

FOUNDATIONS OF BYZANTINE LATE MIDDLE AGES ARCHITECTURE THOUGHTFULNESS

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Abstract. *Only in the recent few years have a number of facsimile publications on architecture offered a possibility of studying the original texts from different time periods. Those, already rare studies on the theory of architecture in the western civilization, almost regularly completely omit the Byzantine achievements in the so-called entirety of thoughtfulness (enkyklios paideia), that was a main characteristic of Byzantine learning. This learning, based on the ancient Greek and Hellenistic foundations, in many ways concern architecture, especially the architectural theory. That is why writing a good account of the architectural theory of this, historically such an important country as Byzantium, in such a long historical period (since 312 till 1453), has been a difficult task (this contribution is just the initial part of the study). One should not be disregarded that the architectural theories are never completely independent of historical, geographical or even personal prejudices of their authors. In this sense, a subject matter of this treatise is just one 1141 year long part of the architectural theory of the West (West - in civilizational terms, not a political West), the part that rests on Christian foundations that is the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant ones, mainly. It is all treated in order, from ancient pagan Greece and Rome, ancient and Middle Ages Orthodox Byzantium, until Middle Ages and New Age Europe, altogether, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant Europe, and then those parts of the world in which the said civilizational circle managed to take root in: parts of Asia, North and South America, parts of Africa and Australia.*

Key words: *Theory, architecture, entirety of thoughtfulness, Byzantium, Hellenism, Greece, 1141 years*

Byzantine late Middle Ages and Byzantine Renaissance (1204-1453) are two final periods in the culture and architecture of that 1141 year lasting Empire. That is the time, as can be recognised by the year when the first of those periods started i.e. when the second of them ended, when the great Orthodox Empire found itself between the Crusades (led

primarily against it by mostly the Catholic westerners in 1204) and the final fall of Constantinople under the Turkish rule in 1453.

After that, no other culture or architecture in the western world lasted so long or left so dispersed seed around the world; starting with Italy and its Renaissance, based on the Byzantine one in many respects. And this fact is a carefully avoided one out of no scientific reasons, as we will see.

Byzantine Empire was shattered into pieces in 1204. While the Crusaders occupied Constantinople, a part of Bytina, Thrace, the eastern part of today's Greece and the Peloponnesus; the Venetians became the rulers of Aegean Isles and Crete, the Byzantine Greeks themselves formed a number of independent states: Nicomedian Empire, Epire Empire, as well as the far off Trapesunt Empire which continued to last up to 1461. Nicomedian emperor Michael VIII Paleologus was able to reclaim Constantinople and his heirs, although being surrounded by the Bulgarians, Serbs, Venetians, and particularly by the oncoming Ottoman Turks, tried to stop the gradual diminishing of their territories in the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula. During the reign of Michael VIII (1259-1282) Byzantine Empire still stood as a European power, but the reign of his successor Andronicus II (1282-1328) was marked by heavy losses and the beginning of a series of civil wars which almost ruined the state. By the middle of the fourteenth century the Turks started to grow strong in Europe, and the Byzantine emperor became nothing but the weak vassal of their Sultan. When, in 1453 Constantinople finally fell, that event did not have any great effect on the political scene in eastern Europe.

Viewed in such a dark environment, the artistic and architectural achievements during the reign of Paleologuses are very impressive; at least those created up to 1325. The incomparable mosaics and frescoes of the Chora monastery, today the mosque Kariye Camii, and Holy Mary Pammacaristos, today the mosque Fethiye Camii in Constantinople as well as those in the churches in Mistra, on Athos, in Thessaloniki and Ohrid, all show us what luxury the rich Byzantine could still afford at that time. The Serbian kings and emperors gave their best to reproduce the Byzantine models on their own territories.

