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XVIII CICLO

*The vision of the palace of the Byzantine emperors  
as a heavenly Jerusalem*

Tutor  
Prof. LESLIE BRUBAKER

Tesi di  
MARIA CRISTINA CARILE

Settore scientifico di appartenenza: **L-FIL-LET/07**

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## **Introduction**

### **Working on absences**

Recent research has shown that, from the ninth century onwards, the imperial court mirrored the heavenly court of God.<sup>1</sup> However, as we will see in the course of this research, such a conception did not originate in the middle Byzantine period. The vision of the court of the emperor as a reflection of the heavenly court in fact has a long tradition and was developed in Late Antiquity, having an important impact on Byzantine imagery.<sup>2</sup> In studying the development of this idea, I concentrated on the role of the imperial palace as the favourite setting for the imperial court: if the imperial court reflected the heavenly court of God, then the imperial residence, where much of the court ceremonial took place, should reflect the heavenly abode of God in Byzantine imagery and reality. Yet the topic has not attracted much interest from scholars. Mango has addressed the subject,

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<sup>1</sup> MAGUIRE 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Grabar developed this point in an early work that became of capital importance for the understanding of the late-antique and early-Byzantine art (GRABAR 1971). Grabar's work was heavily criticized by Mathews in a very interesting monograph whose thesis, as we will see, is not entirely convincing (MATHEWS 1999).

without however developing it in detail.<sup>3</sup> Only Antonio Carile has outlined the conception of the imperial palace as a heavenly Jerusalem and emphasized the way in which it manifested itself as an expression of imperial ideology in Byzantium.<sup>4</sup> This research is very indebted to Carile's work; my work is however limited to Late Antiquity, and is centred on the analysis of the visual evidence for the palace as it is conveyed by both written and artistic sources. It will consider the value of texts and images in the creation of a web of meanings reflecting the role of the imperial palace, and its conception as a physical and ideal place in late-antique imagery.

### **1. The imperial palace: from the temporary imperial residences to the unique imperial palace of Constantinople**

The imperial palace was the residence of the emperor. In the third century Cassius Dio explained that the imperial residence was called *palatium* in reference to the name of the first imperial residence, that of Romulus on the Palatine hill, where Caesar and the following Roman emperors had their palace.<sup>5</sup> From that first dwelling every place where the emperor resided was called *palatium*.<sup>6</sup> This belief persisted in Byzantium.

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<sup>3</sup> MANGO 1999, 50.

<sup>4</sup> See especially: CARILE A. 2003a; CARILE A. 2003b; CARILE A. 2003c. For the holy palace of Constantinople, see also: CARILE A. 2002a; CARILE A. 2002b, 80-85.

<sup>5</sup> On the palace of the Palatine, see: IACOPI 1995; CECAMORE 2002, 155-211. For its role in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, see: AUGENTI 1996; AUGENTI 2004, 15-18.

<sup>6</sup> CASSIUS DIO, *Hist. Rom.*, 53.16.5-6, ed. E. Cary, VI, London 1917, 234-235. On the antecedents and the mythic origins of the residence on the palatine hill, see the panegyric of Mamertinus in honour of Maximian and Diocletian (AD 289) (MAMERTINUS, *Panegyricus*, I.2, ed. D. Lassandro and G. Micunco, Torino 2000, 72-73 and n.4).

Prokopios clearly repeated the argument in the sixth century when he explained that the name of the residence in Rome, where Augustus later built his dwelling, derives from Pallas, the Greek who lived before the fall of Troy in a lavish dwelling on the same location; for this reason, he continued, the Romans called the imperial palace *palatium*, as did the Greeks.<sup>7</sup> This reference to a different legend on the origins of the Palatine hill's palace shows that Prokopios did not borrow from Cassius Dio, but also that the conception of *palatium* – the imperial residence that was any place where the emperor resided – does not seem to change across the empire and the centuries.<sup>8</sup>

The division of the empire in the age of the tetrarchs resulted in the creation of an imperial seat for the two Augusti and the two Caesars, who had Nikomedia, Milan (*Mediolanum*), Antioch, Sirmium, and Trier (*Augusta Treverorum*) as official capitals. As a consequence of the continuous threat of invasions, from the third century onwards several major cities of the empire acquired a palace to house the emperor and, therefore, the status of imperial residences. This trend continued up to the age of Constantine and throughout the fourth century. In addition, the emperors had several private houses either in Rome or elsewhere, which hosted the

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<sup>7</sup> PROKOPIOS, *Bell. Vand.*, III.21.3-4, ed. H.B. Dewing, II, London 1916, pp. 176-179.

<sup>8</sup> For the use of the word *palatium* in Roman poetry and the legends on the origins of the Palatine residence, see: VIARRE 1961.

emperor at particular times or served as residences for members of the imperial family.<sup>9</sup>

In the fourth century imperial residences are known to have existed in Sirmium, Thessaloniki, Trier, Milan, Nikomedia, and Antioch [Map 1]. In the fifth century, the capital of the Western Roman Empire was transferred from Milan to Ravenna (402) and, accordingly, a palace for the emperor was built there. Constantine's creation of a new Rome in Constantinople was accompanied by the creation of an imperial palace that was meant that was meant to be the visible symbol of the empire.<sup>10</sup> However, at least until the end of the fourth century with the Theodosian family, the palace of Constantinople did not function as a unique imperial residence. The emperors were moving across the empire, residing in the major imperial cities and only occasionally staying in Constantinople. After

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<sup>9</sup> Heliogabalus, for instance, preferred staying in the *Horti Spei Veteris*, a residence identified with the site of the palace Sessorianus, rather than in the official palace of the Palatine (*HISTORIA AUGUSTA, Heliogabalus*, 13.5, ed. R. Turcan, Paris 1993, 92). For the *Horti Spei Veteris*, see: COARELLI 1999 (with references). Ammianus Marcellinus mentions at least three imperial residences, countryside villas for the members of the imperial family: a villa *Pistrensis* near Sirmium where was the daughter of Constance (AMM. MARC., *Hist.*, 29.6.7, ed. G. Sabbah, Paris 1999, 53); *Melanthias*, located near Constantinople where Valens went (AMM. MARC., *Hist.*, 31.11.1, ed. G. Sabbah, Paris 1999, 136); and a villa *Murocinta* where Valentinian II resided with his mother before becoming emperor (AMM. MARC., *Hist.*, 30.10.4, ed. G. Sabbah, Paris 1999, 92). The palace of Diocletian at Split is the only imperial palace whose structures are still largely extant [fig. 1]. However scholars warn that it should be considered as a private residence of the emperor, since it was conceived as a retirement place for Diocletian in his old age, and that no court ceremonial is proved to have taken place there (DUVAL 1961; DUVAL 1961-1962; DE FRANCOVICH 1970, 8-15). For this reason the palace will be considered just as a term of comparison in our survey. For the villa of Diocletian at Split, see: WILKES 1986, esp. 56-70; MARASOVIĆ J. AND T. 1994 (with references); MACNALLY 1994; MACNALLY 1996. Another imperial residence that is believed to be a private mansion of the emperor is that of Galerius at Romuliana (Gamzigrad) [fig. 2]. Galerius contributed monuments, temples, two *mausolea*, and a palace to his birth-town Romuliana: SREJOVIĆ 1993, pp. 31-53; SREJOVIĆ AND VASIĆ 1994, esp. 123-130 and 141 (with references).

<sup>10</sup> DAGRON 1974, 77-102, esp. 94.

the death of Theodosios I, the political situation of the empire changed and Constantinople came to be the only seat of the emperor of the *pars Orientis*.

In Late Antiquity and early Byzantium, the imperial palace of the Byzantine emperors should thus not be seen as a unique palace but rather as a multiplicity of palaces that were all important, since all were considered to be imperial residences. A first attempt at understanding the meaning of the imperial palace and its appearance should take into account the archaeological remains of the imperial palaces. Because of the peculiarity of their nature, the private residences that were the property of the emperor but were not official residences will not be considered here, but only addressed as terms of comparison.<sup>11</sup> The emperor was always accompanied by his court; the dwelling where the imperial court mirrored the heavenly court is the official imperial residence. There the official court ceremonies took place and, accordingly, the architecture and decoration of the palace should have reflected the needs and requirements of display involved by the official court life.

## **2. Multiplicity of imperial residences: archaeological and literary evidence**

Unfortunately, the late-antique imperial residences have lost their original appearance through centuries of destructions and robbery. The

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<sup>11</sup> In addition, since it is the subject of an entire chapter (chapter V), the palace of Constantinople will be but briefly discussed here.



remains of many of them are unearthed under the buildings of modern cities, making archaeological investigations impossible. In addition, in several cases archaeological research was carried out at the beginning of the last century and in uncertain conditions and left no secure and detailed reports.

With the division of the empire in the age of the Tetrarchs, Milan, Trier, Antioch, and Nikomedia became official imperial seats. They all had an imperial palace to host the tetrarchs and played an important role as imperial capitals within the empire.

At the end of the third century, Milan was chosen as the seat of Maximian. The city maintained the status of imperial seat until 402, when the emperor Honorius transferred the court to Ravenna. In the fourth century Ammianus Marcellinus mentioned the palace while speaking of the division of the capitals between Valentinian and Valens: in this passage the palace is called *palatium* and holds the status of one of the most important imperial residences with Constantinople.<sup>12</sup> In the same period the poet Ausonius celebrated the splendour of the city, mentioning its major monuments: the walled enceinte, the hippodrome, the imperial palace (*Palatinae arces*), the theatre, the mint, and the baths.<sup>13</sup> In the same period Milan also had major functional structures enhancing its status of imperial capital. The palace was located in the western side of the city [fig. 3]. Nowadays, the shape of the

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<sup>12</sup> AMM. MARC., *Hist.*, 26.5.4, ed. J. Fontaine, IV, Paris 1977, 70. Elsewhere Ammianus mentioned the palace as *regia* (AMM. MARC., *Hist.*, 15.1.2., ed. E. Gallettier, I, Paris 1968, 106).

<sup>13</sup> AUSONIUS, *Ordo*, VII, 3-7, ed. H.G. Evelyn White, II, 272-273.

circus is still visible in the modern topography of the area,<sup>14</sup> around which scattered evidence in the shape of mosaic floors and structures reveal the existence of a central plan building that was probably connected to a bath. These has been interpreted as areas of the palace and are likely to have been related to a residential context.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, insufficient evidence about the plans and spatial development of the palace renders impossible any clear understanding of the latter's relationship with its surroundings.

An analogous conclusion can be drawn for the imperial palace at Trier. Due to its strategic location, from the end of the third through the whole fourth century Trier acted as an imperial seat and had an important role within the politics of the empire. Several monuments recalling its importance as a capital are still visible in the cityscape, but unfortunately very little is left of the imperial palace.<sup>16</sup> The city held the residence of Constantius Chlorus and Constantine, which was located in the surroundings of the Constantinian basilica, a civil basilica – today a church – that was supposed to function as the palatine audience hall.<sup>17</sup> The palace

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<sup>14</sup> For the circus of Milan, see: FROVA 1990a.

<sup>15</sup> For the history of Milan as an imperial city, see: PIETRI 1992, 157-166; with reference to the archaeology and topography, see: KRAUTHEIMER 1987, 107-148; ARSLAN 1982, 196-206; MIRABELLA ROBERTI 1984, 77-84; LUSUARDI SIENA 1986; REBECCHI 1993. For the palace of Milan, see: BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 223-224; LUSUARDI SIENA 1990; FROVA 1990b; DAVID 1999, esp. 30-47 (summary of previous scholarships and archive's documents, with ample bibliography). For reflections on the palace of Milan in relation to other late-antique residences, see: DUVAL 1973; DUVAL 1992; SCAGLIARINI CORLAITA 2003, 153-156; AUGENTI 2004, 20.

<sup>16</sup> For Trier in Late-Antiquity, see: FERRUA 1969 (with regard to the epigraphy); HEINEN 1985; GAUTHIER 1986, 13-32, esp. 16-17 and 20 (with references); CÜPPERS 1992; RINALDI TUFI 1993. For the imperial palace of Trier, see: CÜPPERS 1984 (this reference was not found); CÜPPERS 1990, 601-605; FROVA 1990e; FONTAINE 2003; KUHNEN 2003. The forthcoming exhibition on Constantine the Great (Trier, June 2th-November 4th 2007) will dedicate a session to the imperial monuments of Trier (DEMANDT AND ENGEMANN 2007).

<sup>17</sup> For the Constantinian basilica, see: GOETHERT 1984; HEINEN 1985, 275-276; ZAHN 1991.

area was located in the north-eastern side of the city, between the Constantinian baths and the Episcopal area, with the hippodrome at the east [fig. 4]. A monumental way led to the palace, enhancing its significance between the major structures of the late-antique city.<sup>18</sup>

The palace of Antioch was located in the north-eastern corner of the island on the Orontes river [fig. 5]. In the fourth century, Libanios celebrated the great beauty and enormous size of the palace (*τὰ βασιλεια*) as a splendour of the city.<sup>19</sup> The late-antique palace and its surroundings were built under Diocletian, on the site of a palatial complex of the Seleucid era, on top of a structure probably belonging to Gallienus.<sup>20</sup> The palace was used as a temporary imperial residence until the age of Valens; the whole area was severely damaged by an earthquake in 538 and it is not clear whether it was restored afterwards.<sup>21</sup> A monumental way led through a tetrapylon to the main entrance of the palace. It enjoyed a view on the landscape and included a bath which had been built by Diocletian.<sup>22</sup> The eastern side of the palace was delimited by a hippodrome, and several baths, a circus, and church built by Constantine were located in the surroundings. Due to the particular geological situation of the city, the late-antique Antioch sits more than six metres below the level of the modern

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<sup>18</sup> CANTINO WATAGHIN 1992, 176.

<sup>19</sup> LIBANIOS, *Or. XI*, 205-207, ed. R. Foerster, I.2, *Lipasiae* 1903, 507-508. For the topography of the area in Late Antiquity, see: POCCARDI 2001.

<sup>20</sup> BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 129-130 (with references); POCCARDI 2001, 156-157.

<sup>21</sup> FOSS 2000, 24.

<sup>22</sup> YEGÜL 2000, 149.

city.<sup>23</sup> The palace area has been located on an island on the Orontes that no longer exists; it has not been excavated and its plan is still totally unknown.

Nothing or very little is known of other tetrarchic residences in Nikomedia, Nikaea (Izник), Serdica (Sofia), Naissus (Niš), Aquileia, Vienne, Arles, and Eboracum (York). Lactantius reported that the palace of Nikomedia was built by Diocletian, along with the circus, the mint, and a weapons factory.<sup>24</sup> The city became the principal residence of Diocletian and its palace was in use at least until 330.<sup>25</sup> Nikaea was a very prosperous city located at an important crossroads of Bythinia. There an imperial residence occasionally hosted the emperors until the earthquake of 363.<sup>26</sup> Serdica had a palace where Constantine stayed at length during his travels in the Balkans, although archaeological research has neither provided any secure evidence on its subject nor many other late-antique remains. Naissus was the birth town of Constantine, located in a wealthy and strategically important area.<sup>27</sup> [fig. 6] In the fourth century emperors and members of the imperial family regularly resided there in a palace that was identified with the villa of Mediana, in the vicinity of the city, but is nowadays thought to have been located elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> [fig. 7a, 7b] Aquileia, located on the sea on the way to the Balkans, had a very important role in Late Antiquity and the

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<sup>23</sup> KONDOLÉON 2000, 7-9.

<sup>24</sup> LACTANTIUS, *De Mort. Pers.*, 7.8-10, ed. J. Creed, Oxford 1984, 12-13.

<sup>25</sup> FOSS 1991b, 1483; FOSS 1995, 183-186.

<sup>26</sup> FOSS 1991a, 1463.

<sup>27</sup> PETROVIĆ 1993.

<sup>28</sup> For the so-called villa of Constantine at Mediana and the presence of an imperial palace at Naissus (Niš): PETROVIĆ 1993, 69-75, esp. 73-74; KOLARIK 1994, 179-182; VASIĆ 2005 (reference not found); JEREMIĆ 2006 and TROVABENE 2005 (with reference to the mosaics); TROVABENE 2006, 127-128.

emperors often resided there.<sup>29</sup> Much of the early Christian appearance of the city is known and literary sources confirm the presence of an imperial palace that, according to an anonymous panegyrist of Constantine, was adorned with beautiful paintings (*Aquileiensis palatium*).<sup>30</sup> However the archaeological research has not yet provided very significant results on the palace remains.<sup>31</sup> At the beginning of the fourth century the emperors periodically resided at Arles. Although the city still maintains several late-antique remains, the palace has not been surely identified yet.<sup>32</sup> Eboracum held an imperial residence or at least a *praetorium* since the age of Septimius Severus. It later became the imperial seat in the *provincia Britannia* and hosted Constantius Chlorus and Constantine the Great.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the emperors had a private imperial palace in the city –as written sources suggest– or if the *praetorium*, the location of which is still uncertain, rather functioned as imperial residence.<sup>34</sup>

At the end of the third century Thessaloniki and Sirmium acquired a great importance, the former as Galerius' seat and the latter as the capital of the Illyricum province. Unfortunately, as we will see in the course of this research, the scholarly debate on the interpretation and date of the astonishing building remains found at Thessaloniki is still very lively and

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<sup>29</sup> BROWN AND KINNEY 1991; CANTINO WATAGHIN 1992, 176-178; SOTINEL 2005 (with references).

<sup>30</sup> *PANEGYRICI LATINI*, VI.6.2, ed. D. Lassandro and G. Micunco, Torino 2000, 200-203.

<sup>31</sup> On the imperial palace of Aquileia, see: DUVAL 1973; LOPREATO 1987.

<sup>32</sup> SINTÈS 1994, 189-190.

<sup>33</sup> BIDWELL 2006.

<sup>34</sup> BIDWELL 2006, 31-33.

has found no agreement yet.<sup>35</sup> While a palace was probably built at the time of Galerius, the ruins identified with the imperial palace seem to date variously from the end of the third to the beginning of the fifth century. [fig. 8-9] This is consistent with the history of a city that was an important strategic point for the military activities of the fourth century, and shows a continuous use of the palace's area in that period. Among the major structures of the palace there are a massive octagon, an atrium surrounded by rooms, apsidal halls, nymphaea, and baths. These main structures seem to be connected to the arch of Galerius and to the Rotunda to the north, to a hippodrome to the east, and to a circus to the west, revealing the presence of a massive monumental area whose function, although very problematic, was likely linked to the imperial display or administration.

At Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica) the archaeological research is far from being complete and is prevented by the persistence of the modern city on the site. Yet a hippodrome and a district probably belonging to the palace have been found in the southern area of the town. The city saw great building activity at the beginning of the fourth century that led to the creation of a monumental and functional urban setting.<sup>36</sup> Even though the presence of a palace in town has long been debated,<sup>37</sup> historical sources speak of a palace – that Philostratus and Zosimos called *τὰ βασιλεια* and

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<sup>35</sup> See below pp. 95-102.

<sup>36</sup> POPOVIĆ 1993, 21-26; FROVA 1990c. Due to an analysis of the written sources that place the palace near the forum, Frova did not agree with Popović's identification of the remains to the south of the hippodrome with the imperial residence.

<sup>37</sup> DUVAL 1979.

Ammianus Marcellinus *regia*<sup>38</sup> – and its location has been confirmed by archaeological investigations which will hopefully cast new light on its plans and appearance.

In 330 Constantine inaugurated the new capital of Constantinople. There the emperor built a palace that was meant to reproduce the palace of Rome, in a general process of reduplication in which the new city was meant to be the new (second) Rome.<sup>39</sup> Very little is known of the original appearance of the palace. Located in the modern district of Sultanahmet, the area of the ancient palace preserves very few remains of the palatine residence.<sup>40</sup> [fig. 10] Furthermore there is almost no evidence of the late-antique buildings. The only late-antique room excavated is a squared court paved with high quality mosaics leading to an apsidal hall, located to the south of Sultanahmet mosque. Its chronological identification, from the fifth to the early seventh century, is still the subject of intense debate among scholars.<sup>41</sup> The remains of another late-antique imperial building, the *Boukoleon*, are still visible on the south-eastern side of the imperial palace,

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<sup>38</sup> PHILOSTRATUS, *Soph.*, II.11, ed. W. Cave Wright, London 1968, 168-169; ZOSIMOS, *Hist. Nova*, IV.18.1, ed. F. Paschaud, II.2, Paris 1979, 278; AMM. MARC., *Hist.*, 21.10.1, ed. J. Fontaine, Paris 1996, 64: Ammianus mentioned the palace of Sirmium as *regia* while describing the *adventus* of Julian in the city.

<sup>39</sup> For the meaning and the high ideological value of Constantinople-new Rome, see: CARILE A. 1994.

<sup>40</sup> The most complete survey on the remains of the palace was made by Mamboury and Wiegand at the beginning of the last century (MAMBOURY AND WIEGAND 1934). See also: MÜLLER-WIENER 1977. In a recent contribution, Bardill has used the latest research to clarify the archaeology of the palace: BARDILL 2006 (with references).

<sup>41</sup> For these remains, named after the Walker Trust of the University of St. Andrews which funded the first archaeological works, see: BRETT, MACAULAY, STEVENSON 1947; TALBOT RICE 1958; BARDILL 1999a. With regards to the mosaics' restorations and interpretation: TRILLING 1989; JOBST AND VETTERS 1992; JOBST, ERDAL, GURTNER 1997; JOBST, KASTLER, SCHEIBELREITER 1999. For the problem of the dating, see: BARDILL 1999a and BARDILL 2006, 12-20.

consisting in a great façade on the sea, a cistern, and a few other remains.<sup>42</sup>

The entrance to the palace, the *Chalké* (to which Mango dedicated a detailed study), was likely located opposite to the church of Hagia Sophia in the south-eastern corner of the *Augusteon* square.<sup>43</sup> It was a great building which gave access to the first complex of the palace, the Constantinian building of the *Daphne*. Since the beginning the emperors have continuously enriched and enlarged the palace by adding new buildings, testimonies to their memory and presence to their successors. As we will see, the written sources do not provide us with clear accounts or descriptions of the palace and, especially for the earlier centuries (at least until the reign of Justinian, when, as we will see, the palace was renewed), it is impossible to visualize it. The palace of Constantinople certainly was a complex composed of a number of buildings linked by means of porticoes and gardens and spread over a huge area.<sup>44</sup> For instance the *kathisma*, the imperial lodge on the hippodrome of Constantinople, although directly linked to the palace, was a building in itself, with rooms and structures.<sup>45</sup> It was a palace in the palace, a small portion of the larger imperial palace. Many reconstructions of the imperial palace have been drawn.<sup>46</sup> [figs. 1-15] They all rely on the tenth-century *De Cerimoniis*, thus variously and

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<sup>42</sup> MANGO 1995 (for the use of spolia); MANGO 1997; BARDILL 2006, 24-28.

<sup>43</sup> MANGO 1959 (fundamental work); JANIN 1964, 110-112; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 248-249; ZERVOÙ TOGNAZZI 1996; BRUBAKER 1999a.

<sup>44</sup> For a summary on the palace, see: MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 229-237; but also MÜLLER-WIENER 1993.

<sup>45</sup> R. GUILLAND 1957; VESPIGNANI 2002, 101.

<sup>46</sup> See especially those of Ebersolt, Vogt, and Miranda: EBERSOLT 1910, plan; VOGT 1967, plan; MIRANDA 1969, plan; but also: PASPATES 1893, plan.



doubtfully reproducing the palace according to a later source that only mentioned the palatine spaces as locations for the imperial ceremonies. In view of the lack of archaeological and written evidence, the picture of the palace of Constantinople is dim and uncertain.

In 402 the capital of the western empire was transferred from Milan to Ravenna. In Ravenna the location of the court of Honorius is still unknown; it might have been located in the north-western area of the city near the complex of SanVitale and Sta. Croce, or in the south-eastern side of the town near the church of San. Giovanni Evangelista.<sup>47</sup> [fig. 16] Later on Valentinian III built a new palace in the south-eastern side of the city, known as palace *ad Laureta*. Not far from there Theoderic had a new residence,<sup>48</sup> some remains of which have been found and excavated at the beginning of the last century.<sup>49</sup> [fig. 17] The palace of Theoderic is thought to have been much bigger than the area excavated. The remains show a square atrium around which an apsidal room, a triconch and other structures developed. It extended much further and surely incorporated a palatine church, St. Apollinare nuovo.

This brief survey of the archaeological evidence for the late-antique imperial palace shows how meagre are the data, affected by the contrasting

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<sup>47</sup> GELICHI 1991, 157; FARIOLI CAMPANATI 1992, 157-158; PORTA 1991, 270.

<sup>48</sup> For the palace of Valentinian III, see: DEICHMANN 1974, 42; DEICHMANN 1989, 50; FARIOLI CAMPANATI 1989; PORTA 1991, 269-271 (with previous bibliography). For the palace of Theoderic, see: FARIOLI CAMPANATI 1989; NERI 1990; PORTA 1991; FARIOLI CAMPANATI 1992; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 1996; DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997, 61-67; MANZELLI 2000, 142-149; RUSSO 2000; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 251-258; MANZELLI AND GRASSIGLI 2001; RUSSO 2004; AUGENTI 2005. For the mosaics found during the excavations: BERTI 1976.

<sup>49</sup> SAVINI AND NOVARA 1998.

archaeological reports and the confused state of the research.<sup>50</sup> The appearance of the palace in Late Antiquity, along with its shape and decoration, seems to be lost. Only scattered fragments are left, along with a few partial plans that unfortunately are often rough and approximate. We are facing an absence of palace.

Nevertheless, we can derive some knowledge from the occurrence of common architectural features in the remains and of a determined topographic connection between the palace and other urban spaces, especially the hippodrome. In the sites that have been better investigated, there is a constant presence of some specific architectural types, such as large apsidal halls, round or polygonal rooms, triconchs, long porticoes, atria in the form of peristyles with gardens and fountains, and baths. As scholars have already noted, these are common features of the late-antique residential architecture that can often be found in aristocratic late-antique mansions around the Mediterranean but should have been far more impressive in the imperial palaces. The large peristyles that were found in Thessaloniki and in the palace of Theoderic in Ravenna are a development of the Roman ‘peristyle house’.<sup>51</sup> [figs. 9 and 18] They probably had gardens with fountains at the centre, creating an open-air space within the building and ultimately connecting the building to an ideal *locus amoenus*.

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<sup>50</sup> Recently Brenk has emphasized the ‘incomplete state’ of the research on tetrarchic residential architecture and the impossibility to draw typologies and schemes within it (BRENN 2005, 71-72; also DUVAL 1987, 489-490).

<sup>51</sup> The villa at Mediana near Naissus also had a large squared peristyle. For many examples of Roman peristyle houses, see: MACKAY 1975, 100-135. For a summary on the development of peristyle houses in Late Antiquity, see: ELLIS 2000, 190-191.

In Late Antiquity, we can observe an increase in the tendency for a longitudinal development of columned porticoes, probably related to the processional function of the porticoes and of the need to connect different spaces across the great extensions of the buildings.<sup>52</sup>

The presence of polygonal halls, such as those in the palace at Thessaloniki, Romuliana, or in the villa of Mediana, has an enormous importance.<sup>53</sup> [figs. 8, 2, 6] These buildings – that variously functioned as audience halls, *triklinia*, nymphaea, or as part of the bath complex<sup>54</sup> – were covered by a dome which, as we will see, had a strong symbolic significance as it connected to the vault of the sky and thus had cosmic implications.<sup>55</sup> In the audience halls, the dome created a visual emphasis on the imperial appearance, thus representing the emperor as a superior presence above which stood the sky in the same fashion as the canopy that always covered the emperor in visual art.<sup>56</sup> In the imperial *triklinia*, the importance of the event happening in the room (the banquet) was overshadowed by the appearance of the emperor. To take part in the

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<sup>52</sup> BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 109-113. The fourth-century villa at Piazza Armerina, formerly and probably erroneously interpreted as an imperial estate, can be a good example for the use of colonnade porticoes connecting different spaces over the extremely great extension of the building. For the villa at Piazza Armerina, see: SETTIS 1975; CARANDINI, RICCI, DE VOS 1982.

<sup>53</sup> For a typological distinction of and a reflection on polygonal halls in late-antique residential architecture, see: SCAGLIARINI CORLAITA 1995.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that the function of different spaces within late-antique residential and palatine architecture is very problematic; it was emphasized by Lavin but is still an open issue (LAVIN 1962, 1-2; ROSSITER 1991, 200-203, especially in regard to the *triklinium*).

<sup>55</sup> Baldwin-Smith, Hautecoeur and Lehmann's works are still essential for understanding the symbolism of circle and dome, with their further developments in architecture and decoration (LEHMANN 1945; BALDWIN SMITH 1950; HAUTECOEUR 1954, 169-175, 214-245; BALDWIN SMITH 1956, esp. 70-73, 130-151, 176-207).

<sup>56</sup> For the canopy, see: BALDWIN SMITH 1950, 54-55, 107; HAUTECOEUR 1954, 129-141 (with reference to the church context); BALDWIN SMITH 1956, 188-193, 197-198.

imperial banquet was an honour regulated according to the social rank and hierarchical order, and in the *triklinia* the emperor had a far more prominent and visible position that was emphasized by the architecture and décor of the room.<sup>57</sup> In other areas, such as baths or nymphaea this architectural type was used to create visually impressive spaces, thus emphasizing the greatness of the house's owner. Polygonal or round spaces covered by a dome sometimes connected different rooms and seem to have been conceived as passageways. One of the best examples is located in the private apartments of the villa of Diocletian at Split, where a huge domed room preceded the imperial chambers.<sup>58</sup> [fig. 18] Its function is unknown and it is impossible to claim that it was nothing more than a passage room, but it may have served either as a passage way – since on its axis it has an entrance to the open vestibule and another to the private apartments – or as a meeting location for the emperor when coming from the imperial apartments. There the dome enhanced the imperial space and was an important symbolic element of a longitudinal architectonic sequence that should be seen as an architectural *hapax*. From the open court that marked the transition between the imperial spaces outside (with the imperial mausoleum and the temples) and inside (the imperial chambers) to the great door symbolizing the limit of the sacred imperial space, the domed room

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<sup>57</sup> For the display of imperial power and hierarchy at the banquets, see: MALMBERG 2005 and MALMBERG 2007. For the *triklinia*, see: LAVIN 1962; BEK 1983.

<sup>58</sup> As it has already been said, this palace was conceived as a private residence of retirement for the emperor. It is not possible to indicate whether, which, and in which terms imperial ceremonies took place there. However the residence at Split is of capital importance as a reference here, since it is the only extant example of imperial villa.

with an *oculus* at the centre pointed out the cosmic value of the private imperial area that developed after it. The imperial chambers were the most sacred place hosting the imperial presence, and as such their architecture played to celebrate the emperor and to emphasize his presence.

The cosmic meaning attached to circular shapes can be also seen in the apsidal audience halls that during Late Antiquity spread in the private aristocratic residences and were common in the imperial palaces.<sup>59</sup> From the basilica of Maxentius in Rome to the more modest apsidal halls of the aristocratic residences,<sup>60</sup> the apse contained a multiplication of circular shapes: the circular form of the apse itself, the apsidal conch, and the triumphal arch that made the transition from the roof of the building to the apse. This emphasized the figure or the element standing therein. As was pointed out earlier, the house's major display rooms, which usually functioned as audience halls or *triklinia* serving as a meeting point with the house owner, were lavishly decorated and included circular features such as domes, apses or niches.<sup>61</sup> In the apsidal halls with a basilical shape, such as the Constantinian basilica of Trier, the smaller basilica of the so-called palace of Theoderic in Ravenna and the apsidal room found in the site of the palace at Constantinople, the nave pointed out the longitudinal development and architectonically embedded a process of waiting that led to the imperial appearance in the apse at the end of the room. [figs. 19, 10, 18] In the same

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<sup>59</sup> The apsidal audience hall is, for instance, a common feature of the palaces of Ravenna, Sirmium, Trier (Constantinian basilica) and Thessaloniki.

<sup>60</sup> For the apsidal rooms in the *domus* of Rome, see: GUIDOBALDI 1986, 206-209, 453-454 n.92; GUIDOBALDI 1999a, 53-54 nn. 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> ROSSITER 1991, 198-202.

way triconchs and lobated shapes were variations on the circle theme, and as they were particularly suitable to emphasize the importance of the room and embellish it they acquired an important role in different spaces within palatine architecture.<sup>62</sup>

These architectural forms common to the late-antique palatine architecture are important to us insofar as they are the only remaining physical traits pertaining to the late-antique imperial palace, itself a multiplicity of different structures that is lost. Even if no imperial palace survives in its entirety, thus creating ‘an absence of palace’, the architectural forms peculiar to it can still be understood. They should be considered as the terms of a concrete but vanished language. Although they do not allow us to reconstruct a complete picture of the palace, they are the only and scattered parts of a complex unity, of which they expressed the conception. The palace, the residence of the emperor that, as we have seen, did not follow a stable architectural type, was made of these architectural forms, as such they all concurred to express the imperial ideology and the court life for which they were conceived and designed.

The archaeological survey can also provide us with further knowledge on the role of the imperial palace within the urban setting of the cities. In 1966 Frazer wrote of an architectonic and ideological connection between the palace, the hippodrome, and the imperial mausoleum,<sup>63</sup> a

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<sup>62</sup> Lavin’s work on triconch and lobated forms within the residential architecture is still of capital importance (LAVIN 1962, esp. 1-15).

<sup>63</sup> FRAZER 1966.

theory opposed by Duval.<sup>64</sup> If Frazer's theory seems to be proved for the villa of Maxentius in Rome (306-312), such a connection between the palace and the hippodrome with the imperial mausoleum is not always evident. [fig. 20] The palace and the hippodrome had a secure link, due to the role played by the hippodrome as the location for the display of the *basileia* to the audience of the common people and, conversely, as the place of acceptance and acclamation of the imperial power.<sup>65</sup> However, the imperial mausoleum does not seem to always have been included in such a scheme. Such a connection might have occurred in the palace of Maxentius in Rome, in the complex of Galerius at Romuliana (where Galerius and his mother's mausolea were not very far from the palace) and perhaps in Thessaloniki if the Rotunda was indeed conceived as Galerius' mausoleum (which is doubtful), but not elsewhere.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, all the imperial seats examined show a proximity between the palace and the hippodrome, establishing an ideological and topographic link that cannot be denied. Duval rightly pointed out that there is no consistence in the planning of the palace and the hippodrome in the late-antique cities.<sup>67</sup> However, every palace plan is different from the others and has a different arrangement of the spaces, showing that several architectural types of palaces coexisted at a time that maintained functional spaces and architectural forms arranged in different ways. What is more, the plans show that the palaces were all

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<sup>64</sup> For a summary of Duval's arguments against Frazer, see: DUVAL 2003, 273-276.

<sup>65</sup> DAGRON 1974, 311; CARILE 1996; VESPIGNANI 2002, esp. 81-100.

<sup>66</sup> For another view on the subject, see: BRENK 2005, 78-83.

<sup>67</sup> DUVAL 1987, 479.

connected to – as at Constantinople – or located in close proximity to a hippodrome [figs. 3, 5, 7b, 8, 9, 10]. It is therefore difficult to deny the topographical link between the palace and the hippodrome, which also finds strong ideological roots. In Late Antiquity the hippodrome is the meeting point for the emperor and the community of citizens. In the hippodrome the emperor manifests himself through public appearances; there the populace has the means to communicate with the imperial power to express its approval or disapproval through the acclamations and the speeches of the city factions' representatives. As Vespignani has shown, the palace and the hippodrome form an important architectonic group within the cityscape, with a high symbolic and ideological value.<sup>68</sup> The proximity of hippodrome and palace is evidence of topographical plan and of the importance of the hippodrome as an imperial and public space at the same time, being the privileged setting for the manifestation of the *basileia* of the emperor to the community.

