

THE CHURCH OF THEODORE METOCHITES:
A RE-READING OF THE EDIFICE AS A MNEMONIC ARTEFACT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
THE MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

72968

ALEV ERKMEN

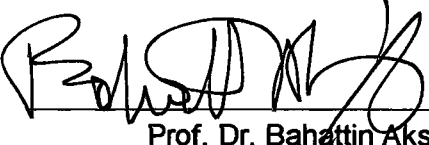
72968

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE


DECEMBER 1998

T.C. YÜKSEKÖĞRETİM KURULU
DOKÜMANTASYON MERKEZİ

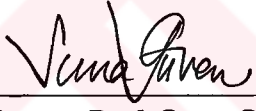
Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences


Prof. Dr. Bahattin Akşit
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.


Assoc. Prof. Suna Güven
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.


Assoc. Prof. Suna Güven
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

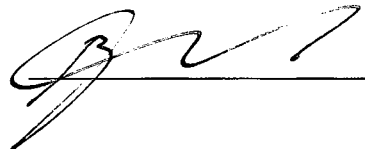
Prof. Ömür Bakırer



Assoc. Prof. Suna Güven



Assist. Prof. Belgin Turan



ABSTRACT

THE CHURCH OF THEODORE METOCHITES: A RE-READING OF THE EDIFICE AS A MNEMONIC ARTEFACT

Erkmen, Alev

M.A., Department of The History of Architecture

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Suna Güven

December 1998, 84 pages

This study attempts to present a possible “reading” of the Church of Theodore Metochites by examining the edifice within the historical and cultural context of Byzantium in the Palaeologan era. Noting that Byzantine culture, as medieval culture in general, was inherently mnemonic, and that its cultural memory functioned through a “textual” process of decoding signs and clues; the discussion attempts to trace the building’s messages to its Byzantine audience by inquiring the connections between the building and its patron; the role of the church’s library; the images within the church and the image of the church itself, and the use of light in perfecting the visual perception and spatial experience -thus the mnemonic quality- of the building.

Keywords: Revivalism, Memory, Textualism, Architectural Mnemonic

ÖZ

THEODOROS METOKHİTES'İN KİLİSESİ (KARİYE CAMİİ): YAPININ BİZANS HAFIZASININ BİR TAŞIYICISI OLARAK OKUNMASI

Erkmen, Alev

Yüksek Lisans, Mimarlık Bölümü, Mimarlık Tarihi Ana Bilim Dalı

Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Suna Güven

Aralık 1998, 84 sayfa

Bu tez, günümüzde Kariye Camii olarak bilinen on dördüncü yüzyıl Bizans kilisesinin kendi tarihsel dönemi ve kültürel bağlamı içindeki sembolik değerini "okumaya" çalışmakta; böyle bir okumanın araçları olarak "hafıza", "metinsellik" ve "mekansal hafıza" kavramlarını önermektedir. Bu kapsamda, yapının banisi Theodoros Metokhites'in politik ve entelektüel kimliği, kütüphane biriminin yapıya kattığı özgün mekansal, işlevsel ve simgesel değerler, genel mekan kurgusunun imgesel değeri ve mimari kabukla ikonografik program arasındaki görsel-mekansal bütünlük incelenmiş; bu temalar ışığında yapının Bizans'ın anlam dünyası içindeki rolü üzerine bir yorum getirilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Canlandırmacılık; Hafıza; Metinsellik; Mekansal Hafıza.

To my mother, my father,
and the memory of my grandmother...



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe more than thanks and appreciation to Assoc. Prof. Suna Güven for encouraging me to select this particular topic, and for her intellectual enthusiasm that made the writing of this thesis such a memorable and rewarding experience for me. I also owe special thanks to Prof. Uğur Tanyeli and Assoc. Prof. İhsan Bilgin for their continuous interest and encouragement in my academic pursuits; and for many inspiring conversations that helped shape various discussions in the text. I am greatly indebted to Assoc. Prof. Oğuz Işık and Dr. Güven A. Sargin, not only for their warm hearted support and friendship, but also for their generous help in easing my inter-city correspondences during the months I spent writing the text. Many friends offered their ideas, time and help throughout the course of my studies. Among them, I can never forget the candid support of Lâle H: Alatan and Kuyaş Örs who were always close by me to show they cared, in their own special ways. And finally, no words can express my gratitude and love to my mother and father, for their endless patience in sharing with me all the well-known agonies of thesis writing, for tolerating all my absences, and for always "being there"...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii	
ÖZ	iv	
DEDICATION	v	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi	
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii	
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	ix	
CHAPTERS		
1 INTRODUCTION		
THE CHURCH OF THE IMPERIAL CHORA MONASTERY:		
EARLY HISTORY AND FOURTEENTH CENTURY RESTORATION		1
1.1 An Outline of the Building's Structural History		4
1.2 Architectural Configuration of the Fourteenth Century Edifice		11
2 BYZANTIUM IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE PALAEOLOGAN ERA:		
"THE CULTURE OF THE SPIRIT" AND "THE SPIRIT OF THE CULTURE"...		18
2.1 Politico-Religious Background: Imperial Decline,		
Relations With the West, the Rise of Orthodoxy		19
2.2 Cultural Context: The Last Byzantine "Renaissance"		24
2.2.1 Spiritual Revival: Hesychasm and		
the Rise in Monastic Ideals		27
2.2.2 Intellectual Pursuits: Byzantine "Humanism"		30
2.2.3 The Arts: Revival, <i>Memoria</i> , Textual (De)Coding		37

3 THE CHURCH OF THEODORE METOCHITES AS	
A “BOOK IN STONE” AND A “MNEMONIC TEXT”	49
3.1 Theodore Metochites: The Author and the Patron	51
3.2 The Church: The <i>Locus</i>, and the (Text)Book	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	80
APPENDIX: LIST OF PALAEOLOGAN EMPERORS	84



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ILLUSTRATION:

1	City plan of Medieval Constantinople, indicating location of the Chora. (Mango, 1986, ill.29)	3
2	Oldest photograph of the Church, dating ca.1860. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.40)	3
3	Plan, indicating six phases of the building's structural history. (Oates, 1960, ill.1)	5
4	West facade, as depicted in a nineteenth century engraving. (A.G. Paspates, <i>Byzantinia meletai</i> , in Ousterhout, 1987, ill.35)	10
5	South facade, after nineteenth century alterations. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.4)	10
6	Plan, indicating spatial components of fourteenth century edifice. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.8)	12
7	West facade, present state of the edifice. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.3)	16
8	East facade, present state of the edifice. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.6)	16
9	Southeast view, present state of the edifice. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.5)	17
10	Northern view, present state of the edifice. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.7)	17

11	Monograms of Theodore Metochites, inscribed on his books. (Sevcenko, 1976, ill.1a, b.)	58
12	Monograms of Theodore Metochites, engraved on cornice of naos dome. (Sevcenko, 1976, ill.2a, b, c, d).....	58
13	Donor portrait of Metochites. (Cimok,1987, ill.14)	59
14	<i>Deesis</i> mosaic. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.110)	59
15	The Church of Theodore Metochites; West facade. (Hypothetical reconstruction, Ousterhout, 1987, ill.18)	73
16	The Church of Theodore Metochites, South facade. (Hypothetical reconstruction, Ousterhout, 1987, ill.19)	73
17	Longitudinal section through naos, looking south. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.20)	74
18	Transverse section through naos, looking east. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.25)	74
19	Plan, indicating iconographic programme of the church. (Rodley, 1994, ill.254)	75
20	Exonarthex, looking north. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.115)	76
21	Exonarthex, looking south. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.116)	76
22	Esonarthex, looking north. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.105)	77
23	Esonarthex, looking south, towards parecclesion. (Ousterhout, 1987, ill.113)	77

24	Naos; view of vaulting, fenestration and revetments.	
	(Ousterhout, 1987, ill.54)	78
25	Naos; looking east, towards bema and apse.	
	(Ousterhout, 1987, ill.50)	78
26	Parecclesion; entrance, looking east.	
	(Ousterhout, 1987, ill.84)	79
27	Parecclesion; looking east, towards apse.	
	(Ousterhout, 1987, ill.81)	79



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THE CHURCH OF THE IMPERIAL CHORA MONASTERY: EARLY HISTORY AND FOURTEENTH CENTURY RESTORATION

The Church of the imperial Chora Monastery, known today as the Kariye Camii, is situated in the northwest of Istanbul, on a sloping site that falls steeply downwards towards the east, and lies between the Adrianople Gate (*Edirnekapi*) and the Blachernae Palace (*Tekfur Sarayı*). (Illustration 1) It is known that the edifice was dedicated to Christ and the Virgin Mary, and served as the *katholikon* (main church) of the imperial Chora Monastery, one of the oldest and most important religious foundations in Constantinople.

It is recorded that the monastery dates from the early history of the city. The church, probably of a later origin, is known to have been destroyed several times due to natural disasters, invasions or the structural instability of its sloping site; and thus underwent constant restoration and rebuilding. The existing edifice incorporates the last three structural phases of its structural

history – namely those of the eleventh, twelfth and fourteenth centuries – together with minor modern alterations that succeeded them. It is, however, mostly to the fourteenth century restoration, carried out ca. 1316-21 by the Empire's *Grand Logothete* (controller) Theodore Metochites, that the present state of the edifice owes its tectonic form, and also the magnificent mosaics and frescoes within. It was under Metochites' patronage that the monastery itself became a vast enterprise with a very large and rich library annexed to the church itself, and also with its public hospital, public kitchen, vast vineyards providing funds for its maintenance; and a luxurious palace for Metochites. However, the church is the only building that survives.

The name of the foundation, "the Chora" is also suggestive of its spiritual significance. As recorded by Paul Underwood (1966:4-7); this epithet implies the monastery lay outside the city walls at its original date of foundation, and remained rural throughout most of its later history; for *Chora* – and its cognates *choros* and *chorion* – refers to land, country, or suburban territory. One view supports that the monastery was built on a hallowed site; possibly on a burial ground of martyrs, and thus there are grounds to conceive of the name Chora, as a toponym. It is also suggested that the term *Chora* attained a mystical meaning, to denote a dedication to Christ, and to the Virgin; and particularly to define certain mystical qualities attributed to them. If not in its original founding; this was clearly the case in the fourteenth century, as several inscriptions inside the church refer to Christ as "the Chora (dwelling place, the land, the sphere) of the living"; and to the Virgin Mary as "the Chora (dwelling place) of the Uncontainable (God)".

Medieval Constantinople, city plan.

1. St. Mary of Blachernae / 2. Blachernae Palace / 3. Tekfurarsayı / 4. Kariye Camii /
5. Charisian gate / 6. Karagömrük cistern / 7. Aetius cistern / 8. St. Mary Pammakaristos /
9. Aspar cistern / 10. St. Romanos gate / 11. St. Mocius cistern / 12. St. Andrew in Crisel /
13. St. Mary Peribleptos / 14. Sis. Carpas and Pappos / 15. St. John of Studius / 16. Golden Gate / 17. Monastery of Lips / 18. Forum Arcadii / 19. Church of the Holy Apostles /
20. Column of Marcian / 21. Forum Bovis / 22. Christ Pantepocres / 23. Christ Pantocrator /

24. Aqueduct of Emperor Valens / 25. St. Polyuktus / 26. Kiise Camii / 27. Kalenderhane Camii / 28. Philadelphion / 29. Myrelaion / 30. Tetrapylon / 31. Forum Tauri / 32. Arap Camii / 33. Forum of Constantine / 34. Sts. Sergius and Bacchus / 35. Binbir Dirik cistern /
36. St. Euphemia / 37. Hippodrome / 38. Buroleon / 39. Fiasica / 40. Mülken / 41. St. Mary Chalcoptreia / 42. St. Irene / 43. St. George of Mangana / 44. St. Sophia / 45. Augusteion /
46. Senate House / 47. Chalké / 48. Baths of Zeuxippea / 49. Imperial Palace /
50. Nea Ekklesia.

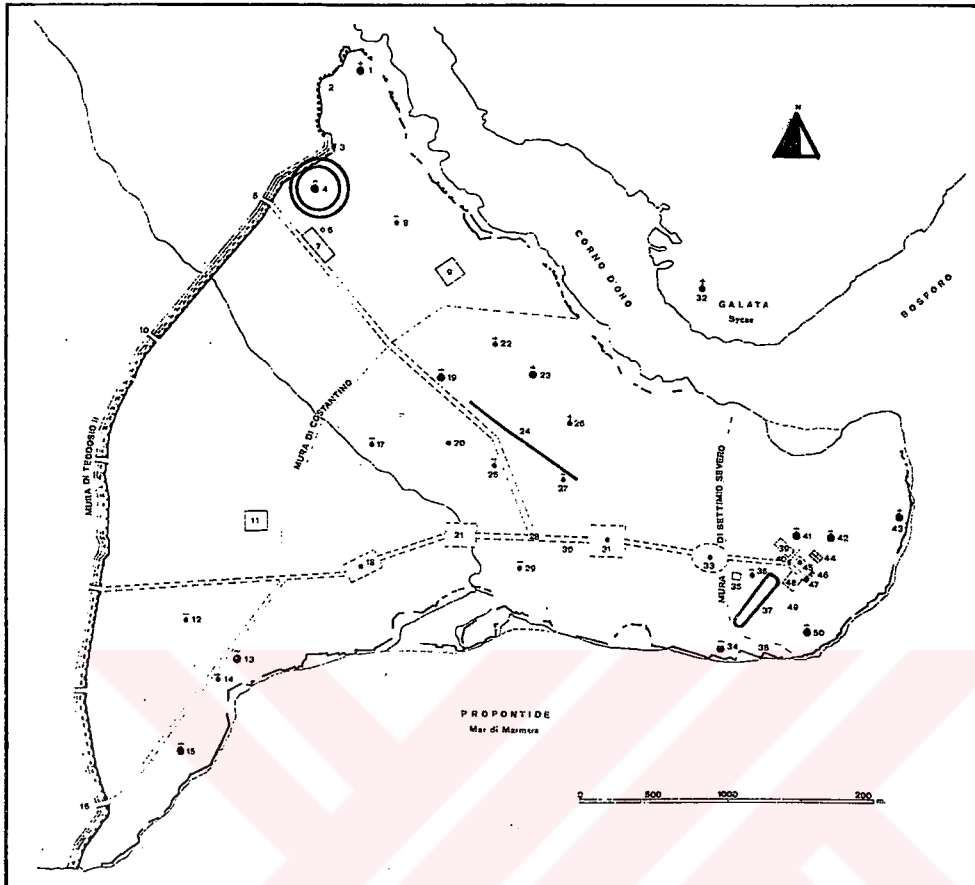


Illustration 1: City plan of Medieval Constantinople, indicating location of the Chora



Illustration 2: Oldest existing photograph of the edifice, dating ca.1860.

1.1.1 An Outline of the Building's Structural History

The accepted view of the structural history of the Kariye Camii identifies six successive construction phases in the building's Byzantine history.¹ (Illustration 3) Accordingly, the earliest construction dates from the sixth century, possibly under the patronage of Justinian or a relative of Empress Theodora. The remains of this first phase are restricted to substructures at the east end of the site, whose main surviving element is a great arcaded wall that runs north to south beneath the apses of today's church. Regarding the slope and instability of the terrain, this arcade evidently created a platform on which a building could be constructed, yet there is no evidence indicating the form or function of the superstructure of this period.

Archaeological evidence reveals that the substructure was reinforced and enlarged in a second construction phase, which probably took place in the ninth century when the Chora monastery was restored by the abbot Michael Syncellus. Such a modification suggests that a new superstructure was erected in this period, but once again there is no indication of its form or function. The two tomb chambers situated beneath the bema may also date from this phase, and reveal that the substructures served as funeral crypts in the building's early history. While these tombs indicate that the building lay within the grounds of the Chora Monastery, it is important to note Oates's (1960:229) emphasis that the substructure plans do not correspond to the

¹ For detailed history of the building and sources, see: Oates (1960); Ousterhout (1987:11-36) and Underwood (1976: 3-13).

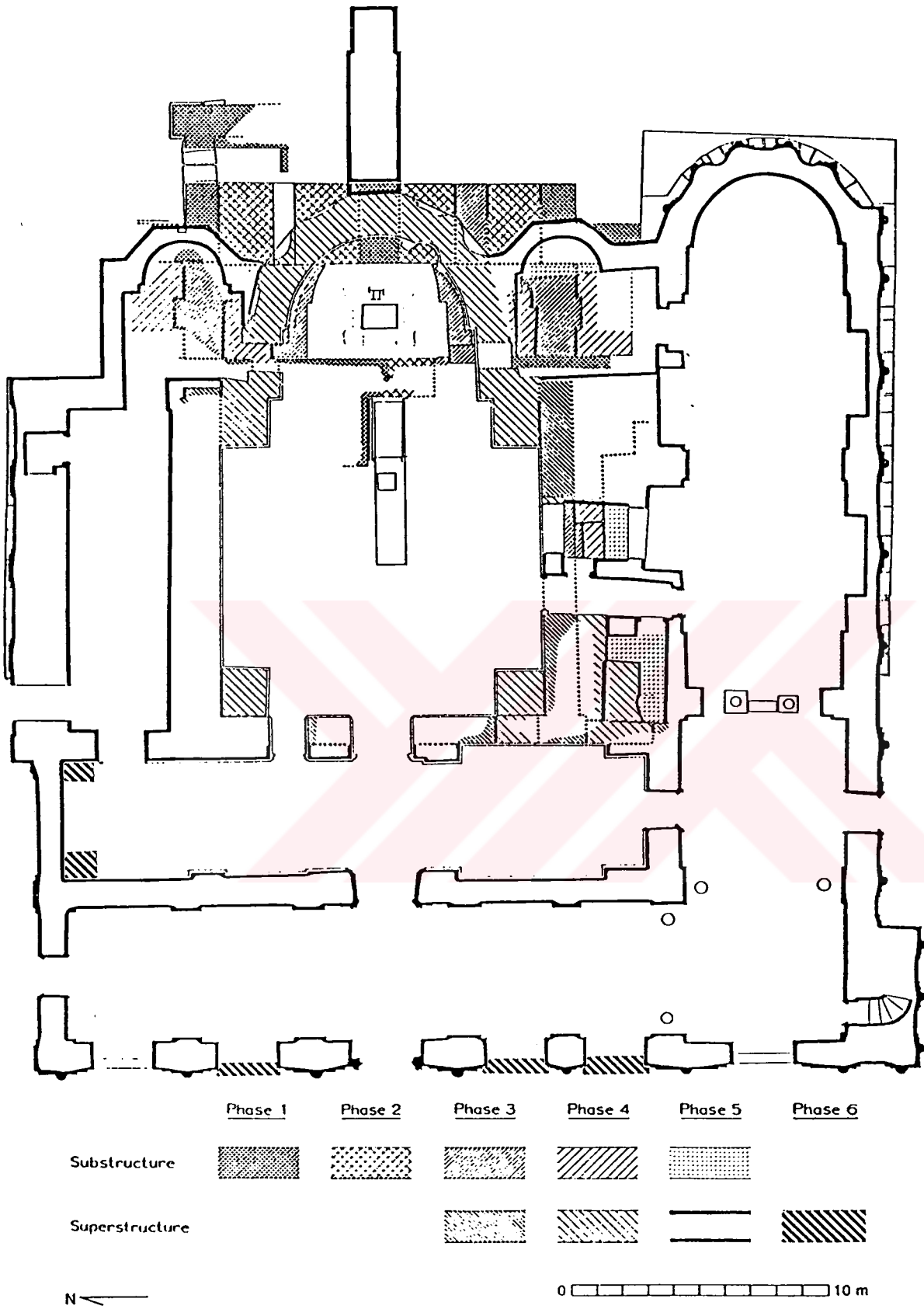


Illustration 3: Plan, indicating six successive phases of the building's structural history.

layout of a church – particularly to the eastern end of the present one. It is thus presumed that the first church on site was constructed in the next construction phase, which dates from the eleventh century.