The written documents about art and architecture of this period are disappointingly scarce. The renewed interest in ancient monuments was documented in the scripts of the Nicaean emperor Theodorus Ducas Lascaris (1254-1258), which we present here because of its significance for the history of taste. It is, however, an important document because there are very few proofs about any interest for the remains of the classic art and architecture in 13th and 14th centuries. In The **Thirty-second Epistle to G. Acropolitus** (Epistolae XXXII ad G. Acropolitam) Lascaris said: **"Pergamon... full of the monuments of the old origin, as it is known, and yet ruined, shows the earlier splendour and elegance of those who made it, as if through the glass. Because, those things are filled with the sublimity of the Hellenic thought and are part of the idea of Hellenic wisdom. That city shows the things like those to us, the descenders, reproaching us with the magnificence of our inherited glory. In comparison to the buildings of today, these evoke awe... The upright walls are there, and the structure is as varied as the structure of the defiant heavens. The river runs between them, crossed by the high arcs, for which (by the Creator of the heaven!) you would not think to have been laid, but to have grown out, naturally, as a sole slab of rock. If a sculptor like Pheidias had seen them, he would have admired their precise sameness and the ab-**

sence of inclination. Among the buildings, there are low cottages, which, appear as the last traces of the ones who left, and that image evokes a lot of pain. For, as if the mouse holes are compared to the houses of modern times, one could say the same, comparing these cottages with the destroyed houses... At each side of the circular wall of the great theatre there are the round towers, competing by the sameness of their stone works, and surrounded by a sort of rings. They are not the work of a modern hand, nor do they reflect the notions of a modern mind: for their appearance fills us with admiration.

What inspired the most important monument of the Michael VIII rule, a bronze statue of an emperor kneeling in front of its namesake, Archangel Michael, was most likely the influence of the ancient times, and not the western part of Europe. Yet, whatever new forms the art and architecture adopted in the times of the Paleologus', the old Byzantine tradition remained prevalent, and the donors were still found among the tiny class of the **feudal** aristocrats. Our main literary source for the art production of the early 14th century, Manuel Philes the poet, created a river of the trendy verses, regularly ordered by the aristocracy, dealing with the icons, liturgical and mundane equipment, posthumous portraits and similar. The contents of his poems were, however, very rarely interesting to the historians and theoreticians of art and architecture, because it consists either out of the clichés or the praises or lineage of his noble patrons.

We do not have much use of the poems of the first Minister Theodorus Metochites (1370-1332) who, after he had been demoted, described the beauties of his ex palace and monastery Chora (which he had renewed) in a meticulously developed hexameter. The overthrow of Andronicus II (1282-1328) led to the fall of his almighty and rich first Minister Metochites, whose palace, described in the following section, and as given in the Metochites' personal records, was devastated by the population:

Inside of it (palace) there was the chapel, the ravishing building... Owing to its sturdy structure made of equally dressed stones, interconnected, it remained undamaged. Inside, the piers support the roof, and outside, also, all around the comfortable vestibule, they are set in the circle. It is a pleasure to see them shining. The entire work, both inside and outside, is composed of the beautiful multicoloured marble cut into slabs, which are also placed upright, all around. Such was the chapel in my palace. Around were the houses seemly of the modern man living conditions, and very usable, too. There were also the gardens of entralling beauty and unstoppable fountains with running water conducted from outside, by the well-built water network... In the interior, the underground reservoirs of water, prevented the capricious heats by coolness of the hand made fountains. Also inside, according to the needs, out of the lavishly built bathroom, the numerous and voluminous water streams exuded, that was joy to see and to use, both inside or outside.

There was also the court yard encircled by the porch, thus protected from the sun-rays; it was the pleasure to stroll in it. It was very large, as befits those buildings, and it was pleasurable to behold its position and the proportion of its length to its width. It was paved by the quarry stone, sprinkled with old lime dust in a uniform, dry layer, so that it can provide the easy passage for the people and the horses without the impairment caused by the muddy soil...

The contacts with the west European art and architecture in the times of the Paleologus must have been more frequent than before, and they had twofold reaction. The Byzantine priests, as was Simeon from Thessalonika, were deeply shocked by the naturalistic paintings and the statues of the western states that showed the break up with the Christian tradition. But that naturalism in the worldly arts and architecture incited the admiration of several educated Byzantine who, rather curious, found their expression in the form of exphrasis.