## **2.1 Further considerations on the scholarly debate**

The scholarly debate on late-antique palaces has not been settled yet and seems to concentrate on the demolition of earlier theories – an unhelpful attitude that largely threatens the development of the field. In a long series of contributions Duval has discussed in detail the earlier theories on the late-antique palaces and concluded that given the actual state of the research

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<sup>68</sup> VESPIGNANI 2002, esp. 81-88.



finding a typology for the imperial palace is impossible.<sup>69</sup> While his argument seems convincing, his particularly pessimistic approach fails to take in account the existence of representative architectural forms (other than the apsidal basilica that is constant within the palatine architecture)<sup>70</sup> or of a defined connection between the palace and the topography of the city, which can for example be seen in the link between palace and hippodrome discussed above. As we will see in chapter IV, Dyggve's theory of the so-called *basilica discoperta*, an open court on the model of Split [fig. 21] axially opening on an imperial audience hall, has been largely disproved.<sup>71</sup> However, his conception of a architecture of power – a representative architecture expressed especially in the form of the apsidal basilica – have found a large audience. The scholarly debate<sup>72</sup> is split between, on the one hand, the interpretation of late-antique palace architecture as an expression of power, failing in finding defined typologies of palaces and, on the other hand, the negative attitude of Duval, a sceptical approach limited to the demolition of earlier theories. The 'iconographical' approach of Swoboda and Bettini is among the most important contributions to this problem,<sup>73</sup> but, since it is based on philosophical and exegetical principles applied to

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<sup>69</sup> See especially: DUVAL 1962; DUVAL 1978a; DUVAL 1978b; DUVAL 1987; DUVAL 1992; DUVAL 2003.

<sup>70</sup> DUVAL 1987, 485; DUVAL 1992, 140.

<sup>71</sup> See below pp. 287-292, 294-302; and DYGGVE 1941.

<sup>72</sup> The scholarly debate was summarized and widely discussed especially by Duval and De Francovich thus will be treated here as a whole (for Duval see n. 54; DE FRANCOVICH 1970, 1-25).

<sup>73</sup> At the end of his career Swoboda clearly expressed the interpretative aim of his architectural study and the incomplete state of the research on palatine architecture, taking a position that is slightly different from that of his first work on ancient palaces (SWOBODA 1961 and SWOBODA 1969, 272-274). Furthermore, see: BETTINI 1949.

the study of architecture, is of theoretical nature and can hardly find a conclusion. Assuming that architecture is a representational system with a primary functional aim but with a symbolic content and defined meanings – approach influenced by semiotic theories that had a great impact on the architecture historiography that Duval has opposed<sup>74</sup> – then the architecture of a palace would necessarily display the power, wealth, and social status of the owner. Although it is not possible to reach an unanimous conclusion and there is no fixed model of palatine building in Late Antiquity, we have tried above to show that the occurrence of determined architectural forms in the palatine architecture indicates that there is an architectural vocabulary which should be seen as the means to express defined concepts. In Late Antiquity the absence of a palatine typology is counterbalanced by the use of specific architectural forms repeated and arranged in different ways in different palatine contexts, evidence of the multiplicity of architectonical solutions on the palace's theme and of a taste for variation. As the late-antique *domus* and villa show a great variety of models that are difficult to categorize, so the palatine architecture defies fixed types and manifests itself as the greatest form of residential architecture. However those constant architectural forms differently arranged within the palaces always produce systems that are self-sufficient. The palace in Late Antiquity is an organized reality with its own structures: reception areas, private apartments, baths,

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<sup>74</sup> Such an approach is exemplified in Tafuri's reading of contemporary architecture (TAFURI 1980). For the basics of the semiotical approach, see: ECO 1968; ECO 1971. For the relationship between semiotics and architecture with a reflection on the functional and connotative aspects of architecture, see: SCALVINI 1975; DE FUSCO 1989.

gardens, chapels or temples, great entrances, and a wall which separate it from the outside. This consistent unit is a world complete in itself, a city in the city, thought to be separate and far from the outside.<sup>75</sup> This is clear in Byzantium, where the palace is a closed reality to which the access is severely regulated and where the imperial power's sacrality is manifested only to a chosen few.<sup>76</sup> The guarded great entrances symbolize the insurmountable limit of this reality: the gates and the walls are the boundaries over which the *basilieia* was enacted.

In recent years, archaeological study of the imperial palace has found a new development increasingly consistent with the value of the palace in imperial ideology. Through archaeological evidence, Ćurčić has outlined the value of the palace as a city in the city, which is however linked in various ways to the general topography of the city at large.<sup>77</sup> The fourth-century imperial residences appear in fact connected to determined topographical solutions that link the palace with the major elements of the late-antique city: walls, city-doors, triumphal arches, baths, colonnaded streets and, again, hippodromes. Outside any categorization, the connection between the palace and the general urban topography expressed the value of the imperial palace as a principal factor determining the urban setting of the late-antique city.

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<sup>75</sup> For the palace as a close and separated reality, see: TEJA 1993, 628-629, CARILE A. 2002a, CARILE A. 2003c, 603-604.

<sup>76</sup> CARILE A. 1996, 111.

<sup>77</sup> ĆURČIĆ 1993.

Yet an important point to which archaeologists have not paid enough attention has been recently addressed by Brenk, namely the existence of imperial temples or churches/chapels within the palace.<sup>78</sup> Although very little evidence is left, the author pointed out to a growing demand for a religious building used in the development of private cult forms in the palace. As in the Roman villa a defined space was dedicated to the cult, so it was in the tetrarchic residences where this space became a sumptuous temple. This tendency led to the creation of churches for the imperial house within or near the palace. While the archaeological evidence is extremely meagre for Late Antiquity, Brenk does not consider the great impact of the cult of relics in imperial ideology and their value in imperial ceremonial as a manifestation of the holy *basileia* of the emperor.<sup>79</sup> This is a point of capital importance to understand the presence of churches and chapels within the imperial palace, which will be discussed in the fifth chapter with reference to Constantinople.

## 2.2 Literary sources

As we have seen, the available data allow us to affirm that late-antique imperial palaces were great buildings with very astonishing architectonic structures. Unfortunately, this can be assumed only on the bases of their plans, which are often incomplete – as the rest of the structures are buried under modern cities, awaiting excavation or destroyed

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<sup>78</sup> BRENK 2005, 72-78.

<sup>79</sup> On this point, with particular reference to the city, see: ORSELLI 2003b, esp. 864-867 and nn.

– while their elevation survive only for a few metres. Their architecture can be partially understood but their picture remains dim and largely unknown. Due to robbery and destruction, only fragments of the decoration have been found, revealing a very precious furbishing of marbles, mosaics, and precious artworks that is however insufficient to draw correct reconstructions of the decorative and pictorial programmes. It is clear that these data are too fragmentary to understand what the imperial palace looked like. A complete and exhaustive study of the imperial palace on the basis of archaeology is impossible today. Without a clear idea of the appearance of the late-antique palace, we must look elsewhere to evaluate the social and ideological meaning of this building.

In this attempt to understand how the imperial palace was conceived, we have taken into account a number of literary texts both Latin and Greek – since both the languages were still in use in different parts of the empire and in different contexts until the sixth century. Our investigation started with the idea that how we represent something reflects our conception of that thing and thus that, although using different means that are appropriate to different media, both written and visual representations of the imperial palace were suitable sources.<sup>80</sup> In this survey, analysing historiography and poetry from the first centuries of the Roman Empire to the sixth century A.D., we found ourselves again working on absences. The imperial palace was in fact never described. It was always mentioned in connection to the

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<sup>80</sup> The visual representations of the imperial palace will be considered in the following chapters.

presence of the emperor in the imperial cities or as one of the most important features of the city itself, enhancing its status among the cities of the Empire, as we stated above. For instance, when in the fourth century Ammianus Marcellinus described the *adventus* of Julian, he said that the emperor was accompanied to the palace of Sirmium, final stop of the ceremony;<sup>81</sup> while in numerous other passages the author briefly mentioned the palace as the place where the emperor resided in his travels across the empire. Celebrating the splendour of Milan, Ausonius mentioned the palace as one of the glories of the city, along with the hippodrome, the city-walls, the mint, and the baths.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, in its apology of Antioch Libanios emphasized the role of the palace as splendour of the city, as the element that by its presence enhances the meaning of the city itself.<sup>83</sup> When in the sixth century John Malalas described the city of Constantinople as it was built by Constantine, he wrote that the emperor built a palace (*παλάτιον μέγα*) such as the one in Rome, and listed it together with the hippodrome among the great achievements of Constantine in the city.<sup>84</sup> The palace was always mentioned in association with an emperor and his stay, and thus was a compound of the imperial figure, the natural location where the emperor resided. Furthermore the palace was an element of tremendous importance for the identity of the city, mostly mentioned along with the hippodrome and the major monuments of imperial display that made a city an imperial city

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<sup>81</sup> AMM. MARC., *Hist.*, 21.10.1, ed. J. Fontaine, Paris 1996, 64 (*regia*).

<sup>82</sup> AUSONIUS, *Ordo*, VII, 3-7, ed. H.G. Evelyn White, II, 272-273.

<sup>83</sup> LIBANIOS, *Or.* XI, 205-207, ed. R. Foerster, Stuttgart 1963, 507-508.

<sup>84</sup> MALALAS, *Chr.* 13.7, ed. J. Thurn, Berlin 2000, 246-247.

and were emphasized in the cityscape for their dimensions and splendour. The palace was therefore seen as a natural attribute of the emperor, a quality of the imperial power that had an enormous impact on the appearance and status of the city as an imperial seat.

The palace was sometimes recorded as the location of an event and, for this reason, some features such as its rooms were quickly mentioned. For instance in the sixth-century account of the Nika revolt (532) and in various passages in the *Anekdotai*, Prokopios often referred to different areas of the imperial palace and the hippodrome of Constantinople. Unfortunately, these are only brief allusions, included in the accounts of other events.<sup>85</sup> When John Malalas tells of the meeting between Pulcheria and Eudokia in the private chambers of the empress in the palace, he mentions the curtains which adorned it.<sup>86</sup> The passages were intended to describe an event and thus only allow for a rough understanding of the different spaces within the palace and of the decoration of its rooms. The palace was never described at length.

In our survey, we found very few descriptions of imperial palaces. They are all represented as great achievement of the emperors, on which great sums of money were spent and which reflected the splendour and the magnificence of the imperial house.<sup>87</sup> Instead of focussing on the palaces' appearance, the authors seem attracted by the works of art that adorned

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<sup>85</sup> PROKOPIOS, *Bell. Pers.*, I,XXIV.43-50, ed. H.B. Dewing, I, London 1914, 234-239.

<sup>86</sup> MALALAS, *Chr.*, 14.4, ed. I. Thurn, Berlin 2000, 274.

<sup>87</sup> See for instance: SUETONIUS, *De vitae caesarum. Nero*, 31, ed. H. Ailloud, Paris 1932, 175.

them, by their shining colours and preciousness, and by the great spaces that convey the grandeur of the patrons. This is evident in Suetonius' description of Nero's palace, in which great attention is paid to the huge size of the building: a compound of porticoes, halls, domes, gardens with lakes, and different structures that recalled a city. It was covered in gold, pearls, and precious stones, and ingenious devices pervaded it with perfumes.<sup>88</sup> In his fourth-century description of the palace of Antioch, Libanios outlines the huge size and the beauty of the palace.<sup>89</sup> The author mentioned the favourable location of the dwelling on the Orontes and its abundance in rooms, colonnades, and halls; however he clearly stated that was impossible to give an accurate account of the palace in his text, since the palace was so great in size and beauty that it should have been the subject of an oration and not only of a passage. In the sixth century, when Prokopios mentions the imperial palace of Constantinople in the *De aedificiis*, he clearly stated that it was impossible to describe it in words.<sup>90</sup> The author was however very careful in defining its boundaries expressing the enormous dimensions of the palatine complex, which was so huge – as it was rebuilt by Justinian after the Nika revolt (532) – that it included a former imperial house, the so-called palace of Hormisdas.<sup>91</sup> He described at length the square in front of the palace, the *Augusteon*, and the entrance of the palace, the *Chalké*, giving

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<sup>88</sup> SUETONIUS, *De vitae caesarum. Nero*, 31, ed. H. Ailloud, Paris 1932, 175-176.

<sup>89</sup> LIBANIOS, *Or.* XI, 205-207, ed. R. Foerster, Stuttgart 1963, 507-508. For commentaries (and translations) on the passage, see: DOWNEY 1959, esp. 675 and 283; FESTUGIÈRE 1959, esp. 24-25, 44-46; NORMAN 2001, esp. 48-49 and nn. 109-113.

<sup>90</sup> PROKOPIOS, *De Aed.*, I.10.10, ed. H.B. Dewing, London 1940, 82-83.

<sup>91</sup> PROKOPIOS, *De Aed.*, I.10.4, ed. H.B. Dewing, London 1940, 80-81.



a detailed account of the works of art, such as statues, mosaics, and portraits, displayed there.<sup>92</sup> In Prokopios' description of the *Chlake*, great attention was paid to the beauty of the monument and to its impressive architecture that was a compound of columns, domes, and arches, but especially to the lavish decoration and the colours of the marbles. The description seems accurate; however it did not allow for a final and firm reconstruction, fostering a very lively scholarly debate.<sup>93</sup>

The most interesting celebration of the palace, and particularly of the throne room, is that of Corippus, writing in praise of the emperor Justin II (565-578).<sup>94</sup> The passage draws the palace (*Augusta domus*) as a heavenly vision of shining light, comparing it with the starry sky. Again the huge dimensions of his rooms and its sumptuous and bright décor are emphasized. In this display of light the throne is covered by the golden vault of a richly adorned ciborium. This setting, repeatedly recalling the sky with cosmic metaphors, anticipates the appearance of the emperor. Although not describing the palace at length, the text is of capital importance in that it features the palace with a heavenly aura and depicts it as a 'living sky'. As outlined by Carile, this image makes the assimilation between the palace

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<sup>92</sup> PROKOPIOS, *De Aed.*, I.10.5-9, ed. H.B. Dewing, London 1940, 82-83: *Augusteum*; PROKOPIOS, *De Aed.*, I.10.5-9, ed. H.B. Dewing, London 1940, 11-20: *Chalké*.

<sup>93</sup> Until the present, Mango contributed the most comprehensive study on the *Chalké* (MANGO 1959). For the *Chalké*, see also: JANIN 1964, 110-112; ZERVOÛ TOGNAZZI 1996; BRUBAKER 1999a.

<sup>94</sup> CORIPPUS, *In laudem*, III.180-230, ed. Av. Cameron, London 1976, 66-67, 187-188 (commentary), see also ed. A. Antès, Paris 1981, 60-62.

and the heavenly paradise explicit, and clarifies the nature of the imperial appearance.<sup>95</sup>

Descriptions of the palace are extremely rare; they emphasize the great dimensions and the amazing beauty of the building, in a way that, as we will see, is consistent with other descriptions of palaces in Roman times and Late Antiquity. The special attention paid to the palace's entrance or astonishing features should be connected with the importance of conveying the greatness of the emperor and of the *basileia*, by means of celebrating the façade of the palace, itself visible to all. At the beginning of the sixth century, Cassiodoros, an important personality at the court of Theoderic, in fact explained that the impressiveness of the palace can first be seen in its vestibule. He clearly states that the palace and its monumental entrance convey the power of the empire and the imperial sovereignty.<sup>96</sup> However, the rarity of imperial palaces' descriptions is due to the impossibility of describing it. As it appears from Libanios and especially Prokopios, it is not possible to describe the palace.<sup>97</sup> This is perhaps due to its impenetrability and sacrality, which since the fourth century – in Eusebios and an anonymous panegyrist of Constantine – seem the major characteristics of the imperial palace.<sup>98</sup> Strangers were rarely admitted in the palace of the emperor. It was continuously guarded by troops of special soldiers, called

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<sup>95</sup> See especially: CARILE A. 2003a; CARILE A. 2003b; CARILE A. 2003c, 610-613.

<sup>96</sup> CASSIODOROS, *Variae*, VII.5 (especially VII.5.1), ed. Mommsen, Berlin 1894, 204-205.

<sup>97</sup> LIBANIOS, *Or.* XI, 207, ed. R. Foerster, Stuttgart 1963, 508; PROKOPIOS, *De Aed.*, I.10.10, ed. H.B. Dewing, London 1940, 82-83.

<sup>98</sup> *PANEGYRICI LATINI*, IX, 16.5, ed. D. Lassandro and G. Micunco, Torino 2000, 312-313. EUSEBIOS, *De laud. Const.*, prologue. 4, ed. I.A. Heikel, Leipzig, 1902, 195.

*candidati*.<sup>99</sup> As only a few people were admitted to the presence of the emperor, so the entrances to the palace were strictly selected. The palace, visible manifestation of the *basileia*, was inaccessible and unapproachable.<sup>100</sup> Its monumental entrance was the only part visible to the eyes, and the court writers could thus describe it to their audience without violating the secret of the palace's interior.

For Cassius Dio and Prokopios, every place where the emperor dwells is a *palatium*. This appears also from our survey on the literary evidence; the palace seems a necessary attribute of the emperor, it is a compound of the imperial power, an essential trait of the imperial figure with whom the *palatium* forms a hendiadys, a compound. The importance of the palace relies on the deepest concerns of the *basileia* of the emperor. In Late Antiquity, to abandon the palace meant to renounce the empire. This was clearly stated in an anonymous praise of Constantine – *cum excedendo palatio iam se abdicasset imperio* ('by leaving the palace he had already renounced to the command') – as well as in the words pronounced by the empress Theodora in Prokopios' account of the Nika revolt.<sup>101</sup> The palace is thus a prominent attribute to the *basileia* and the emperor.

As we have seen, an exhaustive and complete description of the imperial palace is lacking. The only way to understand its role and how it was perceived and understood is to work on the 'negative evidence'. In the

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<sup>99</sup> For the *candidati*, see: GUILLAND 1976.

<sup>100</sup> For the secret character of the imperial reception and the palace, see: CARILE A. 2003b, 618-621; TEJA 1993, 619-624.

<sup>101</sup> *PANEGYRICI LATINI*, IX, 16.6, ed. D. Lassandro and G. Micunco, Torino 2000, 312-313; PROKOPIOS, *Bell. Pers.*, I.XXIV.36, ed. H.B. Dewing, I, London 1914, 230-233.

majority of the cases the palace is the necessary location for court life, with only a few (though important) words spent to describe it and its aura. Again we are facing an ‘absence’: the palace is there, but we cannot understand its appearance, it seems an indescribable but bright place. Its presence is real in the scene but aporical in that it is not possible to visualize it. We are working on glimpses, on lack of material, on absence of imperial palaces that are however meaningful because they are filled with their presence.

### **3. The present research**

This study aims at understanding the conception that lies behind the architecture of the palace. Understanding the vision of the palace of the Byzantine emperors in Late Antiquity means to understand how the imperial palace was represented and perceived by contemporaries. The present study therefore uses literary evidence and works of art as its primary sources, since they convey a representation, thus an interpretation of the palace and a way to express its main value to the reader/listener/holder.

As we have seen, the palace was a sacred place. This conception of the palace as a holy space allows us to understand its relationship with the heavenly dimension, and namely to the heavenly kingdom of God. Through the analysis of texts and visual representations we will discuss this relationship, taking in account several other aspects of historical imagery and aesthetics in Byzantium.

Finally, Constantinople and its palace represent the embodiment of the image of the palace as a heavenly Jerusalem. As we will see in the last chapter, there the homology between the imperial palace and the heavenly Jerusalem was enacted and had an important impact on the city itself.

## **Chapter I**

### **Literary sources: palaces and imperial palace.**

#### **On the way to the heavenly Jerusalem**

Any understanding of the palace of the Byzantine emperors and of its significance in the late-antique society requires, as we stated above, an understanding of how the palace was perceived, understood and, therefore, represented in Late Antiquity.

Our attempt to reconstruct this image through an investigation of the sources concerning the imperial palace has been very problematic because of the brevity and the very limited number of the relevant passages. In an effort to solve such problems, we should now try to understand how palaces were conceived, described and designated in late-antique literary imagery. This involves a study of the evidence concerning palaces in both poetry and various genres of prose, such as historiography and novel, from Roman to late-antique times. Such an approach help us understand the different models of palaces and, ultimately, the one among those where the image of

imperial palace finds its origins. As we will see, in Late Antiquity this particular model appears closely connected to the image of the kingdom of God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

### **1. Latin and Greek literature**

We have studied, in a comparative way, a number of descriptions of palaces in an attempt to understand the main features of buildings, the lexicon used, and the possible influences among different writers. These texts range from the first century B.C., the golden age of Roman poetry, to the fifth century A.D., with a particular emphasis on the Roman imperial and late-antique periods. We have also included the Homeric poems as well as Apollonios Rhodios' *Argonautica* in this survey, due to their importance within the development of Latin and Greek literature and, particularly, their influence of palace descriptions.<sup>1</sup>

Two principles have guided this broad comparative study: the conviction that, in Late Antiquity, the distinction between Paganism and Christianity cannot uncritically be considered to have been a sharp one and the consideration that, in the world of Late Antiquity, the Greek and Latin languages were both means to express a common world, itself a compound of many different cultures that had in common the same Roman imperial

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<sup>1</sup> HOMER, *Odyssey*, IV.43-46 (palace of Menelaos), VII.81-133 (palace of Alcinous); APOLLONIOS RHODIOS, *Arg.*, III.214-246 (palace of Aetes).

administration.<sup>2</sup> Christianity was in this world a new faith, accepted by Constantine then imposed as the imperial faith under Theodosios I. However the population as a whole did not immediately abandon their previous faiths, and Christianisation occurred in various ways throughout the empire. Christianity and Paganism coexisted for some time, simultaneously influencing the life of ordinary people. Thus in the fifth century, a Christian author such as Sidonius Apollinaris would still writing poems that contained obvious Pagan elements; and the authorship of both a long epic poem, the *Dionysiaca*, and that of a paraphrase of St. John's gospels were attributed to the same author, Nonnos of Panopolis. In the sixth century the churchmen Venantius Fortunatus wrote poems and hymns of classical theme. Ancient mythology was still used as a common language in literary writings as well as in works of art long after the empire was proclaimed Christian.

Although, in the first phase of this study, we separately approached poetry and prose and, among each of these two, the various literary genres, we came to the conclusion that the literary form and genre seem to have no particular influence on the description of palaces. The poetical form and the metre are of no importance for the present task: they do not seem to interfere or to have a significant influence on the descriptions. Descriptions of palaces inserted into historical accounts are sometimes more detailed than

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<sup>2</sup> For a study of the late-antique religion in the Mediterranean world from this perspective, see: FOWDEN 1998, 538-560. For an overview on the persistence of Paganism into Christian society, see: CAMERON AV.1993, 69-71. Concerning the use of Latin and Greek in the Mediterranean between late Roman empire and Late Antiquity, see: CAMERON AV. 1991, 1-2, 139-140 (where the topic is discussed in relation to a west-east division of the empire).



poetical descriptions of fantastic dwellings; however, as we will see, poetical descriptions of palaces may also have very vivid features that seem to be influenced by contemporary structures, and at the same time historical descriptions of palaces do not seem intended to be primarily accurate accounts.

List of the relevant passages included in this study:

- Homer, *Odyssey*, IV. 43-46: palace of Menelaos.
- Homer, *Odyssey* VII. 81-133: palace of Alcinous.
- Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautica*, III. 214-246: palace of Aetes.
- Virgil, *Aeneid*, VII. 170-191: palace of Latinus.
- Catullus, *Carmina*, LXIV. 43-51: palace of Theseus.
- Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, II. 1-18: palace of the Sun.
- Lucan, *Pharsalia*, X. 111-127: palace of Cleopatra.
- Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica*, V. 426(407)-454: palace of Aetes.
- Statius, *Thebais*, VII. 40-63: palace of Mars.
- Statius, *Silvae*, I. II. 144-157: palace of Venus.
- Statius, *Silvae*, I. III. 1-89: villa of Manilius Vospiscus.
- Statius, *Silvae*, II. II. 1-106: villa of Pollius Felix.
- Statius, *Silvae*, IV. II. 18-37: palace of Domitian.
- Suetonius, *De vitae caesarum*, VI. 31: palace of Nero.
- Apuleius, *Metamorphosis*, V. 1-2: palace of Cupid.
- Apuleius, *De mundo*, XXVI: palace of the Kings of Persia.

- Achilles Tatius, *The romance of Leucippe and Clitophon*, I. XV. 1-8: House-palace of Clitophon.
- Claudian, *De raptu Proserpinae*, I. 237-245: palace of Ceres.
- Claudian, *Epithalami = Carmina*, IX. 49-96: palace of Venus.
- Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina* II. 418-423: palace of Aurora.
- Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina* XI. 14-33: palace of Venus.
- Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*, III. 124-183: palace of Elektra.
- Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca* XVIII. 62-92: palace of Staphilos.
- Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*, XLI. 275-287: palace of Harmonia.
- Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 8. IV. 17-23: palace of the Eternal God.

This survey by no means records all palace descriptions. It was carried out on a limited number of cases that form a representative sample thanks to their different natures and chronological origins. A number of other literary works, mainly from Late Antiquity, were taken in account even though they do not include palace descriptions. Palaces are in fact rarely described and, as we will see, their occurrence is due to the particular part they played in the narrative or their use as a way to emphasize the owner's exceptional wealth or divine authority.

## 1.1 Features of the descriptions of palaces and of the described palaces

In none of the cases taken into consideration, the author is primarily interested in describing the architectural spaces. Even when the palace's rooms are best described, the description only gives a rough idea of the building. For example, the villa of Manilius Vospiscus, that of Pollius Felix, the palace of Domitian in Statius' *Silvae*, Nero's residence in Suetonius, and the palace of the kings of Persia in the work attributed to Apuleius are all described at length and with an extreme care for details.<sup>3</sup> The authors attempt to give a sense of the spatial development; however it remains impossible to draw the exact plan or shape of the buildings from these texts. In these texts a few phrases address the structure and the text focuses on the astonishing details of the decoration or on the feelings and emotions produced on the visitor.<sup>4</sup> The same can be said for the description of the palace of Elektra in Nonnos' *Dionysiaca* in which a dome is said to dominate the hall of the palace,<sup>5</sup> thus giving an idea of the shape of the hall. Elsewhere, the author also mentions the porticoes of the palace. However, these elements are not connected to a description of the building, but are rather seen as astonishing structures. The dome can also be connected to the bright light emanating from the building recalling the sky, thus suggesting a

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<sup>3</sup> STATIUS, *Silvae*, I.III.1-89 (villa of Manilius Vospiscus), II.II.1-106 (villa of Pollius Felix), IV.II.18-37 (palace of Domitian); SUETONIUS, *De vitae caesarum. Nero*, VI.31; APULEIUS, *De Mundo*, XXVI.

<sup>4</sup> For the involvement of the senses in late-antique descriptions, see: JAMES L. and WEBB 1991.

<sup>5</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.137.

cosmic significance and implying a sacred space.<sup>6</sup> A cosmic reference can also be seen in the circular room of the Suetonian palace of Nero, which turns all day as the globe.<sup>7</sup>

When there is a transition between the indoors and a garden area, it is outlined to introduce the spectacle of the garden, a very important aspect of these palaces: it emphasizes the greatness and magnificence of the building. The presence of gardens, with fountains and statues, can be found in Statius and Claudian, in the romance of Achilles Tatius and in Nonnos of Panopolis, as well as in numerous other writers.<sup>8</sup> The features of the palaces they describe sometimes strongly recall Homer's account of the palaces of Alcinous or the *Argonautica* of Apollonios Rhodios, although the details are organized differently in new within the compositions, attributing a particular character to each garden. For instance, the presence of statues and *automata* is a typical aspect of the Homeric tradition,<sup>9</sup> and is an important aspect of the Nonnian description of Elektra's palace.<sup>10</sup> In fact, fountains and statues decorated gardens at the time of Homer, and were still common and seen as indicators of great luxury in late-antique palaces.<sup>11</sup> However, in Nonnos of

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<sup>6</sup> See commentary and notes to *Dionysiaca* by Gigli Piccardi (GIGLI PICCARDI 2003, 290-291 nn. 124-128).

<sup>7</sup> Suetonius, *De vitae caesarum. Nero*, VI.31.

<sup>8</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, VII.111-133 (palace of Alcinous); Apollonios Rhodios, *Arg.*, III.220-228 (palace of Aetes); Statius, *Silvae*, I.II.154-157 (palace of Venus); Suetonius, *De vitae caesarum. Nero*, VI.31; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, I.XV.1-8 (House-palace of Clitophon); Claudian, *Epithal.* = *Carmina*, 9.60-85 (palace of Venus); Nonnos, *Dion.*, III.140-169 (palace of Elektra).

<sup>9</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, VII.91-94.

<sup>10</sup> Nonnos, *Dion.*, III.169-179.

<sup>11</sup> For the value of gardens within the villas and palaces in Late Antiquity and Byzantium, see especially: Littlewood 1987; Maguire 2000; Maguire 2002b.

Panopolis and Homer they have different characteristics and decorate different gardens.

The purpose of the descriptions, regardless of their literary form, is not giving an exact and correct account of the spaces. No text provides enough elements to reconstruct the exact plan or appearance of the palaces. The authors emphasize the great size of the building, elements such as columns or doors, works of arts such as mosaics, colours, and precious materials.

The columns seem to be of capital importance in all the descriptions, appearing in almost all the texts taken into account.<sup>12</sup> References to columns can be found in Virgil's description of Latinus' palace, Ovid's palace of the Sun, Statius' palaces of Mars and in the palaces described in *Silvae*, Apuleius' palace of Cupid, Claudian's palace of Ceres and palace of Venus, Nonnos' palaces of Elektra and Staphilos. The columns, and thus the colonnades, are the main elements of a palace.

Significant attention is also given to the doors, lintels or threshold in Virgil's, Statius' and Claudian's palace descriptions, in Sidonius Apollinaris' palace of Venus and Valerius Flaccus' palace of Aeetes as in a number of other texts.<sup>13</sup> The doors and their precious lintels symbolize the

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<sup>12</sup> APOLLONIUS RHODIUS, *Arg.*, III.216-8 (palace of Aetes); VIRGIL, *Aeneid*, VII.170 (palace of Latinus); OVID, *Metamorphoses*, II.1 (palace of Sun); STATIUS, *Theb.*, VII.43-4 (palace of Mars); STATIUS, *Silvae*, I.II.152 (palace of Venus); APULEIUS, *Metamorphoses*, V.1 (palace of Cupid); ACHILLES TATIUS, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, I.XV.1 (House-palace of Clitophon); CLAUDIAN, *De rap. Pros.*, I.245 (palace of Ceres) and *Epithal.* = *Carmina*, 9.89 (palace of Venus); NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.126 (palace of Elektra); NONNOS, *Dion.*, XVIII.81 (palace of Staphilos).

<sup>13</sup> HOMER, *Odyssey*, III.84 (palace of Alcinous); APOLLONIUS RHODIUS, *Arg.*, III.216, 219 (palace of Aetes); VIRGIL, *Aeneid*, VII.185 (palace of Latinus); OVID, *Metamorphoses*, II.4

building itself; the thresholds render the sense of transition between different areas of the palaces as well as between indoor and outdoor spaces. Doors, lintels, and thresholds therefore convey the determined space occupied by the building: they define the limits of a distinguished space.

All of these palaces are described as bright and shining, underlining the precious materials they are made of or decorated with, such as gold, ivory and precious stones. By contrast, Statius' palace of Mars is the only one said to be dim and gloomy, made of iron and war spoils.<sup>14</sup> The language Statius uses in his description is actually an antonym of that of all the other descriptions, thus suggesting that the visual imagery of the palace contains – across time periods and genres – specific features holding particular meanings of a generally positive nature.

The attention for works of art such as mosaics, gilded roofs and carved lintels, as well as for the radiant light emanating from the precious materials they are made of seems to increase from the first century B.C. onwards,<sup>15</sup> becoming a central aspect of late-antique descriptions of palaces.<sup>16</sup> This can be due to the taste for works of art as synonymous with wealth and to the attention to their bright colours and high value as symbols

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(palace of Sun); Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, X. 120 (palace of Cleopatra); Valerius Flaccus, *Arg.*, V.407, 416-453 (palace of Aetes); STATIUS, *Theb.*, VII.56-8 (palace of Mars); STATIUS, *Silvae*, I.II.146 and 152 (palace of Venus); APULEIUS, *De mundo*, XXVI (palace of the kings of Persia); CLAUDIAN, *De rap. Pros.*, I.239 (palace of Ceres) and *Epithal.* = *Carmina*, 9.90 (palace of Venus); SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, *Carmina*, XI.20-24 (palace of Venus); NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.135-136 (palace of Elektra) and XVIII.85-86 (palace of Staphilos); VENATIUS FORTUNATUS, *Carmina*, 8.IV.18 (palace of the Eternal God).

<sup>14</sup> SMOLENAARS 1994, 22-27.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance Catullus' description of the palace of Theseus (*Carmen* LXIV.43-51).

<sup>16</sup> See for instance: NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.124-183 (palace of Elektra) and XVIII.62-92 (palace of Staphilos); VENATIUS FORTUNATUS, *Carmina*, 8.IV.18 (palace of the Eternal God).

of luxury. It should be also seen as connected to the esoteric significance attached to stones in Late Antiquity.<sup>17</sup>

All these elements work together in the texts in order to convey the idea of marvellous residences, but remain scattered details that cannot serve to recreate an exact picture of the palaces they refer to. They give us a glimpse into it and create a dim image, that cannot however be properly understood in any actual physical way. This may also be due to the character of the literary form they use, principally *ekphrasis* (description). This form was very far from the modern concept of description, which tends to be as clear as possible. It was, as we will see, the product of a different sensibility and approach to the object described.

## 1.2 *Ekphrasis*

Henry Maguire identified the rhetorical value of *ekphrasis* as a literary performance whose origins lie in primary education where it was one of the topics of training.<sup>18</sup> Developing the subject with a particular attention for the meaning of *ekphrasis* in late and postclassical rhetorical theory, Liz James and Ruth Webb emphasized that *ekphrasis* was a description intended to recreate before the listener the image of an object as clearly and vividly as if it was actually seen. As a result, the listener was

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<sup>17</sup> See for instance the introduction to the collection of Greek lapidaries published by Les Belles Lettres: HALLEUX AND SCHAMP 1985

<sup>18</sup> MAGUIRE 1974, 113-114; MAGUIRE 1981, 22.

somehow transformed into the beholder of a visual scene.<sup>19</sup> Thus the great detail in which the palaces' most impressive features are described – such as the bright colours, the precious materials and the works of art – allows both the writer and the reader-beholder to visualise these palaces. These striking features of the palace are intended to astonish the beholder as much as to describe the most remarkable characteristics of the building.

In the works of Apollonios Rhodio, Valerius Flaccus and Nonnos of Panopolis the precise detail used to describe the amazed reaction of the protagonist in front of the buildings renders the scenes as if it was actually taking place.<sup>20</sup> The authors seem to know the places described in the *ekphraseis* through their own experience. The authors render the protagonist's response to the spaces of the palaces as if they had previously experienced the visit themselves. By doing so, they transmit the same impression to the reader/listener. The palaces are described from the eyes of the protagonist, and as they appear to him. Indeed, the details described are the ones that the protagonist sees in his own personal tour around the palace. The purpose of these texts is not to describe the buildings in detail in order to give a clear view of the exact shape of the palace, but to give the reader the elements in order to figure out for herself or himself the marvellous spectacle of the palace, through the astonishment of the protagonist in front

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<sup>19</sup> JAMES L. and WEBB 1991, 4-5; see also Cavallo, especially with respect to the practice of reading in Byzantium: CAVALLO 2002, 423-7.