As confirmed by documentary evidence, the ninth century building was completely destroyed by the beginning of the eleventh century, and the building was restored by Maria Ducaena, mother in law to Emperor Alexius Comnenus, between 1077 and 1081. These restorations constitute the third phase of construction at the Kariye. All remains of the previous building were apparently removed before this restoration, leaving only the substructures at the east end. Nothing remains of the superstructure of this First Comnenian Church; yet archaeological evidence provide enough information to depict a hypothetical plan of the building at this period. According to Ousterhout's (1987) reconstruction, the Kariye of the eleventh century was a cross-in-square church with a central dome carried by four columns, and with lateral narthexes to north and south².

Possibly due to the shifting of the ground or to an earthquake; the first Comnenian Church was destroyed and had to be rebuilt shortly after its original foundation. Attributed to the patronage of Isaac Comnenus ca. 1120, this fourth construction phase brought radical changes to the form of the building. The eastern end of the church was completely replaced and a new

² The cross-in-square church with a central dome was the classical plan type of Middle Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture, as this scheme provided the ideal architectural framework for the Byzantine decorative programme. Other imperial foundations of the period, such as the Theodokos of Lips (Fenari İsa Camii), Christ Pantocrator (Zeyrek Camii) and Christ Pantepoptes (Eski İmaret Camii) bear similarities to Ousterhout's hypothetical plan of the eleventh century Kariye. For a formal analysis of this church type, see Demus (1948:11-3).

and larger apse, still surviving today, was constructed. New pastophoria were added; including a prothesis, a diaconicon, a western narthex and a parecclesion to the south of the naos. The most significant change was the transformation of the plan from a cross-in-square scheme to a cruciform naos (an atrophied Greek cross plan, also referred to as the domed basilica). This transformation also involved the replacement of the free standing columns supporting the dome with massive masonry piers, and the replacement of the naos dome with a new, larger one. In effect, the larger apse and dome evidently gave the interior a more monumental character, and the replacement of the columns with corner piers no doubt unified the space of the naos. Yet it may be asserted that these changes were not solely, or perhaps essentially results of spatial considerations. As Ousterhout (1985b:175-6) underlines, the new structural system was evidently more stable; as the piers would be more resistant to shifts of the ground or to earthquakes. It is on this basis that Ousterhout (1985b:178) defines the Kariye's twelfth century cruciform plan as "a direct response to the practical necessities of the site."³

There are no records depicting the building's condition between the early twelfth and early fourteenth centuries, but the writings of Theodore Metochites, fourteenth century *ktetor* (founder) of the Chora Monastery, reveal that the building was almost completely destroyed at the beginning of the fourteenth century, with only its cruciform naos surviving. This is when the

³ Ousterhout (1995b:179) also points out that the atrophied Greek-cross plan had not appeared in the mainstream of Byzantine architecture since the ninth century, and its use in the Kariye reintroduced this church type; popularising its use in and around Constantinople.

fifth phase of construction at the Kariye began under Metochites' patronage. Dating from ca. 1316 to 1321, it is this phase to which the building owes the greater part of its present appearance.

Metochites' building programme consisted of the reconstruction of the naos dome; the rebuilding of the pastophoria; the construction of a giant flying buttress on the east end and the addition of ancillary spaces enveloping the building on three sides – namely an exonarthex (outer narthex) and esonarthex (inner narthex) to the west; a two storeyed northern annex; a belfry on the south-west corner and a new parecclesion on the south of the building.⁴ The mosaic cycles in the narthexes and the frescoes in the parecclesion are also products of Metochites' building campaign.

The final phase of the building's Byzantine history involves minor changes and additions to the church in the late Palaeologan period, dating a few decades after Metochites' construction. In this phase, the arches of the exonarthex -originally an open portico with no door or glazing- were blocked. Three of them were converted to *arcosolia* (tomb niches), while the central opening became the main portal of the building. As Ousterhout (1987:105) observes, the closure of the exonarthex seems to have transformed it from an individual unit, to an extension of the parecclesion. Columns supporting

⁴ The addition of such "enveloping spaces" to existing buildings was a characteristic trait of Palaeologan architecture in general. Contemporary examples from Constantinople in which pre-existing buildings were enlarged in this manner include St. Theodore (Kilise Camii) and the Church of the Pantokrator Monastery (Zeyrek Camii). As Ousterhout (1987:95) points out, while the former examples were enlarged in several building phases, the fourteenth century additions to the Kariye were the result of a single building programme. Another important distinction is that the Kariye is the only monument in Constantinople in which an attempt to unify both the formal and functional aspects of individual components may be observed.

pointed arches on the south-west bay of the exonarthex are also later additions, probably intended to provide additional support for the belfry.

Changes in the visual forms of the building continued in later periods: Following the Ottoman Conquest of Constantinople, the building was converted to a mosque between 1495 and 1511, whereby the Byzantine belfry was remodelled as a minaret and a *mihrab* was added to the apse wall. The naos dome (above the drum) was also renewed, possibly in the eighteenth century. (Illustration 4) The most significant alterations in the building's post-Byzantine history were made in the second half of the nineteenth century (1875-76), when the original undulating roofline above the exonarthex arcade was replaced by a sloping roof. (Illustration 5) This change also involved the removal of the double dogtooth cornice which originally edged the scalloped roofline; and the removal of the exposed barrel vault that originally covered the north annex. In Ousterhout's (1995:15-17) words, the effect of these alterations was "to make stagnant and lifeless what was once a dynamic silhouette"; while also "exaggerating the irregularities of the plan".

Having served as a mosque for over four centuries; the building was declared a national monument in 1945. During the 1950s, the building underwent an extensive restoration programme; carried out by the Byzantine Institute of America. Following the completion of the restoration work; the building began to function, as it does today, as a museum.

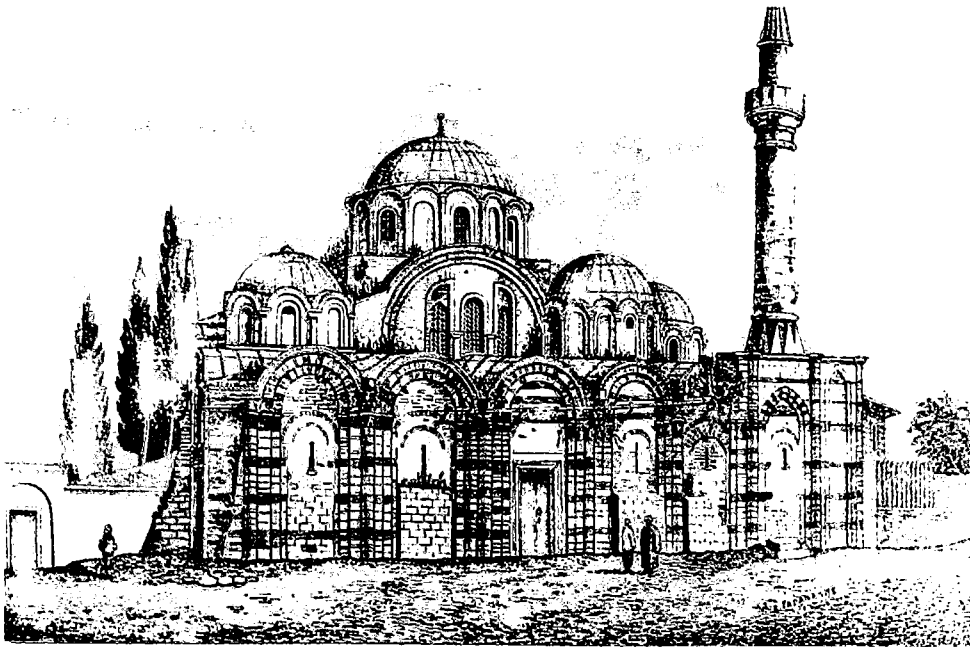


Illustration 4: West facade, as depicted in a nineteenth century engraving.

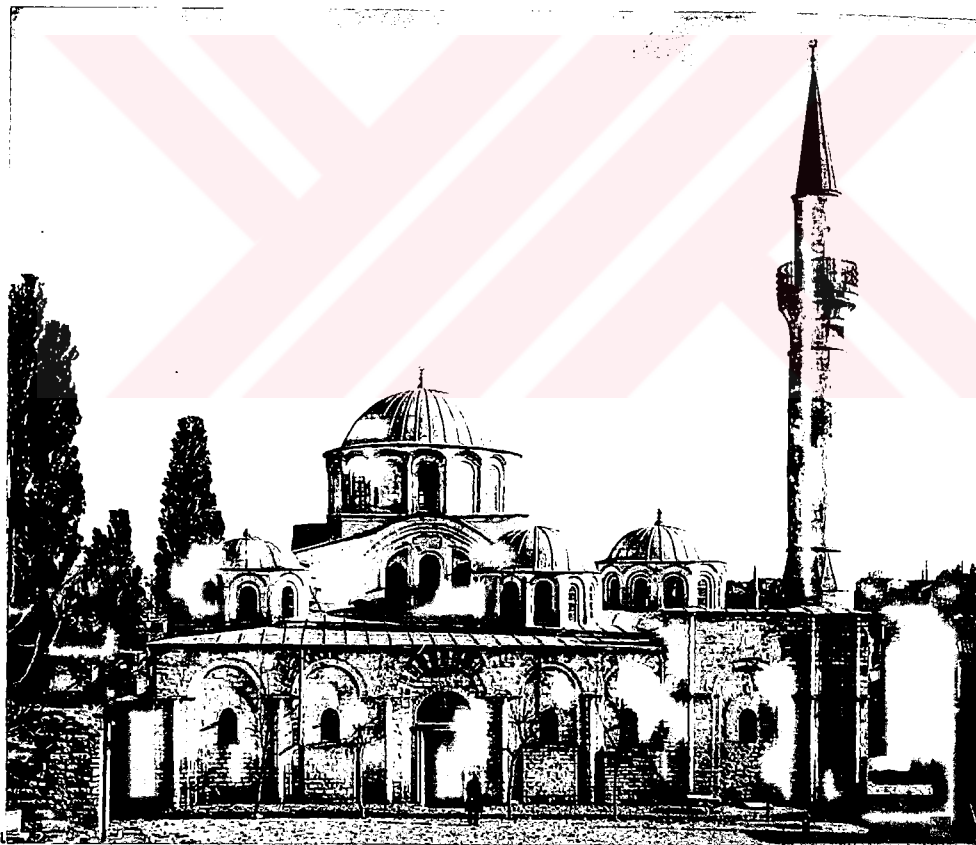


Illustration 5: West facade after nineteenth century alterations - notice new roofline

1.1.2 Architectural Configuration of the Fourteenth Century Edifice

Despite the aforementioned changes in the form of the building, the present state of the Kariye Camii still provides a fairly accurate impression of the original appearance of the fourteenth century edifice; namely the Church of Theodore Metochites. Today's Kariye is surrounded by newer buildings on its north and south, a small square on its west, and a small garden on its east. Pedestrian and vehicular access to the building is from the north-west and south. When approached from the north-west, the building appears at the foot of a small, sloping square, whose inclination gives perhaps the best indication of the slope of the site. When approached from the south, the building appears at the end of a narrow street of restored wooden houses.

The building is made up of five major components: An exonarthex;esonarthex; naos; parecclesion; and northern annex. The pastophoria of the church consists of a prothesis and a diaconicon. (Illustration 6) Entrance to the building is through the central opening of the west facade, which was, as mentioned above, converted into the main portal of the building in the nineteenth century. The portal opens into the vaulted space of the exonarthex. These vaults are decorated with mosaic cycles of the lives of the Virgin and Christ, to which the church was dedicated. Three of the originally open arches on the west facade now serve as arcosolia, while the remaining two (those on the northern and eastern ends) are simply closed off by curtain walls. All five arches have arched windows above eye level – windows of the arches containing arcosolia are placed higher than the others, as can be

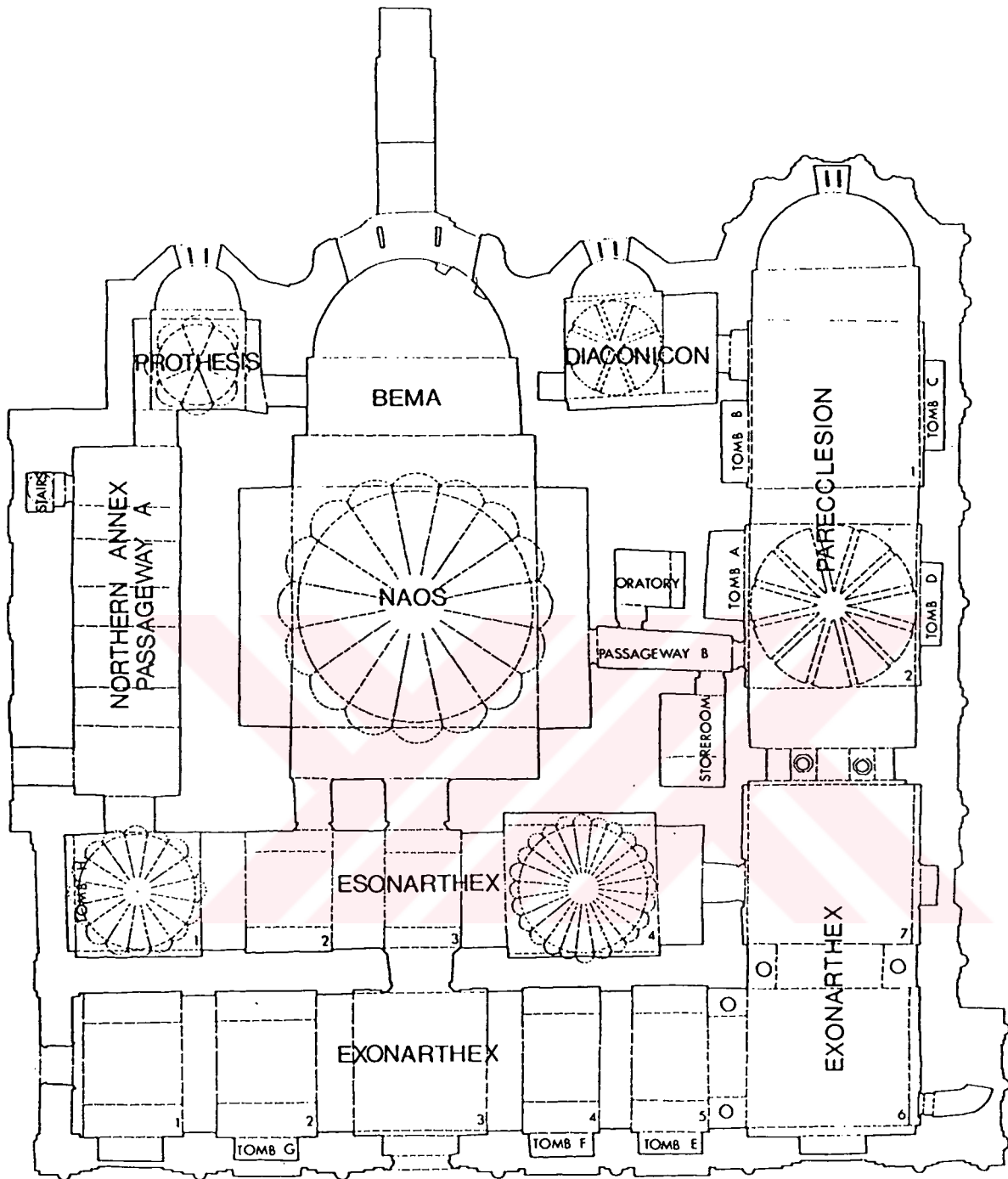


Illustration 6: Plan, indicating major spatial components of the fourteenth century edifice.

distinguished from the outer facade. The exonarthex is connected to the parecclesion by way of its L-shaped plan which creates two bays extending eastward towards the apse of the parecclesion. Access to the esonarthex is through a doorway on the eastern wall, directly facing the main portal.

The esonarthex is composed of four bays, with domes covering its north and south bays. The south bay has a distinct treatment. Besides being the largest bay of the esonarthex, it also has a distinct decorative programme, which includes a grand Deesis mosaic on the eastern wall. This bay connects the esonarthex to the parecclesion by way of an arched doorway on its south end. The north bay contains a tomb and its dome is decorated with mosaics depicting the ancestry of Christ. A door on the east wall of this bay opens to the lower floor of the northern annex. As Ousterhout (1995a:21) points out, the relationship between the esonarthex and the northern annex is similar to that between the exonarthex and the parecclesion. Thus, the naos is enveloped by two L-shaped units, "each following a separate system of organisation".

Two doorways connect the esonarthex to the space of the naos. The central portal in the third (central) bay is situated on the same axis as the main entrance portal and the portal connecting the two narthexes. A mosaic depicting Metochites presenting a model of the church to Christ takes place above this door. The second doorway immediately next to the main portal, on the south corner of the exonarthex bay, is a much narrower one, with no door or frame.

The inner space of the naos has a cruciform plan. Four piers carry the dome on a drum which is divided into sixteen windows. These, together with large lunettes on the west and south walls, provide plenty of natural light to the interior. The apse is semi-circular, with a tripartite window on the east end. There is an Ottoman *mihrab* on its south. The north, west and south walls are covered with marble revetments, and there are mosaics on the piers and above the cornice level of the walls. A small portal on the north wall of the bema leads to the prothesis, and a narrow corridor on the south side connects the naos to the parecclesion.

The parecclesion, attached to the south flank of the naos and slightly longer than the length of the naos, is entered through a triple arched opening in the final bay of the esonarthex. It consists of a single-aisled chapel with two square, domed bays and a semicircular apse on the east end. The first bay is covered with a ribbed domed standing on a drum, decorated with a fresco of the Virgin and angels. This bay houses two tombs, one belonging to Theodore Metochites. A portal on its north wall opens to a narrow corridor (referred to as passageway B) leading to the inner space of the naos. The corridor is flanked by two small chambers (assumed to be an oratory and a storeroom), and there is an inaccessible gallery above it. The eastern bay of the parecclesion is covered with a low, domical vault. This bay also houses two tombs, one on each side of the bay. A small portal on the northern wall leads to the domed diaconicon. The walls and vaults of the parecclesion are covered with frescoes, while decorations in the tomb arcosolia also include mosaics.