The turn towards the more naturalistic understanding of the art appeared in Byzantium around 1400. It is hard to talk about the architecture in that sense, though one should always have in mind that its relationship with the other visual arts is always present. At any rate, a few of the Byzantine who in the time of decline of their Empire went to the west European countries, started to regard the art and architecture in different terms. The case of Manuel Chrysoloras is especially interesting. He accepted Aristotle's relationship of art towards the nature, and was the first to evaluate the Byzantine contribution in historical terms. Chrysoloras was a great traveler, the stateless Greek and a man of Renaissance, at first the Paleologian one and only after, and on its basis, the Italian one.

In the **Epistle 1** (Epistolae 1) sent to Prince Ioannis Paleologos (later emperor Ioannis VIII) in 1411, the philologist and diplomat, Manuel Chrysoloras (1350-1415) compares the Roam, where he lived then, to Constantinople in 15th century (Fig 1). The old and the new Rome were similar, as a daughter is similar to her mother. But, Constantinople is more beautiful than Rome:

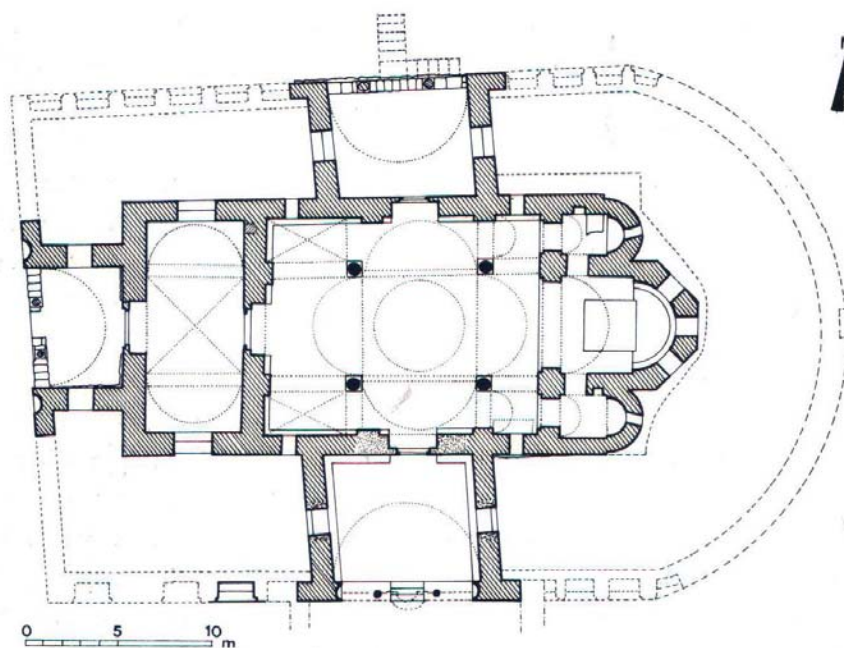


Fig. 1. The church of Saint Sofia, Trapesunt, before 1260.
(foundations by Talbot Rice)