<sup>20</sup> APOLLONIUS RHODIUS, *Arg.*, III.215-216 (Argonauts in front of the palace of Aetes); VALERIUS FLACCUS, *Arg.*, V.415 and 454 (Jason looks at the palace of Aetes); NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.131-134, 180-183 (Cadmos stares at the palace of Elektra) and XVIII.90-92 (Bacchus astonished in the palace of Staphilos).



of it. The authors did not compose descriptions with a documentary intention, but wrote literary passages, which, by their own nature, ignite the imagination of the readers/listeners, who can complete the image to their own taste and imagery by means of the information provided by the author.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the *ekphraseis* affect emotions through all senses; in order to convey a comprehensive impression on the reader/listener, the authors give not only visual details but also information that relates to smell, hearing, taste and touch.<sup>22</sup> The descriptions found in Suetonius' *Nero* and in Apuleius' *De Mundo*,<sup>23</sup> the first a historical work and the second a philosophical one, are not significantly different from those mentioned above.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, particulars such as the description of precious roofs, the attention paid to doors and works of art, and the focus on architectural elements such as porticoes and halls are also found in poetical *ekphraseis*. Such descriptions are literary accounts, from which it is not possible to assume any actual correspondence to real buildings.<sup>25</sup> Particular attention for given architectural and decorative features may thus be interpreted either

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the idea that Late-antique education led to an increase in the capacity of imagination and that, although Late-antique and early Byzantine art seem very abstract to us, it could be 'realistic' to the contemporary beholder, see: ONIANS 1991, 1-23.

<sup>22</sup> Often rendered by means of adjectives. Ruth Webb argues that 'what makes an *ekphrasis* an *ekphrasis* is the reference to perceptible details, whether of objects or actions, the purpose of which is to place the subject (whatever it is) before the eyes of the audience' (WEBB 2000, 68).

<sup>23</sup> SUTONIUS, *De vitae caesarum. Nero*, VI.31; APULEIUS, *De Mundo*, XXVI.

<sup>24</sup> The same can be said for the descriptions of palaces and suburban villas in Statius (STATIUS, *Silvae*, I.III.1-89: villa of Manilius Vospiscus; II.II.1-106: villa of Pollius Felix; IV.II.18-37: palace of Domitian).

<sup>25</sup> Several attempts have been made to do this for the house of Nero: for a discussion see: BRADLEY 1978, 170-181.

as the effect of literary influences or as the reflection of a common palace imagery.<sup>26</sup> While the question of the accuracy of such imagery is not, strictly speaking, relevant to this discussion, it is worth noting that similar images of palaces are reproduced across literary genres. It cannot be excluded that they were accurate descriptions of real buildings, but as the buildings described no longer exist, their importance is first and foremost that of literary accounts. The *ekphrasis* is thus not merely a description<sup>27</sup> but also, to a certain extent, a vision of powerful imagination intended to recreate a scene before the reader/listener that was seen, but also somehow both lived in and felt. The meaning of *ekphrasis* as vision is also supported by the fact that these scenes are often described through the eyes of the protagonist who sees the palace appearing from a certain distance,<sup>28</sup> and by the great impact that they are intended to have on the readers/listeners through an abundance of adjectives intended to stimulate their perceptions and make them experience the scene described.

*Ekphraseis* have often been seen as literary exercises that reproduce a great number of earlier passages while at the same time claiming a sense of realism and originality. The question of the accuracy of *ekphrasis* notwithstanding,<sup>29</sup> we must next discuss the originality of the ekphrastic

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<sup>26</sup> To large extent, even in contemporary imagery a palace is characterized by very large halls, high roofs often supported by columns, precious materials and, generally, grandiose architecture.

<sup>27</sup> As James and Webb make clear (JAMES L. and WEBB 1991, 1-17).

<sup>28</sup> See for instance: NONNOS, *Dion.* III.123-126 (palace of Elektra) and XVIII.62-63 (palace of Staphilos).

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion on the subject, see: MAGUIRE 1974, 115-140. *Ekphraseis* of works of art should not be read as archaeological accounts for a reconstruction of the past (MAGUIRE 1974, esp. 14-15; JAMES L. and WEBB 1991, 1).

genre. In such literary descriptions, it is often possible to find expressions, metaphors, phrases or even entire structures taken from previous sources. The description of the palace of Cleopatra in Lucan's *Pharsalia* relies extensively on that of the palace of Theseus written by Catullus.<sup>30</sup> Statius' palace of Mars has many aspects borrowed from Virgil's palace of Latinus.<sup>31</sup> Some features of Ovid's palace of Cupid reminds us of several of the earlier descriptions of palaces, and indeed of Homer's palace of Alcinous, Lucan's palace of Cleopatra, and Statius' palace of Mars.<sup>32</sup> The Nonnian description of the palace of Elektra shares many elements with the Homeric palace of Alcinous.<sup>33</sup>

On the one hand, scholars warn that the compositions must be approached with caution because the contrast between the claim of reality and accuracy and the actual plagiarism of earlier literary works can bring about a loss of credibility.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand the repetition of earlier examples into new works did not necessarily imply copying or plagiarism in ancient times. These notions are modern academic categories that are improperly applied to ancient contexts. Repetitions of earlier passages should rather be seen as evidence of a different way to quote somebody else's work whose purpose could be, for example, to demonstrate the

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<sup>30</sup> LUCAN, *Pharsalia*, X.111-127 (palace of Cleopatra); CATULLUS, *Carmina*, LXIV.43-51 (palace of Theseus).

<sup>31</sup> VIRGIL, *Aen.*, VII.170-191 (palace of Latinus); STATIUS, *Theb.*, VII.40-63.

<sup>32</sup> OVID, *Metamorph.*, V.1-2 (palace of Cupid); HOMER, *Odyssey*, VII.114 and 130-132; LUCAN, *Pharsalia*, X.116-120; STATIUS, *Theb.*, VII.61.

<sup>33</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.124-183; HOMER, *Odyssey*, VII.81-133.

<sup>34</sup> Outlining the general tendency for apologia, exaltation and exaggeration of Byzantine writers, Mango applies this view to Byzantine literature in general (MANGO 1975).

author's knowledge and high education or to create a link with the past and declare membership in an authoritative literary tradition. Moreover, especially in the Late Antiquity, new works of literature and art had the tendency to recall earlier models. Even the concept of 'new' had a different meaning from the modern one, and implied traditional features in a changed context.<sup>35</sup> In ancient times, the practice of making references to earlier authors, without explicitly referring to them, was widespread across literary genres, but was even more common in poetry where defined metrical and poetic rules had to be followed. Moreover, as Liz James pointed out in her discussion of the relationship between imagination, memory and rhetoric,<sup>36</sup> texts evoked and stimulated images, which were already part of the readers/listeners' backgrounds through references to earlier literary works. In short, *ekphraseis* of palaces recalled not only passages but also images already known.

For instance, Nonnos' palace of Elektra clearly recalls the Homeric description of the palace of Alcinous,<sup>37</sup> but also Achilles Tatius' gardens,<sup>38</sup> which itself borrowed from Menander and Himerios.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the

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<sup>35</sup> For the concept of 'new' in Byzantium see: CARILE A. 1994, 205 and CARILE A. 2002c, 54-58, with regards to the notion of Constantinople as New Rome; MAGDALINO 1994, 7, with special attention to the rhetoric of renewal in imperial rulership.

<sup>36</sup> JAMES L. 2003a, 59-61: the author develops a subject raised earlier in BRUBAKER 1989, 24-26.

<sup>37</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.124-183; HOMER, *Odyssey*, VII.81-133.

<sup>38</sup> ACHILLES TATIUS, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, I.XV.1-8.

<sup>39</sup> As Charlet points out (CHARLET 2000, 176).

Nonnian *ekphrasis* of Staphilos' palace is linked to the Apollonian's palace of Aetes and the Homeric palaces of Menelaus and Alcinous.<sup>40</sup>

As Joëlle Gerbeau stated, 'la description d'un palais est un topos épique'; consequently, its typical features are the splendour and the brightly shining light, the amazement of the people, the gardens, the fountains, and the statues.<sup>41</sup> These characteristics can be found in Homer's account of the palaces of Alcinous, in the *Argonautica* of Apollonios Rhodios, in the romance of Achilles Tatius and in Nonnos of Panopolis, as well as in numerous other writers.

The *topoi*, which are widespread in *ekphrasis*, seem to be the product of the influence of ancient and extremely authoritative writers; they could be defined as features commonly found within different descriptions of palaces. However, it is worth noting that they are used and arranged within the context in different ways, in order to create settings that are similar, but with each having its own identity. If we take away those features commonly identified as *topoi*, the *ekphraseis* lose much of their grandeur and vitality. In other words, if we do not take into account the high columns, the works of art, the roofs, the walls, the garden with its sources, features which could be described as *topoi*, every palace description loses its sense as an extremely luxurious setting for the development of a scene as part of a literary work. Removing the *topoi* from scenes in which the setting plays an important part causes these scenes to lose their meaning. It is difficult to

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<sup>40</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, XVIII.62-92; APOLLONIUS RHODIUS, *Arg.*, III.213-246; HOMER, *Odyssey*, IV.43-46 and VII.81-133.

<sup>41</sup> GERBEAU 1992, 14; TISSONI 1999, 260 n. 9.

divorce the *topoi* from the *ekphraseis* because the *topoi* are not features of little importance. As Leslie Brubaker argues, *topoi* are the evidence of a complex structure of thought peculiar to a certain culture.<sup>42</sup>

What remains of interest for our discussion is the way in which the writers present the image of the palace. The principal features of a palace – high columns, luxurious gardens and works of art – are the attributes which characterize and distinguish it from other buildings. The fact that these *ekphraseis* are unhelpful in reconstructing the real appearance of a palace is irrelevant; their significance is the image they convey, that of a palatial building with its features. The significance of these *ekphraseis* lies in what they tell us about the conception of the palace and the imagery of the time in which they were written.

### 1.3 Palaces in Nonnos of Panopolis: a case study

The case of Nonnos of Panopolis is of capital importance for the present research. Two literary works of very different nature, the *Dionysiaca* (a mythological poem) and the *Paraphrases of St. John's Gospel* (a transposition in poetry of the Christian gospel) have been attributed to this author, of whom very little is known.<sup>43</sup> This study examines the palaces described in the *Dionysiaca* in relation to the *Paraphrases* and notes connections between the two works. Such an attempt

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<sup>42</sup> BRUBAKER 1989, 25.

<sup>43</sup> For a complete bibliography on Nonnos of Panopolis, see: <http://www.gltc.leidenuniv.nl/index.php3?m=57&c=145> (last accessed on 13.11.2006). The web page is compiled and maintained by M. Cuypers of the University of Leiden.

is useful in order to understand the common thought that guides both the poems and the symbolic meaning of the palace within the late-antique imagery.

The *Dionysiaca* is a poem composed of forty-eight books which describes the *epos* (mythical story) of Dionysos. The earthly peregrinations of the god in his three manifestations as Zagreos, Bakkhos and Iakkos save humanity through the gift of the vine, fulfilling Zeus's will, and allow Dionysos to ascend to Olympos and thus regain his place near his father. The *Dionysiaca* contains three main *ekphraseis* of palaces: the palace of Elektra (book III, ll. 124-183), the palace of Staphilos (book XVIII, ll. 62-92), and the palace of Harmonia (book XLI, ll. 275-287). These three *ekphraseis* show two different typologies of palaces that will be discussed below: the first one includes the palaces of Elektra and Staphilos, the other one the palace of Harmonia.

The *Dionysiaca* describes the palace of Elektra at Samothrace as bright and radiant. The palace, on its high columns, is visible from the city and covered with mosaics and other works of art. The protagonist of the scene is Kadmos: through a brazen threshold he enters a domed room, with mosaics on the walls, in which two carved doors with high frames face one another.<sup>44</sup> Later he visits a luxurious garden, in which there are fountains, statues and *automata*.

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<sup>44</sup> NONNOS, *Dion*, III.134-140.

The description reminds the reader of a Byzantine palace: the architecture and the decorations of the walls are typical features of palaces contemporary with the author.<sup>45</sup> In two contrasting passages, Nonnos informs the reader that the palace was built by the god Ephestos, who is traditionally known as a builder of palaces in the epic (l. 132: *Ἡφαίστου σοφὸν ἔργον*). Yet, two lines later he tells us that the palace seems newly built (l. 134 *νεοσταθέος δέ μελὰθρον*). Daria Gigli Piccardi suggests that Nonnos intends us to understand the palace built by Ephestos in a fifth-century architectural style.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore Pierre Chuvin argues that the shape of the palace is similar to other examples of late-antique buildings, such as the palace of Diocletian at Split.<sup>47</sup> If we compare Nonnos' description of the palace of Elektra with Homer's description of the palace of Alcinous (*Odyssey* VII. 83 ff.), the distinction is clear and we may recognise in the former a building contemporary with its author. The walls of the Homeric palace of Alcinous are clad in bronze plates and framed by a cornice of blue enamel, while the palace of Elektra is covered in mosaics and works of art. In the main hall of the palace of Alcinous, where the thrones are located, there is no trace of the dome which dominates the hall of the palace of Elektra. The details of the palace of Alcinous are reminiscent of a *megaron*, while those of the palace of Elektra are typical of late-antique palace architecture.

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<sup>45</sup> For an overview on late Roman and Late-antique villa decoration, see: ELLIS 1991; ELLIS 2000, 114-144.

<sup>46</sup> GIGLI PICCARDI 2003, 292 n. 134.

<sup>47</sup> CHUVIN 1976, 4.



Another important feature is the description of the gardens: here, in contrast to the architectural description, the influence of the Homeric palace of Alcinous is evident.<sup>48</sup> According to Nonnos, an enormous garden with a great variety of fruit trees faces the palace. Two sources give water, one for the inhabitants of the palace and one for the plants of the garden. Several golden statues of young men hold lamps to light the banquets at the palace in the evening. Before the gates, golden and silver dogs bark as the protagonist enters. All these details appear in both the Homeric and the Nonnian *ekphraseis* of the garden, leading one to conclude that the description of the gardens of the palace of Elektra is modelled on that of the gardens of Alcinous' palace.

The presence of statues and *automata* is a typical aspect of the Homeric tradition,<sup>49</sup> but is also common and indicative of great luxury in late-antique palaces.<sup>50</sup> This feature may come from epic imagery, but may also originate from Nonnos' direct experience of late-antique buildings.

Like the palace of Elektra, that of Staphilos is described as bright and covered with shining mosaics. There rows of columns support a gilded wooden ceiling, the walls are resplendent with metals and precious stones, and a immense carved portal majestically stands.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> As Pierre Chuvin points out (CHUVIN 1976, 139), the description of the palace followed by the one of its gardens is a *topos* in Late-antique literature (APOLLONIUS RHODIUS, *Arg.*, III.214-246).

<sup>49</sup> HOMER, *Odyssey*, VII.91-94.

<sup>50</sup> For *automata* with reference to the palace of the Byzantine emperors and with references, see most recently: BERGER 2006, 66-72. For a discussion on *automata* at the Byzantine court, see: TRILLING 1997.

<sup>51</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, XVIII.62-92.

The description of Staphilos' palace's features is even more meticulous than the *ekphrasis* of Elektra's palace. The account reveals in detail the great splendour of the palace and pays much attention to the precious stones and metals of which it is made. As Fabrizio Gonnelli and Joëlle Gerbeau point out,<sup>52</sup> the author carefully mentions all the stones, paying attention not to their esoteric significance, which would be a common approach in Late Antiquity, but rather to their bright colours and high value as symbols of luxury.<sup>53</sup> Staphilos and Bakkhos, the protagonists of the scene, walk along a portico, all covered in mosaics, with its columns supporting a gilded wooden roof, to a great portal carved in ivory or perhaps with ivory carvings.<sup>54</sup> The god passes through the portal and enters the great hall with its gold decorations.

The dominant colours of the scene are gold and red, which were associated with Dionysos in mythical iconography. However, these colours were also commonly associated with royalty in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine traditions.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, in his description of Staphilos' palace,

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<sup>52</sup> GONNELLI 2003, 335 nn. 73-74; GERBEAU 1992, 15. Hélène Frangoulis denies any magical implication of the stones in the *ekphrasis* of Staphilos' palace (FRANGOULIS 2003, 444-5).

<sup>53</sup> The subject needs to be carefully analysed in a further study, taking in account the Late-antique literary works on precious stones. At this stage we should emphasize the extremely important value of light in Byzantine aesthetics: according to Liz James, the Byzantine eye was more attracted by the light and brightness of an image than by its colour: JAMES L. 2000, 35-46. For an interpretation of the importance of light within the Nonnian passage, see: TISSONI 1999, 260 n. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Fabrizio Gonnelli prefers to translate *Dion.*, XVIII.86 (GONNELLI 2003, 336 n. 86) with 'carved in ivory or perhaps with ivory carvings', while Gerbeau and Maletta interprets the passage as meaning that they are similar to ivory (GERBEAU 1992, 137 n. 85-86; TISSONI 1999, 87).

<sup>55</sup> For the symbolism of gold and red in Byzantium: BRENK 1972; AVERINCEV 1979; JAMES L. 1996, 106-107, 121-3; furthermore, for purple as symbol of imperial dignity, with high

Nonnos underlines the beauty of the buildings, leaving aside some features typical of Homer's palace of Alcinous' and Nonnos' palace of Elektra such as the garden, the fountains, the statues and the *automata*. The description therefore is focussed on the beauty of the interiors and on the astonishment of the beholder, Dionysos, in front of such a marvellous spectacle.

The description of the palace of Harmonia differs markedly from the previous two accounts. The palace is self-built, constructed neither by Ephestus nor by human hands, and it is shaped like the universe, with four quarters joined into one. On its enceinte, four gates face the four winds and are guarded by four maids. This description is that of a walled palace and is reminiscent of a city rather than of a dwelling. The description of Thebes in the *Dionysiaca*, book V, ll. 85-87, can serve as a reference for this passage.<sup>56</sup> Nonnos writes that Thebes is a sacred city reproducing on earth a shape similar to that of heaven. In the same way, the palace of Harmonia is a round image of the universe (*περίτροχον εἰκόνα κόσμου*).<sup>57</sup>

It is thus clear, from the descriptions already presented, that we find two different typologies of palaces in the *Dionysiaca*. On the one hand, the palaces of Elektra and Staphilos are described at length and have similar characteristics: both the palaces are covered with mosaics and other works of art; furthermore, in both the palaces' *ekphraseis*, great importance is

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implications which leads to a Christ-mimetic symbology, see CARILE A. 1998, 243-269. For other characters of eastern royalty and their impact in Byzantium, see: PANAINO 2004.

<sup>56</sup> GIGLI PICCARDI 2003, 290-291.

<sup>57</sup> ACCORINTI 1997, 366 and n. 94: as the author points out, Nonnos utilises *εἰκόνα κόσμου* also in *Dion.*, VI.65 and XL.416, the former instance is of particular interest since it is referred to in another cosmic context.

given to the materials of which they are made. On the other hand, the palace of Harmonia is described using features that are characteristic of an entirely different model of dwelling.

As Gianfranco Agosti points out,<sup>58</sup> there is a close connection between the beginning of the *ekphraseis* of Elektra's and Staphilos' palaces and the incipit of the fifth book of the *Paraphrasis S. Evangelii Ioannei* (*Paraphrase of St. John's Gospel*). In the latter passage, on the way to Jerusalem, Christ sees the city from afar, close to the sky, resting on shining marble columns. In the Christian text Jerusalem is expressed by means of the periphrasis *δòμος*.<sup>59</sup> In Agosti's analysis, the theme of Jerusalem as *δòμος* is developed in detail, making explicit the meaning of the word as both temple and palace.<sup>60</sup> The significance of the columns, the bright light of the *δòμος* and the symbolism of the colourful image are connected both to the late-antique aesthetic and to the tradition of the representation of heaven. The columns are elements of prestige but also a symbol of palaces, as we saw earlier, and recall the columns of the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>61</sup> Light is associated with divinity in the Pagan tradition as well as synonymous with knowledge in the platonic and neo-platonic traditions and an attribute of the Church in the Christian texts.<sup>62</sup> Moreover being high and close to the sky is associated with the concept of divinity in the Homeric Olympos and the

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<sup>58</sup> AGOSTI 1998, 193-214; AGOSTI 2003, 38-52 (especially 42-45), 265-283.

<sup>59</sup> As we will point out below, the same word is also used to refer to the dwelling of Harmonia in the *Dionysiaca* at the beginning of the passage (*Dion.*, XLI.277).

<sup>60</sup> And, by extension, as city (AGOSTI 2003, 271-273).

<sup>61</sup> AGOSTI 1998, 201-202, 205-206; AGOSTI 2003, 40-41, 276-281.

<sup>62</sup> AGOSTI 1998, 206-209; AGOSTI 2003, 45, 274-275.

Indo-European tradition.<sup>63</sup> In his study, Agosti fosters the connection between the *ekphraseis* of Elektra's and Staphilos' palaces and the *δῶμος* of Jerusalem of the *Paraphrasis* for the first time, and defines these concepts within the context of Late Antiquity, in fifth-century Egypt.<sup>64</sup>

Agosti's contribution needs to be summarized at least in order to examine the connections between the *Dionysiaca*'s descriptions of palaces and the *δῶμος* of Jerusalem in a different way. However, while Agosti relates the description of the Jerusalem *δῶμος* in the *Paraphrasis* with the palaces of *Dionysiaca*, we will begin with the palaces and then move on to the *δῶμος*.

Agosti demonstrates that the temple-palace equation is also present within the *Dionysiaca*, where Nonnos uses the language and therefore the imagery of a Christian writer – hardly surprising from an author able to compose both an epic poem and a commentary on a gospel.

It is worth noting that Latin writers, in some cases, also defined palaces as temples. For example, Lucan's palace of Cleopatra, Valerius Flaccus's palace of Aeetes, Statius's palace of Mars and Sidonius Apollinaris's palace of Venus are all called *templum*,<sup>65</sup> using the word as a periphrasis for palace or as a term of comparison. Furthermore, the subject is often a dwelling for gods or royal personalities, as is the case for the palace of Cleopatra in Lucan's *Pharsalia* – a text that develops historical

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<sup>63</sup> AGOSTI 1998, 199-200; AGOSTI 2003 42 n. 17.

<sup>64</sup> AGOSTI 1998, 213-214; AGOSTI 2003, 38-47

<sup>65</sup> LUCAN, *Phar.*, X.111; VALERIUS FLACCUS, *Arg.*, V.415; STATIUS, *Theb.*, VII.55; SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, *Carm.*, XI.15.

events in a poetical and almost mythological way – or for the palace of Aeetes, king of Colchis, son of the Sun and the nymph Perse, in Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica*.

We may also add that human hands do not build the palaces of divinities. Apuleius, in the *Metamorphosis*, clearly defines the palace of Cupid as 'a kingly palace, not built by human hands but by divine skills',<sup>66</sup> leaving the actual builder unknown, in an atmosphere of mystery which characterizes the whole passage. The Cyclops, mythological monsters connected by birth with Vulcan, built the palace of Ceres in Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae*.<sup>67</sup> Vulcan-Ephestos, the god who traditionally is described as a builder or art maker, built the palace of Venus in Claudian and Sidonius Apollinaris;<sup>68</sup> he is referred to as a manufacturer of the decorated doors and of the portraits of Mars,<sup>69</sup> respectively, in the *ekphrasis* of the palace of the Sun in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and in the description of the palace of Mars in Statius's *Thebais*.<sup>70</sup> Gods do not build the residences of humans or other non-divine persons, although in some cases they do contain works of art made by Vulcan-Ephestos. Such is the case, for example, of the silver and golden dogs of Alcinous, human king of the

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<sup>66</sup> APULEIUS, *Met.*, V.1: *domus regia est, aedificata non humanis manibus sed divinis artibus*.

<sup>67</sup> CLAUDIAN, *De rap. Pros.*, I.240-241.

<sup>68</sup> CLAUDIAN, *Carmina*, IX.58-59; SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, *Carm.*, XI.29-30.

<sup>69</sup> The doors are symbols of the building itself as the threshold of the space of the building: they define the limits of a distinguished space.

<sup>70</sup> OVID, *Met.*, II.5; STATIUS, *Theb.*, VII.61.

Phaeacians, in the *Odyssey*.<sup>71</sup> The houses of gods are also synonyms with temples, and in the classical tradition none of them is made by human hand.

We find further evidence for this conclusion in the *Dionysiaca*. The palace of Elektra, daughter of the divinity Thetys, is clearly described as built by Ephestos for Elektra's wedding. There is no mention of the builder of Staphilos' palace, thus suggesting that his palace belongs to a human environment, especially since Staphilos is the king of Assyria and a particularly wealthy human being. Nevertheless, he is a privileged human being, a close friend of Dionysos: the celebrations in honour of the deceased Staphilos underscore the friendship between the virtuous man and the god in the following book. What is more, the palace of the Harmonia, Aphrodite's daughter, is self-built: its location is a honoured seat, in heaven, and its main feature is to be the image of the universe itself, thus it is the most important and sacred dwelling within the work.<sup>72</sup>

In the *Dionysiaca*, each palace under examination corresponds to a different 'level of divinity'. The palace of Staphilos represents the lower level, belonging to a human being and built on earth. Elektra's palace corresponds to an intermediate level: its owner has divine origins and the residence itself, located at Samothrace, is up on a hill that dominates the crowded streets. Harmonia's dwelling is on a heavenly level: both its location and its features separate it from direct comparison with the other palaces, thus giving it the status of a totally supernatural residence, devoid

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<sup>71</sup> HOMER, *Odyssey*, VII.91-94.

<sup>72</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, XLI.278-279.

of connections with humanity. Harmonia herself achieves an extremely high status as a cosmic divinity as she holds the seven tables of human history and is able to weave the image of the universe. As Francis Vian points out, in the *Dionysiaca* we find two Harmonias, following a process of duplication common to many divinities in the work of Nonnos. One Harmonia is Aphrodite and Ares's daughter, adopted by Elektra, and later becomes the wife of Kadmos; the other, also Aphrodite's daughter, achieves the status of a cosmic divinity inhabiting a dwelling which has cosmic significance.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, within the narrative development of the *Dionysiaca*, Elektra's and even Staphilos' palaces are enriched with different meanings that give them a higher status. These residences are important locations for the development of Dionysos' epos: they both host the god and, therefore, can to some extent be seen as divine residences.

Among the scholars who have written about the passage concerning Elektra's palace, Daria Gigli Piccardi offers an analysis of particular interest. Her interpretation of the Nonnian description suggests that the palace represents a heavenly and divine level in contrast to the earthly level, which is symbolized by the intricate streets of the town. In fact, a meeting essential for the future birth of Dionysos, between Kadmos and Harmonia,

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<sup>73</sup> VIAN 1993, 40-42. We could argue that such a process of duplication, but also of multiplication in some cases, can be seen as a feature of a poem which Nonnos claims to be characterized by great variety, *ποικιλία* (NONNOS, *Dion.*, I.14-15). This may be also a feature of the time in which Nonnos writes, an era in which the ancient gods also lose their defined characters and achieve a certain universality. This universality is also recognised by Fowden in *Dionysiaca*, which in its consequences leads to henotheism (FOWDEN 1993, 57-58). The same process is also underlined in different terms by PEACOCK 2000, 437-438.



takes place in the palace of Elektra. To signal this intermediary position, the palace is on a high hill. Its columns give it a shining and impressive appearance. Kadmos is astonished by its bright light and the splendour of its domed hall, both of which recall the sky, suggesting cosmic significance and implying the sacredness of the space.<sup>74</sup>

The *ekphrasis* of Staphilos' palace begins with the sight of the residence from afar after a difficult journey,<sup>75</sup> but there is no indication of an elevated location.<sup>76</sup> Elektra's residence and the *δόμος* of Jerusalem in the *Paraphrasis* also appear from afar, but the palace is high on its columns (*κίοσιν ὕψωθειῖσα*),<sup>77</sup> and Jerusalem is close to the sky (*αἰθέρι γέιτων*).<sup>78</sup>

Elektra's and Staphilos' palaces are both connected to the *δόμος* of Jerusalem: to different extents the descriptions of both the palaces in facts recall Jerusalem, a *δόμος*.

The meaning of the palace is not, however, the same in each story and in the whole narrative. Staphilos' palace is the setting for the development of the hospitality theme and expresses the joy of banquets celebrating Dionysos' cult. Elektra's palace is the location for a meeting that plays a fundamental part in the life of Dionysos. The palaces have important characteristics that enrich their significance. As mentioned above, the

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<sup>74</sup> GIGLI PICARDI 2003, 290-291 nn. 124-128.

<sup>75</sup> During the narrative of the Indian war, Dionysus reaches the palace of Staphilos, where he intends to rest after a difficult battle. Books XVIII and XIX, where the episode of Staphilos' hospitality and the games in his honour are located, represent a variation on the account of the war.

<sup>76</sup> For the symbolism see AGOSTI 1994, 185-188.

<sup>77</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.126.

<sup>78</sup> NONNOS, *Par.*, V.1.

representation of Elektra's palace is enriched by the dome, an important cosmological symbol which is totally absent from the description of Staphilos' palace.<sup>79</sup> The description of Staphilos' palace highlights its significance as a colourful and extremely luxurious residence.

The *ekphraseis* of Staphilos' and Elektra's palaces involve plot differences which affect the description of the palaces. While the two descriptions have the same broad aim of featuring important places where special scenes take place, they bear different meanings. As we have already said, the palace of Staphilos host the god while the residence of Elektra is the location for an important event in the story of Dionysos. As a result, the palace of Staphilos can be said to have a lower importance compared to that of Elektra.

In the three descriptions examined in the *Dionysiaca* – the palaces of Staphilos, Elektra, and Harmonia – the words used for identifying the palaces hold different connotations. Staphilos palace is a βασιλῆϊος αὐλή,<sup>80</sup> a regal palace; Elektra's palace is a πανδόκος αὐλή (all-receiving palace),<sup>81</sup> the regal palace which symbolizes the starting point for the life of the god, often the same words also indicate God's residence in the *Paraphrasis*;<sup>82</sup> whereas Harmonia's palace is designated as δῶμος.

Again it is possible to underline three different 'levels of divinity' which characterize the palaces. The fact that the term δῶμος is also used in

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<sup>79</sup> BALDWIN SMITH 1950, especially 61-94.

<sup>80</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, XVI.62.

<sup>81</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, III.125.

<sup>82</sup> As underlined by Agosti (AGOSTI 1998, 210; AGOSTI 2003, 43).

the *ekphraseis* of Elektra's and Staphilos' palaces does not invalidate the previous statements. Both palaces in fact are divine to a certain extent, but neither of them is presented as *δῶμος* in the incipit of the passages. This is because each one is going to become a *δῶμος* only when hosting the most important god in the *Dionysiaca*, Dionysos, who came on earth to save humanity. In contrast, Harmonia's palace is already a *δῶμος*, being self-built and located in heaven. As such, it is related to the *δῶμος* of Jerusalem of the *Paraphrasis*.

Jerusalem in the *Paraphrasis* serves as the earthly location for events in the life of Christ. However it is called *δῶμος*, a word that means palace but also temple, as Agosti has shown.<sup>83</sup> Jerusalem is the *δῶμος par excellence*. The term more specifically applies to the Temple,<sup>84</sup> the house built by Solomon for God where, in the Hebraic tradition, Melchisedek sacrificed to God. Jerusalem represents the place where God is honoured and expresses the grandeur of the people of Israel, who find their spiritual and political core in the city elected by God.<sup>85</sup> Jerusalem is displayed as the centre of the universe and always retains an eschatological value, which in the New Testament becomes the new Jerusalem,<sup>86</sup> the city of God, descending from the sky to take that place which earthly Jerusalem is not

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<sup>83</sup> AGOSTI 1998, 196-201; AGOSTI 2003, 38-42, 271-273.

<sup>84</sup> Jesus always shows great respect towards the Temple. For a complete analysis of the subject, see: KHÜNEL 1987, 49-51. Concerning the Temple in *Paraphrasis*, II and V see: LIVREA 2000, 89, 251-254, 272, 282-284; AGOSTI 2003, 271-3.

<sup>85</sup> BONFIL 1994, 47-52.

<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, the echo of a new Jerusalem can also be seen in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, especially Ezekiel. Bianca Khünel stresses the contrast between the earthly character of the Old Testament' future Jerusalem and the heavenly nature of the new Jerusalem in the New Testament (KHÜNEL 1987, 39-43)

anymore able to maintain.<sup>87</sup> The new Jerusalem is the heavenly city of God where there is no temple, as itself is a temple (*Ap.* 21,22).

The description of the *δόμος* in the fifth chapter of the *Paraphrasis* represents the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. The *δόμος* is characterized by the columns, a detail which immediately recalls the Holy Sepulchre, often symbolized by columns. The Holy Sepulchre was erected by Constantine or his mother in the fourth century to celebrate the saviour and his passion, and was certainly clear in the mind of a poet of the fifth century.<sup>88</sup> However, the columns are described as multicoloured and shining, qualities that recall the heavenly Jerusalem of the *Revelation*, more than the Holy Sepulchre itself.<sup>89</sup>

The heavenly Jerusalem as described in *Revelation* 21, 9-27 is a bright dwelling up on a hill, completely covered by precious stones. It is the holy city belonging to God and descending from the sky. The scene describing the holy city is developed as a vision, in which the key features are strikingly similar to those found in the *ekphraseis* of the Nonnian palaces.

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<sup>87</sup> It has been said that the earthly Jerusalem has a bipolar aspect: positive in the eschatological value always attached to it in the Old Testament, and negative for becoming the city of crucifixion, the place which does not recognise the son of God in the New Testament. For a clear explanation of the earthly Jerusalem' bipolar significance, see: MORINI 1996, 133-134.

<sup>88</sup> KHÜNEL 1987, 81-89, with bibliography. For the archaeology and history of the Holy Sepulchre see: CORBO 1982; more recently, with bibliography: FALLA CASTELFRANCHI 2005, 116-119.

<sup>89</sup> As Enrico Livrea underlines in his commentary on *Par.*, II.97, the light of the precious stones demonstrates that Nonnos certainly remembers the heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation* 21.11 (LIVREA 2000, p. 283). Agosti suggests an association between the *δόμος* and Jerusalem of *Revelation* (AGOSTI 1998, p. 198; AGOSTI 2003, 38-42, 276, 283). For the diffusion of John's *Revelation* in Late Antiquity, see: MAZZUCCO 1981, 49-75; KOVACS and ROWLAND 2004, 2-6.

As a result, an evocation of Jerusalem may be present in the descriptions of Staphilos' and Elektra's palaces in *Dionysiaca*, but is far more overt in the *ekphrasis* of Harmonia's palace.

Harmonia's palace is depicted with few features: it is located in heaven, and it is the round image of the universe, every side facing a wind.<sup>90</sup> The round image is divided into four quarters, with four doors, each guarded by a female servant. The *ekphrasis* of the palace appears as part of Nonnos' account of the celebration of the origins of the city Berytus, a narrative in the tradition of *laudes civitatum*,<sup>91</sup> literary works common in Late Antiquity celebrating both the origins and the character of a city. Aphrodite goes to the palace of Harmonia to consult the tables where the history of humanity is inscribed, and in particular the history of the city's foundations.<sup>92</sup> As Francis Vian clearly shows, the palace is located outside the world, just like the palace of the Sun, and both of them preserve cosmologic tables with the history of the cosmos within their walls.<sup>93</sup> In that unknown place, far from the cosmos, the palace of Harmonia may be seen as a cosmos in itself, since its owner is the mistress of the cosmos, capable of reproducing it on textiles. When Aphrodite arrives at the palace, Harmonia is weaving a cloth with the representation of the earth, the sea and

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<sup>90</sup> For a recent reading of the cosmologic contents of the passage, see: RENAUT 2006.

<sup>91</sup> ORSELLI 1994, 38; ORSELLI 2003, 236.

<sup>92</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, XLI.263-398.

<sup>93</sup> For Vian and Accorinti's discussion on the analogies between the two episodes, see: VIAN 1995, 53-65 and ACCORINTI 2004, 162-163. The palace of the Sun is not described in an *ekphrasis* (VIAN 1993, 40 and 42-43; VIAN 1995, p. 53) and in the *Dionysiaca* other palaces are mentioned without being described in *ekphraseis*: for instance *Dion.*, VI. 15-43 (palace of Astraïos); *Dion.*, XL.354-65 (palace of Agenor).

the personifications of the rivers at the centre, surrounded by the sky, the stars and the Ocean all around at the edges of the image.<sup>94</sup>

The palace of Harmonia recalls the *δόμος* of Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem, both in its features and in its significance. Of the Apocalyptic Jerusalem the author emphasizes the walls; on each side there are three doors, each one protected by angels. Likewise the palace of Harmonia is a dwelling surrounded by high walls, divided into four quarters with four doors, each one guarded by a female servant.