The northern annex consists of a single barrel vaulted chamber, on each of its two floors. The lower level (referred to as passageway A) connects the esonarthex to the prothesis. Access to the upper level is through a narrow stairway on the east end of the northern wall. It is assumed that the lower floor of the northern annex served as the *diakonikon* (vestry), while the upper floor housed the library of the Chora Monastery. The small niche on the south wall of the upper floor, overlooking the naos through a small arched window, was probably a private chamber for Metochites.

The spatial organisation of these components creates four major axes within the building. The major longitudinal (west-east) axis begins at the main portal and ends at the apse; extending outwards with the giant buttress on the east end. A second, parallel axis begins at the foot of the belfry, extends through the two southern bays of the exonarthex and the parecclesion, and ends at the parecclesion apse. The first lateral (north-south) axis runs through the esonarthex, as both esonarthex domes and the inner doorway connecting the esonarthex and parecclesion are aligned with the entrance east of the belfry. The domes of the naos and parecclesion are aligned with the central bay of the south facade; thus forming the last axis of the building.⁵

⁵ See Ousterhout (1985a:19-20) for a detailed account of the building's spatial and axial composition.

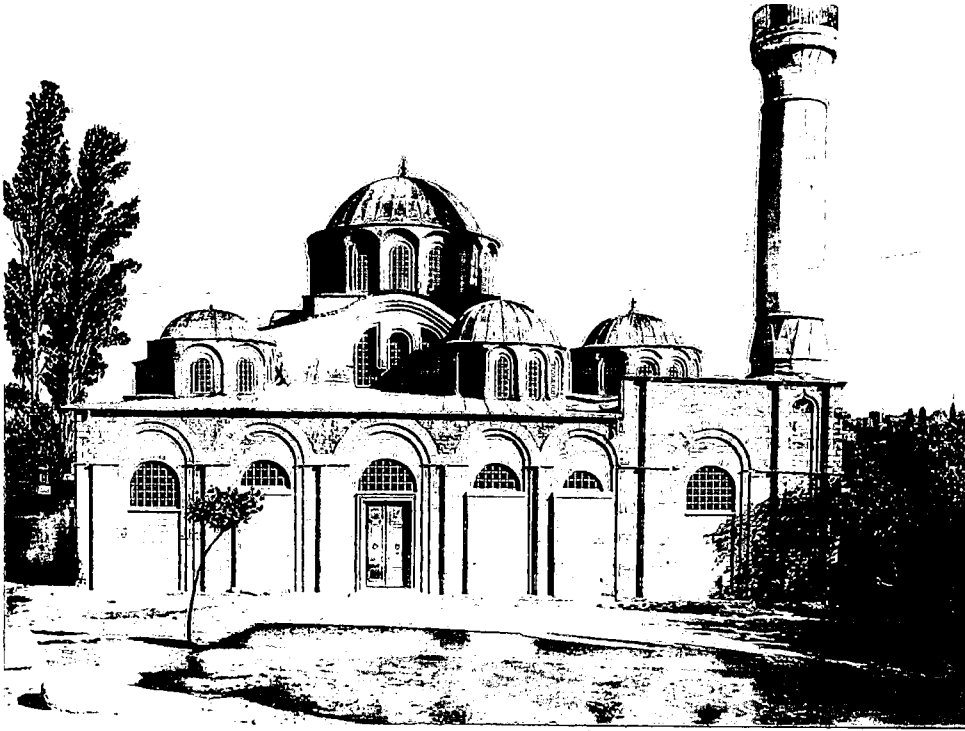


Illustration 7: West facade, present state of the edifice.



Illustration 8: East facade, present state of the edifice.



Illustration 9: Southeast view, present state of the edifice.



Illustration 10: Northern view, present state of the edifice.

CHAPTER 2

BYZANTIUM IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE PALAEOLOGAN ERA: “THE CULTURE OF THE SPIRIT” AND “THE SPIRIT OF THE CULTURE”

Like all buildings of historical significance, The Church of Theodore Metochites can be interpreted as both a reflection of, and a mirror to the historical and cultural forces of its age. By broadest definition, the building was an imperial monastic church, rebuilt in the Byzantine capital in the early fourteenth century. Its patron, Theodore Metochites, was not only the first non-imperial *ktetor* of this imperial foundation, but also *Grand Logothete* of the Empire, and one of the leading intellectuals of his time. That is to say, the erection of the edifice brought together imperial interest, ecclesiastical function and unique conditions of patronage. The ideological frame that joined these idiosyncrasies, and the symbolic meaning of the edifice itself comes to clearer light when examined within the context of major politico-religious events and cultural trends of the building's historical setting: the early years of the Palaeologan Era.

The Palaeologans were both the last and the most enduring of all Byzantine dynasties. Their era began in 1261, when Michael VIII Palaeologus recovered Constantinople from the Latin Crusaders. It ended as the last Byzantine emperor (who, somewhat ironically, bore the name Constantine) surrendered the city -and the Empire- to the Ottomans in 1453. The two centuries of Palaeologan rule were characterised by intense political, economic and social problems, all heightened by -and indeed, often rooted in- sharp ecclesiastical controversies. The period was not the beginning of the Empire's decline (which is often dated to the mid eleventh century) but decadence was certainly one of its major denominators. So too was a great spiritual revival and an outstanding achievement in the arts. In scope of this final epoch, the years under the first two Palaeologan Emperors are particularly important as they instituted the events and trends that were to endure until the last days of Byzantium. They also provided the political, spiritual and artistic grounds upon which the Church of Theodore Metochites was constructed.

2.1 Politico-Religious Background:

Imperial Decline, Relations with the West, the Rise of Orthodoxy

Having re-instated the ancient Empire in its spiritual and historic capital,⁶ Michael VIII Palaeologus (1259-82)⁷ had declared himself the "New

⁶ The following reconstruction of events is based on Gill (1979:182-223); Nicol (1979a:1-31); Nicol (1979b:7-41); Runciman (1970: 1-23) and Vasiliev (1952:656-86).

⁷ The years given in parentheses correspond to dates of coronation (not birth) and death. See Appendix for a complete list of Palaeologan Emperors.

Constantine, second founder of the Christian Empire". Yet, as he entered Constantinople, there was hardly anything left of the ancient Empire but its name. Its territories were so fragmented that the Byzantine map was reduced to little more than a group of city states. The Empire was still rich, but resources were diminishing. Trade was being exploited by Venetian and Genoese merchants. The army was almost negligible. Constantinople was still the largest city in the world, but after nearly sixty years of Latin Occupation (1204-61), was severely depopulated and in a state of physical ruin. Amidst political decline and economic decay, she could no longer sustain her traditional role of defending the eastern wall of Christendom against the growing power of the Ottomans. Furthermore, the Latin threat from the West was continuing. Backed by Pope Gregory X, Charles of Anjou, King of the Two Sicilies, was preparing a new crusade to recapture Constantinople and establish Latin rule.

Despite all symptoms of decline, the Palaeologan Era began with a feeling of rejuvenation. Soon after recovering the ancient capital, Michael VIII began a grand campaign to revive the ancient glories of the Empire. Taxes were raised, and resources increased. A new agreement was made with the Venetians and the Genoese, and trade improved. Many of the palaces, churches and monasteries of Constantinople were restored. The emperor waged war in northern Greece and in the Balkans, and won back some of the Empire's lost territory. He arranged marital alliances with rulers of neighbouring countries to ward off any new danger. But still, the Empire remained weak against the Ottoman threat, and more so against the

expected Latin attack. In case of combat with the Crusaders, defeat was inevitable. So, Michael resorted to diplomacy instead of arms: He agreed to ecclesiastical union with the West. In 1274, the (re)union of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches was declared with a Council held in Lyons. The Byzantine emperor thus accepted the supreme authority of the Pope. In return, he was assured papal protection against his enemies. As Donald Nicol (1979b:12) describes, the Council of Lyons was "a spiritual triumph for Pope Gregory, and it was a diplomatic triumph for Michael VIII". But in effect, neither party benefited from its consequences. Both union and peace were short-lived. In 1281, Pope Martin IV (fifth successor of Gregory X) excommunicated Michael VIII and gave his support to Charles Anjou's plans against Byzantium. However, the crusade was prevented by a riot known as the Sicilian Vespers, which destroyed Anjou's plans and caused a series of controversies that kept the West occupied with its internal problems for the next few decades.

The threat of Latin invasion had finally ended, but the domestic climate in Byzantium was far from peaceful. In uniting with the Catholic Church, Michael VIII confronted with great opposition from the Byzantine clergy. The problem of ecclesiastical union with the West had always been one of the greatest debates that divided Byzantine society, and supporters of the union were always a small minority. The Emperor had to take extreme measures to calm the resistance of the anti-unionists, which included persecuting and imprisoning a large number of monks and churchmen. But he could not prevent the majority of Byzantine society from turning against him. In Byzantium, where religion meant everything and society was identified with

the Church, the integrity of Orthodox faith was far more superior to political advantages. Although he had restored the Empire and saved it from Latin invasion, Michael VIII was considered a heretic by his own Church and by his own people. Hostility towards him was so strong that when he died in 1282, "the New Constantine" was even denied the last rites of an Emperor.

The next Palaeologan in line to the Byzantine throne was Michael's son, Andronicus II (1282-1328). Having inherited an Empire divided by religious conflict, the new Emperor's first act was to renounce union with the Latin Church and restore Orthodoxy. Thus, his period began with a feeling of peace and jubilation. Prisoners convicted for opposition to the union were set free. The Church too was freed from the pressures of the Emperor and the Pope, and restored itself as the supreme spiritual authority of the Christian World. It was, in fact, the rise of Orthodoxy that characterised the period in general. Reaction against the Union had greatly increased the power and prestige of the Church. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, it was not to the Emperor but to the clergy that Byzantines turned for assurance and comfort amidst imperial decline. The restoration of Orthodox faith had almost directly changed the role of the Emperor in the eyes of the society and of the Church: He was still indispensable in the theocratic system, but his authority was now secondary to that of the Church. Furthermore, the Empire's centralised state mechanism was disintegrating under the local autonomy of city states. The Ottomans were advancing steadily from the East and South, and the Kingdom of Serbia was posing a new threat from the West. Problems prevailed with the Venetian and Genoese merchants. The Empire still

possessed great wealth, but its distribution was highly uneven. The clergy was richer than the State, and the wealth of aristocratic families contrasted sharply to the poverty of the peasant majority.

In short, the Empire continued to decline while the Church gained strength. Knowing the Byzantine mind, this was not surprising. Like all societies of the Middle Ages, the Byzantine society was, first and foremost, a theocratic one. Its members believed that their Empire was the reflection of God's Kingdom of Heaven, and that its salvation, like that of their individual souls, depended on the strength and purity of their Orthodox faith. Thus, in a state of political and economic misery, it was to the "other world" that the Byzantine majority turned for comfort and aid, and religion and the Church surpassed the significance of worldly politics or the State. This rise of spiritual ideals found its most vivid expression in the Hesychast movement which, led by the Athonite monk Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), advocated a return to the ancient origins of Orthodox monasticism. One of the most prominent Hesychasts of the period was Athanasius I (1289-1293;1303-1309), Patriarch of Constantinople. Appointed by Andronicus II, he was famed for being "a stern puritan and a rigorous ascetic ... (who) openly professed to despise scholarship". (Nicol, 1979a:12 and 34) Being such, he was quite the opposite of the *Grand Logothete* Metochites, who was known, among many assets, as a "cultured aesthete" and one of the most intellectual men of his time.

It is indeed possible to depict the general characteristics of the period by looking at the two men closest to the Emperor: The Patriarch Athanasius I,

who stood as a symbolic figure of the rise of spirituality, and Metochites himself, whose personal endeavours in arts and letters were also symbolic to the general tendencies of the era. For while decadence was paralleled by spiritual revival, it was also paralleled by an unprecedented ferment in artistic and intellectual activity — it was indeed this cultural aura that gave the Palaeologan era its greatest distinction.

2.2 Cultural Context:

The Last Byzantine “Renaissance”

As most medieval civilisations, the Byzantine civilisation is often identified with its “conservatism”. It was deeply rooted in tradition, and prized the dogmas of religion (Orthodox Christianity) as the supreme repository of truth, wisdom and salvation. Not only all fundamental aspects of spiritual, social and stately life, but also the practice of the arts and scholarship followed the rulings of the Church. This does not mean that Byzantine culture was static, or relied completely on inherited or predetermined formulas; for there were clearly identifiable changes in taste, style, technique and affect in the course of the centuries. Yet it is crucial to recognise that both artistic and scholarly activity sustained the same social and ecclesiastical role throughout Byzantine history: The major function of the representational arts was to create iconographic counterparts of Holy Scripture by instructing the illiterate, reminding the faithful of Holy miracles and arousing feelings of Christian devotion. The essential aim and function of scholarship was, similarly, the acquisition of true knowledge of God. As John Meyendorff (1976:95)

observes, "Spirituality and art were the expressions of the same religious conscience, of the same Byzantine mind". In turn, the cultural vision of the "Byzantine mind" tended to see "the historical process of change as an imperfect and fallen reflection of a permanent, immovable world of concepts and ideas". (Meyendorff, 1993:70) The natural consequence of this mentalité was an overall unity in cultural artefacts and aesthetic standards, together with the suppression of individual expression and a general predominance of continuity over novelty.

Given this innate conservatism (or traditionalism), it seems paradoxical that the cultural history of the Byzantine Empire records a series of "Renaissances"; each named after the ruling dynasties of their respective periods — The Macedonian Renaissance of the late ninth to tenth centuries; the Comnenian Renaissance of the eleventh to twelfth centuries; and finally the Palaeologan Renaissance of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The paradox is obvious: Not only is a series of continuous Renaissances a contradiction in itself; but the scholastic, medieval world view and the implications of Renaissance (i.e. regeneration, secularism, transition from one state to another, etc.) are mutually exclusive. Thus, both Demus (1976:157) and Meyendorff (1976:106) emphasise that in Byzantium, there was no ground for a Renaissance in the proper sense of the term. Therefore, to explain how Byzantine conservatism was tempered with changes without compromising its consistency; a slight adaptation of definitions seems necessary: None of the so-called Byzantine "Renaissances" was a real cultural revolution — such as the Italian *Rinascimento* of the fifteenth century.

Instead, each cultural intensification in Byzantium took the form of a “antiquarian involution” (Mango, 1980:279) or a revival which “provoked slight changes in taste and in outlook, but (did not alter) the medieval patterns of mind”. (Meyendorff, 1976:101) In this frame, the Palaeologan era, like the former periods of cultural intensification in Byzantium; may be better grasped when considered as to be one of the various “waves of medieval revival” which Erwin Panofsky (1972:8) refers to as “renaissance”.

Thus, in examining the Palaeologan cultural context, if the established keywords of “conservatism” and “Renaissance” are replaced with “continuity” and “revival”; not only the artistic and symbolic quality of the period’s artefacts, but also their historical connections, their ideological motives and the impact they had on their illiterate audience -who looked upon them as worldly reflections of the heavens- may, perhaps, be grasped from a more “Byzantine” point of view.

In order to begin such an inquiry, it seems vital to pose three basic, but crucial questions: Firstly, what the reasons of this revival were — i.e. “Why were the Byzantines looking back?” Secondly, what the object(s) of this revival were — i.e. “What were the Byzantines trying to revive?” Then lastly, what the nature of this revival was — i.e. “How did the reasons and objects of revival materialise in Palaeologan attitudes and artefacts?” Like the questions themselves, the grounds that offer their answers form a triad. It may be asserted that revivalism in the Palaeologan Era developed within the frames of three interrelated cultural spheres: Spirituality, scholarship and the arts.

2.2.1 Spiritual Revival: Hesychasm and the Rise of Monastic Ideals

Spiritual revival was no doubt the most essential component of the Palaeologan period. As mentioned above, it culminated in the monastic ideals of the Hesychast movement, and the Patriarch Athanasius I played significant role in propagating its doctrines. Although the apparent “reasons” of spiritual revival have already been stated⁸, it is interesting to see how the aforementioned hypothesis is verified by the words of Athanasius I himself, in a letter written to Emperor Andronicus II:

Do not think that we shall prevail by means of armed attacks ... even if the whole West, if it were possible, were to join to help us. What then is the solution? Turning towards God and repentance to the utmost of our ability, for which he is patiently waiting.⁹

It thus becomes clearer that the declining state of the Empire was the chief cause of the rise in religious ideals. From one point of view, the passion for an esoteric, spiritual life may be conceived as a form of escapism: It seems that the Byzantines had no hope of any “worldly” salvation from their enemies, and thus lived in constant expectation of heavenly assistance. A similar assumption can be made by noting Henri Gregoire’s assertion that “Christians were only Christians because Christianity brought them liberation from death”.¹⁰ Indeed, as their Empire “lived under the sentence of death”

⁸ See Section 2.1 Politico-Religious Background, p.19-24.

⁹ Nicol (1979a:13), quoting Talbot, Alice-Mary (ed., 1975) *The Correspondence of Athanasius I, Patriarch of Constantinople. Letters to the Imperial Family, and Officials*, Dumbarton Oaks Texts, III, Washington D.C.

¹⁰ Meyendorff (1974:212) quoting Gregoire, Henry (1948), *An Introduction to East Roman Civilization*, London, Oxford University Press, p.134-145.

(Southern, 1990:79), the Byzantines seem to have turned their hopes and expectations to the Christian promise of eternal life.

The role of Hesychasm, as a revivalist and monastic movement, was crucial in determining the spiritual aura of the period: As Meyendorff (1993:79) explains, the primary concern of Hesychast (or Palamite) theology was:

... preserving the idea that God and humanity could interpenetrate each other while remaining distinct; that the Christian faith was to be expressed in terms of communion with God (or "deification", *theosis*).

The emphasis on "deification" (*theosis*) is critical. The christological meaning of the term implies that although God is totally inaccessible in his essence; he is yet present and active in the world, and Man (the baptised) may be united with him (be deified) through prayer and contemplation, or through the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. It is crucial to note that Byzantine spiritualists described deification as a living "experience", and considered it as the original purpose and aim of human existence. As such, this belief constitutes the essential doctrine of traditional Byzantine Christianity, and also provides the key to decipher the revivalist component of Hesychasm, together with its nature.

As a monastic movement, Hesychasm advocated a mystical and solitary life, devoted to prayer and contemplation. The roots of the Hesychast's psychosomatic method of prayer are recorded to reach as far back as the Cappadocian Fathers; or more directly to the teachings of the great mystic of the eleventh century, Symeon the New theologian (949-1022), who continued

the tradition of St. Maximus the Confessor and became known as “the interpreter of the idea of deification” or “the prophet of Christian ‘experience’”.

