorique», vv 727–730.

⁶¹ Miller, «Poème allégorique», vv 828–1106.

when exiled to Didymoteichon,⁶² Metochites composed a series of autobiographical poems addressed *To Himself*. There he exposed his thoughts on his personal experience acquired through years of fortune and misfortune. In one of his poems he recalls his Constantinopolitan palace destroyed by the mob in 1328.⁶³ For our purpose, it is interesting to note the vague terms he used in describing his closed, intimate space: splendid, solid, delightful to behold, exceeding well-built. The author is more explicit when describing the «public» parts of his residence. He lets us know that the chapel had columns inside to support the roof, a forecourt surrounded with columns and that the floor and the walls inside and outside were sheathed with multicolored shining marbles, woven in variegated design. He speaks also of a court with galleries, of water flowing in well-built conduits that fed cisterns and beautiful baths. However, even those elements, so much elaborated in other literary descriptions, do not seem to seize Metochites' attention as to describe them in a more concrete manner. In fact, the author is striving to reconstruct his person through the remembrance of his possessions. Speaking of his home, he is captive of his own emotional experience of it; when referring to his palace he virtually describes his own feelings about it.

Although love romances might reflect Western models,⁶⁴ the texts quoted above could reproduce Byzantine realities as well. It is noteworthy that ekphraseis of castles or palaces were an indispensable narrative element and that, with no exception, these residences enclosed gardens beautified with waterworks, reflecting real palaces or grand houses of the Byzantines.⁶⁵ In this connection, it is interesting to note that *Phlorios and Platziaphlora* or *Imperios*

⁶² On Metochites, see I. Ševčenko, «Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the intellectual trends of his time», in P. A. Underwood (ed.), *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4 (London, 1975), 19–91. The poems in the edition by J. M. Featherstone, *Theodore Metochites's Poems 'To Himself'* (Vienna, 2000). Here, we refer in particular to Poem 19, 112–31.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, verses 155–226.

⁶⁴ Although, the general concept of love romances might derive from Western European models. See, Carolina Cupane, «Il motivo del castello nella narrativa tardo-bizantina», *JÖB* 27 (1978), 229–67, esp. 237 ff., n. 36, 242.

⁶⁵ On Byzantine garden culture, see: L. Brubaker and A. R. Littlewood, «Byzantinische Gärten», in M. Carroll-Spillecke (ed.), *Der Garten von der Antike bis zum Mittelalter* (Mainz am Rhein, 1992), 213–48; A. R. Littlewood, «Gardens of Byzantium», *Journal of Garden History* 12/2 (1992), 126–53; Littlewood and al. (eds.), *Byzantine Garden Culture* (cit. n. 39, above).

and Margarona,⁶⁶ which follow closely western prototypes, lack ekphraseis of palaces with gardens. It is true that in Western Europe the late antique garden culture was not a continuous tradition. Medieval gardens appeared first in monastic centers and literature;⁶⁷ it was only by the late Middle Age that gardens appear in a secular architectural context, probably under Byzantine and Arab influence.⁶⁸ However, the earliest example of a secular building conceived to include gardens is dated to the sixteenth century and reflects several traditions. The plan of the villa on via Laura in Florence designed by Sangallo for the de' Medici foresaw *giardini segreti* (that is an enclosed garden) and a vast garden in front of it (fig. 11).⁶⁹ It has already been suggested that the building was conceived as the reproduction of the Greek house described by Vitruvius,⁷⁰ and we have to bear in mind for the Italians of the Renaissance, the term «Greeks» meant equally the ancient Greeks or the Byzantines.⁷¹ Therefore, the reconstruction of a «Greek» house might refer to A mixed tradition, ancient Greek, Roman, but also Byzantine.

Byzantine palaces with irrigated gardens, beautified by waterworks continued the Roman tradition that organized in defined schemes the long tradition of «Paradise» established in the eastern Mediterranean basin from remote times.⁷² Byzantines shared with Persians and Arabs the vision of the ideal landscape in which buildings were to be surrounded by exquisite gardens (fig. 15). Palaces in art and poetry are regularly set in a paradise, which is depicted or described as the ultimate source of felicity in life and afterlife. Paradise answers man's longing for absolute happiness; architecture in Paradise suggests human activity and measure, and by making Paradise more real invites to a fuller appreciation of natural beauty.

⁶⁶ Ed. Kriaras, *Βυζαντινὰ ἐρωτικά μυθιστορήματα* (cit. n. 37, above), 131–249.