Guards protect important places, such as cities, imperial palaces<sup>95</sup> and holy places which cannot be approached by everyone and need to be defended. The emphasis on the walls and doors surrounding Harmonia's palace and the Apocalyptic Jerusalem also reminds us that city walls and doors are often symbols of a city as a whole.<sup>96</sup> Orselli has clearly shown the connection between city, in its symbolic meaning of ,temple and palace, and the holy Jerusalem.<sup>97</sup> Here both dwellings have a cosmological significance: Harmonia's palace is divided into four quarters, each facing one of the four winds. In a parallel fashion, the Apocalyptic Jerusalem has four sides, one for each cardinal point, and three doors for each side, each one bearing the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel (*Ap.* 21, 12-13), signifying that Jerusalem faces every direction and is a centre for the whole world. In short, the two dwellings share their main characteristics.

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<sup>94</sup> NONNOS, *Dion.*, XLI.294-302).

<sup>95</sup> For various military troops at the imperial court of Byzantium, see for instance: HALDON 1984, 119-141.

<sup>96</sup> DE SETA 1989, 11-12; ORSELLI 2003a, 233-250.

<sup>97</sup> ORSELLI 1994, 421-427.

However, the shape of heavenly Jerusalem is square whereas the palace of Harmonia is round. The four doors of the palace of Harmonia are perfectly aligned with the cardinal points, creating an ideal division of the circular enceinte of the palace into four identical portions. Likewise, the walls of heavenly Jerusalem are divided into four portions, each identical to the other, bearing the same number of doors and made of the same precious stones. From this point of view the two enceintes are not very different, built on the same concept of partition into four sections. In the medieval western tradition the representation of Apocalyptic Jerusalem as a circle has been justified by the comparison with the Holy Sepulchre and the round shape of the holy places in Jerusalem.<sup>98</sup> In the case of Harmonia's palace, the dwelling is round as the representation of the world in the weave of Harmonia, while it is the division into four quarters that recalls the four sides of a square.<sup>99</sup>

In the *ekphrasis* of the palace of Harmonia there is no mention of the light or of the materials of which the palace is made but, as Carolina Cupane observes, the author stresses the shape of the dwelling and its cosmologic significance.<sup>100</sup> The significance of Harmonia's palace and the heavenly Jerusalem is cosmic. The palace of Harmonia can be seen as an archetype because it preserves the future of the cities, which is written in the table of

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<sup>98</sup> GOUSSET 1974, 47-60; COLLI 1981b, 127-129; KHÜNEL 1987, 129-130.

<sup>99</sup> We should also underline the strict connection between the squared and circular forms of ancient Syro-Palestinian popular culture, connected to the cult of the holy stones, as Baldwin Smith demonstrated (BALDWIN SMITH 1950, 71-74). This recalls the links Livrea stresses between Nonnos's work and the Syro-Palestinian area; Nonnos for instance based the *Paraphrases* on a Syriac version of John's Gospel (LIVREA 2000, 49-51).

<sup>100</sup> CUPANE 1979, 199-201.

human history, and is an image of the universe itself. In contrast, the Apocalyptic Jerusalem is eschatological, an arrival point envisaged after a long peregrination. It is, in this respect, similar to the palaces of Elektra and Staphilos. The βασιλῆιος αὐλή of Staphilos and the πανδόκος αὐλή of Elektra share some features with heavenly Jerusalem, as we have seen, but neither of them has its absolute cosmic character. Only Harmonia's δῶμος is a heavenly dwelling, and the few elements used to describe it remind us of the heavenly Jerusalem's cosmic value and help to define it as a link between the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrasis*.

This reflection on the palaces on *Dionysiaca* leads to the conclusion that every palace tends to simulate the heavenly Jerusalem,<sup>101</sup> but only the palace of Harmonia closely resembles it. It belongs to the sky, as the Apocalyptic Jerusalem comes from the sky. Heaven, the sky, is a symbol of those realities and truths that are unknown to the human mind. These preserve secrets such as the archetypal image of the world in the case of Harmonia's palace,<sup>102</sup> or the eschatological image of the world for the Jerusalem of *Revelation*.<sup>103</sup> These places are visualized as dwellings in their wide range of implications, as palaces-cities-temples. The δῶμος is therefore a universe, complete in itself, guarded and walled. It is a paradise, far from

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<sup>101</sup> Carile has developed the question of the status and the meaning that the imperial palace acquires in Byzantium (see especially: CARILE A. 2003b, 602-45 and also CARILE A. 2003a and CARILE A. 2003b). Orselli has stressed the value of Constantinople as an new Jerusalem (ORSELLI 1994, p. 421; followed by MORINI 2000, p. 408), a question which we will discuss in chapter V.

<sup>102</sup> In a revealing metaphor of Matthew's gospel, the heavenly kingdom is compared with a secret treasure (*Matthew* 13,44).

<sup>103</sup> The heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation* also acquires an archetypal value (as pointed out by ORSELLI 2003a, p. 234), becoming a model for cities in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance (see for instance: RUSSEL 1994, 146-161).



the everyday life, a marvellous building which can be experienced only in a vision.

We have in the previous pages offered a new interpretation of the three visions of palaces in the *Dionysiaca*, outlining the various levels of meaning of the palace in Nonnos of Panopolis and, more generally, in late-antique imagery. The connections among the palaces of the *Dionysiaca* and heavenly Jerusalem are important manifestations of the concept of *δῶμος* as palace and temple in late-antique imagery. The word *δῶμος* had a broad meaning in late-antique culture: the concepts of ‘palace’, ‘city’ and ‘temple’, all of which could be rendered by the word *δῶμος*, were deeply connected, each one implying a reference to the others and, for that reason each achieving the status of a sacred space, where divinity can manifest itself.

Nonnos’s work is the privileged place to understand a series of symbols and a common imagery that cannot be strictly categorised as either exclusively Pagan or exclusively Christian. The *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrasis* demonstrate that in the context of Late Antiquity strict categorizations between ‘Paganism’ and ‘Christianity’ should be avoided. The *Dionysiaca* has long been called the last Pagan poem, but it rather seems the product of a changing era where it is not possible to distinguish Paganism and Christianity as two stable categories anymore.<sup>104</sup> Enrico

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<sup>104</sup> Concerning Late Antique Egypt, with particular attention to culture, religion and their impact on society and literature, see: CAMERON AL. 1970, 193-199; CAMERON AL. 1982, 217-21, 246, 272-273, 286-289 (revising much of his previous paper: CAMERON AL. 1965, 470-509); WIPSZYCKA 1988, 117-165; BOWERSOCK 1990, 64-68; BAGNALL 1993, 251-2;

Livrea has historicized the work of Nonnos, pointing out to the common language and cultural background in both the *Paraphrasis* and the *Dionysiaca*.<sup>105</sup> These two poems should thus be studied in the context of the times then they were produced rather than as exclusively Christian or Pagan. In Late Antiquity, mythology was still alive as a widespread imagery and as a means of literary and artistic expression, but carried meanings peculiar to its own environment, distinct from those it had during the classical period.

This enquiry shows that around the concept-idea of palace there is a transmigration of symbols and features from the old Pagan world to Late Antiquity. This was a world *in fieri*, defining its own reality, defying oversimplified categorizations.

#### **1. 4 Further reflections on terminology**

As we have seen from the work of Nonnos, Greek as well as Latin texts used a variety of words that reflects the variety of palaces. From this comparative study, some important conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between the lexicon and the determinate function of a palace. Before this, however, we should summarize the semantic differences among the words naming the palace, paying particular attention to Latin passages and their chronological location. We will follow the same methodology

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introduction of Del Corno in TISSONI 1999, XVII-XXIV; for Alexandria, see: HAAS 1997, 154-58; for a discussion on religion within the late-antique Mediterranean context, see: FOWDEN 1998, 538-560.

<sup>105</sup> See especially LIVREA 2000, and LIVREA 2003, 447-455; but also the work of Domenico Accorinti (ACCORINTI 2004), Gianfranco Agosti (AGOSTI 2004), Daria Gigli Piccardi (GIGLI PICCARDI 2003), Fabrizio Gonnelli (GONNELLI 2003), and of all of the translators and commentators of the Nonnian *Paraphrasis*, directed by Enrico Livrea.

applied in the study of the palaces in Nonnos, analysing the incipit of each passage.

Thus two passages use the word *tectum*, Virgil's palace of Latinus (*tectum augustum*) and Claudian's palace of Ceres (*tecta*).<sup>106</sup> The first meaning of *tectum* is 'roof' as well as its plural *tecta* that is used to emphasize the size of the building.<sup>107</sup> The words *limina* (threshold), used in Flaccus' description of the palace of Aetes, and *atria* (series of courtyards, palace) of Claudian's palace of Venus<sup>108</sup> – the first the plural of *limen* and the second of *atrium* – are synecdoches, since part of the structure represents the building as a whole. The roof, the threshold and the open court, which in the plural stand for 'palace', are important elements of such a building: the first indicates a space that is covered, and thus a house; the second one marks the transition from a space to another one, it thus differentiates internal and external dimensions, such as outside and inside a house; and the third indicates the whole of a palace as a series of rooms, courts, and open spaces.

The word *regia* literally means 'royal residence' or 'palace': by extension it can indicate a royal seat, a capital or a significant part of the palace. It can also refer to a palace's court or a roofed colonnade, a basilica, or a portico.<sup>109</sup> Catullus' palace of Theseus is an *opulenta regia*, a luxurious

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<sup>106</sup> VIRGIL, *Aeneid*, VII.170 (palace of Latinus); CLAUDIAN, *De rap. Pros.*, I.237 (palace of Ceres).

<sup>107</sup> GLARE 1996, 1909.

<sup>108</sup> VALERIUS FLACCUS, *Arg.*, V.426 (407); CLAUDIAN, *Carmina*, IX.85 (palace of Venus).

<sup>109</sup> GLARE 1996, 1599: if *regia* is accompanied with the adjective *caelestis* ('of the sky') or the word *caelum* ('sky'), it refers to Heaven.

palace; Ovid's palace of the Sun as well as Apuleius' palace of the kings of Persia are indicated as *regiae*.<sup>110</sup> It should be noted that Theseus is a mythical king and that, in the relevant passage of Ovid's work, the Sun is a god appearing in his kingly role. Therefore both the personages live in a *regia*.

On the basis of this comparative study, *domus* seems to be the word most often used to refer to a palace. Statius' palace of Venus is a *domus alta* while the palace of Mars is a *domus immansueta*; the palace of Cupid in Apuleius is a *domus regia*; Nero's imperial palace in Suetonius as well as the palace of Aurora in Sidonius Apollinaris are also *domus*.<sup>111</sup> *Domus* is the building where a person resides,<sup>112</sup> and as such can be the house of divinities or that of a Roman emperor. By extension the term can also be applied to designate one's homeland or city. This Latin word corresponds to the Greek *δῶμος*. *Domus* and *δῶμος* are sometimes applied to temples as divine houses, sacred and divine places.<sup>113</sup> The opposite phenomenon also occurs, as divine or kingly abodes are sometimes named *templa*. This is the case of Venus' palace in Sidonius Apollinaris as well as Cleopatra's palace in Lucanus.<sup>114</sup> The word *templum*, which in its literal form designates a sacred space dedicated to a divinity, is also applied to the heavenly palace of

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<sup>110</sup> CATULLUS, *Carmina*, LXIV.43-44 (palace of Theseus); OVID, *Metamorphoses*, II.1 (palace of Sun); APULEIUS, *De mundo*, XXVI (palace of the kings of Persia).

<sup>111</sup> STATIUS, *Theb.*, VII.40-41 (palace of Mars); STATIUS, *Silvae*, I.II.145 (palace of Venus); APULEIUS, *Metamorphosis*, V.1 (palace of Cupid); SUETONIUS, *De vitae caesarum. Nero*, VI.31 (palace of Nero); SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, *Carmina*, II.418 (palace of Aurora).

<sup>112</sup> GLARE 1996, 572.

<sup>113</sup> GLARE 1996, 572; LIDDLE AND SCOTT 1996, 444.

<sup>114</sup> LUCANUS, *Pharsalia*, X.111 (palace of Cleopatra); SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, *Carmina*, XI.15 (palace of Venus).

a divinity. However the work of Lucanus (first century A.D.) uses it to refer to the residence of a queen, thus providing evidence of the conception of sacred kingship. Thus as the *domus/δῶμος* is the sacred dwelling of a divinity or an emperor, so is the *templum*. The two words appear to be deeply connected: the concepts of imperial or divine residence and temple are linked in their character of being both sacred spaces.

In Venantius Fortunatus the palace of the ‘eternal God’ is described as *palatia*.<sup>115</sup> The palace is thus conceived as a compound of palaces. From its original meaning as the ‘Palatine hill’, the word *palatium* went on to mean ‘imperial residences on the Palatine hill’.<sup>116</sup> It then refers to any imperial residence and, as is the case here, refers to the divine residence of God. As for the words *domus/templum*, the sixth-century work of Venantius Fortunatus suggests that the imperial and divine domains are interwoven and influence each other, allowing the use of words originally attached to imperial connotations to be used for divine associations as well. This is very important to us because it reveals the conception of the heavenly abode as an imperial palace and, conversely, the understanding of the imperial palace as a heavenly abode.

This comparative study demonstrates the correspondence between the conception of imperial palace and that of divine abode through the analysis of the words used to indicate the palace in the incipit of each passage. A recent study has shown the same type of conceptual

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<sup>115</sup> VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS, *Carmina*, VIII.4.17 (palace of the eternal god).

<sup>116</sup> GLARE 1996, 1284.

interpenetrations between kingly and divine abodes by applying a different methodology and restricting the field to the Homeric texts.<sup>117</sup> The author took into account the different words identifying the palace itself, its rooms and the main hall of a palace – μέγαρον (the Homeric palace, but also its main hall), δόμος or δῶμα (palace or its rooms), θάλαμος (wedding room), and οἶκος (house) – analysing them as plural or singular forms in the context of the Homeric poems. This study offered a new understanding not only of the Homeric lexicon, but also of the meaning of different palace typologies. The choice of a particular word rests on the representative function of that space. For instance the main hall of a palace is called μέγαρον only when the king or the queen, owners of that palace, are present; when they are absent, the hall loses its function as the place of display of the king/queen, and thus does not serve as the imperial hall. Accordingly, in the presence of the king/queen any room of the palace is called μέγαρον. After a study of Homer's lexicon, the author applied the same methodology to the *Argonautica* of Apollonios Rhodios and to Virgil's *Aeneid* and, as it turns out, in both Apollonios Rhodios and Virgil the same connection between the room's function in a determined situation and the lexicon used seems to exist. Our comparative study of the passages' incipits draws similar conclusions: a palace is designated in a particular way depending on its owner. Being a human being, a semi-divinity, a divinity, or an emperor affects the palace itself, and consequently the lexicon used to identify the

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<sup>117</sup> PAGELLO 2003, 21-52.

palace reflects such differences. Both the palace and its function in the display of royalty or divinity are directly expressed in the choice of the words used to designate the palaces. At the same time there is a progressive tendency to identify divine palaces with words that were restricted to an imperial usage in earlier periods. This is extremely important, as it betrays a way of thinking that identified divine palaces with imperial palaces, and thus saw the imperial palace as a model that could be used when producing representations of the heavenly residence of a divinity.

## **2. What was the heavenly Jerusalem and how was it represented?**

Having shown how the palaces, and especially divine palaces, reflected a supernatural heavenly kingdom in late-antique imagery, we should reflect on the concept of the heavenly kingdom, (and more specifically of heavenly Jerusalem), and its representation in Late Antiquity. As we will see, the analysis of a number of references to the heavenly kingdom will demonstrate the close connection, in the common imagery, between the heavenly Jerusalem and the concept of palace.

### **2.1 Heavenly Jerusalem: the Bible**

As we have already seen, the concept of heavenly Jerusalem is an intricate point of contact between the ideas of city, temple and palace. As such its understanding – and ultimately the understanding of the heavenly

Jerusalem as the heavenly kingdom of God – must reflect the image of Jerusalem as it appears in the Scriptures. The symbolic meaning of this city is connected both to its earthly and to its heavenly character.

Jerusalem was the city of the Temple, the house built by Solomon for God where, in the Hebraic tradition, Melchisedek made sacrifices to God.<sup>118</sup> It is the holy city elected by God, it honours God in the temple, and represents the spiritual and political centre of the people of Israel.<sup>119</sup> Paradoxically, that city did not recognize Christ as the son of God; it therefore became the location of Christ's death and resurrection and, especially from the fourth century onwards, the holy city of Christianity. Meanwhile, in AD 70, it underwent great destruction with the razing of the Temple.<sup>120</sup> This city was the historical Jerusalem, a real city with a urban plan and citizens that was of crucial importance as the political and religious capital of the Jews.

In the Christian perspective, Jerusalem was regarded as the *omphalos*, the centre of the world,<sup>121</sup> and Golgotha, where Christ was crucified in the same place as Adam's burial and directly above his head,<sup>122</sup> created a link in Jerusalem between Christ's death and the beginnings of the human history. Jerusalem therefore held great cosmic significance as the theatre of the most important events of humanity. This is well expressed by Ezekiel and Isaiah,

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<sup>118</sup> KHÜNEL 1987, 23-28.

<sup>119</sup> BONFIL 1994, 47-52.

<sup>120</sup> For the history of the city, see: WHARTON 1995, 85-100.

<sup>121</sup> Golgotha, and by extension Jerusalem, were considered as a *omphalos* from the middle of the fourth century onwards (KHÜNEL 1987, 88).

<sup>122</sup> PARENTE 1983, 238-242.



who prophesized the coming of a future Jerusalem that was to be a holy city holding a holy temple, house of the God of Israel.<sup>123</sup> According to Isaiah, Jerusalem was to become a marvellous and wealthy city because of the presence of God, with a marvellous and holy temple as His house (Isaiah 60.1-22). For Ezekiel, the new Jerusalem was to be built upon a high mountain, a walled city-temple with perfect dimensions where God will dwell among the people of Israel (Ezekiel 40-48).

The temple, where God was glorified on earth, is tightly connected to the concept of the new Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the holy city because it housed the holy temple of God and at the same time was extremely important as the historical capital of Israel. The image of the temple – with which Jerusalem was always associated in the Scriptures – affects the image of Jerusalem because the concepts of city and temple merge together in the image of Jerusalem itself.<sup>124</sup> Its peculiarity is to be the city of God and, by extension, His temple and residence on earth. The prophetic books, especially Ezekiel, add an eschatological value to the image of Jerusalem that is retained and augmented in the New Testament. There the meaning of Jerusalem is amplified: the heavenly kingdom of God that is mentioned in the gospels and becomes evident in the *Revelation* of John (21-22), where Jerusalem acquires a totally heavenly character.<sup>125</sup> The New Testament

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<sup>123</sup> *Isaiah*, 1:26, 2:1-5, 60: 1-22; *Ezekiel*, 40-48. For a discussion on the meaning of the prophecies on Jerusalem, see: KHÜNEL 1987, 34-39.

<sup>124</sup> This has already been emphasized by Bianca Khünel (KHÜNEL 1987, 39-43).

<sup>125</sup> For the heavenly kingdom of God as it is announced in the Gospels, see: *Matthew*, 4.17; 24.30-31; *Luc*, 4.43; *John*, 18.36. The influence of John's *Revelation* is here assumed, the scholarly debate on the subject notwithstanding. Although the influence of the text has long

reveals a tension around the image of the kingdom of God, which is only clearly stated to be the new Jerusalem in the *Revelation* of John, where it is specifically identified as the heavenly Jerusalem, the holy city of God. In the *Revelation* it is the place, observable only in heavenly visions or at the time of last days, where God dwells among the elect. It is a bright kingdom of light coming from the sky, whose walls are made of precious stones and pierced by twelve doors guarded by angels. It is a perfect square where there is no temple as itself is a temple illuminated by the glory of God. It holds the major features of a city, such as the walls and the city-doors; yet its function is that of the heavenly dwelling with the throne of God at the centre. The earthly character of the future Jerusalem of Ezekiel and Isaiah thus stands in contrast with the heavenly Jerusalem of the *Revelation*, where it acquires a strong eschatological significance. However there is a constant ambiguity and interrelationship between the two.

The main features of the heavenly Jerusalem are its holy character as the city, and at the same time the holy temple of God; its resplendence with bright light; the precious stones of which it is made and the presence of God at its centre, on His glorious throne. The city is holy, itself a holy temple, as in the Christian era the holy places of pilgrimage of Palestine, and among them especially Jerusalem, will be regarded. The resplendent character of the city as a whole is one of the main features of God from the Old Testament to the opening of the gospel of John (John 1). The city has walls

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been discarded, it now seems confirmed by literary as well as artistic evidence (MAZZUCCO 1981, 52-53; see also: ENGEMANN 1979, 73-107; THIERRY 1979, 319-320).

and city-gates, important elements that are the primary attributes of a city from the *laudes civitatum* to the late-antique and Byzantine representations of cities.<sup>126</sup> It is made of gold and precious stones that are the main expressions of the holiness, from the holy collar of the priest in *Exodus* (Ex. 28: 17-20; 39: 10-12) to the representation of Jerusalem of Isaiah (Isaiah, 54: 11-12; 60:17) and the description of Eden in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 28:13). The throne of God is the expression of His sovereignty and almighty power: it is a typical attribute of God that is also found in Isaiah and Ezekiel (Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:26-28; 10:1). As we will now see, all these elements are primary features that also characterize the kingdom of God in a number of other sources.

## 2.2 Saintly visions

A very prolific field for understanding the image of the palace in Late Antiquity is that of the visions of saints, where paradise is often depicted as a bright dwelling surrounded by or encircling a garden. This image, recorded in many middle Byzantine texts, has earlier origins. Between the tenth and the eleventh century, in texts such as the vision of the monk Kosmas and the life of St. Basil the younger, the heavenly kingdom is seen as a palace or even a city. These have been associated with the imperial palace and the city of Constantinople, where various ceremonies take

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<sup>126</sup> For the walls as primary elements of the representation of a city, see: EHRENSPERGER-KATZ 1969. On the influence of the Roman imperial ceremonial on the *Revelation* of John, see: AUNE 1983.

place.<sup>127</sup> The anonymous *Revelation* of Anastasia, a text attributed to the mid-Byzantine period, although its date is still the subject of much debate among scholars, provides further evidence of the image of the heavenly kingdom as a palace.<sup>128</sup> The conception of the heavenly kingdom as an imperial palace and, ultimately, as Constantinople itself should be interpreted as the explicit form of a conception that first appears in texts from various times and places in the Roman and Late Antiquity periods.

In the third-century *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (203), the African martyr Saturus has a vision of the paradise in the form of a radiant building.<sup>129</sup> In heaven the martyr reaches an enormous, bright garden inhabited by other martyrs; at its center stands a structure whose walls are built of bright light. Four angels dressed in white tunics bring him inside this resplendent building, where a saintly song was incessantly sung. A man with white hair and a young face sits on a throne in the middle of the room, surrounded by elders.

All the features of the vision are reminiscent of an imperial reception: the building, the throne, the court and the songs imbue the image

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<sup>127</sup> For the visions of the monk Kosmas and St. Basil the Younger, see: ANGELIDI 1982 and 1983. For the conception of paradise as the garden of an imperial palace, with references to the *Revelation of Andreas Salos*, see: TIMOTIN 2006b.

<sup>128</sup> *POCALYPSIS ANASTASIAE*, I. For this text, see: TIMOTIN 2006a, 407-408 (with a summary of the scholarly debate on its dating and further bibliography); BAUN 2007 (a forthcoming study with a new edition of the text).

<sup>129</sup> *PASSIO PERPETUAE*, 11-12, ed. H. Musurillo, Oxford 1972, 120-121. There is extensive literature on the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*; for a summary, see: BREMMER 2003, 55-73. For a comparison between the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* and John's *Ravelation*, see: MAZZUCCO 1981, 67-70. In a recent study Timotin read the representation of heaven in the vision of Saturus merely as a garden, not taking into account the door that marks the transition between the garden and the space 'built of light' where God manifests Himself on a throne, even though this space is clearly differentiated from the outside garden (TIMOTIN 2006b).

with an imperial aura. At the same time, as has been already noted, the vision of the palace borrows several elements from the *Revelation of John*: the light, the songs, the four angels described as *zoa*, the throne and the elders.<sup>130</sup> The vision of Saturus seems a privileged place where imperial elements mix with influences from John's heavenly Jerusalem to offer a new expression of the heavenly kingdom.

The fourth-century vision of Dorotheos, the authorship of which is still debated, adds important details for the visualization of the kingdom of God.<sup>131</sup> This text, probably originating from an Egyptian syncretistic environment highly influenced by gnosticism, describes at length the heavenly kingdom and the court of God, offering important evidence for the comprehension of late-antique imagery. The *Visio Dorothei* draws a direct homology between the imperial palace officers and the court of God, using specific terms that refers to imperial dignities in the description of the heavenly court.<sup>132</sup> Just like at the imperial court, there is a strictly defined hierarchy among the officers at the court of God, where the same titles and dignities distinguish the members of angelic court.<sup>133</sup> In heaven, Dorotheos experiences the kingdom of God as a bright dwelling with walls, guarded gates, porticoes and courtyards. The heavenly kingdom is a palace where God manifests Himself among his heavenly followers. As the representation

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<sup>130</sup> For a comparison between the vision of Saturus and the *Revelation of John*, see: PETRAGLIO 1979.

<sup>131</sup> For the vision of Dorotheos, see: HURST, REVERDIN, RUDHARDT 1984; KESSELS AND VAN DER HORST 1987, 313-357; LIVREA 1986, 687-711; BREMMER 1988, 82-88; LIVREA 1990, 145-156; BREMMER 1993, 253-261; BREMMER 2002, 128-133.

<sup>132</sup> On this subject: BREMMER 1988, 82-88; LIVREA 1990, 145-156.

<sup>133</sup> For titles and dignities at the Byzantine court, see: CARILE A. 1998b.

of the heavenly court is modelled on the imperial example, so does the representation of the heavenly kingdom reproduce an imperial palace. There everything is bright, the brightness and the abundance of shining light being one of the central features of the heavenly kingdom.

The vision of Dorotheos is a text of capital importance in the context of this research because it explicitly connects the imperial and heavenly realms, and particularly the imperial court with the palace and court of God by using the same imagery and applying the same lexicon to the two realities. The bright light of the heavenly palace reproduces the splendour of the imperial palace, the throne is an attribute of both God and the emperor, and the multiplication of gates, porticoes, courtyards and halls of the heavenly kingdom evokes the complexity of the imperial residence.

In the fourth-century Coptic life of Apa Matthaëus the Poor, apparently written by one of the saint's disciples sometimes after his death, the heavenly Jerusalem is described as a palace with gates and halls.<sup>134</sup> The monk, who founded a monastery in Upper Egypt under the patronage of Pachomius, saw a palace in heaven whose walls, doors, and gates were clad in gold and colourful precious stones. Inside the building the monk entered a court with a garden, where a committee of monks was sitting on thrones.<sup>135</sup>

The vision – highly influenced by John's *Revelation* in its definition of the heavenly kingdom as a 'heavenly Jerusalem' made of gold and precious stones – describes the heavenly kingdom as an amazing palace

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<sup>134</sup> For the vision of Apa Matthaëus the poor and bibliography on his Coptic saint life, see: SAUGET 1967a; KAKOSY 1994, 100-102 and nn. 13-16.

<sup>135</sup> *VITA APA MATTHAEI*, ed. W. Till, Rome 1936, 20-21.

with walls, gates, courts, and a garden where the monk is admitted to the presence of a heavenly committee seated on thrones. Once again these elements combine to offer an image of heaven as a marvellous palace.

In the sixth century Gregory of Tours reported the heavenly vision of St. Salvius, bishop of Albi in southern Gaul who died in 584.<sup>136</sup> The saint was brought to the highest sky by two angels. There, through a resplendent gate, he entered a luminous building whose floor was shining in gold and silver. A bright, amazing light and perfumes pervaded that space of indescribable dimensions and magnitude. In heaven the saint encountered the martyrs and was admitted to the presence of God, who manifested Himself as a voice coming from above.

In this vision the heavenly kingdom (*locus sanctus*) is again a palace made of the most precious materials, gold and silver, and whose most important features are the bright light and the indescribable magnitude that is pervaded in perfume.

In the vision of St. Martha, mother of the stylite St. Simeon the younger (late sixth or early seventh century), the saint sees heaven as a multiplication of palaces.<sup>137</sup> The saint ascends to heaven where she finds many palaces, among which one is for her son St. Simeon and another for herself as a saint. In this case there is not only one palace-temple in heaven, but a complex of palaces that were built through the holy acts and lives of the

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<sup>136</sup> GREGOR. TUR., *Hist. Franc.*, VII.1, eds. B. Krusch and W. Levison, Hannover 1951, 325-326.

<sup>137</sup> For the vision of St. Martha, see: *VITA S. MARTHAЕ*, 17, ed. P. Van Den Ven, Brussels 1962, 206.

saints. The model of the palace of God is thus reproduced on a smaller scale for the saints who lived in accordance to the Christian doctrine.<sup>138</sup>

In the vision of St. Martha, the main feature of these buildings is the bright light. There is a throne in the middle of each one of these palaces, symbol of the status achieved through sainthood. It is clear that this text represents a variation on, and amplification of, the image of heaven as a palace. Here the saints are given palaces as rewards for their sanctity: the palace is in fact a model descending from and referring directly to the palace of God.

The image of the paradise in Late Antiquity and Byzantium was variously interpreted in the texts as a garden or a heaven with buildings, which are sometimes connected to a garden.<sup>139</sup> The image of paradise as a garden comes from the description of the garden of Eden in the Old Testament (*Genesis* 2).<sup>140</sup> It is a primordial paradise created by God and located somewhere in the easternmost regions of earth.<sup>141</sup> It is a marvellous garden planted with every sort of trees giving fruits, among which are the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. The four greatest rivers flow from it: the Phison (Ganges), the Gihon (Nile), the Tigris and the Euphrates.<sup>142</sup> The

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<sup>138</sup> It is worth noting that the same theme is present in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* (see below, pp. 90-91).

<sup>139</sup> LECLERCQ 1938; FILORAMO 1992; BURTON RUSSEL 1997, 40-61. For Byzantium, see: PODSKALSKY, KAZHDAN, CUTLER 1991; BIBIKOV 2006.

<sup>140</sup> For the origins and the development of the concept of Eden, see: DELUMEAU 2000, 3-70.

<sup>141</sup> The earthly location of heaven is the subject of a lively debate, both among church fathers and in modern scholarship (AUFFARTH 1999, 171-172; HILHORST 1999, 130; BREMMER 2003, 59 n. 17).

<sup>142</sup> A summary on the history of the concept of paradise in biblical and apocryphal texts until the third century A.D., with particular reference to the image of paradise in the apocryphal *Revelation of Paul*, draws three primary models of paradise: the earthly



heavenly paradise is the eschatological abode of God, accessible to the blessed on the Day of Judgement. Although the paradigmatic text for the representation of this heavenly kingdom is John's *Revelation*, the perspective of a future dimension is, as we have seen, already envisaged in Ezekiel and depicted as a heavenly palace in a number of apocryphal texts.<sup>143</sup> This model of paradise is thought to be located in heaven, being the heavenly residence of God. The concept of paradise as a garden was extensively developed in Jewish and Christian literature. In the writings of the Church fathers it further acquires the dimension of an actual paradise, visible and real. It is, in fact, usually associated with the Christian church and, more generally, with Christianity.<sup>144</sup> The image of heaven as a palace is rarely found in the writings of the church fathers; an exception is St. John Chrysostom who clearly expresses the homology imperial palace-heavenly Jerusalem in a description of God as a king, set upon His throne in a vestibule, amidst his court of angels and saints. The passage depicts an imperial audience hall as the setting for the heavenly appearance of God. This heavenly palace is 'the city of God' (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ πόλις).<sup>145</sup> Both the

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paradise as the abode of Adam and Eve, the earthly paradise after the fall, and the heavenly Paradise (HILHORST 1999).

<sup>143</sup> HILHORST 1999, 136-139. For the developments of the concept of heavenly paradise in Byzantium, see: WENGER 1951, 560-563; PATLAGEAN 1981; GOLITZIN 2001; MAGUIRE 2002b, 27-31.

<sup>144</sup> BURTON RUSSEL 1997, 64-81; BENJAMINS 1999 (with particular reference to Augustine); DELUMEAU 2000, 15-22. For further developments of this concept in the Middle ages, see: AUFFARTH 1999. For the origins and use of the term *paradeisos* as Eden in the Old Testament, see: BREMMER 1999; BREMMER 2002, 109-127. The Christian church has often been associated also with the heavenly Jerusalem (CAROZZI 2004: with particular reference to the medieval Europe).

<sup>145</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *In Matthaëum Homilia*, 2.1, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, LVII, 23.

text and the lexicon used directly refer to an imperial context, with which St. John Chrysostom was thoroughly familiar.

The idea of a heavenly paradise as the kingdom of God located in the sky was further developed in Byzantium.<sup>146</sup> This vertical dimension is important to us because it reflects the hierarchical nature of Byzantine ideology.<sup>147</sup> In a vertical scale of values, the emperor is the minister of God on earth and, as such, administrates the earthly cosmos that mirrors a supernatural, heavenly order.<sup>148</sup> The nature of texts such as lives of saints and saintly visions is extremely important even when the circumstances of their redaction is unknown because they were a popular genre and, as such, reflect the imagery of the common people. In this respect overtime we noticed that the hierarchical character of late Roman and late-antique society was used in descriptions of the heavenly kingdom and, furthermore, that the heavenly kingdom was described as an imperial palace. The imperial palace was thus a marvellous and distant world commonly seen as the mirror of the heavenly kingdom. The heavenly kingdom could be visualised as an imperial palace, the highest example of perfection in antiquity.

The hagiographical sources taken in consideration here originate from a variety of chronological and geographical locations. The vision of

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<sup>146</sup> PODSKALSKY, KAZHDAN, CUTLER 1991; WENGER 1951, 560-563; PATLAGEAN 1981; GOLITZIN 2001; MAGUIRE 2002b, 27-31.

<sup>147</sup> For the hierarchical order of the Byzantine society, see: CARILE A. 1998a and 1998b.

<sup>148</sup> In the sixth century the deacon Agapetus described the *basileia* of Justinian emphasizing the role of the emperor as the minister of God on earth (AGAPETUS, *EKΘΕΣΙΣ*, 37, 46, 61, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, LXXXVI, 1176, 1177, 1181).

Saturus was written in 203 in North Africa. The vision of the monk Apa Matthaëus the poor is a late-antique Coptic text whose date of redaction is still debated. The vision of Dorotheos is dated to sometime in the second half of fourth century. The life of St. Salvius was written in Gaul by Gregory of Tours, in the sixth century. The vision of St. Martha was probably written in the vicinity of Antioch between the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century. These sources reveal the spread of this image around the Mediterranean and throughout the Roman empire. Nevertheless, the development of the vision of the heavenly kingdom as a palace, from the beginning of the third to the beginning of the seventh century, is an intricate point that need further research.

### **2.3 In Jewish mystic literature, apocrypha, and pseudoepigrapha**

In some areas, namely in Egypt and Palestine, the vision of the other world as a heavenly palace finds further evidence, which has different nature and a specific development. Even though we are unable to determine the degree and nature of these sources' influence on the image of the heavenly kingdom as a palace in late-antique and Byzantine imagery, it is worth noting that Egyptian traditional belief on the other world, Jewish mystic literature and Gnostic philosophical speculation all envisaged the heavenly kingdom as a palace.