As to the “nature” of Hesychasm, Meyendorff (1976:87-8) explains that in the beginning of the fourteenth century, the movement was:

... far from being the teaching of an esoteric, ascetic, and subjectivist sect, interested only in the personal spiritual progress of the individual, but was ... very much involved in the visible and social life of the church.

It was this “involvement” that made Hesychasm such an essential current of the Era. Indeed, its social role eventually acquired a political tone in the later years of the century (ca.1337-8), when the doctrines of Gregory Palamas were challenged by Barlaam the Calabrian, a Greek monk from South Italy. Their theological debate divided the Empire into “Palamites” and “anti-Palamites”; and was finally resolved when Palamas overruled Barlaam’s opposition at the Councils of 1347 and 1351; and the Hesychast doctrine was recognised as the true doctrine of the whole Orthodox church. Just like the christological debates of the fourth and sixth centuries; the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries, and the problem of Union with the Latin Church; the “Hesychast controversy” was a theological issue that had significant and enduring consequences.¹¹ Its major impact on Orthodox spirituality, and thus on the Byzantine cultural context was seen in the development of Palaeologan liturgy, and in the issue of religious symbols.

¹¹ For detailed accounts of Hesychasm, and the theological controversy between Palamas and Barlaam, see: Meyendorff (1974:75-8); Meyendorff (1993:78-82); Nicol (1979a:9-14); Nicol (1979b:51-7); and Vasiliev (1952:665-70).

2.2.2 Intellectual Pursuits: Palaeologan “Humanism”

To elucidate the scope and role of intellectual activity in the Palaeologan Era; first it seems necessary to introduce a framework of dualities which was intrinsic to Byzantine thought. As Nicol (1979a: 31-65) points out, the Byzantines recognised two “estates” — that of “the spirit”, and that of “the world”. Among numerous visions, habits and beliefs; this division led to the acceptance of two distinct types of “experience” and two distinct forms of “wisdom” — “spiritual experience” which was to be achieved through “inner wisdom”; and “temporal experience” which was complemented by “outer wisdom”. As a natural consequence of this serial division, there were two distinct groups of scholars in Byzantium, each pursuing their chosen path¹². Obviously, those in pursuit of inner wisdom were ascetic monks, who devoted themselves to reading ancient scripture and the work of ancient Eastern Fathers. Those who strove to master outer wisdom were intellectuals (with secular monks among them), who formed a learned minority that concentrated their studies on ancient Greek philosophy; especially the work of Plato and Aristotle. Thus defined and thus divided; each endeavour had its limits: The pursuers of inner wisdom could only learn and know “what God had chosen to reveal”. Anything beyond the revealed truths was considered unknowable. By definition, the acquisition of inner wisdom aimed at spiritual perfection; and as such, was not strictly an intellectual exercise. On the other

¹² It seems important to remind that “Byzantine scholars” (learned monks, academicians, dignitaries or aristocrats) were an effective, but minor social circle. The great majority of the Byzantine society were laymen, and the rate of literacy was very low.

2.2.2 Intellectual Pursuits: Palaeologan “Humanism”

To elucidate the scope and role of intellectual activity in the Palaeologan Era; first it seems necessary to introduce a system of dualities which was intrinsic to Byzantine thought. As Nicol (1979a: 31-65) points out, the Byzantines recognised two “estates” — that of “the spirit”, and that of “the world”. Among numerous visions, habits and beliefs; this division led to the acceptance of two distinct types of “experience” and two distinct forms of “wisdom” — “spiritual experience” which was to be achieved through “inner wisdom”; and “temporal experience” which was complemented by “outer wisdom”. As a natural consequence of this serial division, there were two distinct groups of scholars in Byzantium, each pursuing their chosen path¹². Obviously, those in pursuit of inner wisdom were ascetic monks, who devoted themselves to reading ancient scripture and the work of ancient Eastern Fathers. Those who strove to master outer wisdom were intellectuals (with secular monks among them), who formed a learned minority that concentrated their studies on ancient Greek philosophy; especially the work of Plato and Aristotle. Thus defined and thus divided; each endeavour had its limits: The pursuers of inner wisdom could only learn and know “what God had chosen to reveal”. Anything beyond the revealed truths was considered unknowable. By definition, the acquisition of inner wisdom aimed at spiritual perfection; and as such, was not strictly an intellectual exercise. On the other

¹² It seems important to remind that “Byzantine scholars” (learned monks, academicians, dignitaries or aristocrats) were an effective, but minor social circle. The great majority of the Byzantine society were laymen, and the rate of literacy was very low.

hand, the limits of outer wisdom were drawn by the distinction between inner and outer wisdom itself: Philosophy (the study of the ancient Greeks) was considered to be valuable for training the mind, but was, by definition, a secondary estate. As Steven Runciman (1970:86) underlines, general opinion claimed that it “could not teach what to think, but it could teach how to think. It could not explain heaven, but it could help to explain the earth”. Ancient philosophers were appraised for providing the mental techniques of understanding the “created and revealed” world; but consulting them on matters already elucidated by the Bible, the scriptures, or by the saints was considered a great offence against the Orthodox conscience. Theology was the “Queen of Sciences” in Byzantium, and philosophy was only seen fit to serve as her “handmaid”. (Nicol, 1979a:52 and Runciman, 1970:31)

Most essentially, outer wisdom was regarded to be “the wisdom of the Hellenes” — and here the word Hellene meant pagan. Predictably, monastic circles were strictly against the attempts of reviving pagan ideas. Yet Greek antiquity was an indispensable part of the Byzantine past. Though pagan ideology had been rejected with the adoption of Christianity, its culture remained as one of the major constituents of Byzantine civilisation. This is particularly why the antiquarian interest in Byzantium can be interpreted as a revival. Just as the ascetic circles were looking back on their ecclesiastical past to recover the golden principles of spirituality; so too were scholars reflecting on the classical past, sometimes with more than just intellectual intentions. As Runciman (1970:22-3) emphasises, classical revival attained a new meaning in the Palaeologan Era:

With their political power crumbling around them, the Byzantines clung to their great cultural asset. In a world where ancient Greek learning was increasingly admired they could claim that they were Greeks, the heirs of an unbroken succession to the poets and philosophers, the historians and scientists of ancient Hellas; and the claim carried them proudly on.

It is on the grounds of this consciousness of Greek inheritance on which Runciman (1970:22 and 24) claims that “the Palaeologan Renaissance was essentially a Greek, Hellenic Renaissance”. Indeed it was this new sense of national identity, and the renascent spirit of “humanism” that the study of ancient culture created, that distinguished the Palaeologan Era from earlier periods, and from earlier revivals.

Yet, while the legacy of Hellenic wisdom gave the Byzantines a source of pride and self-determination; its pagan connotations continued to pose a major problematic. Nicol (1979a:60) reminds that this dichotomy had already been expressed in the mid thirteenth century by Emperor Theodore II Laskaris, who referred to his Empire as “the double kingdom of (ancient) philosophy and of the theology built upon it and rising above it”. Obviously, the keynote of the statement was the will to “rise above” pagan heritage, and no doubt this meant to “Christianise” it. Indeed, throughout Byzantine history, the question of how to reconcile Hellenic philosophy and Christian theology was a constant occupation; and the conflict between ascetic monks and academics was a constant problem. Predictably, the doctrines of the Church always overruled those of the Academy. As many historic instances firmly illustrate, the cost of exceeding the limits of outer wisdom was anathema: The Neoplatonic philosophers of the fourth and fifth centuries, such as

Porphyrius, were considered enemies of Christianity; Justinian's legislation had restricted the teaching of pagan philosophy at universities; and Byzantine intellectuals of the Comnenian Era were condemned at the Councils Council of 1076-77 for attempting to construct a metaphysical system based on a Neoplatonic conception of the world and man.

In this context, Byzantine humanists could never really break through what Meyendorff (1976:101) refers to as "the Christian, theocratic fortress of Byzantine civilisation". On the other hand, those who actually wanted to were always a minority; as the revivers of the Hellenic tradition themselves were religious men devoted to the rites of the Church. It is thus clear that the essential missing ingredient of Palaeologan "Humanism" (if such a rubric is appropriate) was secularism. Theirs was not a humanism that considered Man as an autonomous being; but a "Christian, God-centred humanism" (Meyendorff, 1974:78) based on the belief that, like Jesus himself, man can only become "truly human" through deification.

One can hardly expect such a God-centred humanism to chose pagan philosophy as its sole object of revival. Indeed it was not so. As André Grabar (1976:12) observes:

... the antiquity which ... humanists like Theodore Metochites ... called upon was for the most part Christianised antiquity, which was closer to them in its spirit and in its subjects than pagan antiquity.

Thus it can be asserted that there were two currents of revival in the Byzantine intellectual tradition. One of them paralleled the revival in spirituality by reminiscing on the theological truths set down by the Early

Christians. The other took the form of an academic (Hellenic) patriotism and reflected on the philosophical truths of the classical, and pagan, past. Within the political context of the Palaeologan Era, each current provided a scholarly resort from the desolate state of the Empire; and each group of scholars had their expectations: While ascetics believed their worldly efforts would be rewarded with eternal life in the divine universe; the humanists seem to have sought (or found) refuge in the immortal cultural legacy of their ancient ancestors.

It is of note that despite their essential differences, both intellectual efforts used the same scholarly techniques. Whether studying Hellenic philosophy or Early Christian theology; the Byzantines copied, imitated, or at best, commented on the material at hand. Thus, yet another vital ingredient Byzantine intellectuals seem to have lacked was “originality”. While a real renaissance of learning would call for originality in the use of material being studied or revived, it appears that Byzantine humanists had little concern for it. As Nicol (1979b:50) underlines, “they laboured in learned commentaries and paraphrases of the classics (but) they built surprisingly little on the ancient foundations which their diligence had unearthed”. This was not because they were devoid of creative skills, but because they were somehow convinced that there was nothing they could add to the knowledge perfected by the ancient Greeks or by the Christian Fathers. A frequently quoted passage from the preface of Metochites’s *Miscellaneous Essays* provides a lucid expression of this prejudice:

The great masters of the past have said everything so perfectly that they have left nothing for us to say. All we can do is make comments on them out of our own experiences.¹³

When compared with Erwin Panofsky's (1982:3-4) definition of the humanist as an individual who rejects authority, who looks upon tradition as something to be re-instated if necessary, and who makes critical and historical interpretations of inherited material; the position of Byzantine humanists like Metochites comes into clearer light. Both their willing bounds to the authority of the Church, and their self-constructed restraint on originality prevented the Byzantine "Renaissances" from being a real cultural revolution. Yet this does not imply, by any means, that the work of Byzantine scholars was not valuable: The Byzantines produced some of the finest examples of Medieval theological treatises, hagiographical texts and Christian devotional literature. Besides their contributions in the field of inner wisdom, they copied manuscripts, wrote encyclopaedias, compiled Greek epigrams, and prepared numerous translations, commentaries and paraphrases of ancient philosophy. Many modern historians believe these commentaries had great influence on the scholars of the Italian Renaissance,¹⁴ and that we owe much of our present acquaintance with classical texts to Byzantine manuscript copies and commentaries.

¹³ Runciman (1970:94) and Sevckenko (1976:44) quoting from Theodore Metochites, *Miscellanae Philosophica et Historica*, C. Muller and T. Kiessling (ed.), Leipzig, 1821, p.14-16.

¹⁴ See for example, Runciman (1970:97-103) and Vasiliev (1952:699-701). For a closer study on the Byzantine influence on the Italian Renaissance, see Setton, "Byzantine Background to the Italian Renaissance", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society C*, Part I, p.40-73.

Yet beyond their historic value, these works (and the antiquarian interest that produced them) also had significant contemporary impact. Hence Alexander Kazhdan's (1995:11) assertion that "the more the Byzantines imitated or studied antiquity, the more innovative they became". If this statement is held true, then the Palaeologan Era must be regarded as one of the most innovative periods of Byzantine history, if not the most innovative. The innate interest in antiquity gained momentum from the Hesychast movement and also by the patronage of Emperor Andronicus II, whose court was "compared by contemporaries to the Stoa and the Lyceum of Antiquity". (Nicol, 1979a:34) Given this intellectual ferment, Kazhdan's assertion directly raises the question concerning whether or not, or how the "innovations" aroused by Palaeologan antiquarianism left their mark on the artistic and architectural enterprises of the period.

To pose possible answers to this question; two further points need to be underlined: Firstly, it is crucial to note that the conflict between Byzantine ascetics and humanists was not always at boiling point, and there were notable, yet short-lived periods in which humanistic values could lead a peaceful coexistence with traditional spiritual doctrines. The beginning of the Palaeologan Era was one of such periods. As Meyendorff (1976:96-100) emphasises, there were no signs of open friction between the two groups in the early fourteenth century. This was much due to their common stand against Michael VIII's unionist policies; and to the fact that the Hesychast movement had not confronted with Barlaam's attacks on monastic spirituality.

The second point concerns a new social grouping of patronage in the Palaeologan Era — namely the emergence of a new class of “private” patrons. While the Emperor and the Church sustained their traditional roles as patrons of the Empire’s artistic and architectural enterprises; Meyendorff (1976:100) stresses that

... wealthy dignitaries and humanists, and not the Hesychast ascetics, had the necessary means, the necessary interest, and the necessary taste to become the promoters of what is called the “Palaeologan Renaissance”.

It was indeed this “high society” of Palaeologan aristocrats who fostered the cultural rise of the epoch by investing their wealth and taste; together with their spiritual and worldly aspirations, in the erection of elaborate private foundations – palaces, churches, chapels and particularly in monasteries where they thought to retire and/or rest after death.¹⁵

2.2.3 The Arts: Revival, *Memoria*, Textual (De)Coding

To examine the art of the Palaeologan Era within its spiritual and intellectual context; it seems vital to specify the agent(s) of “revivalism” in the Byzantine world. Earlier on, the importance of revival was introduced (together with that of continuity) as a key to grasp the evolutionary phases of Byzantine culture.¹⁶ The preceding discussions have tried to clarify the

¹⁵ As listed by Gersave Mathew (1963:139) some of the leading names of this class were Theodore Metochites, Alexis Apakaukas, Michael Tarchaniotes, Martha Glabas, Maria Palaeologina, Euphrosyne Palaeologina and Lascaris Khatzikis. It is of note that “all men of this list were leading civil servants and the women were members of the imperial family”.

¹⁶ See Section 2.2 Cultural Context: The Last Byzantine “Renaissance”, p.24-26.

essential distinctions between the so-called Byzantine “Renaissances” and the Italian *Rinascimento*; and between Byzantine “humanism” and its ancient origin. A parallel distinction between Byzantine revivalism and the renowned European revivalist attitudes of the nineteenth century may cast light on the specific social and ecclesiastical function of Byzantine art.

The crux of the distinction lies in the role of “memory”. Each Byzantine revival was “mnemonic”. The statement may seem tautological at first; yet the following comparison may help explain that it is not: The revivalists of the nineteenth century “Battle of Styles” were in fact “discovering” (rediscovering at best, but not remembering) cultural patterns and artefacts of a dead past – and furthermore, a past which was, in most cases, not their own. The agent of their revival was not memory, but documentation – such as Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s engravings of Pompeii or Rome. It is possible to define, perhaps even undermine their attitude as “Romanticism” or “historicism”; but from a significant point of view, their revivalist ideals present an outstanding (and highly successful) attempt of “constructing” a collective memory which would otherwise never have existed.¹⁷ Thus memory, (or its construction) was the intention and aim, not the mental or cultural tool of their revivalist appeals. In this light, it becomes relevant to conclude that nineteenth century revivalism, which stands as the almost immediate historical connotation of revival itself, was not mnemonic.¹⁸

¹⁷ I am indebted to Prof. Uğur Tanyeli for drawing my attention to this point.

¹⁸ From the same perspective, it is also possible to define the revivalist component of the Italian *Rinascimento* as mnemonic. For an analysis, see Yates (1974:129-60).

On the other hand, the nature of Byzantine revivals was exactly the opposite – due to the obvious fact that Byzantine culture was medieval (pre-modern) and thus radically different from those that prepared or defined modern cultural consciousness. Mary Carruthers (1996:8) defines one of these essential cultural differences by underlining that “medieval culture was fundamentally mnemonic, to the same profound degree that modern culture is documentary”. As in the medieval world in general, the fundamental role assigned to memory, or *memoria* (trained memory), had numerous cultural implications in the Byzantine world. Of these, the most significant seem to be its function in the production and reception of cultural artefacts; together with its role in determining the content and social function of artistic (representational) activity.

In analysing these implications within the scope of Byzantine revivalism; one may firstly, and rightly define each revivalist moment (i.e. each “Renaissance”) of Byzantine history as a memorial process in which the Byzantines were recollecting the ever present memory of theological (Christian) revelations and philosophical (antique) formulations of their own past. The intended aim of Byzantine revivals was to sustain the cultural traditions which constituted the specific -and in their view, privileged- foundations of their Empire; and thus ensure that the collective memory of their spiritual and imperial assets carried on without interruption. Seen in this light, memory was not only the agent of the cultural revivals in Byzantium, but the perpetuator of Byzantine culture itself. It may even be asserted that had the Byzantines ever ceased to “remember”, they would have ceased to be

"Byzantine". Hence a more essentialist answer to the earlier question concerning the "reasons" for Byzantine revival(s). In the particular context of the Palaeologan Era, it may also be asserted that given the decadent conditions of the Empire at the time, the Byzantines had even more need for the memory of a golden past - be it Christian or Hellenic.

That the Palaeologans had more need to remember is a probable, yet disputable suggestion. On the other hand, the Palaeologans certainly had "more to remember" than their predecessors, as theirs was the final epoch of a millennial tradition itself identified with its adherence to models inherited from the past. Within the frame of artistic revival, this historical position posed a very significant advantage; as it multiplied the number and range of sources which Palaeologan artists could choose as the subject of their revival, and as models for their own art.¹⁹ As Grabar (1976:12) emphasises:

(Palaeologan art) was the only art of its time that was in a position to combine in its works elements that went as far back as antiquity with others that came to it from models of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Two points need to be emphasised to fully apprehend this historical connection. Firstly, that Palaeologan artists, as Palaeologan spiritualists and

¹⁹ As both Nicol and Mango point out; it is tempting, yet somewhat irrelevant to search for an interaction between Byzantine culture of the Palaeologan Era and contemporary cultural developments in the West. Although Nicol (1979b:46) reminds that "the Chora monastery was being decorated just at the moment when Giotto was at work at Padua, that Gregory Palamas was the contemporary of Tauler and Eckhart, (and) that Metochites could have known William of Ockham"; he immediately underlines that there was practically no intellectual contact between Byzantine and Western societies at the time. Furthermore, as Mango (1980:279) explains, "the period was dominated by hostility towards the Latins and Roman Catholicism". This was, no doubt, a direct and predictable consequence of the Latin Invasion and the problematic union with the Catholic Church. Thus, contemporary models of the West may be said to have had little or no impact on the Palaeologan Renaissance. On the other hand, the possible stylistic influence of fourteenth century Oriental (especially Syrian) models is also discussed by Demus (1948:37) and Grabar (1976:12-15).

intellectuals alike, were drawing their models and inspirations from their native, imperial past of Christianised antiquity. Secondly, and more significantly, that the Byzantine models of the tenth to twelfth centuries were themselves products of revivals – namely those of the Macedonian and Comnenian “Renaissances”. Although the imprints of their individual stylistic traits can also be traced in Palaeologan art,²⁰ their major function was intermediary: They provided the Palaeologans access to the major source of their art – which was, according to both Demus (1976) and Grabar (1976:14), the art of the great Justinian. In Grabar’s words:

... thanks to the springboard of Macedonian renaissance, Palaeologan art succeeded in creating new versions of models from the Justinianic period, without changing these models beyond recognition, and once again making them serve in the framework of the Byzantine aesthetic.