If I wished to count the memorials, crypts, monuments and statues that exist or have existed in our city (Constantinople), I would be in a hard position. I would have to admit that there are several more of them there, than here (in Rome), but some of them are also a lot more beautiful and ravishing. Take, for instance, the tomb of the emperor who is the founder and the guardian of the city, as well as other tombs which are situated in the imperial mausoleum around it – which is miraculous to see – and many other which are preserved in the vicinity of the Church of the Apostles, except for those that disappeared, as all those which are in the vestibules of the churches in different parts of the city. Or take for instance, the statue of the emperor who made the laws, in front of it, if I remember correctly, to the east, there are other statues erected on the giant pier. All such statues existed in the city, as their remaining pedestals show, and the inscriptions on them; they were in different places, but especially on the hippodrome. Many of them, I heard are removed now, I saw myself before... How big, costly and beautiful those statues must have been, one can suppose by the beauty, height, lavishness and magnificence of those pedestals. Remembering them, I remember that in the line with the same street, towards the west, once existed the city gate, large enough to let through the whole towers and fortresses (if they could move) and cargo ships with all their rigging and masts; and (it was made) of large marble slabs, and above it there was a stoa which glittered to a distance; and far off, there was the pier which also supported the statue. And on the other hill, the one above your residence, there is a pier and other on the Strategion, and the third to the right from the church of the Apostles, as well as many other pedestals convenient for the statues. And what about the purple pier on the east end of the same street, where there is the soaring cross – the same one which Constantine the Great himself placed in the courtyard of his palace, and which surpasses all the other statues and monuments...

The Trapesunt Empire was founded in 1204 the successors of the Byzantine emperor Andronicus I Comnenus) (1183-1185). The palace in the Trapesunt city on the Black Sea whose remnants still stand, was built some time later, probably gradually (Fig. 2). In the **Trapesunt Praise** (Encomium Trebizondis) Ioannis Bessarion (1403-1472), At first the Nicaean Bishop and then the Patriarch, that is the Cardinal, whom the Crusaders instituted the same year as the one who was for the Roman Catholic church in Constantinople, wrote the following about that palace: **The dwelling place of the emperors was placed in the present-day acropolis, and is nothing else than acropolis itself, because by the force of its walls and the variety, magnitude and the beauty of its structure surpasses, by the nature of things, all the other buildings. Its western wall is the common to the acropolis and the palace, and to a height of the second floor, serves the same purpose. From that point on, it rises solely as the wall for the palace itself, and is high above the acropolis wall, almost to the same extent as the acropolis wall rises above the ground. The walls turn into other directions, appropriate by the height, thickness and the rest, go all the way down. Taking up more than half of the acropolis, they adjoin that area to the palace, and they are enough for the resistance to the oncoming enemy, and for the safe protection for those who are inside. They give a possibility to enter through two gates and have one emergency exit, and the rest is compact so that they disable and contain the attacker. At each side, there is an open space for the rooms and dwelling places for**

the emperor's servant, while the palace is rising in the middle and has one entrance with the staircase, so that the access road leads uphill. When it is entered, at once, on one side one comes across the lavish vestibules and the halls of sufficient beauty and size, to receive a large number of people. The halls are surrounded with the balconies turned to all the directions and exposed to all the winds. On the other side, there is a very long and beautiful building, with a floor completely covered with the white marble, and the ceiling glitters with the bouquets of flowers, gold and various colours. The complete recess of the ceiling gleams with the glittering stars which emulate the celestial ones and does not conceal the excellence and refinement of the painting. All around, on the walls, the corps of the kings is painted. Both the ones who ruled our country and their predecessors; There are, painted, the dangers our city survived and those who attacked it, to their own peril. High above, at the top of the building, a covered imperial bema stands, with pyramidal roof supported by four pillars. It is also covered with white marble, the roof and everything, and it divides the emperors from their subordinates, as if with a partition. It is there where the emperor dwells the most, to work with his ministers, to talk to the ambassadors, to speak and to be spoken to. Further on, there is another imperial room (bema) of an outstanding height and width, covered with roof, with piers all around. In this structure, decorated with paintings, there is a number of stairs, so that the emperor elevates very high, so it there he wants to give lavish banquets for his ministers and other subordinates. On the left side, one unexpectedly enters the system made of many rooms, with one very different among them: it is bounded by four equal sides, like the framework, and it contains memories of the Creation of the world and of the origin and history of men. On the right hand side, there are many halls, vestibules, terraces, premises and rooms divided by the colonnades flowing one into another, in an unsurpassable proportion, and each bigger than the next one, all built up to evade description and truly harmonious. There is the church, decorated with the beautiful paintings and the holy objects, which are, though not so numerous, of an outstanding beauty. What the church lacks in size, it compensates with its loveliness.