In Egyptian traditional belief, the image of the other world merges with that of a palace. As Kákosy pointed out, passages from the *Book of the*

*Dead* – a collection of Egyptian funerary texts on the other world dating from the sixteenth to the third century B.C. – and paintings from Ptolemaic temples show the other world as a palace to which the deceased has to be admitted.<sup>149</sup> The dead enter the great door of the palace and then pass through gates, gardens with rivers and bridges to reach the blessed state. In ancient Egypt the temple itself was considered as a palace. Kákosy noted that this image of the other world as a palace became very popular in Greek and Roman Egypt.<sup>150</sup>

Part of the Jewish mystic literature is called the *Hekalot* (palaces/temples). Written between the third and the seventh century A.D, this is a mystic collection of texts on the other world.<sup>151</sup> It tells of the ascension to heaven and of the difficulties and struggles to reach the highest sky, where God manifests Himself on a throne in the middle of a courtyard. This latter part is the particular subject of the *Merkabah*, the treatise on the vision of God on His chariot-throne in the seventh heaven.<sup>152</sup> It depicts heaven as a compound of skies in the form of palaces, each one comprising gates and walls, each gate leading to the next sky until one reaches the highest sky where one can see God. It is clear that the heavenly residence of

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<sup>149</sup> KÁKOSY 1994.

<sup>150</sup> KÁKOSY 1994, 107. Another development of the image of the palace in Egypt is represented by the hieroglyphic form *serekh*, ‘palace’, which represents the enceinte of the pharaoh’s dwelling (BARD 2000, 81-82). For the influence of the Egyptian court culture on late-antique and Byzantine ideology, see: CARILE A. 2000c, 123; CARILE A. 2000a, 117-125; CARILE A. 2003b, 603-604; see also CARILE A. 2003a and CARILE A. 2003c.

<sup>151</sup> SCHOLEM 1973a, 40-79.

<sup>152</sup> SCHOLEM 1973b, 24-44; IDEL 1996, 14-15, 42; MAIER 1997, 22-27.

God is an enormous dwelling, with gates, walls, and courtyards. This is, once again, a representation of the heavenly kingdom as a palace.

A similar conception of the other world can be found in Gnostic texts, where the heavenly kingdom is represented – and thus conceived – almost in the same way. Gnostic philosophy was influenced by *Merkabah* mysticism and is said to have had a great impact on the further developments of the *Hekalot* as well as on Christian texts such as the vision of Dorotheos.<sup>153</sup> The sense of ascension, the sequence of heavens, the requirements for passes to allow ascent to the next sky, and finally access the vision of God are typical features of all these texts. A meticulous analysis of this literature might provide further elements to determine the influences among these texts as well as between these and other traditions. Modern scholarship has underlined that apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature – such as *II Enoch* or the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, where heaven is once again described as a compound of marvellous dwellings<sup>154</sup> – had a much greater influence in Byzantium than was thought until recently.<sup>155</sup> This task, however, would go far beyond the present task of

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<sup>153</sup> On the relationship between Jewish *Merkabah* and Gnosticism, see: GRUENWALD 1982. Parrot has demonstrated the influence of Egyptian traditional beliefs on Gnosticism for some texts (PARROT 1987).

<sup>154</sup> In *II Enoch*, a Jewish work dated between the first and the second century AD and preserved only in Old Slavonic, the representation of heaven is a series of skies, culminating with the vision of God's palace in the seventh sky. For the *Acts of Thomas*, see: *Acts of Thomas*, 17-22, ed. M. Bonnet, Hildesheim 1990, 124-22. For the Greek and Syriac texts, see: KLIJIN 2003. For the Latin version, see: ZELZER 1977. A collection of studies on the apocryphal acts of Thomas was recently published by Bremmer (BREMNER 2001). For the present purpose it is worth mentioning Amore's study on the Latin text and manuscript tradition, which casts a new light on the historical development and fortune of the palace theme introduced by the Acts of Thomas in the Middle Ages (AMORE O. 2005).

<sup>155</sup> See for instance the critics of Golitzin: GOLITZIN 2001, 125-131.

investigating the conception of the imperial palace in Late Antiquity and will not be attempted here. For now one should simply note the presence of a long term tradition that saw the heavenly residence as a palace and note that this tradition developed in different philosophical, speculative trends.

### **3. Conclusion**

The study of different written sources allows us to understand two important points. First, in Roman as well as in late-antique imagery there is a direct homology between divine residences and the imperial palace, reflected in the lexicon used to name the palaces themselves. *Ekphraseis* of palaces appear as unclear visions where a few outstanding elements are recorded. The palaces are not accurately described but great emphasis is put on their main features. Colonnades, walls, doors, domes, halls were simultaneously considered as major structural elements and as conceptual means to visualize the space of a palace. Descriptions of divine palaces seem to represent realities that were actually known to the authors through direct experience, pointing out at the wealth and display of power of the owner and emphasizing light, colours, and precious materials.

Secondly, the depiction of the Christian heavenly kingdom likewise shares many common traits with the long tradition that visualized the kingdom of God as an imperial residence. Biblical and para-biblical texts are important in order to understand this tradition and the meaning of the

Christian heaven as the residence of God. Sainly visions record the kingdom of God as a bright palace, reproducing the same model. Here again, features such as walls, doors, halls, and gardens all resplendent of bright light concur to create a picture of the heavenly kingdom sharing elements broadly used in the descriptions of palaces. Furthermore, in Late Antiquity the heavenly court is described by applying to it a lexicon proper to an imperial context. An imperial aura imbues the description of the heavenly kingdom, and thus the heavenly kingdom and the imperial palace appear connected by a common imagery.

We will now move on to the analysis of a few images of palaces in late-antique art in order to see if similar conclusion can be drawn from the study of the visual sources.

## **Chapter II**

### **Palaces in the mosaics of the Rotunda at**

### **Thessaloniki?**

The lowest mosaic frieze of the dome of the Rotunda of Hagios Georgios at Thessaloniki depicts a series of architectural structures that will here be examined. Before undertaking a discussion of the mosaic, it is necessary to say a few words about the Rotunda and its relationship with the urban setting of the city. Although much has been written about this topic, scholars still argue about the building's original function, date, and the changes that have been made over the centuries.

#### **1. Archaeology**

As it appears today, the Rotunda is a large building with a centralised plan. It is made up of a huge cylinder covered by an enormous dome, measuring about 24 metres in diameter, with its key located some 34



metres from the ground.<sup>1</sup> [figs. 22-23] The central space is surrounded by seven barrel vaulted bays and a deep sanctuary on the eastern side.<sup>2</sup> [fig. 24] The walls are pierced by large windows, one above each bay, and by lunettes at the base of the dome; five windows lighten the apse. The entrances are located at the southern and eastern bays.

As shown by Kalliopi Theokaridou's accurate analysis of the walls, the present form of the building is the result of several restorations and changes.<sup>3</sup> The author identified at least six periods of building activity: one Roman, one early Christian, one seventh-century, a few medieval, and one Turkish.<sup>4</sup>

During Roman times, the Rotunda was built as a centrally planned building up to the springing of the dome, above the lunettes. The entrance was to the south, where a portico gave access to the southern bay and then to the nave.<sup>5</sup> During the first early Christian phase, a deep sanctuary ending in an apse was added and the construction of the dome was finished. On both sides of the sanctuary, two arches communicated with an ambulatory that surrounded the central nave. The original southern access was retained and embellished with a monumental structure. In the seventh

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<sup>1</sup> HEBRARD 1920, pl. 1; TORP 1963, 3. The height of the dome was provided by Thomi Kakagianni, member of Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki, who kindly accompanied me during a survey at the Rotunda and gave me precious information about the restoration works.

<sup>2</sup> The building is not perfectly oriented. Although it has an inclination of about 30° south of east, here we will not take it into account, for example speaking about the sanctuary as just to the east side instead of to the south-east side, and so on.

<sup>3</sup> THEOKARIDOU 1992, 57-76.

<sup>4</sup> Theokaridou published drawings of the four sides of the monument, clearly showing the different building phases: THEOKARIDOU 1992, 58-61.

<sup>5</sup> For a reconstruction of the portico, see: VELENIS 1974, 311-313.

century, repairs of the walls were undertaken, probably as a consequence of an earthquake. The apse was rebuilt from the windows upwards, a new roof was added covering both the apse and the sanctuary, and extensive work was undertaken on the eastern side of the dome.<sup>6</sup>

Theokaridou's analysis added new evidence to the archaeological investigations of Hébrard and Dyggve, scholars who pioneered the study of the Rotunda. Hébrard found that both the arch of Galerius and the Rotunda were located on the same north-south axis,<sup>7</sup> which perpendicularly crosses the *Via Regia* near the arch.<sup>8</sup> Later, in 1939 and again after the Second World War, Dyggve continued the archaeological investigation in the area.<sup>9</sup> He discovered that a monumental columned street connected the arch and the Rotunda and that the Rotunda underwent great changes during the early Christian period.<sup>10</sup> Originally, the building was surrounded by a *temenos* ending in two semicircles on the eastern and western sides. The bays were closed; they were pierced to access the ambulatory at a later date.<sup>11</sup> Dyggve claimed that the dome of the Rotunda initially ended in an *opaion*.<sup>12</sup> In his excavation of the church, he found a reliquary under the remains of the altar in the sanctuary and evidence of a drainage well in the

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<sup>6</sup> THEOKARIDOU 1992, 62-64.

<sup>7</sup> HEBRARD 1920, 6, 18.

<sup>8</sup> In that part the *odos Egnatia* is named *Via Regia* (TORP 2003, 240 n. 2: with bibliography). For the *Via Egnatia* and Thessaloniki, see: FASOLO 2005, 125-129.

<sup>9</sup> For the earliest the archaeological researches, see: DYGGVE 1957 and DYGGVE 1958; TORP 2003, 240-241.

<sup>10</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 82-83; DYGGVE 1958, 355-357.

<sup>11</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 82; DYGGVE 1958, 355-356. Menzios suggests that the monumental street connecting the arch to the Rotunda was a *via tecta* (roofed passageway) rather than a *via columnata* (MENTZOS 1996, 348-349; MENTZOS 2002, 64 n. 41).

<sup>12</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 82; DYGGVE 1958, 356.

middle of the nave on the vertical axis with the supposed *opaion*.<sup>13</sup> On the basis of the holes in the building's masonry, Dyggve claimed that the original revetment consisted of a marble cladding on the walls up to the lowest mosaic frieze of the dome.<sup>14</sup> He also discovered a mosaic medallion at the centre of the dome.<sup>15</sup>

The work of Theocharidou finally disproved the presence of an *opaion*:<sup>16</sup> the original dome of the Rotunda did not end in an *opaion* but was left unfinished or, as Ćurčić and Menzios have recently suggested, collapsed after an earthquake.<sup>17</sup> Only later, with the transformation of the Roman building into a church,<sup>18</sup> was the construction of the dome finished. At that time, the dome was built following a project different from the original one. Its shape was not exactly circular: the keystone is at a higher

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<sup>13</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 82; DYGGVE 1958, 356-357.

<sup>14</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 82-83; DYGGVE 1958, 357.

<sup>15</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 83-84; DYGGVE 1958, 358.

<sup>16</sup> THEOKARIDOU 1992, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Torp had previously hypothesized that the dome was left unfinished (TORP 1963, 1-12; TORP 1991, 15). Menzios has suggested that the dome probably collapsed after an earthquake, which Ćurčić has proposed to be perhaps the one of 363 (MENTZIOS 2002, 62-63; ĆURČIĆ 2000, 14). The contribution of Ćurčić has cast a new light on the building's earlier phases through an acute architectonic analysis and a reflection on the relationship among the monuments of the city. The author has dated the original building to the time of Constantine the Great (years 322-323), identifying it as the mausoleum of Constantine himself and attributing the collapse of the dome to an earthquake in the year 363. He dated the conversion of the building the time of Theodosios I; he identified a sixth-century phase when the Rotunda served as the cathedral and considerable repair works undertaken in the ninth century (ĆURČIĆ 2000). Menzios has argued against Ćurčić's theory, proposing that the Rotunda was built by Galerius. According to Menzios, the Rotunda, the arch, and the palace belonged to the same architectural concept, which was surely associated with Galerius. Moreover the Rotunda could not function as a pagan mausoleum, since it is *intra muros*; only the mausoleum of Constantine at Constantinople and that of Diocletian at Split were located inside the walls, the former being the tomb of the *conditor urbis* and the latter a tomb located inside a private imperial residence and not a city. Moreover, the size of the Rotunda exceeds that of any other contemporary mausoleum, and the structure does not have any crypt or burial place (MENTZIOS 2000, 61 and n. 25).

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the original name of the church, see: KLEINBAUER 1972b.

level than it should be.<sup>19</sup> Since there is no evidence of conduits in the nave, the presence of a drain is also doubtful.<sup>20</sup>

Since 1939, Dyggve had claimed that the Roman masonry found at the Rotunda dated to the time of Galerius and that the early Christian transformation of the Rotunda into a church was to be credited to the emperor Theodosios the Great.<sup>21</sup> Dyggve's claims were not supported by clear evidence, yet they had an enormous influence on the ensuing scholarship.<sup>22</sup>

The same can be said for Dyggve's theory about the function of the building. The existence of a common axis linking the Rotunda and the arch of Galerius, as well as the evidence of a monumental columned street connecting the two buildings, led to the hypothesis that the Rotunda originally served as the imperial mausoleum or as a temple for the imperial cult.<sup>23</sup> [fig. 25] This was also due to the results of Dyggve's archaeological investigations. He with certitude localized the hippodrome on the southeastern corner of the city, and assigned several monumental buildings, which he interpreted as remains of the imperial palace, to the area south of

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<sup>19</sup> THEOKARIDOU 1992, 63. Furthermore Theokaridou localized holes in the interior masonry allowing a correct reconstruction of the marble revetment: THEOKARIDOU 1992, 67-68. For a former hypothetical reconstruction of the original interior of the Rotunda, see: VELENIS 1974.

<sup>20</sup> ČURČIĆ 2000, 13.

<sup>21</sup> DYGGVE 1941 (This contribution was not found); DYGGVE 1957, 80, 86-87; DYGGVE 1958, 362.

<sup>22</sup> Dyggve's research begun from the question of the relationship between the arch of triumph and the emperor Galerius, and the existence of a common axis linking the Rotunda and the arch (DYGGVE 1957, 80; DYGGVE 1958, 355).

<sup>23</sup> DYGGVE, 1957, 86; DYGGVE 1958, 362.

the arch, just next to the hippodrome.<sup>24</sup> [fig. 8] Following Dyggve's theory, at the time of the Rotunda's transformation, it became the palatine church, linked with the palace by means of a monumental street.<sup>25</sup>

Although this is a very interesting theory, it is not supported by secure historical evidence and is largely based on assumptions. Galerius had certain connections with the area of Thessaloniki.<sup>26</sup> Although the sources claiming the existence of his palace within the city are quite late,<sup>27</sup> it is common opinion that he resided in Thessaloniki sometime during the years 298-303 and 308-311 and was then buried in his hometown *Felix Romuliana* (Gamzigrad).<sup>28</sup> At that time, he probably resided in the first nucleus of the imperial palace. Galerius' connection with the building of the Rotunda is however not firmly proved.<sup>29</sup> Recently, the results of Ćurčić's architectonic study of the first phase of the Rotunda have demonstrated that the Rotunda may have been built by Constantine the Great rather than Galerius. This claim is based on the absence of a crypt and the abundance of windows above the lower niches, features that are

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<sup>24</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 80-81; DYGGVE 1958, 353-355.

<sup>25</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 86-87; DYGGVE 1958, 361-363.

<sup>26</sup> The association of the city of Thessaloniki with the emperor Galerius relies on the iconographical interpretation of the sculptures of the arch. Dyggve admits that Kinch's attribution of the arch to the emperor Galerius had to be considered as a starting point for his study (DYGGVE, 1957, 80; DYGGVE 1958, 355). The arch was probably erected by the city of Thessaloniki in honour of Galerius (MENTZOS 2002, 60; with bibliography).

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the sources, see: DUVAL 2003, 280-281 n. 37 (with bibliography).

<sup>28</sup> According to Mentzos the first phases of the Rotunda and the palace were beyond doubt due to Galerius (MENTZOS 2002, 60-61). The presence of Galerius in Thessaloniki in the years 298-303 and 308-311 is testified by the activity of the imperial mint (ADAM-VELENI 2003, 163).

<sup>29</sup> Mentzos claimed that the Rotunda was surely linked with Galerius and that the building predates the arch (MENTZOS 2002, 60-61).

typical of the mausoleums dating to the time of Constantine.<sup>30</sup> Before 324, Constantine the Great built a harbour in Thessaloniki and probably completed a large octagon in the proximity of the hippodrome.<sup>31</sup> If the Rotunda was built by Galerius, it could probably be conceived as a temple, since there is no evidence of burial arrangements in its structure. Alternatively, if it belonged to Constantine the Great, it could have functioned as Constantine's mausoleum; it should then be ascribed to the time when the city of Thessaloniki competed with other cities on the new capital of the empire.

These are only hypotheses. The original function of the building and its dating remain open to question. However, the connections of the city and of its buildings with the imperial house are undeniable. Thessaloniki received the attention of the emperors, especially during Constantine's reign and at the time of the Theodosian dynasty.<sup>32</sup> In Dagron's analysis of the journeys of the fourth-century emperors, Thessaloniki appears as a temporary residence, especially for Theodosios I, who periodically stayed there to defend the Balkans against the threat of invasion.<sup>33</sup> In the fifth century, the city was often visited by members of

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<sup>30</sup> ČURČIĆ 2000, 10-14.

<sup>31</sup> ČURČIĆ 2000, 11.

<sup>32</sup> For an analysis of the imperial presence in Macedonia and Thessaloniki from the time of Galerius onwards, see: HATTERSLEY-SMITH 1996, 12-19.

<sup>33</sup> DAGRON 1991, 13-14. The emperor Theodosios I was active at Thessaloniki in the first period of his reign, during the conflict with the Goths, and in the winter 387-388 (DAGRON 1991, 82-83). According to fifth-century sources, he was baptised in the city, while he was residing there (HATTERSLEY-SMITH 1996, 16). However his fame is linked to Thessaloniki because he was responsible for the massacre of the hippodrome in 390 (MALALAS, *Chr.*, 13.43, ed. J. Thurn, Berlin 2000, 269, see also commentary and notes: JEFFREY E. AND M.

the imperial family, who actually resided in the palace for considerable periods.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the city of Thessaloniki acquired a great importance in the middle of the fifth century, becoming the seat of the *Praefectus Pretorius Orientis*.<sup>35</sup>

The first phase of the Rotunda may date to the reign of Galerius or, following Ćurčić, to the time of Constantine; it would have undergone a Christian transformation later, under the patronage of the Theodosian dynasty. Both the earliest building activity and the Christian phase of the Rotunda were certainly carried out under an imperial sponsorship.

Although no firm evidence has survived that attests to the existence of a palace during the Roman period, the town surely had a residence worthy of receiving an emperor. The fact that members of the imperial family preferred to reside in the city of Thessaloniki rather than in any other Macedonian city demonstrates that there was a palace to accommodate them, even for long periods of time.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Thessaloniki was apparently chosen to host the marriage of Valentinian III and Eudoxia, an event that ultimately took place at Constantinople:<sup>37</sup> this demonstrates that Thessaloniki could have provided all the facilities

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1986, 188; HATTERSLEY-SMITH 1996, 17; TORP 2003, 244 n.18). For the palace of Thessaloniki at the time of Theodosios I, see: CROKE 1981, 478.

<sup>34</sup> Galla Placidia resided in Thessaloniki with her son Valentinian III between 424 and 425 (CAGIANO DE AZEVEDO 1979, 27). Theodosios II was taken ill and forced to stop there in the 425 (DAGRON 1991, 15; HATTERSLEY-SMITH 1996, 18). Valentinian III and his wife Eudoxia spent there the winter 437-438 (HATTERSLEY-SMITH 1996, 18-19).

<sup>35</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 90-94 (with reference to one Hormisdas mentioned in an inscription of the walls); VICKERS 1973; CROKE 1981, 480-482.

<sup>36</sup> MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chron.*, s.a. 424, 437, ed. B. Croke, Sidney 1995, 13, 16.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion on the sources regarding this event, see: CROKE 1981, 479-480; HATTERSLEY-SMITH 1996, 18-19.

for this important event, including an imperial palace to host the court, an important church to celebrate the imperial marriage, and a monumental urban setting that provided the backdrop for the event. After 441, with the move of the Praetorian prefect and his troops to Thessaloniki and the construction of another palace to accommodate him, the role of the imperial palace becomes unclear.<sup>38</sup> Thessaloniki was not visited by the emperor or his family until the reign of Justinian II; from the fifth century onwards, the function and destiny of the imperial palace is obscure.

As Kleinbauer points out, the most important issues are the exact localisation of the imperial residence, how long it functioned, and its relationship with the Rotunda.<sup>39</sup> The existence of a palace has been seriously discussed by Duval, a severe opponent of Dyggve as concerns the hypothesis of a stable imperial residence at Thessaloniki; indeed, he opposed the theory conceived by Frazer and developed by Dyggve that relates the imperial palace to the mausoleum and the hippodrome.<sup>40</sup>

Duval and Torp have recently discussed Dyggve's contributions to our understanding of the probable relationship between the supposed palace of Thessaloniki and the Rotunda in two publications commemorating the work of Ejnar and Ingrid Dyggve.<sup>41</sup> While Duval's paper discusses the archaeological situation of the area, expressly referring

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<sup>38</sup> CROKE 1981, 479-480.

<sup>39</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 57-58; KLEINBAUER 1972b, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Duval has discussed Dyggve's theory of the proximity of palace-hippodrome and mausoleum as a reflection of the imperial ideology of power (DUVAL 2003, 276-277, 287-288 with bibliography).

<sup>41</sup> DUVAL 2003; TORP 2003.



to his long-standing problems with Dyggve's theories about the proximity of the palace, the hippodrome, and the mausoleum, Torp's article discusses the archaeological results of Dyggve's excavations. Both papers are of extreme importance for their attempts to clarify our knowledge about the palace in light of the most recent bibliography.

The Rotunda was indisputably located on a north-south axis, connected to the arch Galerius by means of a monumental columned street that probably was built at a later date [figs. 8, 25]. A large hall was found to the south of the arch of Galerius. For our purposes, it is not important whether or not this large hall was part of the palace.<sup>42</sup> From its size and mosaic decoration, it was surely a monumental space.<sup>43</sup> Other monumental buildings were found on the south of the hall, in the area next to the hippodrome. The ensuing archaeological excavations shed light on a number of important structures, magnificently paved in mosaic and *opus sectile*, such as apses, halls, and a large octagon.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, the archaeological evidence is difficult to understand between the area of the arch and its vicinity and the area with the greatest concentration of ancient structures (Plateia Navarinou) [figs. 26-28]. Despite several attempts to determine a longitudinal development within the remains, a feature that is typical of late-antique palaces, the relationships among the major

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<sup>42</sup> On the function of the hall, see: TORP 2003, especially 269-271(with bibliography); DUVAL 2003, 293-297 (with bibliography).

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion about this large hall, see: ASIMAKOPOULOU-ATZAKA 1998, 183-185.

<sup>44</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on the area of the palace: SPIESER 1984b, 97-123; DUVAL 2003. See also: ADAM-VELENI 2003, 164-165. For its decoration, see: ASIMAKOPOULOU-ATZAKA 1998, 185-197.

monumental buildings are still quite obscure; it is thus hard to claim that a consistent building project existed in the area of the palace.<sup>45</sup>

Although it is impossible to connect the main bodies of archaeological evidence or to determine chronologies with any certainty, it is beyond doubt that the area of the palace had great value in early Christian times. The Rotunda, the arch, and the area of the palace were indisputably connected; they were located on a major urban axis that is still visible today within the modern structures of the city. From the Rotunda southwards, it is still possible to distinguish the urban axis where all of the monumental buildings were built. Despite the fact that the existence of a conceptual link among the remains is undeniable, the deeper logic behind the construction of the palace is difficult to reconstruct. As Duval has underlined, the major problems are the chronology of the remains and the identification of their function, the relationship between the remains and the still-unclear ancient topography, and the connections among this area, the hippodrome, and the neighbourhood.<sup>46</sup> The concentration of such a high number of monumental buildings surely indicates a complex where power would be on display, such as a palace or a civic centre.

Today, the area is extremely urbanized; further archaeological excavation is hardly possible. It is difficult to define any ceremonial axis of

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<sup>45</sup> For the development of the palace remains in relationship with late-antique palatial architecture, see: BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 33-35. The existence of a consistent building project laying behind the palace's structures was long claimed, although the development of the buildings in the area are of difficult understanding (CAGIANO DE AZEVEDO 1979, 24; FROVA 1990d, 206; BEJOR 1993, 134).

<sup>46</sup> DUVAL 2003.

circulation that would have connected the buildings; nor it is easy to establish secure dating for many of the structures. As a result, it is not possible to positively identify the remains discovered by the archaeological excavations, or the function or the rational of this group of structures.<sup>47</sup> We may nonetheless draw a few conclusions. Firstly, the Rotunda was on such an important urban axis that the main entrance of the building remained on the south side, even when the building was transformed into a church. Secondly, that axis connected the church to a monumental centre of power through the arch of triumph; the configuration of this centre is still hotly debated, although its main elements are surely the hippodrome, a basilica, a bath complex and an octagon on the south side of the *Via Regia*.<sup>48</sup> All of this is sufficient to recognize the importance of the newly converted Rotunda during Christian times.

The Rotunda's function as a palatine church or a *martyrium*<sup>49</sup> cannot be claimed on the basis of the fragmentary and confused records that we currently possess; neither the meagre historical sources pertaining to the early history of Thessaloniki, nor the evidence for the palace's existence, are of any use. The function of the church will only be able to be deduced from internal evidence, new archaeological records, or from the study of the internal decoration.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The destination of the structures was mainly connected to the palace. Acutely Duval analysed the state of the investigations and proposed different solutions (DUVAL 2003).

<sup>48</sup> For discussion and bibliography, see: DUVAL 2003, 288-291.

<sup>49</sup> This hypothesis was expressed by Kleinbauer in 1972 (KLEINBAUER 1972a, 55-56).

<sup>50</sup> In this regard the existence of 'drainage well' just in the middle of the central area of the church is a topic that need a further discussion. If the building did not have an *opaion*,

## 1.1 Restoration

Over time, the Rotunda has undergone considerable restoration. In 1892, the lost mosaic at the eastern side of the dome was painted by S. Rossi, and the Ninth Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki promoted the cleaning and repair of the mosaic decoration in 1952-1953 under F. Zachariou.<sup>51</sup>

After the powerful earthquake of 1978, the Ninth Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki began a great restoration project to consolidate and repair the Rotunda's building structure and decoration; this project was carried out in three phases: 1978-1994, 1995-1999, and 2000-2006.<sup>52</sup> In the first phase, the primary work consisted of the cleaning and consolidation of the walls.<sup>53</sup> The conservation of the mosaic decoration was followed by the substantial cleaning and consolidation of the substratum and the mosaic surface, which is still a work in progress.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the restoration activities, documentation and modern archaeological research are extremely important aspects of the works carried out at the Rotunda after 1978. New drawings and photos of the mosaic have been accompanied by specific research applying scientific methodology to the study of the building and its decoration. This approach

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one can ask if the evidence interpreted as 'drainage well' were not misunderstood. Unfortunately, until now in the reports there is no evidence of any archaeological record pertaining to the floor of the church.

<sup>51</sup> KANONIDIS AND MASTORA 2003, 404 n.4 (with references).

<sup>52</sup> KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU 2005.

<sup>53</sup> 'REPORT' 1986, 54-62; KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU 2005.

<sup>54</sup> KANONIDIS AND MASTORA 2003, 404 n. 4 (with references); BAKIRTZIS 2005.

involved the laboratory analysis of the Rotunda's marble sculptures and the scientific study of the church's natural lighting.<sup>55</sup> Through the analysis of the marble relieves, it was possible to draw a map of the marble trade between Thessaloniki and Asia Minor as well as to define the existence of local craftsmen in Thessaloniki working with semi-finished or rough material imported from Asia Minor.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the study of the natural lighting of the building provides much new data related to the impact of natural light on both the mosaic and on the architecture of the church.<sup>57</sup> It is of great importance that scientific analysis is carried out for the mosaic decoration as well. Scientific data relating to the mosaic would enhance what is known about the Rotunda and solve some of the major problems that still inflame scholarly debate. Analysis of the mortar and the *tesserae* of the mosaic would cast a new light on the concern about the materials' place of origin – if not of the craftsmen – as well as the mosaic's dating.

## **2. The mosaic**

After the removal of the Turkish decorations of the dome, a mosaic organized in concentric circles was found. A badly damaged medallion appeared at the centre of the dome, showing what is left of a haloed Christ with his right hand raised, dressed in a tunic, and holding a cross [fig. 29].

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<sup>55</sup> MENTZOS, BARBIN, AND HERRMANN 2002; ILIADIS 2001 and 2005.

<sup>56</sup> MENTZOS, BARBIN, AND HERRMANN 2002, 324-326.

<sup>57</sup> ILIADIS 2001 and 2005.

The medallion is encircled by a row of stars, a wreath with fruits of all seasons, and a rainbow. In the next zone, four winged angels support the central medallion with their hands. The rayed head of a phoenix stands between two of them on the east side, just below Christ's head in the central medallion. On the south, four rays are still visible between two of the angels; their source of origin is however unknown.

Unfortunately, this is all that is left of the first mosaic circle of the dome decoration. Indeed, the first and second concentric circles have all but disappeared. Only a few scattered fragments of the second section are visible, just above the lowest frieze, and show a series of feet in sandals walking in a garden-like setting. The second mosaic zone is divided from the lowest frieze by a mosaic cornice representing architectural mouldings. In the lowest friezes, a series of eight panels are separated from each other by bands of acanthus leaves. Unfortunately, the eastern panel is now missing. The panels bear the same broad composition: two or three *orantes* stand in front of luxurious architectural structures that dominate each of the scenes. The buildings represented are all organized around a central exedra, where different elements are represented. In the north- and south-eastern panels, a bust of Christ being raised by two angels decorates the central pediment [figs. 30-31]. In the northern and southern panels, a jewelled cross surrounded by a stream of water and with a dove descending over top of it stands under a hexagonal canopy [figs. 32-33]. In the north- and south-western panels a throne filled by a closed book is covered by a

circular canopy [figs. 34-35]. Although the mosaic is heavily damaged in the centre of the western panel, an apse enclosed by slabs is still visible [fig. 36]. The background of the entire mosaic is pervaded by gold; the only exceptions are Christ's medallion, which has a silver background, and the garden-like ground of the second circle where the figures are walking.

Only a few of the vaults of the bays and lunettes bear their original decoration. Mosaics are still visible in the vaults of the south-eastern, southern, and western bays, and in the south-eastern, western, north-western, and north-eastern lunettes. Various geometric decorations cover the lunettes, while geometric patterns are filled with vegetal and animal elements in the mosaic of the bays. Only the southern bay has a richer decoration, where a large cross is depicted on a silver background with caskets of fruits alternating with birds.<sup>58</sup>

## **2.1 The mosaic: a survey and technical notes**

During a recent survey at the Rotunda, the Ninth Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki, to which I am very grateful, allowed me to walk on the scaffolding around the dome. As a result, I was able to observe the mosaic at a close range and was able to see the present state of work.<sup>59</sup> The staff of the Ninth Ephorate provided me with ample technical information and allowed me to observe the mosaic and examine the drawings, but I was not allowed to take new pictures or to make

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<sup>58</sup> For the mosaic of the southern bay, see: TORP 2001, 295-317.

<sup>59</sup> The survey took place in June 2006.

sketches of the details, official copies of which will soon be published by the Ephorate.

When entering the church, one has the impression of a huge, bare building, partially due to the fact that the keystone of the dome stands at a height of 34 m. The lack of the marble and mosaic decoration, which have been mostly destroyed, leaves the extant mosaics alone to convey the impression of the original interior. The golden and colourful mosaics shine against the bare brickwork, appearing extremely radiant. Although the dominant colour seems to be gold, the mosaic decoration enriches the church with a great variety of other bright colours. Where the mosaic is extant, the dome shines as if it was directly reflecting the light. This is due to the mosaic's technique. The setting of the *tesserae*, their size (1 cm<sup>2</sup>), and the skilful play with colour together convey an impression of brightness.

All of the *tesserae* are made of glass, except for a few colours – the white and a few nuances of red, pink, and purple – for which stone cubes are used. The gems and pearls that cover the encrusted columns and the crosses depicted in the mosaic are in fact large glass *tesserae*. Although mother-of-pearl was used in addition to glass in the *tesserae* of the sixth-century mosaics of Ravenna,<sup>60</sup> there is an almost constant use of glass *tesserae* in the Rotunda mosaic. Although the range of colours is quite limited, one has the impression that the panel is very colourful due to the

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<sup>60</sup> In the mosaics of St. Apollinare nuovo they were replaced by big buttons during the restorations of the last century (information coming from the direct experience of the author).



technique used.<sup>61</sup> The combination of differently coloured *tesserae* produces various nuances: in the peacock's tail, for instance, the juxtaposition of yellow next to blue and red makes a green colour that is rendered through the reflection of light on the blue, yellow, and red *tesserae*. The clever use of differently coloured *tesserae* to make new colours is also made possible by their small size. This allowed them to be easily combined, so that it is possible to render details of the buildings, facial traits, and features of the costumes.

Silver and golden *tesserae* are cleverly and differently used depending on the elements of the mosaic. While the background is made of golden and silver cubes, only gold and radiant colours are utilized for the buildings. In the buildings, the shading is rendered through the interplay of golden and colourful *tesserae*. The structures that are intended to be portrayed in the light are made of golden *tesserae*; those that are supposed to be in the shade are done with different nuances of yellow, red, and brown. Although no direct light could possibly reach the dome, when the Rotunda is lit, the golden part shines; when it is in the dark, the other parts shine. The background of the mosaic is always bright due to the mix of silver and golden *tesserae*.

A striking feature of the overall architectural frieze is the marginal amount of optical distortion. Since dome mosaics and some wall mosaics are intended to be seen from the floor and thus rely on optical rules for

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<sup>61</sup> Information provided by Themis Kakagianni, who guided me during the visit on the scaffolding.

correctly rendering images seen from afar, the depictions often seem disproportionate when seen close up. Although the frieze was covered by three floors of scaffolding, a fact that only allowed me to analyse one long, round area at a time, the proportions of the human figures and the details of the buildings did not appear to be distorted to me. This could be a false impression, due to the impossibility of viewing the frieze as a whole. However, if this is true, it could be important in defining the mosaic technique as well as perhaps for the determination a specific school of mosaicists.

### **3. Literature on the Rotunda mosaics**

The literature about the mosaic of the Rotunda is extremely vast. Scholars still hotly debate the date and the subject of the mosaics. In the following section, I will try to summarize and discuss the major contributions.

In 1939, Wiegand made a first attempt to identify the figures of the *orantes* standing in the panels.<sup>62</sup> Through an analysis of the inscriptions, he identified the *orantes* as martyrs and concluded that they were located in the frieze in order to embed a universal church calendar. The ‘calendar theory’ and the methodology utilized by the author were later largely

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<sup>62</sup> WIEGAND 1939.

opposed.<sup>63</sup> His assumption that the *orantes* are martyr saints, however, was almost unanimously accepted and had an enormous impact on the following interpretations of the mosaic.

During the archaeological campaign of 1952-1953, L'Orange and Torp were assigned the study of the mosaics on the dome of the Rotunda that had been discovered by Hébrard and examined by Dyggve.<sup>64</sup> In 1955, Torp published his first contribution on the mosaics;<sup>65</sup> later in 1963, his pioneer monograph about the mosaics appeared.<sup>66</sup> From that time, Torp has continued his study and has developed the details without substantially changing his opinions. For this reason, we will discuss his contributions from 1955 to the present leaving the chronological presentation of the scholarship.

Torp's hypotheses are based on one firm point: the mosaic decoration is contemporary with the transformation of the Rotunda into a church that,<sup>67</sup> according to Dyggve, dates to the time of Theodosios the Great (379-395).<sup>68</sup> The author, though he has recently reaffirmed this point, has never reviewed this dating.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 68-78; KLEINBAUER 1982, 25-37; SPIESER 1984B, 153-156.

<sup>64</sup> HÉBRARD 1920, 31-34; DYGGVE 1955, 180; DYGGVE 1958, 358; L'ORANGE 1970, 257.