With this statement, Grabar not only fixes the essential source of the Palaeologan artistic revival, but also points to two extremely significant qualities of Byzantine artefacts: That they were “new versions” of their models; and that they “served” a particular purpose. Basically, the first point concerns the relation of the artist and his model, or to that between copy and original – namely “imitation”. The latter, signifies the social role acquired and sustained by artistic activity. To clarify both points; it seems crucial to turn back to the wider context of medieval culture, and examine the two interrelated concepts of “textualism”, and “*memoria*”.

²⁰ It is of note that scholarly opinions vary on the first hand models of Palaeologan art: While Demus (1976:157-8) and Grabar (1976:12-4) suggest that Palaeologan artists were primarily modelling the art of the tenth century (Macedonian era); Mathew (1963:142) and Vasiliev (1952:710) consider Palaeologan art to be a continuation of the artistic style and technique developed in the twelfth century (Comnenian era). Without attempting to discuss the subtle differences between the two positions; I have adopted the first, more recent opinion, as the emphasis of my point is the connection of Palaeologan art with that of the age of Justinian.

According to Carruthers (1996:11-13), "textualism" denotes an understanding of words as signs or clues; and involves constant interpretation of the original material at hand. Thus in the process of textualising, the original work acquires commentary and gloss. Most essentially, textualising occurs in the socialising of a story through *memoria*: Texts are valued for their social function, and provide the sources of a group's memory. Through textualism, "works become institutions as they weave a community together by providing it with shared experience and a certain kind of language. And it is its socialising function that offers a better grasp of the concept of *memoria*:

Memoria refers not to how something is communicated, but to what happens once one has received it, to the interactive process of ... "textualising" which occurs between oneself and others' words in memory. (Carruthers, 1996:13)

Although it should be pointed out that Carruthers is, obviously, addressing both textualism and *memoria* as literary concepts; it seems highly appropriate to employ them in the field of arts, and suggest that the practice of arts in Byzantium was inherently textual. In light of earlier discussions, it may also be concluded that Byzantine spiritualism and scholarship were also textual; for besides working with actual (biblical or philosophical) texts, they too involved mnemonic and interpretative processing. Yet it is crucial to acknowledge that in the medieval world, a text was not necessarily confined to a written document, or to a book. As Carruthers (1996:8-12) points out; in a memorial culture, a text is something that provides the memorial clues and traces of pre-existing truth. Thus, while any human artefact which both records and generates this mnemonic process may be conceived of as a "text", a book is

merely one of the many ways of remembering a text. Thus it is possible, and crucial to conclude that in the medieval, memorial culture of Byzantium; a work of art (for example, an image or a scene) was conceived through the same mnemonic and social process as the written word. There was, however, an extremely significant distinction between artistic and literary activity, in which the former gained primacy over the latter; as regards its socialisation: It must be underlined that spiritual and intellectual pursuits could only appeal to ("socialise" among) a very small minority of literate people – i.e. those who could read and write scripted words. On the other hand, artistic activity had the strength and means of reaching society as a whole. In this sense, Byzantine art (like medieval art in general) was "the book of the illiterate",²¹ and as such, both its production and reception involved a mnemonic and textual process.

As regards artistic production; the initial juxtaposition between Carruthers' definition of textualism and Byzantine practices can be found in Robert Byron's (1930) assertion that "Byzantine representational art was the first to discover that principle of interpreting, instead of reproducing, perceived phenomena".²² This interpretative approach -as a typical asset of medieval, thus memorial culture- was apparently not only characteristic of the representational arts; but also of architecture. As Richard Krautheimer (1969:116-30) illustrates, the relation between architectural copies and their

²¹ I borrow the phrase from Vernon Hyde Minor (1994), who refers to medieval art as "the Bible of the illiterate".

²² Mango (1980:256) quoting from Robert Byron (1930), full reference not provided.

originals was also not one of precise imitation, but a transference of the symbolic meaning attributed to the original into sometimes completely different formal and spatial schemes. All these observations underline that the Byzantine conception of "imitating" a given model was far from creating its mechanical reproduction; but rather the transfiguration of its indwelling symbolic value. As Krautheimer (1969:121) suggests, "(models) were imitated not for their own sake but for what (they) implied".

Beyond being the object of artistic revival, these "implications" also constituted the essential and unchanging content of Byzantine art and memory. Specifically, Francis Yates (1974:55) explains that they were:

... things belonging to salvation or damnation, the articles of faith, the roads to heaven through virtues and to hell through vices. These were the things which (the pious Middle Ages) sculptured in places on its churches and cathedrals, painted in its windows and frescoes. And these were the things which it wished chiefly to remember by the art of memory, which was used to fix in memory the complex material of medieval didactic thought.

A further explanation of how "art" functioned as the indispensable agent of "the art of memory"; or in other words, of how art operated as a mnemonic marker of medieval didactic thought, can be found in André Grabar's (1976:15) striking resemblance of Palaeologan art to "enlarged book illustrations". It is of note that he is in fact referring to the stylistic affinity between Palaeologan monumental art and the miniatures in antique illuminated manuscripts; yet his analogy may also be acknowledged as a functional one: Just as medieval book illumination aimed to aid the memory to record the text by providing it with a visual counterpart of the written message (Carruthers,1996:9); so too medieval art aimed to aid the memory to record,

or recollect biblical messages by providing “illustrations or expressions of Christian faith” (Rice, 1994:7). It is in this sense that it acquired and sustained its “extra-aesthetic” function of being the book (or Bible) of the illiterate.

Thus it can rightly be said that “seeing was believing” in Byzantine culture. Yet seeing in this sense was not an idle act, for it involved learning; remembering and dedication – and these were the three correlated ecclesiastical functions of artistic activity²³. As underlined earlier; the primary function of Byzantine art (as medieval art in general) was to instruct the ignorant. As Vernon Hyde Minor (1994:50) relates from St. Bonaventure; images “were made ... so that the uneducated who are unable to read Scripture can, through statues and paintings of this kind, read about sacraments of our faith in, as it were, more open scriptures”. Having thus recorded these sacraments in memory, the second function of art was to enable and ensure their socialisation. In serving Palaeologan spirituality, Grabar (1976:9) explains that art “contribute(d) to the work of salvation pursued by the Church ... by reminding the faithful that the Incarnation had opened the way to ‘deification’ of every man”. Lastly, its third aim and function was to complete the mnemonic (textual) process through “interacting” with its audience; or in other words, by arousing feelings of veneration (i.e. devotion, gratitude and faith) to holy figures. Hence Joan

²³ It is of note that beyond its ecclesiastical functions; Byzantine (and medieval) art was also loaded with “practical” and “anagogical” implications. The former implies the “magical or miracle-making” power attributed to holy images (i.e. their power to heal the sick, etc.) while the latter adheres to one of their aesthetic qualities (i.e. their transcendental beauty which ascends the beholder to a divine level). See Kazhdan and Maguire (1991:4-13) for a study on the practical functions of icons; and Eco (1986:17-27) for a commentary on their transcendental qualities and effects.

Hussey's (1961:159) assertion that "Byzantine art (was) part of the congregation's act of worship." There is hardly any need to point out that these functions also determined the unchanging subject matter of Byzantine art, which was Christ; scenes of Christ's life, and portraits of the saints. Thus, as Byzantine art served the Christian creed by functioning as a didactic, mnemonic and devotional device; it can also be said that Christianity gave Byzantine art its *raison d'être*.

This interdependency of the arts and religion is repeated in Thalia Gouma-Peterson's (1995:130) claim that "in Byzantine thought, the primary means for understanding the spiritual was visual perception." Considering, once again, that in the medieval world, understanding was fundamentally a mnemonic faculty; her statement may well be paraphrased to claim that visual perception was the primary means of recollection, or for depositing a message in memory – as claimed by numerous medieval scholars and spiritualists alike. As Gouma-Peterson (1995:13) relates from the words of patriarch Photios: "Has the mind seen? Has it grasped? Has it visualised? Then it has effortlessly transmitted the forms to the memory."²⁴

It is even more crucial to note that the primacy given to visuality and visualisation was accompanied by that given to spatiality and spatialisation. The two complementary principles of the visual and the spatial formed the

²⁴ The quote continues: "Sight is shown in the very fact to be far superior to the learning that penetrates through the ears. Has a man lent his ear to a story? Has his intelligence visualized and drawn to itself what he has heard? Then, after judging it with sober attention, he deposits it in his memory. No less -indeed far superior- is the power of sight."

most basic technique in the medieval art of memory – namely the “places and images (*loci* and *imagines*) scheme” which both Yates (1984:3-14) and Carruthers (1996:71-9) refer to as the “architectural mnemonic”.

As Yates (1984:6) defines, a locus is “a place easily grasped by the memory” - such as a house, an intercolumnar space, an arch etc. - and images are “forms, marks or simulacra of what we wish to remember”. In turn, as Carruthers (1996:73) explains, the architectural mnemonic proclaims images “require an abode” in order to be remembered; as “the embodied cannot be known without a place”. Thus, basically, the architectural mnemonic involves a mental technique of “placing” the images in (architectural) space. Yates (1984:3) describes the process as follows:

The first step is to imprint on the memory a series of *loci* or places ... A building is to be remembered, as spacious and varied as possible ... The images ... to be remembered ... are then placed in the imagination on the places which have been memorised in the building. This done, as soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn and the various deposits demanded of their custodians.

The method ensures that the points are remembered in the right order, since the order is fixed by the sequence of places in the building.²⁵

Hence, the architectural mnemonic reveals the peculiar chain of relations between books, images and places in the medieval world: While images provided visual translations of books; places and buildings provided the spatial framework through which the images (and hence the books) were

²⁵ Yates is reciting the description of the process as given by Quintillian in his *Institutio oratoria*. It is of note that similar descriptions of the “places and images scheme” of *memoria* are to be found in Cicero’s *De oratore*; and also in the anonymous *Ad C. Herennium libri IV*. See Yates (1984:1-3); and Carruthers (1996: 71-9) for a comparison of these descriptions.

recorded in memory (hence learned, remembered and believed in). As such, the art of memory associates the reading and writing, with the production and perception of visual and spatial experience. As recorded by Yates (1984:6):

The art of memory is like inner writing ... For places are very much like wax tablets or papyrus, the images like the letters, the arrangements and disposition of the images like the script, and the delivery is like reading.

It is also significant to underline that while Yates resembles places to wax tablets or papyrus; Carruthers (1994:16) uses the same analogy to define both books and memory itself: "Books, are themselves memorial clues and aids, and memory is most like a book, a written page or a wax tablet upon which something is written". Thus, through the art of memory; and particularly through the architectural mnemonic; places become identified with books.

There is hardly need to point out that the place(s) referred to in the architectural mnemonic is an "imaginary" one, or the mental image created by the memory of an existing building. However, it may be relevant, and perhaps enlightening, to question if or how the primacy given to visuality and spatiality in training medieval memory also provided a paradigm for the erection of "actual" buildings made of real brick and stone. There can obviously be no better building to conduct such an inquiry than the medieval church; as it can be considered a "book" that not only manifests the ecclesiastical policies of its time; but also records and generates the visual and spatial habits of its mnemonic culture.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHURCH OF THEODORE METOCHITES AS A “BOOK IN STONE” AND A “MNEMONIC TEXT”

The preceding chapter had begun by suggesting that the Church of Theodore Metochites can be interpreted as both a reflection of, and a mirror to the historical and cultural forces of its age. In attempting to define these forces; its immediate context presented Byzantium in the beginning of the fourteenth century, as an ancient Empire on the edge of total decay; yet living its final spiritual, intellectual and artistic renaissance; in which the arts played a significant mnemonic role in uniting the Palaeologans both to their imperial past, and to the Christian promise of eternal life. In its broader context; the edifice was presented as a product of the memorial culture of the medieval world, where there was a fundamental correlation between the arts; the art of memory and the art of building. It thus remains to inquire how the particular idiosyncrasies of its *zeitgeist*; together with the more specific conditions of location, patronage, function and meaning are all recorded in the edifice itself.

It must be stated from the outset that it is extremely demanding (if not improbable) for our modern, “documentary” culture; which is over-flooded with “televisual” images and “cyber” spaces; to fully grasp the memorial culture of the medieval world; when even the printed book was a thing of the future, and art, as a textual practice, provided the only available medium. Yet the risk of being totally conjectural may be worth taking, and it may even be reduced by employing a “textual” method of decoding; which implies that the edifice be “read” as if it were a book.

In doing so, it may be wise to take Umberto Eco’s famous warning from *The Name of The Rose*, in which he advises that “when we consider a book, we mustn’t ask ourselves what it says, but what it means.” And without doubt, the guidelines for such an inquiry into meaning are provided by Victor Hugo, in his famous passage from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* entitled “This Will Kill That”, which not only enables, but even encourages the reading of medieval edifices as “books of stone”:

From the beginning of things to the fifteenth century of the Christian era inclusive, architecture was the greatest book of the human race, man’s principal means of expressing ...

(P)eople transcribe(d) their memories in the most visible, the most lasting, and at the same time the most natural medium. Every tradition was sealed under a monument. ...

Architecture began like writing. It was first an alphabet. ... (Then), it became a book. ...

Not only the edifices, but also the location of them revealed the ideas they were to impart...

Architecture recorded the great ideas of the human race. Not only every religious symbol, but every human thought has its page in that vast book. ...

At that time, for the thought written in stone, there existed a privilege perfectly comparable to our present liberty of the press. It was the liberty of architecture. ...

Because architecture was the only free medium, it therefore found full expression in those books called edifices ... All the material and intellectual forces of society converged on the same point – architecture. In this manner, under the pretext of erecting churches to God, art developed to a high degree. ...

Thus, till Gutenberg's time, architecture was the principal, universal form of writing. ... (It was), the chief recorder for the human race. ... And why? Because every important thought, be it religious or philosophic, wants to be perpetuated; because an idea which has motivated one generation wants to motivate another, and to leave its trace. ... How precarious is the manuscript! How far more solid, lasting, and resistant is the edifice, the book in stone!

3.1 Theodore Metochites: The Author and the Patron

Theodore Metochites (ca.1270-1332)²⁶ was, without doubt, one of the most prominent figure among the “wealthy dignitaries and humanists” of fourteenth century Byzantium, and one of the chief promoters of the Palaeologan revival. He had entered the service of Andronicus II in 1290 as a retinue; and had rapidly ascended to the titles of imperial ambassador, *mesazon* (prime minister). In 1316, he became *Logothete* of the Emperor's Private Estates and *Logothete* of the Treasury; and was also appointed the first “lay” *ktetor* of the imperial Chora Monastery. In 1321, the completed restoration work earned him the title of *Grand Logothete*. Thus, he was the most powerful dignitary in the imperial court. His political power was paralleled by his wealth, which too could only be compared to that of the

²⁶ For a detailed portrait of Theodore Metochites see Sevckenko (1976).

Emperor. Furthermore, he had arranged his children to marry relatives of the Emperor; thus relating himself to the imperial house and securing his position and reinforcing his prestige.

Being an ambitious dignitary, he had many rivals, and more enemies than friends. As Sevckenko (1976:31 and 24) records, many of his contemporaries believed that “his wealth was made of the blood and tears of the poor” and disliked him for his “boastful self-love and extreme avarice”. Yet whatever his vices, he was a talented statesman with exceptional influence in state affairs; and was so closely identified with the reign of Andronicus II that any account of Byzantium in the early fourteenth century would seem incomplete without mentioning his role in the Empire’s political and stately life.²⁷

Despite the pride he took in his courtly fame and fortune; Metochites himself would obviously prefer to be remembered as a prominent intellectual and a generous patron of the arts. Alongside his political pretensions; he was an eminent scholar, a prolific author, a passionate bibliophile, an influential teacher, and a sophisticated and presumptuous patron. He was well educated, and took pride in his competence of the ancient philosophers, especially the rhetoricians. He often repeated that his most cherished worldly possession was his collection of rare books and manuscripts; which he eventually housed in the library of his church. Nicephorus Gregoras (ca.1291-

²⁷ It is ironical, and rather tragic that Metochites’ loyalty to his Emperor eventually deprived him of his stately titles and riches. In 1328, Andronicus II was overruled by his grandson Andronicus III, and Metochites was exiled to Thrace as a fallen Prime Minister of a fallen Emperor. He was released from exile, on account of his old age and ill health, in 1330; and returned to Constantinople where he retired to the Chora Monastery and died there in 1332.

1360) -who was one of the most prominent Byzantine historians and astrologers of his time, and who was later famed (and killed) as an active advocate of the anti-Palamite doctrine²⁸ - was his pupil and also the archivist of his church's library. Sevckenko (1976:37) records that his writings -which include *Commentaries on Aristotle, Miscellaneous Essays, Introduction to Astronomy, Orations* and *Poems*- amount to almost nineteen hundred folios. Amongst all his pursuits, his favoured field was astronomy, and he arrogantly claimed to have revived the science single-handedly.