About perspective, and in the framework of the esthetics theory, in the time of the Byzantine dynasty of Paleologus, Nicephorus Gregoras in his work *On the Measuring of the Celestial Bodies Altitude* (Astrolabica) (p. 222) wrote: **Outlining the sphere in a plane is similar to painting. For, exactly as the painters strain to copy the objects exactly, not according to their true characteristics, but in order to render the recognizable to the observers, within the capacity of the human nature, and the length and width of very high structures present as somewhat reduced and lowered, in accordance with requirements of the art, to make them visually more probable in such a way, so do the geometricians and the astronomers draw the solid object in a plane, such as the octahedrons or cubes or all the spherical bodies, like the stars, sky and the earth.**

Epiphanius the Wise, the Russian hagiographer (died 1420) in the letter written 1415 to Cyril of Tver, spoke about how he entreated the renowned sage, philosopher, book illuminator and exquisite religious painter who painted over 40 churches in the cities of Constantinople, Chalcedon, Galata, Kaffa, Veliki Novgorod, Nizhni Novgorod, Greek Teophanes to draw the images of the Saint Sofia's Church in Constantinople for his **Four Gospels** (Cetveroblagovestie):

Realizing he loves me, and does not despise me, I joined the shamelessness to my bravery and required the following: *I beg your Wisdom to paint for me in colours the image of that large church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, the one erected by the great emperor Iustinian who competed with the wise Solomon. Some characters think that it, as it comes to its value and the size, is like the Moscow Kremlin in the inner city – so large is the span of its foundations, when you walk around it. If a stranger to it enters it, and wishes to go around without the guide, he is not able to find the exit, without losing himself, however he may be wise, owing to the multitude of piers and colonnades, entrances and downway stairs, passageways and corridors, various rooms, chapels, staircases, treasury vaults and crypts, partitions and additions, windows, pathways, doors, entrances and exits and massive stone pillars. Draw Iustinian for me, as he was called, as he sits on the back of the horse and holds the copper apple in his hand, the apple said to be as big and voluminous as to be able to contain two buckets of water. I beg you to place all previously mentioned on page of the book for me, so that I can place it at the beginning of my book, and to, remembering your hand work and that church, imagine I am myself in Constantinople...Being a wise man, he answered wisely: It is impossible...*

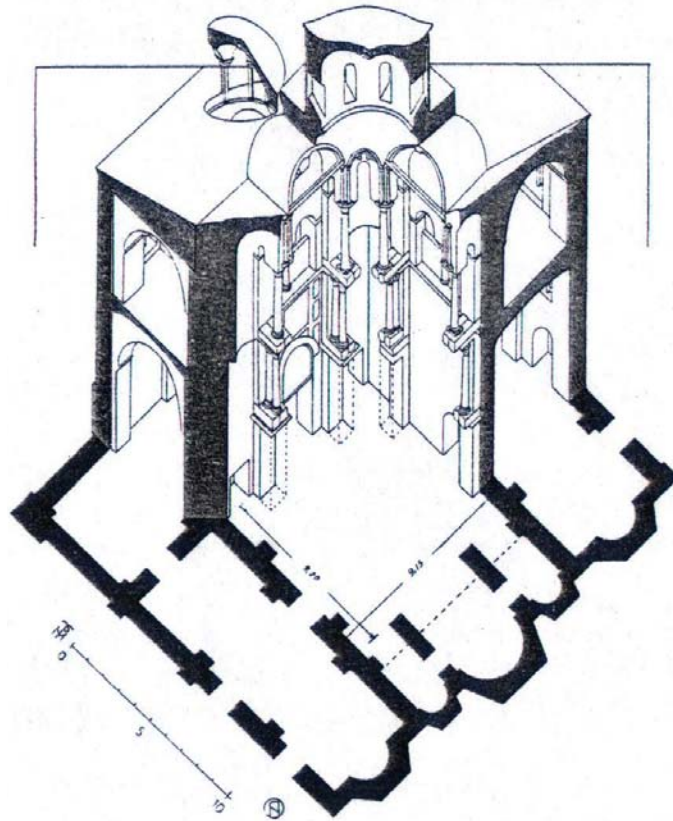


Fig. 2. Paragoritisa Church, Arta, Greece, 1282-89.
(axonometric cross section)