<sup>65</sup> TORP 1955, 489-498.

<sup>66</sup> So far this is the only extensive study on the mosaics of the Rotunda (TORP 1963). A second monograph on the subject, for long promised by Torp, has not been published yet.

<sup>67</sup> This has been claimed after an analysis of the nails that hold the mosaic layers of the dome. The nails were in fact put on the fresh mortar in the higher area of the dome (TORP 1955, 491; TORP 1963, 44-45). In 1991 Torp claimed that the top of the dome and the setting-bed of the mosaic belonged to the same building activity (TORP 1991, 23).

<sup>68</sup> In his first report of the works carried out at the Rotunda, Torp had already dated the mosaic at the time of Theodosios, defining it as 'a monumental work of the imperial art of

Torp's preliminary paper on the mosaics had a strong influence on the literature that followed, especially his interpretation of the architectural frieze at the base of the dome. Torp claimed that the buildings represent both church and palatial architecture and that, following the tradition of the *scenae frons*, *bemas* were incorporated into palatine buildings that were stylistically connected to the Hellenistic palace (*regiae*), with further developments in funerary architecture.<sup>70</sup> According to Torp, the palace can be considered a type of sacred architecture itself, in that its forms are linked to temple structures. The *scenae frons* of the theatre can be interpreted as the development of the palace façade model. Theatres are in fact also connected to the palace due to their use of imperial triumphal symbols and for the role that they played in the emperor's glorification and apotheosis.<sup>71</sup> Torp underlined the striking resemblance between the buildings depicted on the architectural frieze and the monumental tombs at Petra; he explained that the tomb was considered to be the otherworldly house of the deceased and thus represented a particularly magnificent heavenly palace.<sup>72</sup>

The reference to Petra must only be taken as an indication of a similarly broad architectural concept, the main features of which consist of

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the age of Theodosios' (TORP 1955, 291). Later, in 1991, he reaffirmed his opinion discussing the brick stamps, the marble sculpture, and the portraits of the figures represented in the dome (TORP 1991). The same dating is proposed in KIILERICH AND TORP 1998, 23-36.

<sup>69</sup> TORP 1991, 13-28; TORP 2002a, 11.

<sup>70</sup> TORP 1955, 489-498; TORP 2002b, 5. Grabar and Kleinbauer agree with the author for that the buildings descend from the classical *scenae frons* (Grabar 1967, 69; KLEINBAUER 1972a, 59-61).

<sup>71</sup> TORP 1955, 495-496.

<sup>72</sup> TORP 1955, 497-498; TORP 2002b, 4.

the façade's division into two architectural orders and the abundance of domes and pediments. The architecture depicted in the carvings of the stones of Petra relies on a three-dimensional concept; the buildings of the Rotunda, on the other hand, are mosaics that by their own nature are two-dimensional and are dependent on optical rules to convey the illusion of a third dimension.

In 2002, Torp extended his hypothesis in his claim that the buildings in the mosaics are based on representations of the Tabernacle. In his view, the heavenly temple-palace image merges with the image of the cosmic Tabernacle in the mosaics.<sup>73</sup> This is mainly due to the presence of furnishings depicted within the architectural interiors, including brightly jewelled columns, oil lamps, censers, candlesticks and curtains, that are also found in representations of the Tabernacle.<sup>74</sup> However, this interpretation raises a few doubts. The furnishings of the buildings are not only reminiscent of medieval representations of the Tabernacle, but include a great variety of objects that can be found in the representations of church buildings and palatial contexts.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the presence of candlesticks, oil lamps, censers, fountains, *kantharoi*, canopies, and curtains has been interpreted as reminiscent of a church in the majority of the scholarship.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> TORP 2002b, 13.

<sup>74</sup> TORP 2002b, 8-11.

<sup>75</sup> Torp justified the furniture with reference to the Tabernacle tent and its representation in the Ashburnham Pentateuch (Paris lat. 2334, f. 76) (TORP 2002b, 9-11).

<sup>76</sup> The connections between such objects and the church building had as direct consequence the inference that the panels represent church buildings. According to Grabar, the furniture functions as to give the idea of an ideal Christian sanctuary (GRABAR 1967, 69-75). Kleinbauer interpreted the furniture just as liturgical in his first reading of

Although the role of such objects in church liturgy cannot be discarded, it should be noted that these furnishings are also part of other settings. Various types of candlesticks were used in imperial ceremonies and oil lamps were widely used lighting devices in closed spaces.<sup>77</sup> Fountains embellished gardens and peristyles in palace architecture. Canopies and curtains were utilised to cover the image of the emperor: the first one bore a cosmic symbolism well expressed by Corippus;<sup>78</sup> the second was a symbol of honour used for public appearances by the emperor or as an element of palatial architecture,<sup>79</sup> as in the sixth-century mosaics of St. Apollinare nuovo and San Vitale in Ravenna.<sup>80</sup> [figs. 93, 37]

It is important to note that there is no evidence of either an ambo or an altar within the furnishings, the main elements that would identify a church building.<sup>81</sup> An altar is found even in the representation of the

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the mosaic, and as benefaction of the donors to the newly restored church later (KLEINBAUER 1972a, 53; KLEINBAUER 1982, 36-37).

<sup>77</sup> For instance in the *Chronicon* of John Malalas and the *Chronicon Paschale* the use of white candles by the soldiers in procession is reported as a custom from the ceremony for the inauguration of Constantinople in 330 onwards (*Chr. Pasch.*, s.a. 330, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, XCII, 709, see also commentary in WHITBY M. AND M. 1989, 17-18 n. 56; MALALAS, *Chr.*, 13.8, ed. I. Thurn, Berlin 2000, 247, see also commentary: JEFFREY E. AND M. 1986, 322; VOGT 1967, I, 75. In the Projecta casket (four century), servants are represented holding candles beside scenes showing the toilet of a lady, a private ceremony of aristocratic life (SHELTON 1981).

<sup>78</sup> CORIPPUS, *In laudem*, III, 194-200, ed. Av. Cameron, London 1976, 66, 187-188 (commentary), see also ed. A. Antès, Paris 1981 ed. S. Antès, Paris 1981, 60. For the role of the ciborium in imperial symbolism, see: CARILE A. 2003c, 612 (with ample bibliography). The use of canopies is recorded also by several images of kings and emperors in Byzantine manuscript illumination.

<sup>79</sup> For the symbolism of curtains (*vela*, *velaria*) in imperial context see: TEJA 1993, 623-624; CARILE 2003a, 10; CARILE 2003b, 618.

<sup>80</sup> In the mosaics of St. Apollinare nuovo and San Vitale at Ravenna, curtains hung between the columns of the imperial palace and from a portal in the famous mosaic of the empress Theodora, respectively.

<sup>81</sup> For the important function of altar and ambo see: LECLERCQ 1907a, 1330-1347; LECLERCQ 1907b, 3155-3189; TROMBLEY AND BOURAS 1991, 71; BOURAS 1991, 75-76.

Tabernacle tent to which Torp refers.<sup>82</sup> Lacking both elements, it is extremely hard to identify the architecture of the panels as church buildings, especially if the identification is based on the presence of ‘liturgical furnishing.’<sup>83</sup> The furnishing discussed by Torp does not necessarily imply a derivation of the Rotunda architectural panels from the representation of the Tabernacle. Those furnishings are present in a variety of different settings, in churches, palaces and even the Tabernacle tent: all locations for conducting ceremonies and where religious or political power was manifested.

The so-called Tabernacle iconography would be better interpreted as a paradigm for representation of secret and supernatural reality.<sup>84</sup> In the Old Testament, the Tabernacle tent represents the holy of holy, the sign of God’s presence among the people of Israel.<sup>85</sup> It thus becomes an epitome for the representation of sacred space in the form of a church or even an imperial palace, representing the power on earth descended from God.<sup>86</sup>

In another contribution dating to 2002 linking the architectural frieze to the dogmatic issues of the fourth century, Torp interpreted the

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<sup>82</sup> Torp pointed out that in the miniature the altar replaces the arc of the covenant: in that case the Tabernacle tent was ‘christianised’ (TORP 2002b, 10).

<sup>83</sup> While Kleinbauer outlined the absence of the ambo within the architecture, Grabar hypothesized that it could have been represented on the central exedra of the western panel, now heavily damaged (KLEINBAUER 1982, 37; GRABAR 1967, 71). Surprisingly the scholarship seems not to notice the absence of the altar. Torp mentioned it, but without developing the topic in detail (TORP 2002b, 25).

<sup>84</sup> KÜHNEL 1986, 149-165.

<sup>85</sup> *Exodus*, 25, 8.

<sup>86</sup> For this interpretation of the imperial palace with special reference to the sixth century Byzantium, see especially: CARILE 2003b.

themes represented in the middle of each panel.<sup>87</sup> The cross in the southern and northern panels is understood as a clear reference to Christ's baptism and to the dogma of the holy trinity.<sup>88</sup> This is due to the presence of a dove resting upon the cross and to the stream of water surrounding it. The jewelled book on the empty throne of the north- and south-western panels is seen as a reference to the evangelical doctrine, and thus to the law of God.<sup>89</sup> Finally, the priest Romanos, of whom only the right arm and part of the inscription with his name and profession are left, is interpreted as if he was depicted in the middle of the exedra in the western panel. He represents a martyr priest performing the liturgy in the holy bema of the church.<sup>90</sup> All of the dogmatic themes have thus been included within the jewelled gold buildings that 'evidently symbolize the heavenly Jerusalem.'<sup>91</sup>

A few remarks should be made about Torp's interpretation. Torp identified references to baptism in the northern and southern panels. However, the continuous tension between death and life present within this baptism iconography is striking. On the one hand, the cross is a complex symbol: it evokes Christ's passion and resurrection, and humanity's salvation by Christ's sacrifice. The cross in the northern and southern panels is jewelled, a cross of victory; moreover, its precious stones identify

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<sup>87</sup> TORP 2002a.

<sup>88</sup> TORP 2002a, 19-14.

<sup>89</sup> TORP 2002a, 20-24.

<sup>90</sup> TORP 2002a, 24-26.

<sup>91</sup> TORP 2002a, 13.



it as a particular type of cross symbolising the tree of life.<sup>92</sup> The water-cross-dove iconography recalls baptism and the transition into a new life in Christ. The canopy that covers the dove and the cross is hexagonal. As Underwood points out, the number six is reminiscent of the day of Christ's death and is reminiscent of Christ's passion.<sup>93</sup> The two panels are part of a series of eight, another number connected to Christ's baptism and resurrection. Besides the trinity dogma, this is another example of symbolism that relies on life and death: opposite yet coexistent in a continuous oxymoron. This symbolism has both archetypal and eschatological meanings in its very nature.

Surprisingly, Torp neglected to give an eschatological interpretation for the image of the book on the empty throne.<sup>94</sup> The stepped throne bears great imperial and religious significance, and the closed jewelled book is a reference to the *lex Christi*, though not explicitly to Christ's immanent presence. The empty throne embodies the presence of a divinity that is not present physically but rather spiritually.<sup>95</sup> The presence of an object on the empty throne identifies the entity whose presence is presupposed. The book on the empty throne recalls a gospel, and thus Christ's presence. Although Torp excluded any possible eschatological meaning, this iconography seems to point precisely to such a context.<sup>96</sup> The throne is

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<sup>92</sup> For a discussion on the cross, see below.

<sup>93</sup> UNDERWOOD 1950, appendix; KLEINBAUER 1972a, 60 n. 126.

<sup>94</sup> TORP 2002a, 20.

<sup>95</sup> HELLEMO 1982, 103-108.

<sup>96</sup> Since the throne is a symbol of power and sovereignty, often the empty throne has been linked to an apocalyptic context and specifically to the last judgment (VAN UFFORD 1971).

empty, suggesting the next epiphany of God. The book is closed and has a cover encrusted with bright precious stones. The brightness recalls the light of pure *logos* coming from Christ, and the fact that the book is closed imparts a certain amount of mystery on the scene.<sup>97</sup> The scene bears a number of meanings, though the eschatological one cannot be ignored.

In addition, Torp's interpretation of the priest Romanos as standing inside the *bema* creates a problem in the visual reconstruction of the scenes. In Torp's reconstruction of the heavily damaged western panel, the *orans* Romanos is actually inserted inside the sanctuary's platform [fig. 36]. This reconstruction should only be considered to be one interpretation among many, for three primary reasons. First, only one of Romanos' arms is visible and is located at the same height of both the other figures standing on the platform. Secondly, the south- and north-eastern panels bear an analogous composition with three *orantes* standing along the platform. There, the central *orans* is located in front of the platform; Romanos should also have been located outside in front of the architectural background, on the same level of the other figures in the panel. Lastly, the base of the platform from which the architecture of the western panel arises is slightly curved. Continuing to draw its profile in the area where the mosaic vanished, the *orans* would have had a small space to stand; this is identical to the placement of the central figures in the north- and south-eastern panels. Torp's reconstruction is based on a particular optic theory

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<sup>97</sup> The first chapter of the Gospel of John is all centred on the concept of logos-light-Christ (*John* 1).

that would explain the location of the other panels' empty throne and cross under the canopy. This may be true for the elements of the cross and the throne, extremely elaborate images with wide symbolic implications, but it can hardly be applied to the human figures. Indeed, all the evidence shows the *orantes* standing at the same level on a narrow strip outside the buildings.

It is certainly interesting to interpret the figure of Romanos<sup>98</sup> as the cleric whose tongue was cut out during martyrdom and who here performs the liturgy in a sort of *contrappasso* (retaliation). However, this iconography finds no parallel in early Christian art.<sup>99</sup> As a result, the western panel merits further study in order to understand the meaning of the composition and to determine whether this has any of the eschatological implications apparent in the other panels.

In light of all these considerations, Torp's dismissal of possible eschatological connotations in the mosaic seems rather forced. According to Torp, the absence of any eschatological connotation is linked to the interpretation of the whole dome decoration as the ascension of Christ.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately, in his writings on 'the dogmatic themes,' he never gave a meaning to the mosaic as a whole; however, he addressed the matter in another article, also written in 2002. The interpretation of the setting as a heavenly Jerusalem, as he has clearly stated in the second article,

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<sup>98</sup> The scholarship proposed a few solutions to the identification of the martyr Romanos: WIEGAND 1939, 124; KLEINBAUER 1972a, 49; SPIESER 1984b, 154.

<sup>99</sup> Torp was well aware that this would be the only example of this particular iconography (TORP 2002a, 25 and 27).

<sup>100</sup> TORP 2002b, 9.

contradicts his claim in his earlier contribution that the *Revelation* was not used as a source for the mosaic iconography.<sup>101</sup>

In 1967, Grabar presented the first comprehensive interpretation of the entire mosaic of the Rotunda's dome and dated the decoration to the fifth century. In his view, the major theme represented is the second coming of the lord (*parousia*).<sup>102</sup> Since this iconography can be easily confused with that of Christ's ascension, Grabar presented three points to support his thesis. First, the image of a phoenix is located just below and on the same axis with the head of Christ in the central medallion and recalls an eschatological context [fig. 38]. Secondly, in between the angels and the architectural frieze, there is a considerable number of human figures; only the feet of these figures remain intact. Grabar counted at least twenty-two figures, a number far greater than the number of apostles who witnessed the ascension. Thirdly, the apse of the Rotunda was painted with the image Christ's ascension in the ninth century and, in Grabar's view, it is hardly possible that the iconography of the apse was intended to reduplicate the theme of the dome.<sup>103</sup> One further point can be added to Grabar's view: the symbol of the empty throne, which has eschatological connotations that have already been discussed.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> TORP 2002b, 7-8.

<sup>102</sup> GRABAR 1967, 59-81. Later Kleinbauer fully agreed with Grabar, only arguing such an interpretation on the bases of different evidence (KLEINBAUER 1972a, 29-44).

<sup>103</sup> GRABAR 1967, 59-60.

<sup>104</sup> See above p. 118.

Grabar hypothesised that each architectural panel represents a different manifestation of the ideal church.<sup>105</sup> This point is based on the presence of ‘liturgical’ furnishing within the architecture. However, as it has been said above, the furnishings represented are not just liturgical; they can also be found in other settings. In addition, this hypothesis is complicated by the fact that the interior and external dimensions merge in each panel,<sup>106</sup> conveying a comprehensive impression of monumental architecture and ideal buildings. While an apse or a pediment can be seen at the centre of each panel, the lateral superimposed porticoes could be reminiscent of tower-like structures.<sup>107</sup> Concrete architectural elements are arranged on the facades so that that they convey both external and internal dimensions, revealing a comprehensive conception of space that continuously plays with the concepts of ‘internal’ and ‘external.’<sup>108</sup> This device is not meant to confuse the beholder; instead, it aims to create an ideal, supernatural space beyond the confines of reality where such a comprehensive space dimension is possible.

L’Orange presumed that the converted Rotunda functioned as a palatine church and interpreted the iconography of the mosaic as the

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<sup>105</sup> GRABAR 1967, 71-72.

<sup>106</sup> While Grabar noticed this bipolar aspect of the architecture, only Lidov stressed the point that the conception of the facades extends beyond the concepts of ‘internal’ or ‘external’ (GRABAR 1967, 71-72; LIDOV 1998, 342).

<sup>107</sup> As in Lidov’s view (LIDOV 1998, 341).

<sup>108</sup> Brandi considers the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ dimensions as fundamental concepts structuring the architectural space (BRANDI 1967, 49).

expression of Christ's victory.<sup>109</sup> Christ is thus represented as a *Sol invictus* raised in glory by the angels;<sup>110</sup> the *orantes* in front of the buildings are martyrs standing on a paradisiacal bright setting and comprise a gallery of portraits that should be dated to the time of Theodosios the Great.<sup>111</sup> L'Orange concluded by identifying a series of symbols linked to baptism: the canopied cross encircled by a stream of water in the middle of both the northern and southern panels.

L'Orange's view depends extensively on Torp's hypotheses. Of integral importance to his argument is the meeting of a north-south axis and an east-west axis formed by the architecture and the decoration of the church. When the Rotunda was transformed into a church, the southern entrance was retained and, by means of its decoration, the north-south axis was given a greater importance. This importance was defined by a series of crosses along the axis: a bright cross on a silver carpet decorates the southern bay's barrel vault, two jewelled crosses stand in the middle of the southern and northern panels, a third jewelled cross was probably located on the northern side of the first mosaic circle,<sup>112</sup> and Christ's cross is depicted inside the medallion at the apex of the dome [figs. 39, 33, 32, 29].

Unfortunately, L'Orange's work was highly influenced by an antiquated academic approach. Although his narrative virtuously organised

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<sup>109</sup> L'ORANGE 1970, 257-268.

<sup>110</sup> L'ORANGE 1970, 262.

<sup>111</sup> L'ORANGE 1970, 262-263 In 1991 Torp reached the same conclusion discussing the portraits and the expression of the figures (TORP 1991, 23-25).

<sup>112</sup> This cross is no longer visible, Torp claimed its existence from the analysis of the layout of the preparatory drawings left on the bare brickwork (TORP 1963, 37).

all the elements at hand, little attention was paid to the details and to their careful explanation; the contribution was just not as exhaustive as it could have been.

In 1970, Vickers dated the conversion of the Rotunda to the third quarter of the fifth century.<sup>113</sup> The author did not follow Kleinbauer, who had previously reached the same conclusion. The date proposed by Vickers was deduced from the analysis of different archaeological and stylistic evidence. For his argument Vickers considered brick stamps and architectonic sculptures, including the capital and the ambo found in proximity of the church and that are today found in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul.<sup>114</sup> Although scholars have widely discussed the dating of the ambo, the value of Vickers' contribution is his use of the brick stamps as archaeological indices of dating. In 1973, his methodology brought the author to individualise a phase of widespread building activity at Thessaloniki dating to the middle of the fifth century. This increased the meagre knowledge of the early Christian period of the city.<sup>115</sup> Later, Kleinbauer also paid a certain amount of attention to the brick stamps; it should be noted, however, that to this date, archaeological reports have given little attention to brick stamps that are rarely used for dating.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> VICKERS 1970.

<sup>114</sup> The same elements were later discussed by Torp, who however dated the conversion of the building and the making of the dome mosaic to the time of Theodosios the Great (TORP 1991, 13-24).

<sup>115</sup> VICKERS 1973.

<sup>116</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 94-98.

At the beginning of the 1970's, Maria Sotiriou developed Grabar's hypothesis and argued that the panels represent different views of a church building: a heavenly church that has its antitype in the earthly church.<sup>117</sup> In her opinion, the architecture does not belong to the tradition of the *scenae frons*, but rather to Syriac-Palestinian church architecture. The dome's decoration, on the other hand, developed directly from the Roman decoration of Christian catacombs and mausoleums. The inner decoration of the church therefore conveys the idea of a heavenly church with a strong ecclesiastical-liturgical symbolism.

Sotiriou proposed a reconstruction of the dome mosaic in her paper. She did not consider the charcoal cross that Torp observed in the northern part of the dome, but drew attention to a radiant cross that is located on the opposite side, in the southern area of the angels' frieze. There is no remaining evidence of crosses on the bare brickwork of the northern or southern sides of the dome; however, a cross might have been visible at the time of Sotiriou's and Torp's scholarship. The strength of Sotiriou's reading lies in her attempt at showing how different traditions might have merged within the iconography of the mosaic. It is difficult to understand the intricate interior decoration of the Rotunda; its iconography clearly has deeply symbolic implications that extend over the wide panorama of late-antique Mediterranean culture.

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<sup>117</sup> SOTIRIOU 1972a and 1972b (the second contribution was not found).



In 1972, Kleinbauer concluded that the Rotunda mosaic decoration represents the second coming of Christ through the extensive use of iconographic, literary, and archaeological sources.<sup>118</sup> In the author's view, the church was conceived as a *martyrium*, holding relics of the martyr saints who are represented as *orantes* standing in front of the image of the 'celestial ecclesia;' he also concluded that the mosaic should be ascribed to the third quarter of the fifth century.<sup>119</sup> Kleinbauer argued in detail against Grabar's interpretation of the mosaic as a *parousia*, Dyggve's reading of the building as a palatine church, and Wiegand's identification of the martyr saints and his dating at the building's conversion to the sixth century.<sup>120</sup>

Kleinbauer's paper relies on evidence to clarify a number of issues; it also brings forth a few crucial doubts about past interpretations of the mosaic. Kleinbauer interpreted the missing figures in the second concentric zone as archangels by means of New Testament sources and biblical commentaries on the second coming.<sup>121</sup> Although this interpretation is interesting and consistent with the identification of the dome mosaic as a

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<sup>118</sup> Kleinbauer's interpretation of the *parousia* was based on several points. As noticed by Grabar, the theme represented could not be the ascension, since the latter dominates the apse (GRABAR 1967, 59-81). Again, the presence of the phoenix is clearly reminiscent of an eschatological setting for Christ whose sign, the cross – here interpreted as a luminous cross – was seen on the preparatory drawing on the northern side of the dome's bare brickwork. Furthermore the figures on the second concentric circle of the dome are here read as archangels. All this points connect the mosaic to the description of the second coming of Christ in Matthew Gospel (*Math.* 24.31-32) (KLEINBAUER 1972a, 29-44).

<sup>119</sup> This dating is mainly supported by art-historical, historical, and archaeological considerations (KLEINBAUER 1972a, 68-107).

<sup>120</sup> GRABAR 1967; DYGGVE 1958; WIEGAND 1939.

<sup>121</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 41-42.

*parousia*, it can only be taken as a hypothesis. His arguments are not in fact completely exhaustive. The author suggested that the background of the frieze was occupied by a series of archangels alternating with palm trees.<sup>122</sup> The same background has also been found in the mosaics of two sixth-century monuments of Ravenna: namely in the frieze of the martyrs at St. Apollinare nuovo and in the frieze of apostles in the Arian Baptistery [figs. 40-41]. At the Rotunda, all of the figures have vanished; only their sandals and the lower part of a white tunic are still visible. As Kleinbauer pointed out, they are ‘the ordinary costumes for angels in Early Christian art.’ However, they are also worn by a number of other figures, such as the martyrs and apostles in the early Christian monuments of Ravenna. To my knowledge, there is no evidence of any early Christian mosaic representing such a high number of angels. Based on the data at hand, the figures could indeed be archangels, but they also could be martyr saints, apostles, or even the twenty-four elders of Kleinbauer’s initial argument.<sup>123</sup>

Although Kleinbauer admitted that the text of John’s *Revelation* was used in early Christian Thessaloniki to a certain extent,<sup>124</sup> he interpreted the architectural panels as the interior facades of a church imbedded with a strong cosmic character, ultimately reading such an iconography as a ‘celestial ecclesia.’<sup>125</sup> This is due to the abundance of liturgical furnishings that prevent the scene being interpreted as a direct reference to the

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<sup>122</sup> On the bare brickwork the evidence of the tryout of what seems to be palm trees supports this point (TORP 1963, 36-37; KLEINBAUER 1972a, 40).

<sup>123</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 40-41.

<sup>124</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 41.

<sup>125</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 53-54, 62-63.

heavenly Jerusalem of the *Revelation*.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, as has already been stated, the furnishings may well have other interpretations besides the ‘liturgical;’ indeed, the typical and most important elements in the identification of a church, the altar and the ambo, are missing. Kleinbauer tied the architecture evident in the frieze to the tradition of the *scenae frons*, which links the panels to the image of the imperial palace.<sup>127</sup> Kleinbauer pointed out a certain imperial imagery forming the basis of the architectural representations.<sup>128</sup> This interpretation inserts the architectural frieze, with its bright, pervading golden colour and otherworldly traits, into the eschatological meaning of the whole dome decoration.

Following Torp’s book on the mosaics, another monograph on the subject was written by Paola Cattani in 1972.<sup>129</sup> Unfortunately, the work is mostly a summary of the previous scholarship, and did not provide any new understanding of the inner decoration.

In 1977, Lagopoulos and Ioannidis published an interesting article about the Rotunda.<sup>130</sup> The authors proposed a semiotic reading of the mosaic, especially of the southern panel, in the attempt to present a new methodology. Following Grabar’s interpretation of the mosaic, the authors translated the previous reading of the mosaic into a semiotic language. Yet

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<sup>126</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 52-53; KLEINBAUER 1982, 39.

<sup>127</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 58-63.

<sup>128</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 63-68.

<sup>129</sup> CATTANI 1972.

<sup>130</sup> LAGOPOULOS AND IOANNIDIS 1977.

they pointed out some very surprising assumptions that were in contrast with Grabar's hypotheses. For instance, the architectural frieze corresponded in their view to an earthly environment.<sup>131</sup> They also outlined an evident mistake in the composition of the southern panel, where one soldier and one civilian *orantes* are located in the place of two soldiers.<sup>132</sup> [fig. 33] However, the fragment of inscription linked to the civilian *orans* Porphyrios and referring to his occupation is missing; in addition, the accuracy and the high quality that are evident in the mosaic makes such a mistake to seem highly unlikely.

Unfortunately, the analysis of the panel was carried out on the basis of Grabar's previously published interpretation. As a result, the presentation of the methodology failed and lost credibility. Instead of explaining the dome decoration through an analysis of the mosaic, the authors assumed a meaning for the iconography from the beginning of the article without considering any other possible interpretations.

The value of the contribution relies on the fact that the cosmic meaning of the panels is continuously highlighted in relation to the dome decoration as a whole. The paper places a great emphasis on a series of elements that convey the same meaning and ideology, including the presence of the vertical and horizontal axes, and the interrelationship among objects, colours, and locations. In this light, the fundamental flaws of the work, including the final generalisations about Byzantine art, and the

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<sup>131</sup> LAGOPOULOS AND IOANNIDIS 1977, 82.

<sup>132</sup> LAGOPOULOS AND IOANNIDIS 1977, 85; fig.2, 89.

the structure of the article that is often confusing, become of secondary importance.

In 1982, Kleinbauer unfortunately negated much of his first reading of the architectural frieze.<sup>133</sup> His interpretation of the *orantes* as donors, rather than martyr saints, led to a drastic change of opinion about the nature and meaning of the architecture in the panels. Previously, the author had identified the *orantes* as martyr saints gathered for Christ's second coming due to their characteristic of universality and the probable presence of their relics in the newly converted Rotunda.<sup>134</sup> He disagreed with Wiegand's analysis of the martyrs, drawing special attention to the garments, the inscriptions, the supposed universal church calendar, and the cult of Sts. Cosmas and Damian.<sup>135</sup>

Kleinbauer proposed that the *orantes* should have been interpreted as donors after considering their pose and appearance, discussing the inscriptions, and refuting Wiegand's calendar theory.<sup>136</sup> His hypothesis is noteworthy, for it represents a valuable alternative to the traditional understanding of the figures. What is extremely questionable, however, is his interpretation of the mosaic as representing 'the earthly church, and possibly the newly converted Rotunda itself.'<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> KLEINBAUER 1982.

<sup>134</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 44-55.

<sup>135</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 68-78.

<sup>136</sup> KLEINBAUER 1982, 25-37.

<sup>137</sup> KLEINBAUER 1982, 37.

The architecture was reinterpreted as an earthly environment on the basis of the abundant furnishings, which Kleinbauer interpreted as donations of the *orantes* to the newly converted Rotunda. The buildings stand on a uniform golden background, modelled in bright and radiant colourful *tesserae*.<sup>138</sup> Kleinbauer argued that the gold ground does not demonstrate a heavenly setting, but is used to distinguish the frieze from the decoration above and below and provides the appropriate scenery for the *orantes*.<sup>139</sup> This claim seriously underestimates the whole of the architectural frieze. In Byzantine art, the use of gold, especially in a background, is connected to divinity, royalty, transcendental realities, and extraordinary settings.<sup>140</sup> It makes the scene represented absolute and adds a metaphysical meaning to the subject.<sup>141</sup>

The architecture is not standing merely to provide a setting for the *orantes*. Indeed, rather than being inside the buildings, the figures stand outside the buildings on a level lower than that of the building platforms.<sup>142</sup> The location of the *orantes* in front of and before the

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<sup>138</sup> With Torp, L'Orange underlined that the buildings are golden while their shadow are rendered with yellow, blue, red, and green *tesserae* (L'ORANGE 1970, 264-265).

<sup>139</sup> KLEINBAUER 1982, 37-38. In his previous paper Kleinbauer claimed that the golden colour of the frieze of martyrs conveyed the idea of a heavenly setting (KLEINBAUER 1972a, 62).

<sup>140</sup> For the symbolism of gold in Byzantium: AVERINCEV 1979; JAMES 1996, 107; JANES 1998.

<sup>141</sup> To support his argument the author stated that golden background was not suitable for the representation of heaven, since it was used also in the sixth-century imperial panels at San Vitale in Ravenna (KLEINBAUER 1982, 38). However in San Vitale it was used as a setting for the imperial image, that for its own nature is not considered as properly earthly in Byzantine culture, being the emperor a minister of God on earth (EUSEBIOS, *De laud. Const.*, VII.12, ed. I.A. HEIKEL, Leipzig 1902, 212; AGAPETUS, *EKΘΕΣΙΣ*, 37, 46, 61, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, LXXXVI, 1176, 1177, 1181).

<sup>142</sup> The location of the *orantes* down the platforms is noticed by Kleinbauer too (KLEINBAUER 1972, 53 and 58).

architecture introduces the buildings, as if they are the real protagonists of the panels.<sup>143</sup> The architecture has a monumental aspect, covering the entirety of the panels with such richness of detail and precious features that make the buildings leave the background to become the real protagonist of the scene. The colourful golden features and the pervading bright light make the architectural frieze resplendent at the base of the dome, as if to introduce the whole of the decoration above. It constitutes a sort of architectural enceinte for the mosaic of the dome that emphasizes its separate reality.

Kleinbauer supported his argument by adding that the architectural frieze is distinguished from the decoration above it by a mosaic entablature since the whole frieze was a sort ‘dado’ providing a transition between the *opus sectile* below and the dome above.<sup>144</sup> On the one hand, it is hard to think of the frieze as a sort of ‘dado’ because its great dimensions occupy most of the enormous dome. On the other hand, the mosaic frame reproducing architectural mouldings above the panels has the visual function of supporting the garden-like setting of the frieze above. Had the frieze not depicted a sort of ground for the frieze above, the figures of the second concentric circle would have appeared to be flying, probably in the same golden background that dominates the entirety of the dome. At the same time, the cornice connects the architecture with the frieze above: similar mouldings can be found in the panels’ architectural representations.

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<sup>143</sup> For that concerns the martyr Romanos, a contrasting idea has been expressed by Torp: TORP 2002a, 24-25.

<sup>144</sup> KLEINBAUER 1982, 38.

The cornice makes the transition between the architectural frieze, whose structure is organized in eight panels, and the second concentric circle; although the latter is highly damaged, it does not seem to be divided into panels, but is instead dominated by a series of figures. The architectural representation is part of the same heavenly setting of the whole dome decoration; furthermore it encircles the entire scene represented in the dome, becoming a sort of ideal architectural enceinte.

In 1982, Gkioles compared the decoration of the dome of the Rotunda to the dome paintings of the church of Ağaç Altı Kilise in Cappadocia.<sup>145</sup> The author defined the same iconography representing the second coming of the Lord in both the churches. He was thus able to identify the figures of the lost frieze of the Rotunda as a host of sceptre-holding angels. In addition, he discussed Maria Sotiriou's 1972 reconstruction of the Rotunda's decoration in great detail.<sup>146</sup> On the basis of the iconography of the ascension and the second-coming, Gkioles replaced the palm trees of Sotirou's drawing with the sun and the moon and proposed that the phoenix was suspended alone, rather than standing on a palm tree. Finally, he suggested that the iconography of the Rotunda was probably inspired by the liturgy, as are later Cappadocian examples of the same iconography.

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<sup>145</sup> GKIOLES 1982. The mosaic has been variously attributed to either the period before the iconoclasm or the eleventh century (GKIOLES 1982, 124 n. 5: with references).

<sup>146</sup> SOTIRIOU 1972a, fig. 1. This reconstruction, drawn by M. Korres following Sotiriou's research, was recently utilized by Ćurčić (ĆURČIĆ 2000, 32 fig. 7).



While Gkioles' contribution is very interesting, it is ultimately unconvincing. The author proposed a comparison among monuments that are very different both in age and location. If one accepts that the dome of the Rotunda and the rock-cut churches of Cappadocia have the same iconography, one must also argue that the same iconography did not change across the centuries and circulated at great distance among the empire. While possible, this scenario is hard to prove. Furthermore, the architectural frieze of the Rotunda does not find a direct parallel in the Ağaç Altı Kilise, where the lower zone of the dome is occupied by the sceptre-holding angels. In the Cappadocian church, something similar to the architectural frieze of the Rotunda can be found only in the area above the arches of the central area of the church, among the squinches, but not in the dome. There, eight panels – two panels in each wall of the central area of the church – present two saintly figures each. However, it is important to remember that this is not an architectural frieze. Both the position of the saints, who are depicted on the walls supporting the dome rather than on the dome itself, and the absence of the buildings pose problems. Although similarities can be found in the decoration of the two churches, it is hard to base a reconstruction of the Rotunda's decoration on the iconography of the Ağaç Altı Kilise. Finally, proposing an influence of the liturgy on the iconography is hazardous in the case of the Rotunda. The late-antique liturgy was highly influenced by local traditions and is still an open field of research. The Rotunda of Thessaloniki and the Ağaç Altı Kilise are too

different in age, location, size, and probably function. It is therefore very problematic to draw secure conclusions about the iconography and liturgy of the Rotunda on the basis of the Ağaç Altı Kilise, as Gkioles proposed in his article.

In Spieser's monograph, the only one concerning the city of Thessaloniki from the fourth to the sixth century, one chapter is dedicated to the Rotunda. Through a detailed analysis of the mosaics on the barrel vault of the lower bays and on the lunettes,<sup>147</sup> the author concluded that the mosaics date to the beginning of the sixth century.<sup>148</sup> Even though he reached a similar conclusion about the chronology of the conversion of the church, Spieser refuted some of Wiegand's arguments.<sup>149</sup> Spieser analysed some details of the decoration of the dome and relates them to other mosaics of the early Christian churches of Thessaloniki. In this way, he dated the decoration of the Rotunda to the beginning of the sixth century and claimed that it influenced the mosaic tradition of Thessaloniki.<sup>150</sup>

Instead of clarifying the interpretation of the Rotunda decoration, Spieser's careful analysis seems to complicate it. His methodology is

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<sup>147</sup> Only a few bays and lunettes bear their original decoration. The mosaics are still visible in the vaults of the south-eastern, southern, and western bays and in the south-eastern, western, north-western, and north-eastern lunettes.