As Sevckenko (1976:52) underlines, he strictly avoided theological matters, and took every chance to declare that his passion for ancient philosophers posed no threat to religious dogma. He often defended that "acquaintance with secular wisdom (philosophy) was useful to Christians, because by comparing it to Divine wisdom (theology) they could realise the superiority of the latter" (Sevckenko, 1976:40-note 160); and that the real purpose of his astrological studies was to "elevate the spirit and lead to a deeper understanding of the Divine purpose". (Nicol, 1979a:58) He warned his pupils that "involvement in theological matters (should) be avoided and replaced by professions of not only complete, but even banal, religious conformity. Salvation (lies) in safety" (Sevckenko, 1976:53)

²⁸ To further comprehend Metochites' intellectual prominence, it is interesting to note that "during the Palamite controversy, both the anti-Palamite Nicopherus Gregoras and the pro-Palamite Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos quoted the deceased Metochites on behalf of their causes: the former asserted that Metochites had been horrified by what he learned about the incipient heresy; the latter maintained that Metochites had been greatly impressed with young Palamas's intelligence and his knowledge of Aristotle." (Sevckenko, 1976:55)

While he was obviously a religious man, these assertions may well be interpreted as tactful investments on his own "safety", rather than honest expressions of deep faith. He knew that the easiest way his rivals and enemies could destroy him was to accuse him of heresy, and that he would be convicted by both state and Church if they doubted his classical ideas were trespassing the grounds of inner wisdom.²⁹ Thus, he took great care to steer clear of any theological dispute, yet he always maintained that "culture was man's only durable and unalienable acquisition, since it provided him with the most secure shelter in the storms of life." (Sevcenko, 1976:26)

So far described, Metochites may be considered a "typical Byzantine intellectual", with only the exception of his distinct learning and his stately office. Yet he apparently possessed a number of significant assets which distinguished him from the intellectual mainstream of his time; and from other private patrons and dignitaries. Firstly, as stated by Nicol (1979b:52), he strongly believed that "sanctity and scholarship need not be mutually exclusive", and even stated that monks who refused to further their education were using sanctity as an excuse for illiteracy. (Nicol, 1979a:52) It was, no doubt with this belief that he furnished his own monastery with a library, and opened it to public use. Secondly; and perhaps more significantly, he

²⁹ It is of note that Metochites had already lived through the torments of conviction at first hand, as the son of a state prisoner. His father, George Metochites, had served Michael VIII as a fervent supporter of the union with the Catholic Church, and had been imprisoned after the restoration of Orthodoxy. It was mostly to save himself from this disgrace that Metochites became a scholar, and it was indeed his literary talent that attracted the attention of Andronicus II; and earned him a stately position. (Sevcenko, 1976:25 and Nicol, 1979a:58)

possessed a strong aspiration for “immortality through art.” As Sevckenko (1976:51) summarises:

Metochites was original, un-Byzantine and pre-humanistic. First, because he conceived of immortality in secular terms; secondly, because he adduced the Christian *Eulalios* side by side with secular and antique *exempla*; thirdly because he valued representational arts *au pair* with letters.

It was no doubt these assets which dominated his motive as he undertook the restoration of the Chora Monastery. Suggesting that in Metochites’ own eyes, the restoration of the Chora monastery justified some of his rapaciousness; Sevckenko (1976:33) refers to a suggestive quote from *Miscellaneous Essays*: “What pauper could erect ... buildings for use or for show?” It is highly probable, if not obvious, that Metochites had erected his own church for “both” use and show. There is no need to explain what use he intended the building to serve: As a monastic church; with a library and a funerary chapel; it was meant to house Christian worship, scholarly study and funerary ritual. It is particularly important to recall these functions when referring to the edifice as a “showcase”; for all three may be conceived as different means for reaching the same end: Immortality. This was no doubt the greatest of all Metochites’ aspirations, and being a *ktetor* of an imperial monastery alone would grant him his wish, as the *ktetorikon dikaion* (founder’s right) lawfully entitled him to have his portrait in the edifice and also the right to be buried within his church. Yet it seems Metochites resorted to more than just the conventional ways of attaining immortality.

Resting on his own writings; Sevckenko (1976:54-5) provides a lucid summary of Metochites' aspirations for eternal life in both worlds; and how he trusted his church would fulfil them:

For Metochites the Christian, the Chora had to perform the services which any *ktetor* expected from his foundation: to provide him with a haven in the difficult moments of his career and with a permanent refuge in his old age. The monastery and the lands donated to it had to be his investment in eternal life ... (F)or Metochites the egocentric, the Chora's main function was to satisfy his cravings for secular immortality ... Both the Chora and its library ... would perpetuate his memory among future generations. Several of his achievements might assure him immortality, he said -alluding to his astrological treatise- but among all his works, the Chora constituted his chief claim to it: A claim not so much to the eternal life in which the righteous contemplate God -for when he spoke of the Christian beyond, Metochites usually saw there the threat of eternal punishment- as to the glory of a mortal, remembered by unending generations of other mortals.

The message is clear: Metochites wanted to be remembered. Certainly, this does not distinguish him from any other patron of his own time, or for that matter, from any patron in any time in history. What may, or does, distinguish him (and hence his building) is, *how* he wanted to be remembered, and the mnemonic devices with which he chose to ensure that his memory lived on. In this frame, it is crucial to repeat and underline that Metochites was a pretentious statesman, an author who wrote books, a bibliophile who prized his collection as his dearest worldly possession, an astrologer who claimed the science could guide one to Divine truths, an entrepreneur who valued the arts and furthermore acknowledged their immortality, and a humanist who believed in the marriage of sanctity and scholarship. It seems he wanted to be remembered for all his earthly assets, and entrusted his church with a mnemonic marker of each. Thus conceived; the Church of Theodore Metochites may well be interpreted as his "autobiographical" legacy.

As an author, it is inspiring to observe that Metochites' church carried his "signature" in both ink and stone. As Sevckenko (1976:37) points out, both his own books (housed in the church library); and the cornice of the main dome were authenticated with monograms of his courtly title "Logothete"; or his name "Theodoros" and "Metochites". (Illustrations 11a,b and 12a-d) There can perhaps be no better indication that he conceived of his church as one of his "books".

As Metochites' interest in letters was paralleled by his interest in the representational arts; so were these signatures in stone complemented by an image. Following the tradition of centuries; and resting on his patron's rights, Metochites placed a mosaic panel of himself (dressed in stately garb) presenting a model of his church to the enthroned Christ, right above the main portal of the naos. (Illustration 13)

As regards Metochites' political pretensions; it is crucial to keep in mind that he was the first non-imperial *ktetor* of an imperial monastery. All previous *ktetors* were members of the imperial family; and no doubt Metochites considered this privilege as another association with the Imperial house, and another token to his prestige. This was probably the reason why he added the images of previous benefactors of the church - Isaac Comnenus, patron of the twelfth century restoration; and Melanie the nun, a benefactor to the church in the earlier years of the Palaeologan Era; also possibly a relative of Metochites - together with Christ and the Virgin; in the monumental *Deesis* panel in south bay of the esonarthex. (Illustration 14) It is of note that these

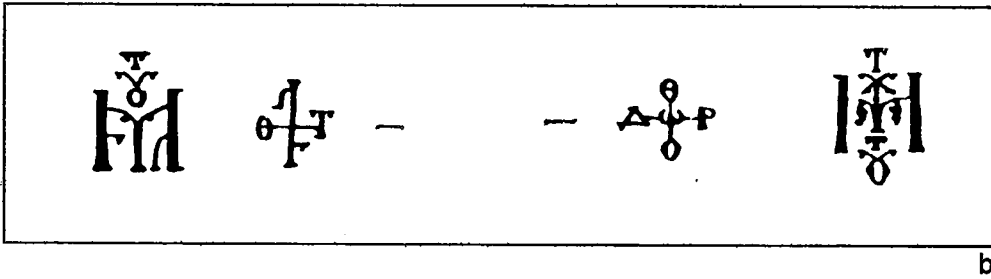
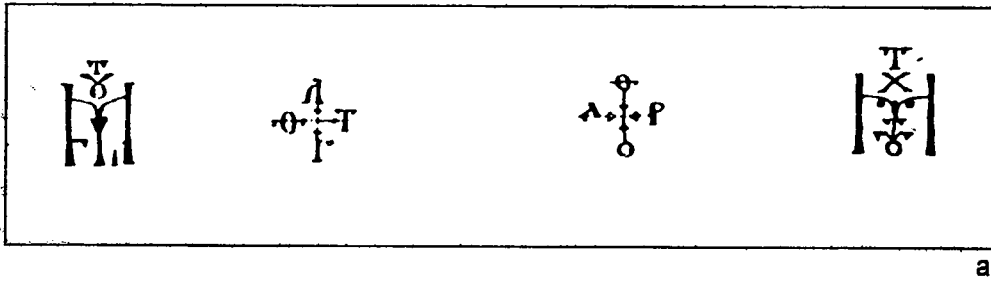


Illustration 11: Monograms, giving name and title of Theodore Metochites on the pages of his *Miscellaneous Essays*.

a. End of Table of Contents b. End of Text

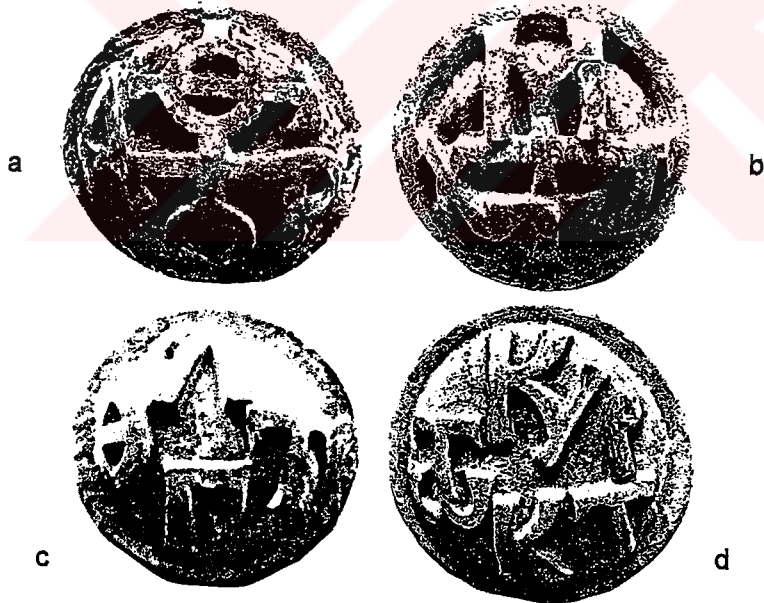


Illustration 12: Monograms, giving name and title of Theodore Metochites on four cardinal points of the cornice at the base of naos dome.

a. East b. West c. South d. North

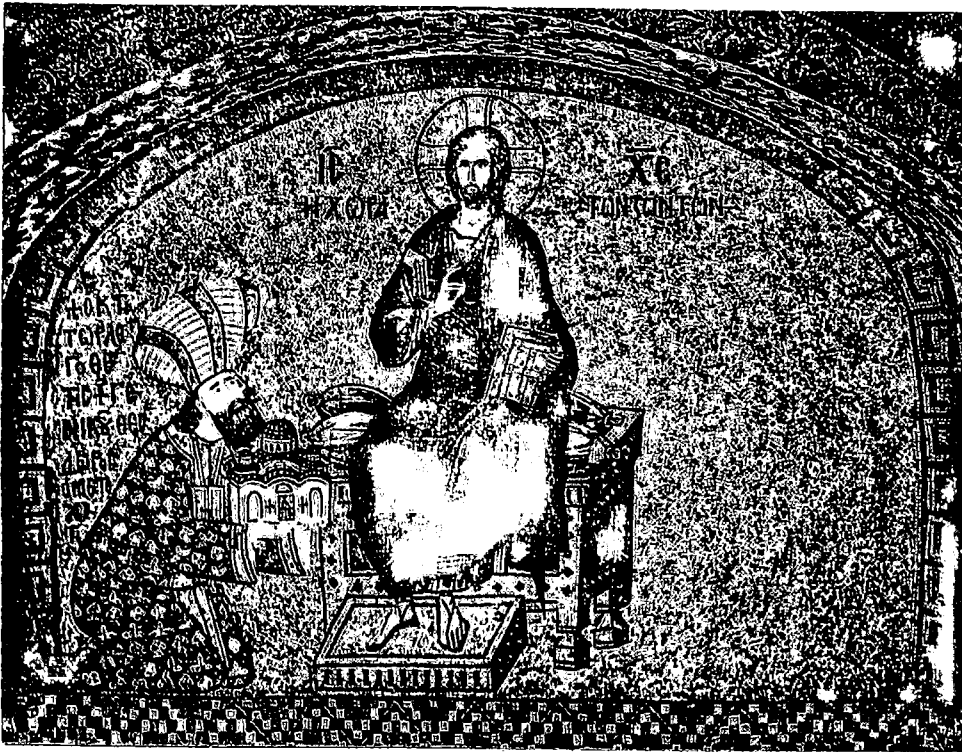


Illustration 13: Donor portrait of Theodore Metochites.



Illustration 14: *Deesis* mosaic.

two figures are the only two historical persons depicted in the church's decorative programme; except of course, for Metochites himself.

It is equally possible that these figures were placed in the panel to honour Emperor Andronicus II, by depicting his imperial ancestors and relatives together with Christ; or that Metochites was adopting these figures as his own relatives, and thus pointing at his own associations with the imperial dynasty. For, as Ousterhout (1995:23) adds, "it is no coincidence that the image of Metochites presenting the church to Christ is above the door to the naos, immediately next to the *Deesis*." According to the architectural mnemonic, which proclaims that the spatial relationship of images dictates the order in which they are to be remembered; the donor portrait of Metochites would be perceived (and thus remembered) either as the final image before entering the sacred space of the naos; or in direct succession to the *Deesis* panel (with the portraits of former imperial *ktetors*); the ancestry of Christ as depicted in the southern esonarthex dome, and the portraits of the apostles Peter and Paul placed on either side of the portal. Once again, the position of the donor portrait can be anything but coincidental.

It is also no coincidence that Nicol (1979a:63) describes the edifice in exactly the same words he describes Theodore Metochites – as a combination of "sanctity and scholarship." No doubt the strongest testimony of Metochites' aspirations of achieving this synthesis was his library, which housed the largest and most valuable collection of books in the Byzantine

capital. Indeed, this collection was a combination of sanctity and scholarship itself; as it included work on Christian theology and antique philosophy alike.

In this context, it is interesting to note that Nicephorus Gregoras is known to have referred to the church as the "Chora" (container) of Metochites' literary heritage. (Sevcenko, 1976:36, note 133). The complement seems to be generously reciprocated by the author and patron himself; for, in a letter to his pupil and assistant, Metochites intimated that "the Chora had been restored so that Gregoras might have congenial surroundings in which he could pursue his studies - and may Christ and the Virgin Mary forgive him for this new dedication of a building which he had dedicated to each of them in turn." (Sevcenko, 1976:35-6)

Although it was customary for monastic churches to include libraries; Ousterhout (1976:115) points out that the relation of Metochites' library was unique. (Illustration 6) While most church libraries were located in a chamber above the narthex; the Chora library was given special treatment and placed on the upper floor of the northern annex. This was, no doubt a direct result of planning considerations (i.e. the narthex would not permit an upper floor; and Metochites was abiding to the plan of the previous, Comnenian Church) yet it also provided the library with extremely good lighting by way of the three north windows that provided ideal, indirect light for reading; and also by the east window which could admit light thanks to the low dome of the prothesis.

The spatio-functional union of sanctity with scholarship can be further enhanced with reference to how Metochites used the building himself. It is known from his own writings that he spent most of his time in his private chamber in the library. Regarding that this chamber had direct visual and audial contact with the naos (Illustration 18); this spatial arrangement enabled him to “pursue his scholarly studies in the library and at the same time listen to the singing of the monks and watch the sacramental services”. (Ousterhout,1987:116)³⁰ Thus the building enabled him to “read” and “worship” synchronically.

Yet Metochites was certainly not the only one whom the church enabled to read and worship at the same time. In fact, the edifice provided its visitors access to two forms of reading; and thus two means of worship. The mosaic cycles of the narthexes were certainly meant to fulfil the educative, mnemonic and devotional functions assigned to art. And, as outlined earlier, the “reading” of images was itself considered to be part of Byzantine worship. On the other hand, the books in the library were at the disposal of the literate.³¹ The building thus brought together spaces for worship and those for scholarly study, which were, as expressed by Metochites himself; two alternative means of attaining Divine wisdom. As such, the Church of Theodore Metochites functioned as a book for both the literate, and the illiterate.

³⁰ It is of note that other monastic churches also had private chambers for their patrons, with similar connections to the naos; such as St. Athanasios' library at the Lavra Monastery in Mount Athos; and the monastery of H. Neophytos on Cyprus. See Ousterhout (1987:116)

³¹ It may be deceiving to assume that the complete library collection was open to outsiders; but is known from the writings of Planudes that the church had a public reading room. However, there is no evidence concerning its location. See Ousterhout (1987:115)

3.2 The Church: The *Locus* and the (Text)Book

In analysing the interrelated spiritual, visual, and spatial qualities of a Byzantine church; and the messages they imposed on the memory of its Byzantine audience; it is crucial to underline a significant asset that combined the physical context and symbolic content of the edifice: As to the architectural mnemonic, the church building provided the physical and spatial framework in which visual, mnemonic images were deposited. It thus served as a storehouse of memories, and may be conceived as a “book” serving as the container (the *Chora*) of one and many images or texts (i.e. artefacts that record or generate a mnemonic process). Yet it is crucial to acknowledge that as a building, the church was also an artefact; and furthermore that its own physical, visual and spatial presence was perceived in association to specific symbolic meanings. Thus, the church itself may also be conceived as an image or text – or perhaps, as a “text-book”.

It is particularly important that these two attributes of the church - as a mnemonic *locus*, and a text - were complementary. While its spatial (architectural) arrangement determined the quality and order with which its images (iconographic programme) were to be remembered; so too did the symbolic significance and hierarchy of the images determine the character of its spatial composition. As such, it presents the perfect historical example of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

It is clear that the images contained in the church were the mosaics and frescoes placed on its vaults and walls, and their inherent messages to the beholder were the truths of Christian revelation. Yet the complementary image of the church itself requires explanation: As Demus (1976:14-17) explains; the Byzantine church, as an artefact, had three major symbolic meanings. Firstly, it was the "image of the cosmos", symbolising heaven and the ordered hierarchy of the universe. This "hierarchic cosmic" formula signified that "the higher a picture (was) placed in the architectural framework, the more sacred it (was) held to be." Secondly, the church was conceived as an image of the places sanctified by Christ's earthly life. Through a kind of "topographical hermeneutics", every part of the church was identified with some place in the Holy land, and thus "the faithful who gaze(d) at the cycles of images (could) make a symbolic pilgrimage to the Holy Land by simply contemplating the images in (the) ... church."³² Finally, the church was conceived as an image of the festival cycle laid down by the Christian liturgy, as its images were positioned according to the liturgical sequence of ecclesiastical festivals – i.e. Christmas (nativity), Epiphany (crucifixion) and Easter (dormition).³³ Consequently, images were arranged according to the "symbolic" cycle of the Orthodox calendar, not to the "historical" time of simple narrative. Demus (1976:16) underlines:

³² As Demus (1976:15) suggests, "This perhaps, is the reason why actual pilgrimages to Palestine played so unimportant a part in Byzantine religious life, and why there was so little response to the idea of the Crusades anywhere in the Byzantine Empire. It may also account for the fact that we do not find in Byzantium the reproductions of individual Palestinian shrines, those reproductions of the Holy Sepulchre, for instance, which played so important a part in Western architecture and devotional life."

³³ For an liturgico-chronological interpretation of the mosaic cycles in the eleventh century edifice Nea Moni on Chios, see Maguire (1992)

All three systems of interpretation ... are so closely accommodated to the dominant architectural type of the cross-in-square church that they must, in fact, have been elaborated for such a building. Only within this framework could a scheme devised after these principles be satisfactorily be placed.