⁶⁷ U. Willerding, «Gärten und Pflanzen des Mittelalters», in Carroll-Spillecke (ed.), *Der Garten*, 252, 255–60; M. Carroll-Spillecke, «Die Gärten in ihrer kulturhistorischen Perspektive», in ead. (ed.), *Der Garten*, 287–8; Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought* (cit. n. 1, above), 228–31; E. Kluckert, *European Garden Design* (Cologne, 2000), 22–31.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁹ Cf. above, 326–7; Pellechia, «Reconstructing the Greek house» (cit. n. 30, above).

⁷⁰ Vitruvius, 6.7.1–6; Pellechia, *op. cit.*, 330ff.

⁷¹ Tanoulas, «The Acciaiuoli palace in the Propylaea» (cit. n. 27, above), 12–15.

⁷² Carroll-Spillecke (ed.), *Der Garten*.

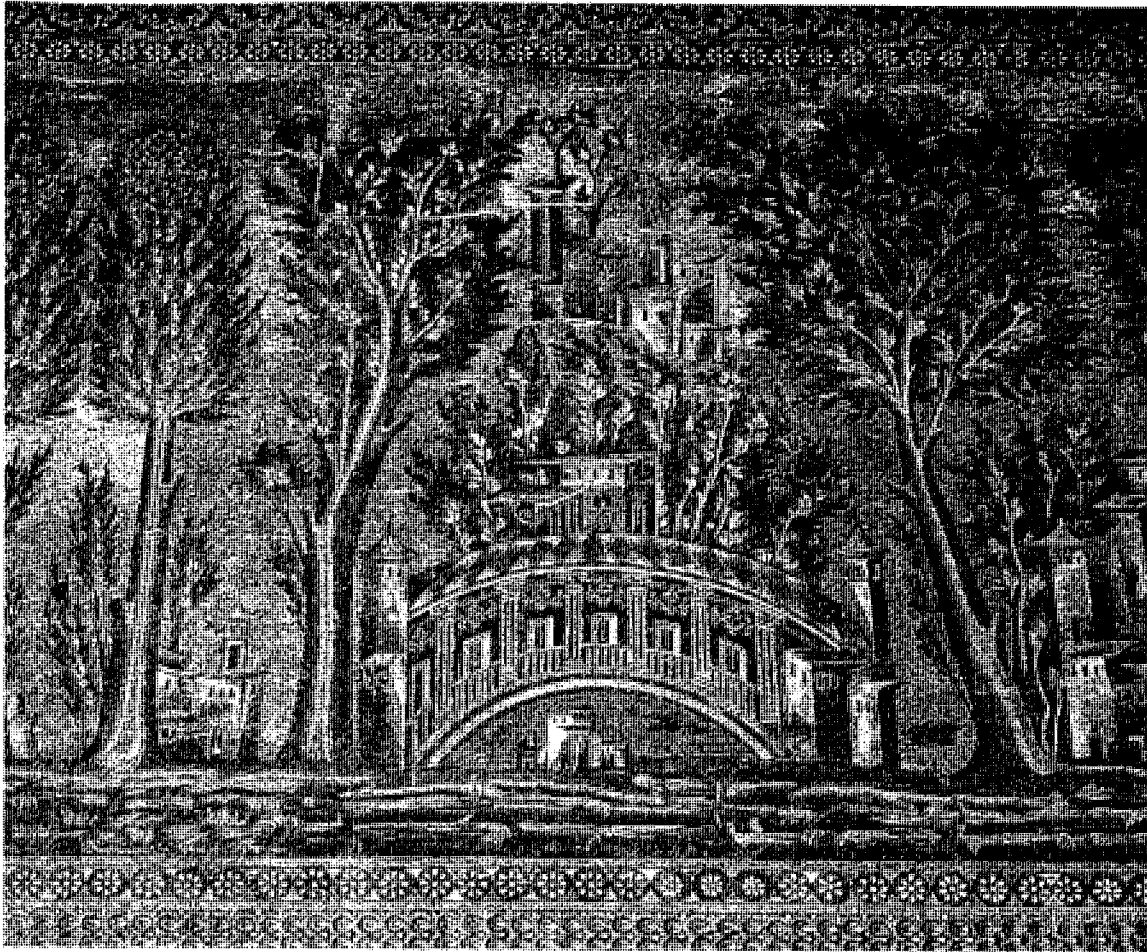


Fig. 15: Damascus, mosque of the Omeyyades. Mosaic depicting architecture in a paradisiac landscape (705-711) (Cutler and Spieser, *Byzance médiévale*).

The architecture described in a paradisiac context in Byzantine literature discussed above and the architecture created as a metaphor of concepts discussed in the first part of this essay, both aimed at beauty. In both cases beauty was to make the vision of the aspired to fulfillment of desire or form of happiness more convincing.