<sup>148</sup> SPIESER 1984b, 132-153. Earlier Spieser had dated the conversion of the Rotunda into a church to the same period of the building of St. Demetrios (510 c.) and argued against a massive fifth-century building activity at Thessaloniki: SPIESER 1984a, 319 and 330. Recently Torp has discussed the mosaic of the southern bay, arguing against Spieser's sixth-century dating and the existence of presumed Sassanid themes in the mosaic (TORP 2001, esp. 315).

<sup>149</sup> Spieser arguments against Wiegand are based on two points: the use of "s" as an abbreviation and the theory of the church calendar (SPIESER 1984b, 153-156).

<sup>150</sup> SPIESER 1984b, 156-164.

methodical and accurate, although it concerns mainly issues of style. In the field of art history, style must be considered just one parameter of interpretation among many; one would therefore expect this parameter to be linked with a historical analysis, which is indeed present elsewhere in the monograph.

Proposing a dating within the first 30 years of the fifth century, Mentzos discussed the iconography of the Rotunda's mosaic, defining it as a *parousia* in which the eschatological aspect is mitigated by a triumphal character.<sup>151</sup> According to Mentzos, some features of the mosaic are not appropriate to an eschatological representation. These include the 'youthful Christ' of the central medallion, the host of angels and 'exalting martyrs,' and the heavenly location of the whole mosaic, features that provide the composition with a triumphal and exalting character. Unfortunately, these elements cannot be proved to have been part of the original decoration: the face of Christ and the host of 'exalting martyrs' disappeared with the lost portions of the mosaic. There is no internal evidence to support the assumption that Christ was represented as a young man. The figures in the lost zone have in fact been variously interpreted as angels, martyrs, or the twenty-four elders; there is nothing that conclusively demonstrates that they were martyrs. Mentzos rightly excluded the possibility that the architectural frieze aims to represent churches, since there is evidence of

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<sup>151</sup> MENTZOS 2002, 74.

Christian symbolism in only two of the panels.<sup>152</sup> According to the author, the whole dome decoration bears a triumphal character that finds a parallel in the iconography of the imperial *adventus*.<sup>153</sup> This allowed Mentzos to establish a direct connection between the transformation of the Rotunda and the imperial house. He thus attributed the decoration of the dome to the years 424-437 and linked it to the wedding of Valentinian III and Eudoxia. Mentzos reached the same conclusions and dating that are proposed in this chapter, although he used a different method to analyze the dome decoration. His article was found only after this present chapter was completed. Although my methodology considerably differs from Mentzos', it is worth noting that the same conclusion on the mosaic's date has been reached in two works that appear so different and independent one from another.

In 2005, a new contribution was made on the topic of the mosaic from a totally different point of view.<sup>154</sup> In the body of this work, Laura Nasrallah was not concerned with issues of dating or defining the art historical milieu in which the mosaic should be inserted. Rather, she attempted to identify the socio-cultural environment that produced the mosaic in Thessaloniki, the impact of the Rotunda's conversion and its mosaic on the people of that city, and how the citizens would have perceived the iconography of the mosaic. After discussing the previous

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<sup>152</sup> MENTZOS 2002, 74.

<sup>153</sup> MENTZOS 2002, 75.

<sup>154</sup> NASRALLAH 2005.

scholarship at length, the author assumed that the Rotunda's first phase belongs to the time of Galerius and that the architectural frieze represents different views of a church building, however depicted as heavenly palaces. As the author stated, this paper is about the city as a 'third space,' about the impression conveyed by the cityscape on the people who lived or visited Thessaloniki.<sup>155</sup> Through an analysis of the visual and written evidence belonging to different periods, but produced for or by the people of Thessaloniki, including Paul's letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians), the Martyrdom of Agape, Eirene and Chione, and the apsidal mosaic of Hosios David and its legend, she reconstructed the image of the city of Thessaloniki as one pervaded by both an apocalyptic tendency and an imperial rhetoric. These had their origins in the first-century letter of Paul and continued at least until the fourth century, but were still alive in the ninth-century manuscripts of the Martyrdom of Agape, Eirene and Chione, and are evident in late texts referring to the legend of Hosios David. Finally, the author related the iconography of the Rotunda to the *parousia* of Christ as the Lord and specifically to a passage from 1 Thessalonians, delineating the imperial imagery of the mosaics as a typical feature of the city and the city's answer to its history of imperial violence and persecution.

This paper casts a new light on the speculations about the Rotunda and its mosaic decoration, relating it to the context of the city. The

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<sup>155</sup> NASRALLAH 2005, 478.

continuous highlighting of the connections among the Rotunda, the arch of Galerius, and the palace recreates a compelling image of the urban and conceptual context which led to the Christian phase of the building. By emphasizing the importance of the apocalyptic texts such as the *Revelation* and the prophetic book of Ezekiel on the iconography of the mosaic and connecting it with 1 Thessalonians, Nasrallah presented very convincing and appropriate textual basis for understanding the mosaic as a *parousia*. Unfortunately, the author did not provide detailed analyses of all the themes represented in the mosaic and sometimes gave misleading interpretations. For instance, she considered the architectural frieze to represent a church by means of palaces, though the symbolic elements of the exedras are not discussed and the furniture is assumed to be liturgical. Even if a detailed analysis of the mosaic was not the aim of Nasrallah's paper, this is important for the ultimate understanding of the iconography in the light of the textual and visual evidence that is presented.

Lately, Spieser has admitted that the mosaic could be dated to the fourth as well as the sixth century on the basis of style; the arguments in favour of each dating are both relevant and consistent.<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, he reaffirmed his dating to the sixth century, discussing the possible presence of relics pertaining to the saints represented in the architectural frieze and comparing the iconography of the dome with the *ekphrasis* of the dome of

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<sup>156</sup> SPIESER 2005, 439.

St. Sergius at Gaza. According to Spieser, the cult of the saints and their relics is a phenomenon that develops from the fifth century; thus, maintaining his belief that the church was a *martyrium* holding the relics of the saints represented in the mosaic, it should be ascribed at a late date, possibly the sixth century. However, evidence of the early development of the cult of relics can be found from the second half of the fourth century in Constantinople, where it saw a great expansion particularly following the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>157</sup> Thessaloniki was sufficiently near Constantinople to be influenced by the capital, especially if one remembers that it was an imperial city where the imperial family often stayed for long periods of time. As a result, the presence of the cult of relics is certainly possible from the fifth century onward, both at Thessaloniki and in the Rotunda. In addition, the *ekphrasis* of Choricios of Gaza, however, is still a very problematic text, as Spieser himself admits,<sup>158</sup> and does not allow any clear understanding of the dome decoration of St. Sergius. Thus, it is hard to compare it to the iconography of the dome at the Rotunda and hazardous to draw conclusions about the dating of the two monuments from this comparison.

In the end, the secondary literature on the mosaic presents no single compelling interpretation. We need to examine the architectural frieze in all its parts and in relationship to the whole decoration of the dome. The

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<sup>157</sup> In this respect, see chapter V, pp. 361-364.

<sup>158</sup> SPIESER 2005, 442.

following discussion will consider only the points that have not been examined by earlier scholarship and already outlined above; we will then put forth several new hypotheses, finally proposing a reinterpretation of the Rotunda's mosaic.

#### **4. The *orantes***

The identification of the figures standing in front of the architecture is crucial to understand the real meaning of the buildings in the lower mosaic frieze of the Rotunda. Sixteen male figures are still visible; each stands in an *orans* posture.<sup>159</sup> In four cases, they are located on both sides of the central area of each panel; in the western, north-eastern, and south-eastern panels there is a third *orans* standing in the centre.

##### **4.1 Physiognomy and garments**

Previous scholarship has analysed the physiognomy of the *orantes* and has defined the frieze as a gallery of portraits typical of late-antique

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<sup>159</sup> Unfortunately, the collapse of the eastern part of the dome led to the destruction of the eastern panel and damaged the north-eastern panel partly and the south-eastern one heavily. In the eastern side of the latter, it caused the loss of the *orans* figure, whose existence is confirmed by reason of the symmetry with the north-eastern panel where three figures are still visible.



art.<sup>160</sup> The heads of the *orantes* are depicted with vivid features as if they were real faces, showing evidence of the great skill of the artisan.<sup>161</sup>

A great variety of male figures is evident in the frieze: both young and old, bald and hairy, with short and long beards, or with none at all, and with different colours of eyes and hair.<sup>162</sup> Special attention is given on the representation of the eyes, which are big and extremely well defined. However, this attention to detail is an overall characteristic of the mosaic, and is not merely expressed in the rendering of the faces. The physiognomy of the *orantes* is extremely detailed, with portraits, faces, and precisely defined garments. The combination of physiognomy and garments distinguish the figures with a high degree of individuality.

All of the civilian *orantes* wear the *paenula*, a large, long cloak that was worn over a long tunic and covered the arms [fig. 42]. The *paenula* was the widespread civilian dress from Roman times through Late Antiquity. Originally, it was mostly used in winter or for travelling, but a law of 378 forbade the senators from wearing the *toga* and insisted instead upon the *paenula*.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 84-85; TORP 1963, 28-30; L'ORANGE 1970, 265-267; TORP 1991, 23-25. Spieser has recently noticed that the head types of the figures can be variously compared with examples from the fourth as well as from the sixth century; however this did not affect his previous sixth-century dating of the decoration (SPIESER 2005, 438-439).

<sup>161</sup> Kleinbauer outlined the naturalism and high individualism of the head type to support his view of the *orantes* as donors (KLEINBAUER 1982, 29).

<sup>162</sup> For some remarks on late-antique hairstyle, see: CROOM 2000, 66-67.

<sup>163</sup> RINALDI 1965, 231. Only later the *paenula* became an attribute of church officials (WALTER 1982, 9, 13-14; PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO 1991a, 1551; BRIZZOLARA 1992, 171; CROOM 2000, 53-54; GOLDMAN 2001, 229). For the garments worn by the *orantes* see: WIEGAND 1939; KLEINBAUER 1972, 46-47; KLEINBAUER 1982, 32-33 (with bibliography); WALTER 2003, 270, 274-275.

The soldier *orantes* wear the *chlamys*: a large cloak that covers the left arm up to the wrist and is held by a golden *fibula* at the right shoulder.<sup>164</sup> [fig. 43] It has a trapezoidal insert of a different fabric and colour in front of it, called a *tablion*.<sup>165</sup> It is worn over a short tunic tightened at the waist by a golden belt. The short tunic has rich embroidered inserts (*orbicula*, *clavi*, *scutlati*) on the right shoulder, the wrists, and on the hem.<sup>166</sup> The *orantes* do not wear any particular kind of shoes: the feet are simply covered with dark socks. The colours and details of the garments vary from person to person. The colour range of the *paenula* varies from white, to light green, to grey, to purple. All the *chlamyda* are different one from another, not only in colours, but also in their embroidery.

A few considerations about the possible dating of the mosaic can be made on the basis of the soldiers' dress. In the ivory of Styliko, dated to the fourth century, the *chlamys* is much tighter and smaller compared to the examples from the Rotunda mosaic, which seems more similar to the

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<sup>164</sup> For the *chlamys*, see: DELBRUECK 1929, 38-39; CROOM 2000, 51; LABARRE 2003, 144; WALTER 2003, 270.

<sup>165</sup> PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO 1991b, 2004; CROOM 2000, 51-53.

<sup>166</sup> For the function of the tunic as part of the roman and late-antique costume: CROOM 2000, 33-36. In the mosaic of Piazza Armerina, several examples of this kind of tunic can be found. Egypt, where the climate is more suitable to preserve textiles, has given great evidence of late-antique items with this kind of embroideries (DAUTERMANN MAGUIRE 1999, esp. 54-55 cat. no. A12, 107-108 cat. no. B12, 168-169 cat. no. C26; LORQUIN 2003). This tunic originally came from the barbarian costume and increasingly became common as part of the military dress during the Late Antiquity (SPEIDEL 1997). The embroideries are distinguished one from another according to their shape (*clavi*: vertical stripes; *orbicula*: roundels; *tabulae* or *segmenta*: squared embroideries; *scutlati*: lozenge-shaped embroideries): KALAMARA 1995, 142; DELMAIRE 2003, 95; LORQUIN 2003, 126.

large cloak in the fifth-century diptych of a patrician.<sup>167</sup> [figs. 44-45] In addition, in the sixth-century imperial panels of San Vitale in Ravenna, the dignitaries' *chlamyda* are tight and straight compared to those of the Rotunda mosaics, though they bear some similar features, such as *fibulae* and *tablia*.<sup>168</sup> [fig. 46]

The *fibulae* in the ivories recall those of the Rotunda mosaics, but the foot is much shorter and characterized by projecting elements. The *fibulae* worn by the dignitaries of San Vitale are very similar to those worn by the Rotunda figures, although the bow is much less characterized. This may depend on technical details, such as the dimensions of the *tesserae* or the size of the figures, but the overall impression is that the garments in the Rotunda mosaics are much more detailed than those of the dignitaries of San Vitale.

In both the cases, the *fibulae* seem to belong to a later stage of the crossbow group called *Zwiebelknopffibeln*, characterized by a cross-shaped body with 'onion-shaped' globes.<sup>169</sup> [fig. 47] From the fourth to the sixth century, the crossbow *fibulae* changed: the foot progressively increased in size and decoration while the crossbar decreased. In the Rotunda mosaic, red *tesserae* outline golden *fibulae*. The foot is straight and vertical, formed by a long series of *tesserae* (6-10 cubes), the bow is quite big, and circles that recall the typical globes are visible at the end of the crossbar

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<sup>167</sup> For the ivory of Stylico, see: COMPOSTELLA 1990, 78; for the Diptych of the Patrician, see: BRECKENRIDGE 1979b (with references).

<sup>168</sup> See also the dress of the *chlamidati* in the sixth century miniatures of the Rossano Gospel.

<sup>169</sup> BROWN 1979, 303-304; FACCHINI 1990, 359; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 1999, 153-156.

and bow. In the imperial panels at San Vitale, the bow is much smaller and seems to define a later stage of the *fibula*. Although it is impossible to date a mosaic on the basis of the representations of *fibulae*, the details of these pins in the Rotunda seem to point to a fifth-century dating. This is very much in keeping with the date determined by the style of the *chlamys*.

From the fourth century onwards, this kind of golden cross-shaped *fibula* was common among high dignitaries and soldiers as a status symbol.<sup>170</sup> Here, the garments, *chlamys*, golden *fibulae* and belt of the soldier *orantes* convey the image of soldiers dressed in rich official costumes. These *orantes*, identified as warriors by the inscription, even show their status of soldiers in their dress and jewellery, and are consistent with the contemporary practice of Roman and late-antique society where dress, colour and jewels were means to display one's social position and wealth.<sup>171</sup>

The fact that the soldiers' garments are so different in detail and colour forms the basis for the hypothesis that there is a certain hierarchy among them. Unfortunately, the research in this field is far from complete and it is not yet possible to define the exact hierarchy or the military class based on the colours or the embroideries of the costumes.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> OLIVER 1979, 302-303; SENA CHIESA 1990, 43; AUGENTI 1996, 129-130; STOUT 2001, 80-82.

<sup>171</sup> For the importance of garments in roman and late-antique society, see: KALAMARA 1995, 70, 139; SEBESTA 2001, 65, 70-71; STOUT 2001; DELMAIRE 2003, 85-87, 98; LABARRE 2003, 150-151.

<sup>172</sup> KALAMARA 1995, 111.

Like the soldiers wearing official garments, the civilians also seem to be dressed in ceremonial clothes. The *paenula*, in fact, covers a very long tunic, which was used either by the clergy or by laymen for special ceremonies in Late Antiquity. The length of the tunic was a means of distinguishing men from women: long tunics were considered too feminine for daily wear, but were accepted for official ceremonies.<sup>173</sup> Here, bishops and deacons are not the only ones wearing the long tunic under the *paenula*; all of the civilian *orantes* do too, expressing the formalities of an important occasion.

The garments of both the soldiers and civilian figures show that the *orantes* are participating in an important event. Their dress reflects their status: wealth and luxury are evident in the costumes. The accuracy with which the costumes are depicted, combined with the detail of the physiognomy, displays both the skill of the artisan and the importance of the *orantes*’ well-defined, specific personalities.

#### **4.2 The inscriptions:**

Each figure was originally accompanied by an inscription. The inscriptions include a name, a profession and a month; the day was omitted.<sup>174</sup> Of the sixteen figures that are still visible in the mosaic, twelve

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<sup>173</sup> KALAMARA 1995, 38-48.

<sup>174</sup> WIEGAND 1939, 116-145; KLEINBAUER 1972a, 45-46; KLEINBAUER 1982, 29-32.

retain their inscriptions entirely and three damaged inscriptions are extant.

One inscription neglects to state the *orans*'s occupation.<sup>175</sup>

Panels	Name	Inscription	Translation	Profession	Month	Dress
S/E	(missing)					
	Leo	Λέοντος  στρα(ιώτου)  μηνι  Ιουν(ίου)	'Leo soldier month June'	Soldier	June	Short tunic and <i>chlamys</i>
	Philemon	Φηλήμονος  χοραυ(λου)  μηνι  Μαρ(τίου)	'Philemon flute player month March'	Flute player	March	Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>
S	Onesiphoros	Όνησιφόρου  στρα(ιώτου) μηνι  Αυ(γούστου)	'Onesiphoros soldier month August'	Soldier	August	Short tunic and <i>chlamys</i>
	Porphyrios	Πορφορίου  μηνι  Αυ(γούστου)	'Porphyrios month August'	(servant)	August	Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>
S/W	K..	K[...] <sup>176</sup>	'K..'			Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>
	Damian	Δαμιανού  ια(τρού)  μηνι  Σε(πτεμβρίου)	'Damian doctor month September'	Doctor	September	Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>
W	(missing)					Short tunic and <i>chlamys</i>
	Romanos	Ρωμανού  πρεσβ(υτέρου) [...]	'Romanos presbyter..'	Presbyter		Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>
	Eukarpios	Εύκαρπιώνος  στρα(ιώτου) μηνι  δε(κεμβρίου)	'Eucarpion soldier month December'	Soldier	December	Short tunic and <i>chlamys</i>
N/W	A..	A[...]  δ[.....] <sup>177</sup>				Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>
	Ananias	Άνανίου  πρεσβ(υτέρου) μηνι  Ιανου(αρίου)	'Ananias presbyter month January'	Presbyter	January	Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>
N	Basiliskos.	Βασιλίσκου  στρα(ιώτου) μηνι  Απρι(λίου)	'Basiliskos soldier month April'	Soldier	April	Short tunic and <i>chlamys</i>
	Priskos	Πρίσκου  στρα(ιώτου)  μηνι  Όκτω(βρίου)	'Priskos soldier month October'	Soldier	October	Short tunic and <i>chlamys</i>
N/E	Cyrrillos	Κυρίλλου  επ(ισκ(όπου)  μηνι  Ιουλ(ίου)	'Cyrrillos bishop month July'	bishop	July	Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>
	Therinos	Θερινού  στρα(ιώτου)  μηνι  Ιουλ(ίου)	'Therinos soldier month July'	Soldier	July	Short tunic and <i>chlamys</i>
	Philippos	Φιλίππου  επ(ισκ(όπου)  μηνι  Όκτω(βρίου)	'Philippos bishop month October'	bishop	October	Long tunic and <i>paenula</i>

Table 1: The inscriptions (according to FEISSEL 1983) and their position within the mosaic.

<sup>175</sup> In the southern panel the figure dressed in purple *paenula* is named Porphyrios, his inscription reports only the month omitting the profession. The absence of the profession could be explained by a mistake of the artist, however a mistake in such a highly skilled mosaic is rather difficult to be admitted.

<sup>176</sup> This reading follows GOUNARIS 1972.

<sup>177</sup> This reading follows GOUNARIS 1972.

Several attempts have been made to identify the *orantes* as martyrs on the basis of their names.<sup>178</sup> No one, however, has successfully identified all the figures, a calendar from whence they could be derived, or the reason why they are present in the mosaic. The inscription of the names obviously serves as to identify the people represented; this is reinforced by the indication of the profession, which is a social datum. Listing the profession is unusual. Normally it occurs on *stelae*.<sup>179</sup> This might suggest that the *orantes* are commemorative portraits, functioning as memorials to the dead. Alternatively, the designer of the mosaic may have felt the need to affirm the position of the persons represented within the society. It is an important datum in that it stresses the role of a particular person in his life time. To state the social role is to stress the earthly origins of the *orantes*.

The indication of the month without the accompanying day of commemoration has resulted in a considerable amount of discussion and cannot find any new explanations here. By means of his ‘calendar theory,’ Wiegand has attempted to identify the figures as martyr saints inserted into a church calendar.<sup>180</sup> Unfortunately, not all the months are represented, though there are more than twelve figures. In addition, the months are not presented in chronological order. There has been much discussion of the pertinence of the names of the saints to a particular church calendar. A

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<sup>178</sup> WIEGAND 1939; SPIESER 1984, 154-156.

<sup>179</sup> This point was stressed by Kleinbauer in order to support the identification of the *orantes* as donors (KLEINBAUER 1982, 34-35, 38).

<sup>180</sup> WIEGAND 1939.

study of the names of the *orantes* has identified the figures as saints coming from different regions of the Mediterranean rather than from a specific area.<sup>181</sup> Different sources give different dates of commemoration, and the Rotunda's *orantes* follow no surviving calendar. Apparently, the group of *orantes* represented here has not been borrowed from any known church calendar.

Attempts to identify the figures have failed similarly. Nevertheless, the *orantes* in the architectural frieze had always been considered as martyrs until 1982, with Kleinbauer's hypothesis that they could be donors.<sup>182</sup> His interpretation is of particular interest; however, it does not solve all the problems of the inscriptions. If the figures of the mosaic were martyr saints, the absence of the day beside the month of commemoration is hard to explain. However, if the *orantes* were just donors, the presence of the month is not understandable, unless it is an unparalleled record of the month of donation. Kleinbauer's identification of the *orantes* as donors is interesting, but there is little supporting evidence. The more plausible identification is that of the *orantes* as martyr saints.

On the south-eastern panel, Philemon is identified as a flute player [fig. 31]. This is a very strange profession. Why a member of such a humble profession should be remembered on the dome of a church is problematic. It is improbable that a flute player would have been rich

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<sup>181</sup> SPIESER 1984, 156.

<sup>182</sup> For an interpretation of the *orantes* as martyrs-saints: WIEGAND 1939, 116-145; TORP 1963, 26-30; GRABAR 1967, 75-76; L'ORANGE 1970, 265-267; KLEINBAUER 1972a, 44-58; FEISSEL 1983, 249-250; TORP 2002a, 24-26; WALTER 2003, 275 (in regards to the soldier martyrs). For an interpretations of the *orantes* as donors: KLEINBAUER 1982, 25-45.



enough to be a donor. However, a martyr saint named Philemon is known. He was an Egyptian musician. After he met the monk Apollonius, he decided to embrace Christianity and was martyred at the beginning of the fourth century, during Diocletian's persecutions in Egypt.<sup>183</sup> According to some traditions, Philemon was commemorated in March.<sup>184</sup> Since March is reported on the inscription beside him in the Rotunda, one can safely assume that the *orans* represents the holy martyr Philemon.

Other evidence points to the identification of the figures as martyr saints as well. In the southern panel, two figures named Onesiphoros and Porphyrios stand [figs.48-49]. It is known that two martyr saints named Onesiphoros and Porphyrios left their hometown, Ephesos or Ikonios, to follow St. Paul on his trips in the first century.<sup>185</sup> There is no mention that Onesiphoros was a soldier; his profession is unknown.<sup>186</sup> Porphyrios was Onesiphoros' servant. They were commemorated together on the same day: either the 9<sup>th</sup> of November or the 16<sup>th</sup> of July.<sup>187</sup> However, the Rotunda inscription records the month of August for both. They are located in the same panel: they seem to be associated as the martyr saints bearing their name. Porphyrios is the only *orans* whose inscription does not

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<sup>183</sup> LUCCHESI 1964, 697-700. This was already noticed by Wiegand and Spieser (WIEGAND 1939, 128; SPIESER 1984, 155).

<sup>184</sup> In the Roman *martyrologium* Philemon was commemorated the 8<sup>th</sup> of March (GOUNARIS 1972, 213; FEISSEL 1983, 104). Spieser has recently noticed that also in the Arab calendar the saint was commemorated in March (SPIESER 2005, 440: with references).

<sup>185</sup> SAUGET 1967, 1178-1179: in the New Testament their hometown is Ephesus (2 *Tim.* 1, 16-18); while according to the *Synaxarium Constantinopolitanum*, they come from Iconius (*Syn Const.*, cc. 821-822 l. 56, 823-824 n.1, 825-826 ll. 56-57, 1026).

<sup>186</sup> WALTER 2003, 275.

<sup>187</sup> BHG, III suppl., 56 n. 2325.

mention his profession. If he was the servant of Onesiphoros, the word *δοῦλος* (servant) would have been pleonastic in the context of a church mosaic representing *orantes*, for all the Christians and especially the pious *orantes* are considered as servants of Christ. We may conclude that Porphyrios' occupation is not expressed in the mosaic because the state of being a servant is conceived only as 'servant of God' in a Christian context.<sup>188</sup> Again, the connections of the martyr saints named Onesiphoros and Porphyrios with the *orantes* bearing these names seem to point to the identification of the figures of the mosaic as martyr saints.

The *orantes* of the south-western panel have always been interpreted as the legendary doctor saints Kosmas and Damian: one of the figures is named Damianos [fig. 42]. In the inscription he is reported as a doctor and associated with the month of September. Unfortunately, the inscription of the other figure was destroyed and only part of the initial K is still visible. Both the *orantes* are bearded and dressed in *paenula*: these features are typical of the iconography of Kosmas and Damian from the sixth century onwards. Presumably, the couple represents the famous *anargyroi*, the doctor saints martyred under the persecution of Diocletian.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, Damian is associated with the month

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<sup>188</sup> LAMPE 1995, 385 (*δοῦλος*, B.2): 'servant' said of Christians as servants of God or Christ. Gounaris states that the absence of Porphyrios' profession should be attributed to his condition of being a servant (GOUNARIS 1972, 215). In Christian inscriptions, the word *δοῦλος* was not used to state the condition of slavery, which was contrary to the Christian belief, rather as an attribute to express devotion to God. With reference to the case of Rome: PIETRI 1985, 241-242; PIETRI 1997, 180-181; CARLETTI 1997, 152. For the condition of slavery in the Byzantine world: KAZHDAN 1985, 218-222.

<sup>189</sup> CARAFFA 1964, 224.

September, when the doctor saints were commemorated in the Roman *Martyrologium*.<sup>190</sup> It is thus not only possible for one to assume that the *orantes* are martyr saints, in most cases it is also possible to draw connections between the figures of each panel.

In the western panel, Romanos and Eukarpios are joined with a third soldier saint whose inscription has vanished. Romanos has been identified with a priest martyred at Antioch under Galerius.<sup>191</sup> Eukarpios can be associated with a soldier martyred at Nikomedia under Diocletian.<sup>192</sup> [fig. 43] One of the dates of commemoration of the saint is December 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>193</sup> Thus, the figure in the mosaic is likely to be the martyr St. Eukarpios. He suffered martyrdom with another soldier called Trophimos, who is probably the other figure wearing the *chlamys* in the panel. If so, the martyrs of the panel are grouped because of their martyrdom by fire. Eukarpios and Trophimos were burned to death; Romanos is commonly thought to have been sentenced to death by fire, though in some traditions he was jailed after suffering terrible torture.<sup>194</sup>

In the north-western panel, the priest Ananias is probably meant to be identified with a martyr from Phoenicia, martyred during the

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<sup>190</sup> In the Roman *Martyrologium* saints Cosmas and Damian were celebrated the 27<sup>th</sup> of September. As it has been already said, the mosaic does not follow any church calendar, but in this case probably it respects a custom that later was recorded in the Roman *Martyrologium*. According to Gounaris, before the Iconoclasm Thessaloniki was under the religious control of the Roman church, however the inscriptions of the Rotunda seem to be influenced by several different traditions (DANIELOU AND MARROU 1964, 392; GOUNARIS 1999, 274).

<sup>191</sup> WIEGAND 1939; SPIESIER 1984b, 154.

<sup>192</sup> SAUGET 1969b, 674; FEISSEL 1983, 106. According to Walter, he was persecuted under Aurelius Probus (WALTER 2003, 275).

<sup>193</sup> This date is reported by the *Martyrologium Hieronimianum* (SAUGET 1969b, 674).

<sup>194</sup> DELEHAYE 1932, 241-283; HALKIN 1961, 14 n. 3; SAUGET 1968, 338-342.

Diocletianic persecutions.<sup>195</sup> The dates of commemoration of this saint at Constantinople were the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> of January. A few saint deacons and presbyters called Ananias are known, however the identification of this figure with the priest from Phoenicia seems plausible. Unfortunately, the inscription of the other figure of the panel is completely lost and any connection between the two *orantes*, both wearing *paenula*, is impossible to determine.<sup>196</sup>

Basiliskos and Priskos appear in the northern panel [figs. 50-51]. Basiliskos is a soldier saint known as a relative of the warrior St. Theodore of Tiron. According to one tradition, he was beheaded in 312 in Comana.<sup>197</sup> In the *Martyrologium Ieronimianum*, the date of the saint's commemoration was April 30<sup>th</sup>.<sup>198</sup> There are a few soldier saints named Priskos. Priskos was one of the soldiers in charge of capturing St. Mamas at Caesarea in Cappadocia during the Aurelian persecutions; he was converted to Christianity by the saint.<sup>199</sup> Another Priskos was a soldier martyred at Capua.<sup>200</sup> Still another is remembered among the martyrs of Sebaste.<sup>201</sup> In no case does the month of commemoration of the saint seem to be October. The Priskos who was among the followers of St. Mamas was beheaded, as was Basiliskos, the other figure standing in the north

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<sup>195</sup> FEISSEL 1983, 107; SPIESIER 1984b, 154.

<sup>196</sup> Gounaris identified him as saint Arcadius, reading one *A* and one *Δ* in the inscription (GOUNARIS 1972, p. 207).

<sup>197</sup> GORDINI 1964a, 54-55.

<sup>198</sup> FEISSEL 1983, 107.

<sup>199</sup> CIGNITTI 1966, 600.

<sup>200</sup> AMBRASI 1968, 1114-1116.

<sup>201</sup> AMORE 1968, 768-771.

panel. If the *orans* of the mosaic was identified with the martyr of Caesarea in Cappadocia, then he could be associated with Basiliskos because of the martyrdom. As in the western panel, the form of the martyrdom could again be the reason since the two martyrs are located in the same panel: both were warrior saints and both died by beheading.

The martyrs Philippos, Therinos and Cyrillos are represented in the north-eastern panel [figs. 24-25]. Philippos is the name of three bishops. One is recorded as a third-century bishop of Antioch who was commemorated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March.<sup>202</sup> Another was bishop of Gortina under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.<sup>203</sup> Another Philippos was the bishop of Adrianopolis and was beheaded under Diocletian.<sup>204</sup> He was commemorated in October as was the Philippos represented in the mosaic. The figure therefore probably represents him.

In the inscription, Therinos is said to be a soldier. Unfortunately there is no mention of a warrior saint named Therinos.<sup>205</sup> A Therinos was commemorated on May 6<sup>th</sup> with St. Demetrios and on April 23<sup>rd</sup> with St. George.<sup>206</sup> This Therinos was thus associated with two of the major warrior saints, and may either have been a soldier saint or have become one by association. The inscription of the month of July does not confirm this, though it might follow a lost tradition.

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<sup>202</sup> SAUGET 1964, 726.

<sup>203</sup> SFAIR 1964, 722.

<sup>204</sup> GORDINI 1964b, 756-758.

<sup>205</sup> GOUNARIS 1972, 211; WALTER 2003, 275.

<sup>206</sup> These dates of commemoration are recorded by the *Syn. Const.*: SAUGET 1969a, 429-430.

There are two mentions of a bishop Cyrillos whose date of commemoration was in July.<sup>207</sup> One was the bishop of Gortina in Crete, martyred under Diocletian and Maximian. The other was a bishop of Antioch who was condemned *ad minas* and died in 306. The identification of Cyrillos with the bishop of Gortina is reinforced by the fact that Cyrillos of Gortina was beheaded, as was Philippos, the other bishop in the panel. Although nothing is known about the martyrdom of Therinos, the presence of Cyrillos and Philippos together suggests that the saints of the north-eastern panel were so grouped because for their martyrdom by being beheaded.

There is no mention of a soldier saint named Leo,<sup>208</sup> though it is known that a St. Leo was commemorated in June.<sup>209</sup> [fig. 54] He suffered martyrdom in the third century, being dragged behind a horse. Philemon, the other martyr represented in the south-eastern panel, suffered the same martyrdom. Thus, the method of martyrdom seems again to justify the grouping of saints in each panel.

Based on this evidence, the figures can be identified as saints who were martyred, largely during the persecutions. In each panel of the mosaic, the martyrs seem to be grouped according to their cause of death. This has never been argued before; however, it seems to have been

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<sup>207</sup> Gounaris, Feissel, and Spiesier read 'July' beside the month in the inscription (GOUNARIS 1972, 211; FEISSEL 1983, 109; SPIESIER 1984b, 155).

<sup>208</sup> GOUNARIS 1972, 212; SPIESIER 1984b, 155; WALTER 2003, 275.

<sup>209</sup> LUCCHESI 1966, 1306-1307.

confirmed by the preceding survey.<sup>210</sup> It must be reiterated that the month reported in the inscriptions does not always correspond with the month of commemoration of the martyr; when it does, it does not seem to follow a specific church calendar.<sup>211</sup> This may be due to the fact that different, lost accounts of the saints' lives were depicted in the mosaic. Unfortunately, until the middle of the fifth century very little of the history of Thessaloniki is known. Perhaps a better knowledge of the history of the city could cast a new light on the choice of the martyrs represented in the mosaic.

On the basis of palaeography, the inscriptions have been carefully studied by Gounaris and Feissel.<sup>212</sup> While Gounaris has strongly opposed Wiegand's palaeographical analysis and dated the mosaic to the end of the fourth century, Feissel has argued that the palaeographical analysis points toward a fifth or sixth century dating and dismisses any earlier date. Nowadays, the role of palaeography in dating inscriptions has been generally discarded. Apparently Byzantine epigraphic script did not change substantially from the third until the ninth century.<sup>213</sup> Thus, the dating of the mosaic should follow a different method of interpretation. In addition to the identification of the figures and a possible reason for their grouping

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<sup>210</sup> However a deeper study would be suitable. This should take into account a comparison between the different traditions of the saints' lives and the original texts.

<sup>211</sup> According to Feissel, the dates of commemoration correspond in two cases with the *synaxarium* of Constantinople and in six cases with the *Martyrologium Romanum*, however the predominant influence of one church calendar cannot be stated (FEISSEL 1983, 109-110).

<sup>212</sup> GOUNARIS 1972; FEISSEL 1983, 103-110, 249-250.

<sup>213</sup> MANGO 1991, 242; CAVALLO 1999, 130.

– which finds no parallel in Late Antiquity – the role of the *orantes* within the composition should be clarified. In this respect, their posture and location can provide further evidence and a possible explanation for their presence in the mosaic.

#### **4.3 Posture and location:**

All of the figures stand upright. They raise their arms with palms stretched upwards, praying. Their pose is that of *orantes*.<sup>214</sup> The figure of the *orans* is common from Roman times through Late Antiquity and indicates devotion and prayer.<sup>215</sup> Here, the image is that of faithful people praying.