Identified today as the Classical System of Byzantine church decoration; this scheme divided the vertical space of the church into three cosmically hierarchic zones. First, the cupolas and the high vaults, representing heaven. Next, the squinches, pendentives and upper parts of the vaults, which symbolised Paradise or the holy land. Thirdly, the lower parts of the vaults and walls; which represented earth. Each image (figure or scene) had its particular place in this hierarchy: As Hussey (1986:359) describes:

The church building, the cross-in-square, was the whole cosmos dominated by Christ the Pantocrator looking down from the centre cupola. Beneath and grouped round him on the vaults and walls were heavenly host, angels, and saints, with Theotokos in the apse above the sanctuary. On the walls was pictured the life of Christ, and then of the Theotokos, the Dormition often on the west wall and scenes from her life on the narthex walls. Thus clergy and congregation would be conscious of their unity with the celestial world pictured around them: Together they were the Church.

In such a scheme, the beholder was expected to direct his/her first glance to the cupola, and from there, gradually descend to the horizontal views. The Byzantine Church was, therefore, both symbolically and structurally an architecture of vaults³⁴, and as such, a "hanging architecture" that did not employ the structural energies of upward growth as did the Gothic Cathedral. As Demus (1976:12-3) points out, this architectonic conception of a building developing downwards was not only a symbolic presentation of the hierarchic

³⁴ It is also important to note that vaulted spaces are technically advantageous for mosaic art, as the arrangement of the cubes in a vaulted surface creates a structural tension that holds them in place, employing the same structural logic as that of an arch or dome.

cosmos; but also of the hierarchical way of thought manifested in Byzantine politics and religion.

Another important feature of the Byzantine Church, once again in contrast to the Gothic cathedral, was that “all images were visible to the beholder”. (Demus, 1976:5) As Hussey (1961:163) explains: “In Byzantium, the beholder was not kept at a distance from the image; he entered within its aura of sanctity, and the image, in turn, partook of the space in which he moved.” The statement may well be interpreted as another acknowledgement to Byzantine faith as “experience”; and may further provide an alternative explanation for the smaller scale of Palaeologan churches in general.

This reduction in the size of churches, which is one of the hallmarks of the period; is often associated with the scarcity of resources; and the decline of population. Yet as many scholars underline; the patrons of the Palaeologans were all men and women of great wealth, and the large number of churches built during the period implies no substantial decrease in the size of congregation. Lyn Rodley (1994:) provides a more convincing explanation and suggests that it was not funds, but skilled workshops and craftsmen that the Empire lacked in the fourteenth century. Another alternative is presented by Thomas Mathews (1982:127-37) who claims that the advent of smaller churches was a direct result of the advent of “privatised” liturgical ceremonies which had less spatial requirements. A further contribution may be made by recalling that the essential doctrine of Byzantine mysticism (i.e. the teaching of Hesychasm) defined deification as a living “experience” that was attainable

through the sacramental life of the church.³⁵ In the guideline of the architectural mnemonic, it is possible to conclude that the “experience” advocated by the spiritualists was essentially a “visual” and “spatial” one – provided by the Byzantine church. No doubt smaller, better-lit spaces (see below) would allow the beholder closer contact (i.e. better visual perception) and hence, ensure a stronger mnemonic relation with the image being contemplated.

The Church of Theodore Metochites, was a mnemonic building by definition; not essentially because it was the *Chora* (container) of its patron’s memory; but more significantly, because it was an edifice rebuilt to restore the memory of a former edifice, or in fact, several former edifices. Such constant concern to keep a building “alive” represents not only the fulfilment of a practical expediency, but a sense of heritage and memory; especially considering the holiness of its site and the imperial status of its former patrons. As regards planning and scale; it abided to the typical cross-in-square type, smaller churches of its era. Its iconographic programme followed the classical system (Illustration 19) No doubt both the plan and scale of the edifice was pre-determined by the foundations and remnants of the former building(s) on site. Like the great majority of Palaeologan churches, it introduced a system of “enveloping” spaces (the parecclesion and northern annex) around the core of the existing building. Yet what may be regarded a contribution, and perhaps a novelty, is that it represents a unique attempt of

³⁵ See Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1 Spiritual Revival: Hesychasm, and the Rise in Monastic Ideals, p.28-9.

unifying the individual units of the plan. This must have been partly due to the fact that Metochites' building programme was completed in a single stage; as opposed to most contemporary buildings that employed an incremental expansion. Yet the chief reason for this overall unity must be the system of lateral axes which counterbalance the vertical axis of the cosmic hierarchy on the ground floor.³⁶ These axes not only reflect the liturgical circulation within the building, but also define the intended sequence with which the mosaic cycles are to be "read". (Illustration 19) It must also be noted that the architectural and iconographic programme were executed simultaneously, in frequent adaptation to each other, thus constituting another major distinction between Metochites' restoration and similar contemporary pursuits which often chose to juxtapose the iconography on a completed architectural scheme.

In examining the tectonic features of the Church of Theodore Metochites as a memory-place, it is vital to remember that the exonarthex was originally an open portico, and thus received plenty of natural daylight from both west and south. (Illustrations 20 and 21) This proves to be especially important, as light was another primary agent of medieval memory training. Yates (1984:51-2) explains that while the orderly arrangement of images (upon a *locus*) was the first prerequisite of *memoria*; the initial requirement of these memory places was that they be "well-lit", in order to assure the images (hence the facts that they designate) be seen (visualised) in the clearest possible way, and thus recorded in memory as accurately as possible

³⁶ See Chapter 1, Section 1.2 Architectural Configuration, p.15.

Considering, as Cutler (1966:82) informs, that the narthexes of monastic churches were mainly designed to serve “monks who had not yet entered holy orders” it becomes clear that the educative/didactic function of the images was meant to be enhanced by sun light; which would accentuate the colour and form of the images.

The mnemonic accent on “light” also explains why the illustrations on medieval manuscripts were referred to as “illuminations”; or that such illustrated texts were called “illuminated manuscripts”. The function of light falling on an architectural space on which an image was placed can indeed be compared to the function of an illumination accompanying a written text. In fact, this play of light constituted another reason why the vaulted system of the cross-in-square church was ideal for the Byzantine iconographical programme; as the curved surfaces of the vaults also enhance the colour of mosaic cubes, by creating “plays of light”.³⁷

Returning to the Church of Theodore Metochites, the primacy given to light as a memory aid may also account for the irregularity of the south esonarthex dome. Ousterhout (1995:21-2) refers to this dome as the “most disconcerting element of the exterior”, and describes it as the “misplaced dome” on the grounds that its height, scale, and asymmetric position to the north esonarthex dome upsets the balance of the west facade. (Illustrations 7 and 15). Yet when considered within the formulas of the architectural

³⁷ It is significant to note that the relation between spatial order and lighting in the architectural mnemonic is paralleled in the aesthetic sphere by the aesthetics of “proportion”, and the aesthetics of “light.” See Eco (1986:28-51).

mnemonic, the dome offers a successful pragmatic solution for providing the *Deesis* panel with direct light by way of the tall lunettes on the west of its drum. (Illustration 23) Had the drum of the dome (and thus the lunettes) been lower, the *Deesis* panel would only have had access to very insufficient, indirect daylight, and would have lost much of its effect.³⁸

Having defined the symbolic content and mnemonic context of the Byzantine Church, and the Church of Theodore Metochites; it remains to mention another factor that exercised equal impact on determining the character of church buildings in Byzantium: the Imperial Tradition. Institutionalised by Constantine, and culminated by Justinian; this tradition may well be defined as a tradition of political and theological “propaganda” whereby all art, especially the art of building, was instrumentalised to manifest the power of the Emperor and the vitality of his Empire’s faith.

Recalling that Palaeologan art transcribed the art of Justinian (the Early Byzantine period – fifth to sixth centuries) and took the work of the Macedonian revival (the Middle Byzantine Period – late ninth to eleventh centuries) as its models; it is interesting to compare the historical conditions of the three periods with respect to this imperial tradition, and to what each period was manifesting by it. The age of Justinian was, without doubt, the heyday of the Byzantine Empire. It is worthy to remark that the era may also be considered a renaissance; as Justinian was trying to revive the glory of the

³⁸ Ousterhout (1995:21) is of course aware that the dome provides light to the “south end of the esonarthex”; yet he discards this explanation as an “over simplification”. It is perhaps of note that he does not mention the *Deesis* panel as a recipient of this light.

Christian Roman Empire. The crown of Justinian's architectural achievements, and the grandest symbol of his imperial legacy was the Hagia Sophia. It was in fact, in this church that the traditional, axial scheme of the basilica was adapted to a centralised plan; and in this era that church buildings first The Macedonian era also marked a high point in the political, religious and artistic life of the Empire. Both the collapse of iconoclasm in 843 and the rejection of the Roman See had restored the domination of Orthodoxy in the Eastern world; and the period was marked with economic prosperity and political strength. It was in this period that the spatial and decorative programme of the domed basilica was perfected.

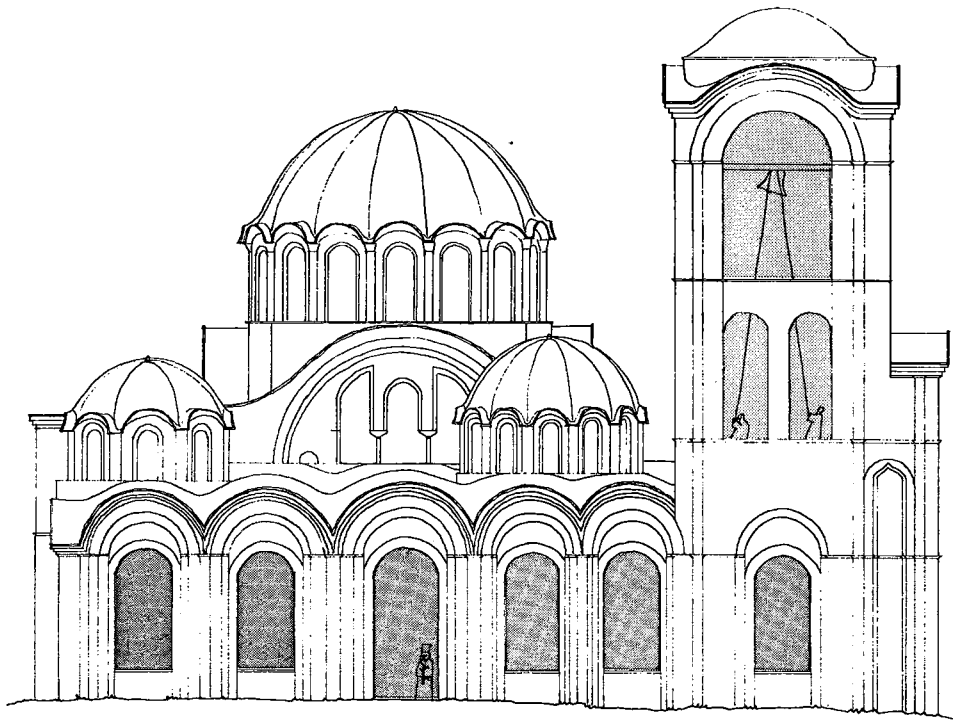
The historical similarities between these periods and the first years of the Palaeologan Era are evident: With the re-conquest of Constantinople and the restoration of Orthodoxy; the Palaeologan era shared their feeling of imperial and spiritual energy. Yet the contrast is also obvious, as while both the age of Justinian and the Macedonian era prospered with political, economic and territorial expansion; the Palaeologans were face to face with decadence. Thus possibly for the first time in Byzantine history; the imperial tradition was converted into a (conscious) pseudo-manifestation, or a means of providing an imaginary refuge; instead of declaring real power and glory.³⁹

³⁹ It is interesting to compare this point with Carruthers' (1996:192-3) assertion that "Memory is the matrix of all human temporal perception. *Memoria* makes present that which is no longer so in actual reality ... (B)oth present and future, in human time, are mediated by the past. But 'the past' ... is not itself something, but rather a memory, a representing of what no longer exists as itself but only in its memorial traces."

Thus, as a concluding remark, it may be suggested that the spiritual, intellectual and artistic ferment of the Palaeologan renaissance; which is often appraised for having produced the finest examples of Byzantine art and scholarship;⁴⁰ may also be considered a final effort of sustaining the Byzantine cultural memory. In this light, it becomes possible to acclaim that the accomplishments of Palaeologan artists in perfecting their technical, visual and spatial traditions were, in essence, results of their efforts in perfecting the memorial traces of their millennial Empire.

The role of the Palaeologan church, as a spiritual symbol, a spatial image and a politico-social statement, can thus be interpreted as the strongest mnemonic device on which the Byzantines transcribed the didactic messages and mystical experience of their creed, and their last manifestations of imperial self-determination. The significance of the Church of Theodore Metochites may be interpreted to lie not only in its singular synthesis of sanctity and scholarship, to recall Nicol's (1979a:63) description, but also in its synthesis of the art of building and the art of memory; whereby it stands to this modern day as a (text)book of visual and spatial images embodying the memory of its patron, that of his Empire and the Empire's faith.

⁴⁰ While all authors in the bibliography seem to share this opinion, it is particularly interesting to note Vasiliev's (1952:709-11) brief account of the historical roots and early scholarly debates concerning this appraisal.



0 10 m

Illustration 15: The Church of Theodore Metochites, West facade.



0 10 m

Illustration 16: The Church of Theodore Metochites, South facade.

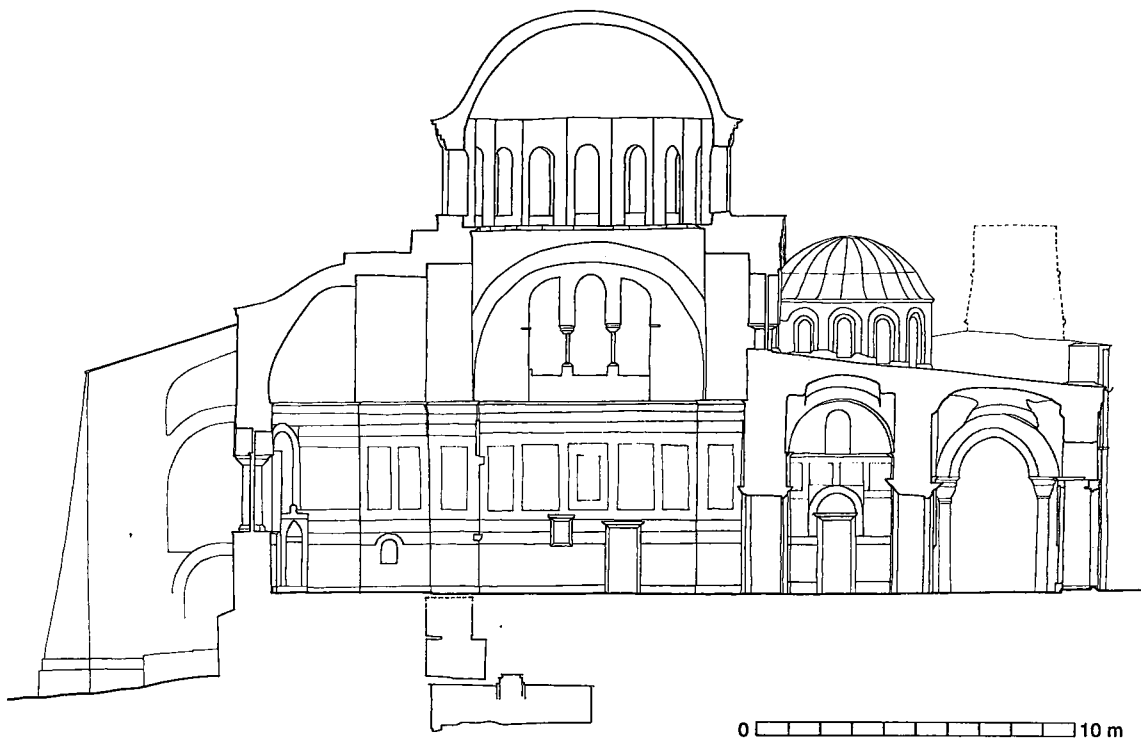


Illustration 17: Longitudinal section through naos, looking south.

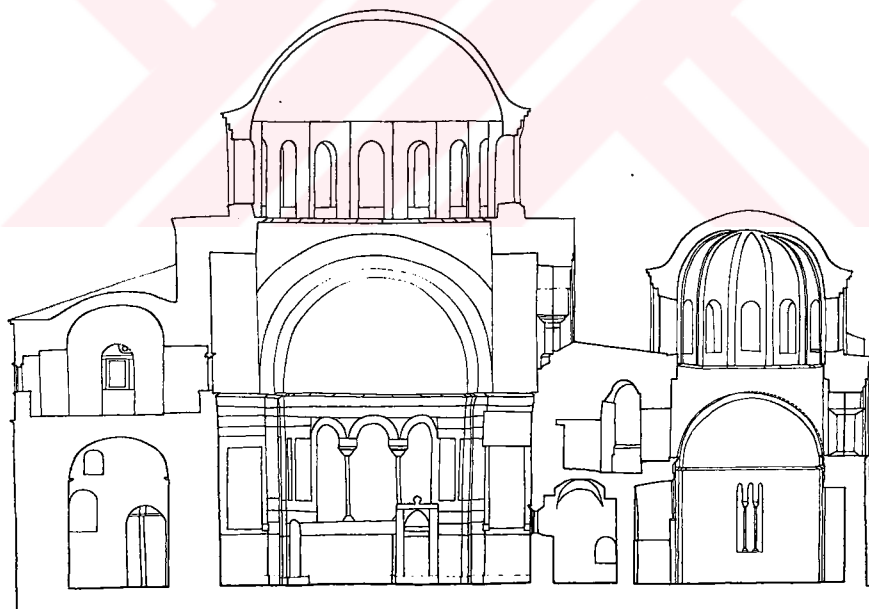


Illustration 18: Transverse section through naos, looking east.