The Byzantine culture was, as can easily be noted in this paper, thoroughly pervaded with faith, Christian Orthodox one. That is why all its definitions were based on the dogmas, evolved in most cases straight from the Bible. There lies the main explanation for the fact that, though systematically destroyed or at least very ruined, the traces of Byzantine architecture were not hard to spot: they were in front of their very eyes in, mostly in the form of enthrallingly structured words about the different building achievements. That is how it was possible to, very often without seeing certain buildings in situ, the west European, medieval, but also the Renaissance builders, using the excellent descriptions of those buildings in Byzantine scripts they had in the libraries of their cities, erect the building quite alike their Byzantine, many centuries old predecessors. The chapel of Carolus Magnus in Achen, as it is already said here, and the Church of Saint Marc in Venice, are only the most famous in the multitude of such proofs of the supremacy of Byzantine architecture and entire Byzantine culture in the long passage of centuries we are discussing.

Covering the traces other than own is an enduring, unfortunately, trait of the conquering onslaughts from the European Catholic West on the Orthodox Byzantium. Fortunately, both for the conquered and the conquerors, and as opposed to architecture itself, the words about architecture are hard to cover. This presentation about the magnificent philosophical background of the Byzantine architecture bears witness to that. This architecture was magnificent both in the late ancient times and the early Christianity, as well as in the Byzantine by no means dark Middle Ages, essentially totally different than the rather dark and chronologically later west European Middle Ages. It was magnificent in the Byzantine renaissance, ravishing precursor of the also ravishing Italian Renaissance.

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MISAONI OSNOVI VIZANTIJSKE ARHITEKTURE KASNOG SREDNJEG VEKA

Predrag Milošević

Tek posljednjih godina mnogobrojne faksimilske publikacije o arhitekturi omogućile su proučavanje originalnih tekstova koji potiču iz raznih vremenskih razdoblja. Ta ionako malobrojna dela o teoriji arhitekture u zapadnom civilizacijskom krugu redovno gotovo potpuno izostavljaju vizantijska dostignuća u sveukupnosti misaonosti (enkyklios paideia), kao osnovnom određenju vizantijske učenosti, koje se u mnogo čemu tiče i arhitekture i koje za svoj osnov ima grčka i helenistička krupna, a neprekinuta dostignuća u istom. Stoga, sastaviti zadovoljavajući prikaz teorije arhitekture u jednoj istorijski tako značajnoj zemlji kakva je Vizantija, i to još u tako dugom istorijskom vremenu, sve od 312. do 1453, prikaz kome je ovaj prilog samo početni deo, pokazalo se kao težak cilj.

Nikada ne treba smetnuti s uma da teorije arhitekture ni u jednom slučaju nisu sasvim odvojene od istorijskih, geografskih ili čak ličnih predrasuda svojih autora. U tom smislu, predmet ovog istraživanja je jedan 1141 godinu dug deo teorije arhitekture civilizacijskog Zapada (ali ne onog političkog, dabome), onog koji počiva na hrišćanskim, što će reći pravoslavnim, rimokatoličkim i protestantskim, uglavnom, osnovima. I to sve idući redom, preko antičkih paganskih Grčke i Rima, antičke i srednjevekovne pravoslavne Vizantije, do srednjevekovne i novovekovne cele, pravoslavne, rimokatoličke i protestantske uglavnom Evrope, a onda i onih delova sveta u kojima je isti civilizacijski krug uhvatio svoj koren: delova Azije, severne i južne Amerike, delova Afrike i Australije.

Ključne reči: Teorija, arhitektura, sveukupnost, misaonost, Vizantija, helenizam, Grčka, 1141 godina