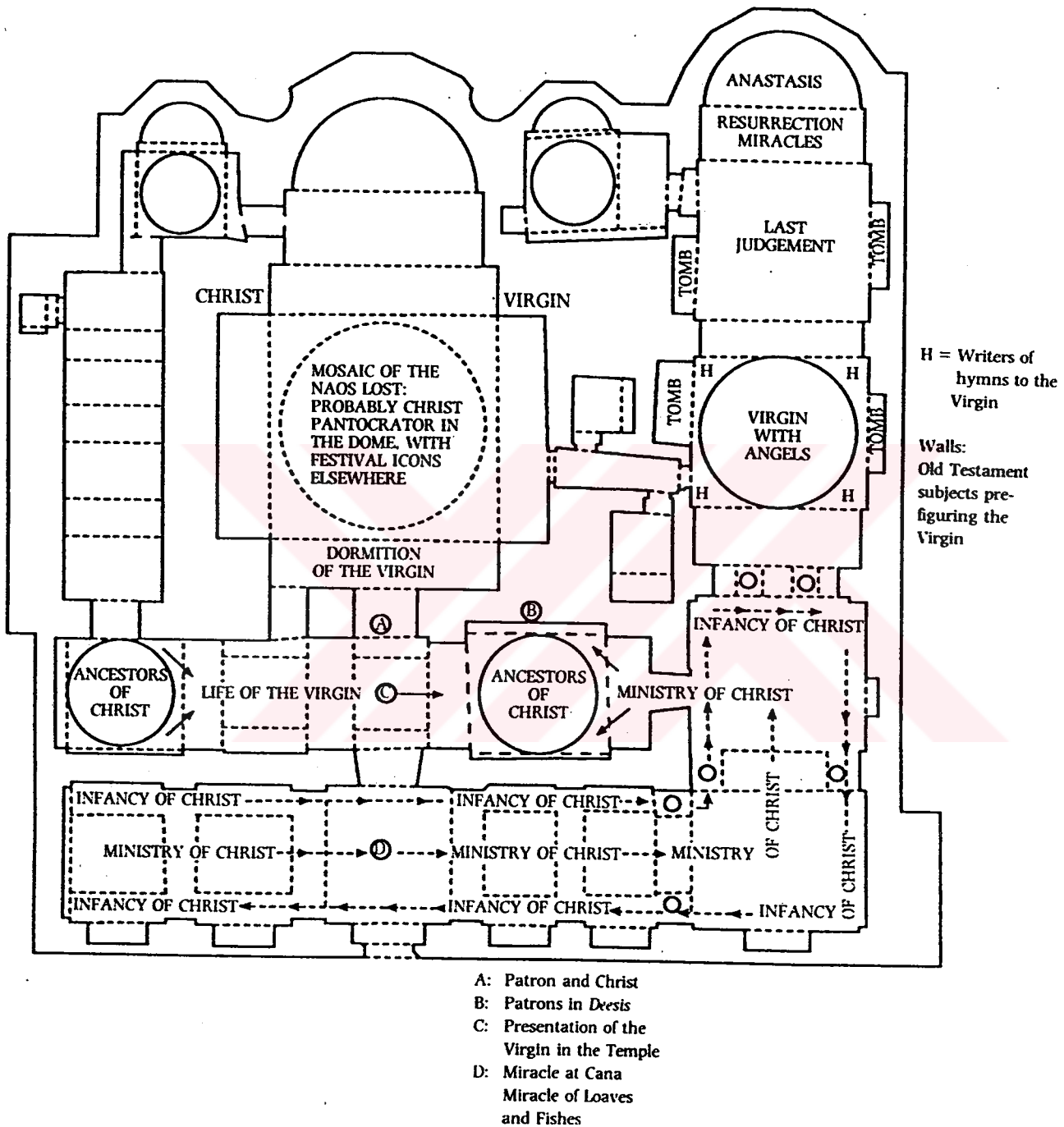


Illustration 19: Plan, indicating iconographic programme of the church.



Illustration 20: Exonarthex, looking north.

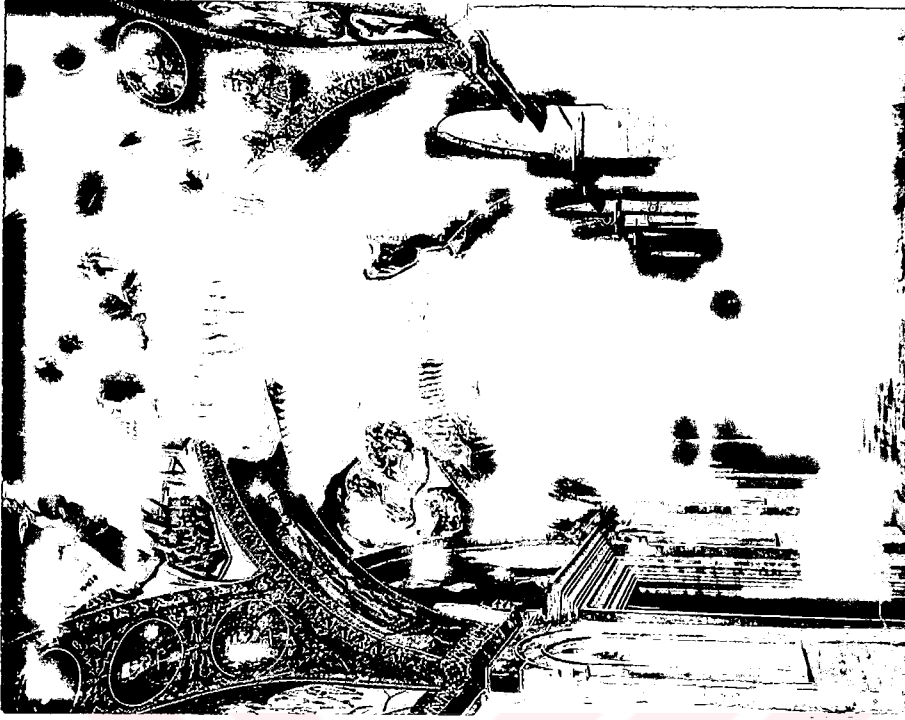


Illustration 21: Exonarthex, looking south.

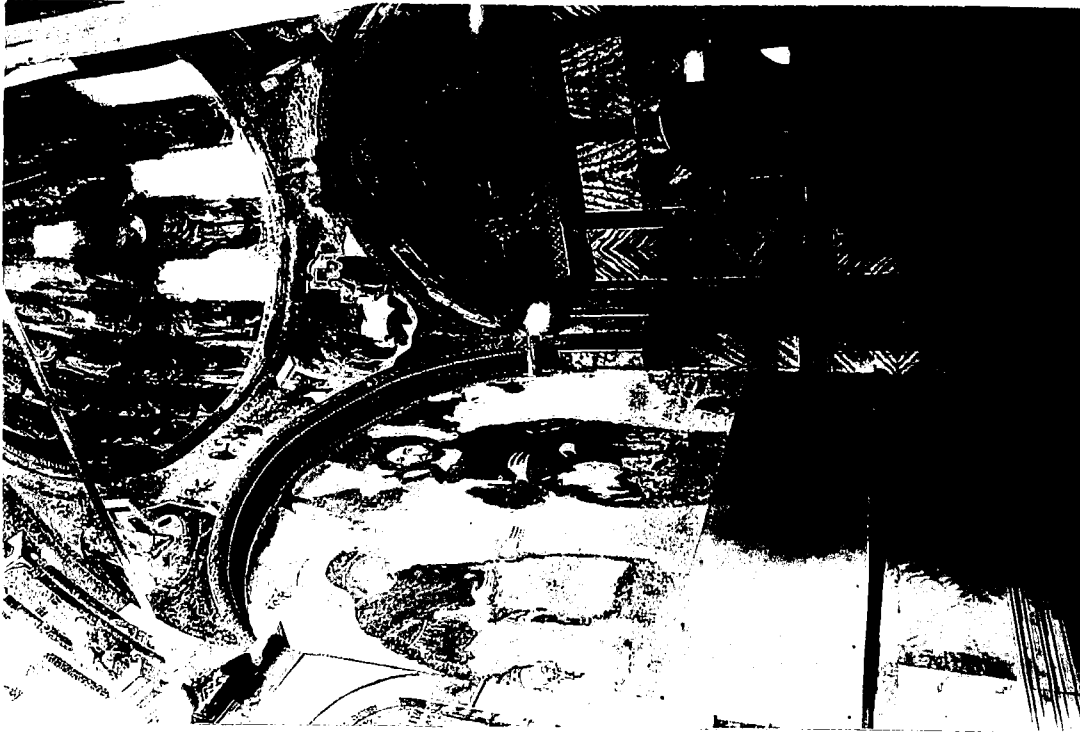


Illustration 23: Esonarthex, looking south towards parecclesion.



Illustration 22: Esonarthex, looking north.



Illustration 24: Naos, view of vaulting, fenestration and revetments.



Illustration 25: Naos, looking east, towards bema and apse

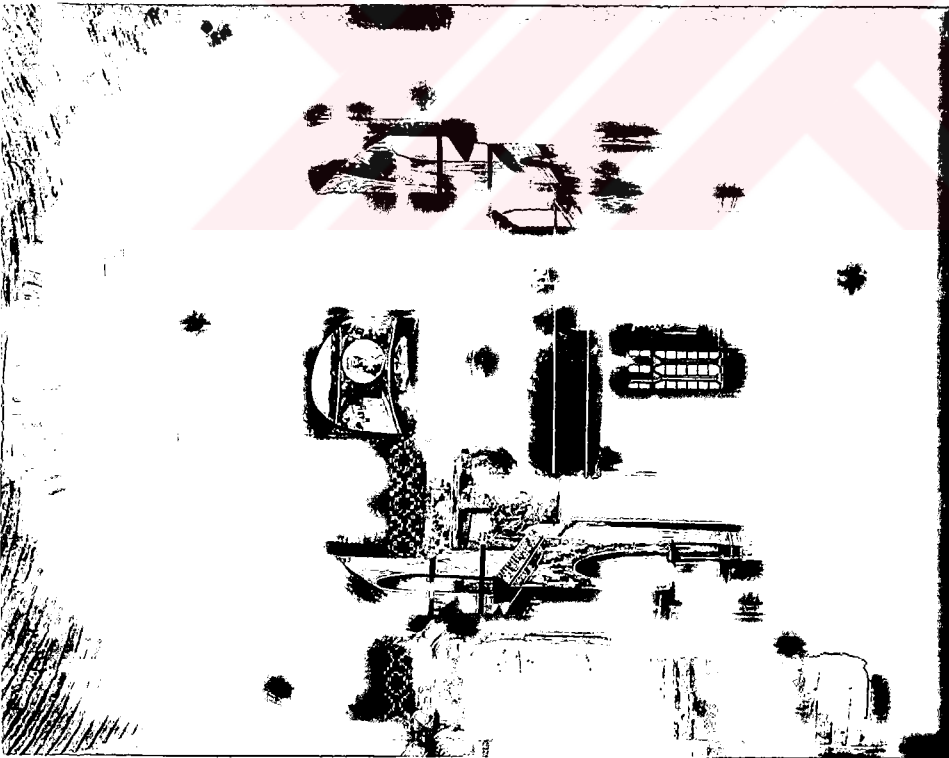


Illustration 26: Parecclesion, from entrance, looking east.

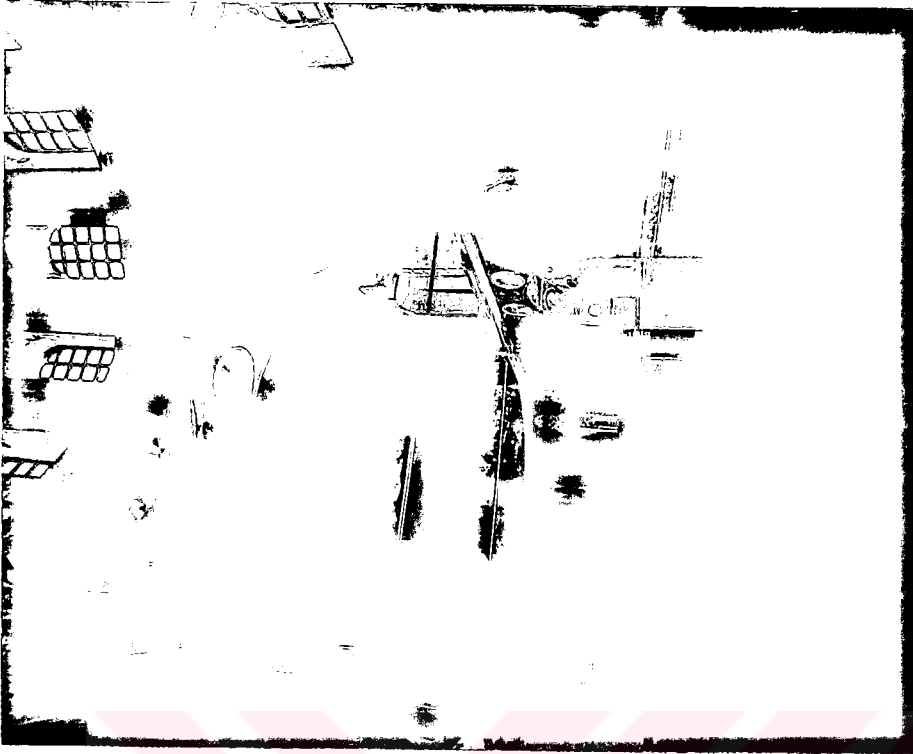


Illustration 27: Parecclesion, looking east, towards apse.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CARRUTHERS, Mary (1990,1996), *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

CIMOK, Fatih (1987), *Chora: Mosaics and Frescoes*, A Turizm Yayınları Ltd., İstanbul.

DEMUS, Otto (1948, 1976), *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art In Byzantium*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1976.

_____ (1976), "The Style of the Kariye Camii and its Place in the Development of Palaeologan Art", *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. IV, ed. P.A. Underwood, Princeton University Press, p.107-161.

ECO, Umberto (1959,1986), *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. H. Bredin, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

_____ (1980, 1992), *The Name of The Rose*, trans. W. Weaver, Minerva Books, Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, Great Britain.

GILL, Joseph (1979), *Byzantium and the Papacy: 1198-1400*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

GRABAR, André (1976), "The Artistic Climate in Byzantium During the Palaeologan Period" *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. IV, ed. P.A. Underwood, Princeton University Press, , p.1-16.

GOUMA-PETRESON, Thalia (1995), "Originality in Byzantine Religious Paintings (Mosaics and Frescoes)", *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music*, ed. A.R. Littlewood, Oxbow Books, Oxford, p.125-145.

HUGO, Victor (1831,1996), *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, Penguin Books, London.

HUSSEY, Joan M. (1957,1961), *The Byzantine World*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York and Evanston.

_____ (1986), *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine World*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

KAZHDAN, Alexander P. and MAGUIRE, Henry (1991), "Hagiographical Texts as Sources on Art", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, No:45, p.1-22.

KAZHDAN, Alexander P. (1995), "Innovation In Byzantium", *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music*, ed. A.R. Littlewood, Oxbow Books, Oxford, p.1-14.

KRAUTHEIMER, Richard (1969), "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Medieval Architecture'", *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance Art*, New York University Press, New York. (First published in *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes*, No: V [1942], p.1-33.)

_____ (1965,1986), *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (Revised edition, edited by R. Krautheimer and S. Curcic) Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1986.

LITTLEWOOD, A.R. (ed.,1995), *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music*, Oxbow Books, Oxford.

MAGUIRE, Henry (1992), "The Mosaics of Nea Moni: An Imperial Reading" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, No:46, p. 205-214.

MANGO, Cyril (1974,1986), *Byzantine Architecture*, Faber and Faber Limited, London.

_____ (1980), *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

MATHEW, Gervase (1963), *Byzantine Aesthetics*, Viking Press, New York

MATHEWS, Thomas F.(1982) "'Private' Liturgy in Byzantine Architecture: Toward a Re-Appraisal", *Cahiers Archeologiques*, No:30, p.125-138.

MEYENDORFF, John (1974), *Byzantine Theology (Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes)*, Mowbrays Co. Ltd., Norfolk.

_____ (1976), "Spiritual Trends in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries", *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. IV, ed. P. Underwood, Princeton University Press, p.95-106.

_____ (1993), "Continuities and Discontinuities in Byzantine Religious Thought", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, No: 47, p.69-81.

MINOR, Vernon Hyde (1994), "Medieval Theory: Christianity, the Human, the Divine", *Art History's History*, Prentice Hall Inc., New Jersey, p.47-57.

NICOL, Donald M. (1979a), *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium, (The Birkbeck Lectures, 1977)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

_____ (1979b), *The End of the Byzantine Empire*, Edward Arnold, London.

OATES, David (1960), "A Summary Report on the Excavations of the Byzantine Institute in the Kariye Camii: 1957 and 1958", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, No:14, p.224-31.

OUSTERHOUT, Robert G. (1982) "The Origins of Palaeologan Construction", *8th Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstract of Papers*, p.10-11.

_____ (1987), *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies XXV, Washington DC.

_____ (1995a), "Another Look at the Kariye Camii", *Arkeoloji ve Sanat Dergisi*, Year: 16, No: 68, Fall 1995, p.14-24.

_____ (1995b), "Beyond Hagia Sophia: Originality in Byzantine Architecture", *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music*, ed. A.R. Littlewood, Oxbow Books, Oxford, p.167-185.

PANOFSKY, Erwin (1955,1982), *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

_____ (1969,1972), *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Icon Editions, Harper & Row Publishers, New York.

RICE, David Talbot (1963,1994), *Art of the Byzantine Era*, Thames and Hudson, London, New York.

RODLEY, Lyn (1994), *Byzantine Art and Architecture: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

RUNCIMAN, Steven (1970), *The Last Byzantine Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

SEVCENKO, Ihor (1976), "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time", *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. IV, ed. P.A. Underwood, Princeton University Press, p.19-91.

SOUTHERN, Richard W. (1970,1990), *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, Penguin Books, London.

THOMAS, John P. (1987), *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*, Dumbarton Oaks Papers Studies No XXIV, Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C..

UNDERWOOD, Paul A. (1966), *The Kariye Djami*, 3. Vols., Pantheon Books, New York.

_____ (ed.,1976); *The Kariye Camii IV*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

VASILIEV, Alexander A. (1928,1952), *History of the Byzantine Empire: 324-1453*, Vol.2, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Milwaukee and London.

YATES, Francis A. (1966,1974), *The Art of Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

APPENDIX

Palaeologan Emperors, as listed by Nicol (1979a:131-132)

MICHAEL VIII Palaiologos, 1259-82 (crowned Emperor at Nicea January 1259; at Constantinople 15 August 1261; died 11 December 1282)

ANDRONICUS II Palaiologos, 1282-1328 abdicated 24 May 1328; died February 1332)

ANDRONICUS III Palaiologos, 1328-41 (died 14 June 1341)

JOHN V Palaiologos, 1341-53 (crowned 19 November 1341; dispossessed April 1353)

JOHN VI Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzene), 1347-54 (proclaimed as rival Emperor 26 October 1341; crowned at Adrianople 21 May 1346; as senior Emperor with John V at Constantinople 21 May 1347; abdicated 9 December 1354; died as monk 15 June 1383)

JOHN V Palaiologos, 1354-76 (reinstated 9 December 1354; dispossessed 12 August 1376)

ANDRONICUS IV Palaiologos, 1379-91 (crowned 18 October 1377; dispossessed 1 July 1379; died 1385)

JOHN VII Palaiologos, 1390 (usurper, 14 April-25 August 1390)

MANUEL II Palaiologos, 1391-1425 (Emperor in Thessalonika 1382-7; crowned at Constantinople 11 February 1392; died 21 July 1425)

JOHN VIII Palaiologos, 1425-48 (died 31 October 1448)

CONSTANTINE XI Palaiologos Dragas, 1449-53 (crowned at Mistra 6 January 1449; Emperor at Constantinople from March 1449; died 29 May 1453).