All of the figures are in a frontal position except for those in the northern and southern panels, whose heads are slightly turned towards the centre of the composition, where the cross stands under the canopy. The eyes of the *orantes* are all looking up, as if they were gazing towards the medallion at the apex of the dome. The slight movement of the heads of the figures of the southern and northern panels, however, expresses their attention to the cross.

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<sup>214</sup> As it has been underlined by KLEINBAUER 1982, 28-29.

<sup>215</sup> LECLERCQ 1936, 2291-2322; BISCONTI 1980; CARR 1991, 1531; BISCONTI 2000a, 235-236.



None of the figures is located inside the buildings.<sup>216</sup> They are standing outside, in front of the platforms from which the architecture arises, on a different, lower ground. They are all standing on a narrow silver stripe, which delimits the space between the platforms and the lower limit of the panel, or on a separate silver step. There are two *orantes* in the panels with a canopy in the middle that flank either side of the central area, standing on a silver step beneath the level of the architecture. In the western, north-eastern, and south-eastern panels there are three saints: two on the each side of the central area and one in the middle, on an axis aligned with the centre of the architecture above. In those panels, the space between the building and the lower moulding of the frieze is so narrow that the central figure's feet stand on the moulding; The figures never stand directly on the buildings' platforms.

The dimensions of the *orantes* appear to be of little significance compared to the whole of the panels. While the panels are more than 4 metres high, the height of the figures is around 1.80 metre.<sup>217</sup> Thus, the figures occupy not even one third of the height of the panels. This could be considered an attempt of the mosaicist to reproduce a realistic scene, as people are usually much smaller than buildings. However their dimensions compared to the whole of the panels allow the buildings to stand out from

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<sup>216</sup> About the original location of Romanos, see discussion above and TORP 2002b, 24-26.

<sup>217</sup> This data were kindly provided by Thomi Kakagianni, drawer of the Byzantine Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquity of Thessaloniki, who is working at the present restoration of the dome mosaic. They differ from those presented by L'Orange and Torp, for whom the panels were some 8 meters high, while the height of the figures varied from 2,28 to 2,42 m (L'ORANGE 1970, 263; TORP 1963, 32).

the background and dominate the scenes. Each scene seems completely dominated by the architecture, which fills almost the whole of each panel. Therefore, the *orantes* do not appear to be the subject matter of the panels; as we have already observed, the real protagonists are the buildings with the exedra at the centre.

Following these considerations, the figures appear to be important primarily in respect to their relationship to the buildings. They do not have the right to enter the magnificent architecture behind them, nor are they ever inserted into the architectural backdrop. They stand outside, perhaps praying to be admitted, or praying for the admission of someone else.

The indication of their names and occupations, and their roles as soldiers and civilians, shines light on their specific earthly role and defines a certain connection to the earthly dimension. The indication of the profession is pleonastic:<sup>218</sup> adding such a datum, the *orantes* as martyr saints would be remembered both for their role on earth and for their role as martyrs. They are thus representatives of a particular model of holy, pious men. Although their earthly role is still remembered, and is indicated by the inscriptions, they are represented on the dome mosaic, a privileged position within the church decoration that symbolizes the sky and the world of God.<sup>219</sup> Their *orantes* pose points towards an identification of the environment as a heavenly setting, marked by the sheer brightness of the buildings.

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<sup>218</sup> According to Kleinbauer, as martyrs there was no need to stress their profession (KLEINBAUER 1982, 35).

<sup>219</sup> BALDWIN-SMITH 1950, 61-94; LEHMANN 1945; GRABAR 1982.

Beside these considerations, it should be noted that the number of soldiers portrayed in the mosaic is extremely high. Of the sixteen figures visible in the mosaics, at least six, and probably seven, are soldiers. All wear the *chlamys*, and six of them are certainly identified as soldiers in the inscriptions.<sup>220</sup> It is peculiar that such a large percentage of the figures are soldiers, whose garments bear different colours and details probably as evidence of different ranks or military positions. They are present in each panel, except for the south- and north-western panels, where two civilians flank the empty throne. The soldier *orantes* occupy a special position within each panel: in the north- and south-eastern panels, they are located at the centre on the axis formed by the medallion of Christ on the pediment of the architecture above; in the northern panel, they flank the cross; in the southern panel, only one of them is present and he flanks the cross; in the western panel, they stand at each side of the central apse. It seems that the soldier saints flank the central area of the panels in order to protect the important event that is taking place at the centre of the scenes. Their presence under the pediment with the risen Christ in glory seems to emphasize the importance of that theme.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Among the *orantes* whose indications of profession are still visible, one can count one flute player (Philemon, in the south-eastern panel), one physician (Damianos, in the south-western panel), two presbyters (Romanos, in the western panel; Ananias, in the north-western panel), two bishops (Philippos and Kyrillos, both in the north-eastern panel): such an high presence of soldiers is striking.

<sup>221</sup> As in the case of the cross, symbol of the victory of Christ, the theme of Christ risen in glory leads to a particular symbolism where imperial representations of victory merge with Christianity, making Christ the powerful *victor* for excellence (LECHNER 1978).

For the third-century Roman army, Simon James points out that what symbolized the military status was ‘the waist-belt, the sword on a baldric, and the cloak-brooch.’<sup>222</sup> This is still visible in the fourth-century ivory of Styliko, where the same combination of elements identifies the dignitary. In the mosaic, the soldiers are not equipped with swords: there is no evidence of weapon., though one could be hidden by the *chlamys*. This seems to point to a later dating for the mosaic, possibly the fifth century.

The representation of the figures as soldiers could have a symbolic meaning. Here the soldiers are dressed as high dignitaries and their garments demonstrate a considerable amount of wealth and luxury. This could be the consequence of an increased importance of the social meaning of the soldier within a society that was more and more militarised. As a result of the continuous threat felt by the frontiers of the empire, soldiers acquired an increasingly important role within the society and reached high positions, especially during the fifth and sixth centuries. The soldiers represented in the mosaic are warrior saints.<sup>223</sup> As in earthly society, the soldiers occupied an eminently high status; the warrior saint had an enormous importance within the heavenly court of God, becoming the great force of the *militia Christi*.<sup>224</sup> The representation of the warrior saints in the Rotunda mosaic reflects their earthly identity, as is seen in the inscription, as well as their heavenly identity: they dress as high dignitaries

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<sup>222</sup> JAMES S. 1999, 21.

<sup>223</sup> For the importance of the warrior saint as ‘symbol of a way of being both Christian and saint’ within the late-antique and Byzantine society, with developments in the imperial ideology, see: ORSELLI 1993.

<sup>224</sup> WALTER 2003, 31-32.

displaying their high status and they are located in proximity to the centre of each panel, protecting the Christian symbols represented there.

## **5. The buildings**

The lowest frieze of the Rotunda mosaics is decorated by a series of panels that are all dominated by luxurious and bright architecture. Originally, eight panels formed the frieze. Now the eastern one is missing, and only seven panels are extant, some of them quite damaged.

The panels all present the same broad composition: a building arises from a *podium* (platform) in front of which two or three *orantes* stand. All the architecture has the same broad structure: they are two-storeyed buildings with a central element – a pediment or a ciborium covered by a circular or polygonal dome – that is surrounded with lateral aisles [figs. 30-36].

Although all the buildings are similar to each other, they can be grouped in pairs of two: dividing the circle of the Rotunda on an ideal east-west axis, the panels on one side reproduce the architectural composition of the opposite panels.<sup>225</sup> With only seven panels extant, this is true for six of them; the westernmost panel is the exception and would have faced the missing one on the eastern side. The eastern panel probably bore a

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<sup>225</sup> This point has been underlined also by GRABAR 1967, 69.

composition analogous to its western counterpart:<sup>226</sup> however, while this is likely, the analysis of the frieze should be carried out based only on the evidence left, since conclusions can not be drawn about what is no longer visible.

## **5.1 Description**

Above the sanctuary of the church, the panels on both sides of the missing eastern section are dominated by two analogous buildings with a central pediment raised on a few steps, above which a domical structure is supported by columns [figs. 30-31]. This central structure is surrounded by two aisles: on the ground level, both seem to be constituted by two projecting porticoes, above which there is another portico with a pediment on the top.

In the panels to the west, a central canopy covered by a hexagonal dome protects a jewelled cross. The cross is inserted into an apse decorated with peacocks' feathers [figs. 32-33]. A sort of balcony covered by a central pediment is visible above it. An arched portico surrounds the apse. On the top of both its ends, a canopy-like circular structure stands on four columns.

The central area of the panels next to the westernmost example is decorated with a circular ciborium, covering an empty throne placed on

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<sup>226</sup> Torp claimed that the missing panel bore the same composition that is still visible on the opposite panel on the west: on the bases of the evidence left this is probable. Nevertheless lacking a close up analysis, such as x-ray of the eastern area of the frieze, it is not possible to claim it (TORP 2002a, 13).

three steps; a closed book lies upon it [figs. 34-35]. The ciborium is located at the centre of a court with a central pediment flanked by porticoes and columned structures projecting out. Above it, there is a balcony with a central apse flanked by two protruding arched structures.

Although the central part of the western panel is highly damaged, a very elaborate building is visible [fig. 36]. In the centre, an apse is surrounded by a semicircular portico; above the portico, there are one or two storeys topped with a large vault. Two superimposed porticoes flank this main structure, the lowest one ends in a pediment and the higher ends in a barrel vault.

## **5.2 Building structures and visual rendering**

The panels convey an overall impression of great magnificence and splendour. This is mostly due to the greatness of the architectonic elements that form the buildings and to the careful use of colour.

Columns and arches are encrusted in pearls and gems; capitals and cornices appear to be sculpted in relief, projecting outward [figs. 50, 51, 55, 56]. Sometimes the portico roofs appear between the columns, showing the skilful carved decoration. Great attention is expressed in the rendering of even the smallest details, as if the panels were to be seen from close by and not from the ground of the building.

A pervading bright light makes the panels shine, conveying the impression that all is pervaded by gold.<sup>227</sup> While the background of the panels is golden – a mix of silver and golden *tesserae* are used to create this effect – the buildings' features are rendered with red, orange, blue, green, brown, grey and white *tesserae* in a wide range of shades. Golden *tesserae* are mixed with other colours to make the elements in the foreground shine. There is almost no use of gold *tesserae* for the elements conceived as to be in the background, however; indeed, the shadows of the architecture are rendered in yellow, green, red, brown and blue.<sup>228</sup> The sunlight has a profound effect on the mosaic and its colours, causing a bizarre play between light and shade. The golden elements in the foreground shine when the light of the sun enters the church, but they are very dark when there is no sunlight. When is dark, the *tesserae* in the background reflect the small amount of light present in the church and shine. What elements appear in the foreground and the background therefore depend on the lighting. This continuous play of light and careful use of colours allows the elements of the mosaic to shift from the foreground to the background, depending on the light, creating movement in the panels.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Recently Iliadis has shown that the dome of the Rotunda was enlighten by natural light coming from the windows at the base of the dome and reflected on the mosaic by the marble revetment of the window-sills (ILIADIS 2001 and ILIADIS 2005).

<sup>228</sup> As Torp and L'Orange underlined (L'ORANGE 1970, 264-265).

<sup>229</sup> The close up view of the mosaics and the information provided by Themis Kakagianni made these considerations possible.



Elements such as columns, vaults, and domes here combine to form the architecture of large buildings. The structures of the buildings are organized in blocks. Rows of columns that support straight cornices or arcades form porticoes or support domed structures that in turn form apses and domes. All of these architectonic structures – including porticoes, domes and apses – are arranged in blocks to form the buildings. Basically, each architectonic block is comprised of a front section with a mix of gold and colourful *tesserae*, and of a lateral section where there is no trace of golden *tesserae* since it is supposed to be in the shade. Here the light and shade divide the architectonic structures and convey the idea that the elements in the foreground have a development in the background. Generally, a central structure in every panel is surrounded or flanked by porticoes that, due to the shadows, appear as if they project outward. The panel composition therefore expresses a spatial development.

The same intention to recreate spatial development is evident in all the panels and in every part of the buildings. Nevertheless, the careful analysis of the relationship between the various architectonic blocks that form each building sheds light on structural problems.

The structures of the second storeys hardly combine with those below. For instance, in the north- and south-western panels, the columns of the porticos on both the sides of the second floor appear to float in the air; one is supported by a portico and another rests on a column of first

floor.<sup>230</sup> The real connection between the first and the second floor is hard to understand, as the second floor is built over the first floor without the building collapsing. This can hardly be attributed to a mistake of the artist, for it is repeated also in other panels; in addition, an artist capable of reproducing the spatial development of an architectonic structure with elaborate shadows would hardly have made such a mistake. The transition from one architectonic block in the mosaic to another does not correspond to an architectonic space that is conceivable in reality. As the porticoes seem to float in the air, so do the second storeys. In a close up analysis, the architectonic blocks merely lay one beside another, without reproducing real buildings and without real spatial development. Due to the inner incoherence of the structures, the various architectonic elements seem to be different parts of the same building; they here connect to give a comprehensive impression of the whole building. These structural problems lead to a crucial point: how the buildings were conceived and how they were meant to be perceived.

The two-storeyed buildings are meant to be represented here with all of their major architectonic elements. The artist intends to convey the comprehensive idea of buildings with spatial development both in depth and in height. All of the blocks that make up the buildings are connected so that the various part of the building may be understood within the space of the panel. The constructions that are represented were likely intended to be

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<sup>230</sup> The same incoherence can be seen in the north-eastern, south-eastern, and western panels.

two-storeyed buildings; the artist could have otherwise reproduced just one floor. The second floor of the buildings creates structural problems in where it joins the first floor, for the aim of the artist was not to depict a building as it was, but to emphasize the greatness of the entire building within the limited space of the panel. For this reason, there is a pervading ambiguity between the inside and outside views. In the buildings, the inner and outer architectonic structures are mixed in order to convey a comprehensive representation of the building itself. The intention here is to reproduce all the parts of a building without conveying its exact spatial orientation.

The spatial rendering and the comprehensive representation suggest the intention of creating a third dimension. However, the impression of a second dimension is still present in the overall composition, perhaps because the perspective technique was not sufficiently developed. The attempt to express the depth by means of shadows gives evidence of the mastery of the artist. The attempt to create a third dimension is valuable in that it was intended to convey the idea of a great space occupied by the buildings. The architecture is meant to continue in the background, probably expanding into the green areas, as seems clear from the tree branches that are visible through the lateral aisles and on the top of the building in the western panel.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> The tree braches are made of vivid-green cubes and contoured with a row of blue cubes.

As a result, the buildings cannot be defined as simple facades. The shadows create a sense of movement for the buildings and the impression of depth in the foreground. Torp's definition of the architecture as *scenae frons* is therefore not exact:<sup>232</sup> the theatre *scenae frons* is just a sculptured façade, with movement caused by projecting elements. The intention here is to portray architecture with spatial development in height and depth. Moreover, the abundance of domes, apses, and porticoes extends beyond the architectonic concept of a church building, especially of that of a basilica, the most common church building until the sixth century. The multiplication of these elements in the mosaic can be hardly conceived as part of one lone church building; rather, it points to the tradition of great late-antique palace architecture, with its abundance of domes, apses, and porticoes, architectonic and conceptual spaces where the imperial ceremonial was performed.<sup>233</sup>

### 5.3 Elements of the architecture

The buildings' decoration provide elements to define their meaning and function. It also hints at a possible dating of the mosaic, a question that is still largely debated. The precision of the architecture decoration cannot

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<sup>232</sup> TORP 1955 and TORP 2002b.

<sup>233</sup> In a study on the late-antique palace architecture, Baldini Lippolis outlined the importance of longitudinal processional axes and the multiplication of architectonic structures as apses, domes, and porticoes, features that can be explained in the light of the development of court ceremony (BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 109-113).

find a complete analysis here. This is primarily because there is little evidence for comparison; secondly for the sake of brevity. We will therefore limit the discussion to a few elements that are useful for the comprehension of the nature of the buildings.

One of the most interesting features of the architecture is the richness of the columns [fig. 55]. Due to the high occurrence of this architectural element, the buildings could in fact be defined as ‘columned architecture.’ Columns with vertical or spiral fluting predominate in the mosaics. They are widespread elements of the monumental architecture that is seen from Roman times onwards.

One important feature is the presence of several kinds of encrusted columns, located in different positions on the first storey of the buildings.<sup>234</sup> The jewelled columns have smooth flutes and rows of pearls and jewels alternating with a clear surface, or rows of jewels alternating with a gemmed flower at the centre of a clear area. In every case, the flute of the column has large and smooth clear areas.

In late-antique art and architecture, jewelled and encrusted columns are common especially from the sixth century onwards. The so-called Ariadne ivory, dated around the first decades of the sixth century, seems to present a more elaborate case: there jewelled crowns are dispersed along a column with vertical fluting.<sup>235</sup> [figs. 57-58] In Ravenna, the sixth-century

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<sup>234</sup> Two typologies are present in the south-and north-eastern panel; three typologies in the south- and north-western; two typologies in the western panel.

<sup>235</sup> One of the ‘twin’ ivories of Ariadne is held at the *Kunsthistorische* Museum at Wien and the other one at the Bargello Museum in Florence (BRECKENRIDGE 1979a).

mosaics of San Vitale can serve as another reference [fig. 37]. There, the flute is completely covered by pearls and gems. The surface of the columns disappears under the rich work of jewels. The columns of the mosaics in Ravenna evidently represent a later stage. The flutes of two columns from the sixth-century churches of Hagios Polyeuktos (524-527) and Hagia Euphemia, now at the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul, are completely covered in inlaid marble;<sup>236</sup> [fig. 59] so are the columns represented in the sixth-century mosaic decoration of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. It seems that a sort of *horror vacui* progressively produced items completely clad in gems and precious metals. The encrusted columns of the Rotunda's mosaic can perhaps be linked to the images of Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the mosaic of Sta. Maria Maggiore at Rome, dating 432-440 [figs. 86-87]. The jewelled towers and walls of the two cities, with large clear golden areas occupied by scattered stones, recall the encrusted columns of the Rotunda. The conception of the vertical elements is the same in both the mosaics; as if the columns in the Rotunda's buildings had taken the place of the city towers of Sta. Maria Maggiore. In addition, the jewelled towers of Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the mosaic of the triumphal arch in San Vitale in Ravenna are completely covered in gems, like the previously mentioned mosaic columns of San Vitale. They thus represent a different stage of development in respect to the mosaic of the Rotunda [figs. 60-61]. Based

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<sup>236</sup> KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 222 figg. 178-179; HARRISON 1986, 411, figg. 138-140: the inlaid columns of Hagios Polyeuktos are interpreted as part of the ciborium.

on these few examples, the columns of the Rotunda's mosaics seem to belong to an earlier period, possibly to the fifth century.

The shell theme is largely used to decorate small pediments and arches in the architecture of the buildings.<sup>237</sup> A larger example is visible on the apse at the centre of the upper storey of the north- and south-eastern panel. There, its position is upside down compared to the other shells and recalls the shell-shaped mosaic in the lower areas of the dome in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia and the niche of the sixth-century panel of Theodora in San Vitale at Ravenna [fig. 37]. The shape of the inner shell in the Rotunda example is rounder than those from Ravenna, and echoes the shell-shaped niches in the fourth-century 'sarcophagus of the two brothers' at the Vatican.<sup>238</sup> Shell-shaped niches are widespread in funerary art: in the niches of the fourth-century sarcophagus now at San Francesco in Ravenna, for instance [fig. 62].

Nevertheless, the shell-shaped apse of the Rotunda mosaic is upside down. A similar example can be seen in the dome mosaic of the Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna (mid-fifth century) [fig. 63]. There, the shell shaped apse is inserted in a small exedra that strongly recalls the buildings represented in the Rotunda's frieze. In the Orthodox baptistery, the shell-shaped apse covers an empty throne that is located just above the pediment with Christ risen in glory. In both cases, the apse is located in the proximity of elements with high symbolic importance: it is not only a

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<sup>237</sup> Shells can be seen on the pediments and arches at the side of the south- and north-eastern panel, and on the arches of the south- and north-western panel.

<sup>238</sup> It is held at the Museo Pio Cristiano at the Vatican City.

decorative element, but is rather a symbol of honour recalling the vault of the sky in its form and adds a particular value to the element standing below. The artistic conception of the shell-shaped vault can be directly compared to the previously mentioned examples of fifth- and sixth-century imperial art of Ravenna, and finds a strong parallel in the fifth-century decoration of the Orthodox baptistery. However, its style, closely related to Roman examples, betrays different craftsmanship and influences.

In the south- and north-western panels, the shape of the canopy dome suggests that of the already mentioned Ariadne ivory [figs. 34, 35, 57, 58]; although, the canopy of the Rotunda and all its architectural elements are located beside extremely rich classical cornices that strongly recall late Roman examples.

In the northern and southern panels, the decoration of the lateral canopy in the second storey finds a strikingly close parallel in the exedras depicted in the frieze at the base of the dome of the Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna [figs. 32, 33, 64, 65]. The Orthodox Baptistery's frieze is like a miniature version of the Rotunda's great architectural frieze. It seems that a common conception lays at the bases of the two mosaics. In both cases, the architecture in the form of an exedra with two lateral aisles creates a bright setting against which Christian symbolic elements can be located, such as the thrones and the altars with the open book in the Orthodox baptistery, and the jewelled cross, the throne, and the image of Christ risen in glory in the Rotunda. Such a close resemblance in the artistic conception and



decoration of the Rotunda's mosaic with an example dating to the mid-fifth century leads to the hypothesis that the mosaics of two buildings are perhaps contemporaries.

Concluding this brief survey, the decoration of the mosaic architecture in the Rotunda already anticipates the art of the sixth century, but seems to represent an early stage of development. There, elements typical of Roman imperial architecture, such as the cornices, are represented next to elements of different inspiration. For instance, the jewel encrusted columns find a parallel only in imperial art of the sixth century.<sup>239</sup> As concerns the shell, the parallel with mosaics of secure imperial provenance, like those of Ravenna, is a relevant element that may also indicate an imperial context for the mosaics of the Rotunda. Thus, a possible imperial origin or the will to echo imperial architecture could be supposed for the buildings represented in the Rotunda.

#### **5.4 Christian symbols and architecture**

In the central area of each frieze, one particular element focusses the composition. It is possible to reconstruct the central elements by integrating the lacunas of each panel within the symmetrical decoration of the opposite panels.

The pediment on the centre of the first storey dominates the composition of the north- and south-eastern panels. The north-eastern

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<sup>239</sup> As we saw, jewelled columns flank the imperial portray of Ariadne and the imperial panels in the sanctuary of San Vitale in Ravenna.

panel is less damaged than its counterpart; its pediment is decorated with an image of Christ carried to glory by two angels [figs. 30-31]. A jewelled cross stands beneath a hexagonal canopy in the southern and northern panels, surrounded by a stream of water with a haloed dove descending over top of it [figs. 33-32]. In the next panels to the west, a rich ciborium covered an empty throne resting on three steps, on top of which a jewelled book is visible [figs. 34-35]. Nevertheless, the central part of the western panel is heavily damaged; marble slabs surrounding an apse are still visible.<sup>240</sup> [fig. 36]

These elements – the bust of Christ risen in glory, the jewelled cross, and the throne – are an integral part of the architecture. They are perfectly inserted into the buildings that develop around focussing the beholder's attention upon them. All of the elements at the centre of the panels point to Christological implications. In the north- and south- eastern panels, a bust of Christ lifted in glory by two angels is in fact evident on the pediment. According to Grabar, this theme is connected to the pagan triumphal representations of theophanies and imperial ascensions and was later reinterpreted to represent Christ's theophany in transfiguration scenes and apocalyptic perspectives.<sup>241</sup> [figs. 30-31]

The pediment and its decoration dominate the entire architectural panel. The structure of the composition emphasizes the image on the pediment. In the south-eastern panel, on axis with the bust of Christ, the

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<sup>240</sup> For an interpretation of the frieze on the bases of these central elements, see: TORP 2002a, 11-34.

<sup>241</sup> GRABAR 1967, 76-81.

*orans* Therinos raises his arms to point to the pediment. The pediment is in the true centre of the panel and its dimensions are bigger than those of the other architectonic elements of the building. In this case, the Christological image is an integral part of the building. At the same time, the architecture is structured in order to stress the importance of the image.

There is a straight allusion to Christ also in the northern and southern panels, where a great jewelled cross stands in all its majesty under a hexagonal canopy [figs. 32-33]. The cross arises from a round platform; it is encircled by a water stream and a haloed dove rests on its top. The body of the cross is clad in red, green, and blue gems as well as gold. The complexity of the scene has been developed by placing the cross in the foreground. This has led to an optical distortion: when seen at a close range, the cross stands in front of the canopy rather than being covered by it.<sup>242</sup>

The cross is the only element in the entire architectural frieze that stands on the real foreground, rising directly above the mosaic mouldings of the lower frame. It could be considered the result of the complexity of the representation, even as a mistake of the mosaicist, but it may also have another meaning. The cross rises from a low pedestal located upon the lowest cornice of the panel. This may be for a symbolic reason. The pedestal elevates the cross recalling Golgotha, the mount of the passion of Christ. Here it must be considered as a symbol of salvation. In the apse of

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<sup>242</sup> According to Grabar and Torp the cross was meant to be seen as under the canopy (GRABAR 1967, 73; TORP 2002a, 14-19).

the church of Sta. Pudenziana (402-417) in Rome, as well as in the sixth- and seventh-century *ampullae* from the Holy Land, a cross rises from a hill.<sup>243</sup> [figs. 78, 66] In the Rotunda's mosaic, the pedestal arises from the cornice as if this was the limit of the earthly world, from which the architecture is separated and distant. The base of the cross seems to rise from a different level than the *orantes*; it is before them, who appear to be in the foreground.<sup>244</sup> This could be linked to the centrality of the mystery of the cross and to its role in the story of human salvation.

The representation of the cross in the lowest mosaic frieze of the Rotunda reflects its value as a poly-semantic element. The cross is the symbol of Christ's death and resurrection, of his victory over death. The body of the aforementioned *ampullae* from the Holy Land has the shape of a palm tree wood. In the Rotunda, the cross is covered with projecting gems so that it recalls the trunk of a tree.<sup>245</sup> In this case, the jewelled cross is a flourishing cross: its body is covered in precious stones that project outwards as if they are fruits from a tree. Apparently, two different traditions merge in the cross of the Rotunda: that of the jewelled cross and

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<sup>243</sup> While the hill upon which is located the cross can be read as a direct reference to Golgotha, the cross raised on step visible in the marble revetment of the western wall of the nave in Hagia Sophia (sixth century), and becoming common on the reverse of the coins in the second half of the sixth century, is a development of the Constantinian symbol of victory that was probably visible in the *Forum Constantini* at Constantinople (CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987, 142-143 and n. 75). For the Holy Land ampullas, see: GRABAR 1958, cat. n.5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 15 (Monza), cat. n. 1, 2 (Bobbio). For the meaning of ampullas and *eulogiae*, see: HAHN 1990, 93.

<sup>244</sup> In the southern panel the *orantes* seem to stand on a step: this is the result of the complicated representation of the cross. To make the base of the cross visible, the whole canopy structure with the water stream as been lowered and the *orantes* put aside on a step which separates them from both the canopy structure and the platform of the architecture.

<sup>245</sup> This point has been stressed by Grabar (GRABAR 1967, 73).

that of the cross of wood. In her semiotic reading of the cross, Silvana Casartelli Novelli identifies the jewelled cross as a sign of salvation that developed from the influence of John's *Revelation* in the fourth-century church decoration of Rome. The jewelled cross is made of precious stones as is the apocalyptic Jerusalem: both the cross and the apocalyptic Jerusalem are depicted with precious stones and gold, an expression of their materiality and elements of the same visual and written language.<sup>246</sup> The wooden cross was the real instrument of the passion and was believed to have been made from the wood of the Tree of Life; it is therefore connected to a paradisiacal context.<sup>247</sup> As was stated above, the jewelled cross in this case is reminiscent of Christ's death and victory as much as it is a symbol of life. In addition, the relationship of the cross with water suggests the presence of life-giving symbolism.<sup>248</sup> The dove descending on the top of the cross is reminiscent of the Holy Spirit that descends on the submerged during the baptism. All aspects seem to suggest the domain of life; the cross thus becomes a symbol of life itself, a concept that is reinforced by the presence of water, in which the baptised is submerged in order to find a rebirth in Christ.<sup>249</sup>

The canopy was intended to cover the cross and to stress its importance, adding cosmic significance to the scene. Its hexagonal form underscores the importance of the number six, which is related to the day

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<sup>246</sup> CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987, 143-145.

<sup>247</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 114-116.

<sup>248</sup> The role of the water as a life giving symbol is well expressed in the iconography of the 'fountain of life' (UNDERWOOD 1950).

<sup>249</sup> *Matth.*, 3.16.

of Christ's death and is often utilized within baptismal contexts.<sup>250</sup> The cross symbolizes Christ's passion and victory, like the number six it recalls his death and resurrection. The meaning of the cross is therefore transferred to the canopy itself by means of numeric symbols. Thus, the tension between life and death is imbedded in the entire representation of the southern and northern panels. At the same time, the canopy holds an architectonic value: it covers the cross and links it with the surrounding architecture, while making it the focal centre of the exedra .

The cross depicted in the Rotunda expresses Christ's victory, a paradisiacal domain of life symbolized by the Tree of Life, the dogma of the trinity, and the baptism as a rebirth in Christ. The significance of the cross and its connections with the Tree of Life were developed in the fourth century; at the same time, the trinity became of foremost importance in dogmatic controversies. The depiction of the Holy Spirit as a dove echoes the words of Ambrose, and its connection with the water symbolism is recalled in Paolinus of Nola.<sup>251</sup> These theological concepts were discussed in the fourth century. the concentration of all these Christian symbols in the frieze of the Rotunda with the theological issues that they recall is striking. An iconography so rich in theological concerns seems to reflect a later and more developed stage of the orthodox speculation, when all these theological subjects were already know and developed, perhaps the fifth century.

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<sup>250</sup> UNDERWOOD 1950.

<sup>251</sup> This was outlined by Hellemo (HELLEMO 1989, 122).

In the north- and south-western panels a closed book is visible on an empty throne arising from three steps. A round ciborium on six columns covers them [figs. 34-35]. The empty throne embodies the invisible but immanent spiritual presence of a divinity.<sup>252</sup> In the art of the fifth century, images of the empty throne proliferate: for instance, empty thrones are shown on the triumphal arch of the church of Sta. Maria Maggiore in Rome (432-440), and in both the lowest frieze of the Orthodox Baptistry (mid-fifth century) and the sixth-century mosaic of the Arian Baptistry at Ravenna.[figs. 41, 64]. The book upon the throne points directly to the identification of divinity and makes real its presence: it echoes a Gospel, the book of Christ's life, or the Bible. The presence of Christ or God is inferred by the empty throne. Since the throne is a symbol of power and sovereignty, the empty throne has often been linked to an apocalyptic context and specifically to the last judgment.<sup>253</sup> In this case, it is important to note that the book on the empty throne recalls the invisible presence of Christ in glory. The cover of the closed book is encrusted in bright precious stones: the brightness recalls the light of pure *logos* coming from Christ.<sup>254</sup> At the same time, the fact that the book is closed creates an inherent sense of mystery about the scene. The book's jewel encrusted cover echoes the jewelled cross of the southern and northern panels. The throne mentioned in the fourth chapter of John's *Revelation* seems to be

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<sup>252</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 103-108.

<sup>253</sup> VAN UFFORD 1971.

<sup>254</sup> The first chapter of the John's Gospel is all centred on the concept of logos-light-Christ (*John* 1).

recalled here. Again, there is an allusion to the imagery of John's *Revelation*. Gems are in fact the material of the heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation*. According to the reading of Casartelli Novelli, the text of John's *Revelation* seems to be the source for the throne's imagery; the precious stones are 'iconic expressive substances'.<sup>255</sup> As for the heavenly kingdom of God, the heavenly Jerusalem of John's *Revelation*, in the case of the book and the throne, gems and precious are the means by which the immanent presence of God is expressed.

In the north- and south-western panels, two golden crosses located on the roofs of the lateral structures of the building, which are lacking in all the other panels, are clear references to Christ. The top of the crosses are shaped in the form of  $\rho$ , recalling the name of Christ like simplified *chrisma*. This type of monogrammatic cross is common in Late Antiquity: a well preserved fifth-century example comes from the area of Aquileia, and is now located at the *Kusthistorisches* Museum in Vienna.<sup>256</sup> [fig. 67] In the Rotunda's mosaic, two pearls are suspended from the crossbar of the monogrammatic crosses. The cross thus appears to be flourished and again recalls the idea of Tree of Life. Two light blue birds, perhaps doves, face the cross. In the north-western panel on the left side, one of the doves seems to take something with its beak. In the south-western panel, the same bird holds a small twig in its beak. A graffito from the catacombs of

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<sup>255</sup> CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987, 155-156.

<sup>256</sup> See the *Kusthistorische* Museum web page: <http://www.khm.at/system2E.html?/staticE/page1582.html> (last accessed on 12.07.2005).



St. Sebastiano in Rome and a sixth-century marble slab from the church of St. Apollinare nuovo in Ravenna serve as parallels for these scenes, however their form is much more stylised.<sup>257</sup> [fig. 68] In the context of the Rotunda's lowest frieze, this is the only element creating a sense of development and continuity between the panels. The scene heightens the meaning of the whole panel: with the immanent presence of Christ symbolized by the book, the bird acts in peace and is a sign of salvation.<sup>258</sup> The dove takes the twig from the base of the cross, signifying that the cross, from which pearls grow like fruit, is a nourishing source. In the apocalyptic context of the scene, this cross and the act of the dove reinforce the importance of the salvation coming from Christ.

The destruction of the mosaic around the platform on which the throne and the ciborium stand makes it hard to understand the architectonic connection with building's platform. The *orantes* are clearly standing on two lower steps separated from both the platform of the throne and that of the building. The lateral aisles of the building seem to project outwards. As a result, the ciborium and the throne appear to be at the centre of a court. The throne and the building are not two separated structures; instead, one is part of the other.

Unfortunately, the eastern panel is totally missing and the central area of the western panel is heavily damaged. As a result, a proper analysis of the Christological implications of the whole architectural frieze cannot

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<sup>257</sup> For the graffito, see: FIOCCHI NICOLAI, MAZZOLENI, BISCONTI 1998, 168, fig. 169. For the marble slab, see: DEICHMANN 1969, 71, fig. 61.

<sup>258</sup> For the symbolism of the dove, see: TESTINI 1985, 1164-1165.

be continued at this time. [fig.36] It is important to stress that the architecture constitutes an appropriate setting for the manifestation of highly symbolic Christian themes. All the buildings seem to embrace the exedras, and the latter are the buildings' focal point. At the same time, the exedras are linked to the Christian elements, and form a consistent group with structural and symbolic links. The buildings should also be considered as symbolic. An ideal place is represented by the buildings, and Christian symbols are shown at the focus of monumental buildings. The Christian elements represented are consistent with the surrounding architecture because of the materials of which they are made. As the cross and the book on the empty throne are made of gold and precious stones, so are the buildings represented here. The gold and gems convey an impression of light and brightness that emanates from the whole scene and symbolizes the manifestation of God. In addition, Silvana Casartelli Novelli's semiotic analysis of the cross adds a further level of significance to the whole scene.<sup>259</sup> The connection of the Christian symbols with the imagery of John's *Revelation* has a dual effect. First of all, the gold and precious stone material that makes up the Christian elements unites both the panels of the Rotunda's frieze and the text of the *Revelation* as expressions of the same conceptual environment. The Christian symbols, the buildings, and the heavenly Jerusalem are all depicted in the same material. In addition to a possible esoteric significance of the stones, it should be emphasized that

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<sup>259</sup> CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987.

gold and gems are uncreated and pure elements. This explains their use in the depiction of the heavenly city-temple-palace, the kingdom of God in the *Revelation*, as well as in the depiction of highly symbolic Christian elements and the idealized buildings of the Rotunda. Secondly, the influence of the text is visible in the symbols of the throne, the jewelled encrusted book, and the cross. The apocalyptic aspects of the Christian elements of the frieze can be connected with the imagery of the *Revelation*. In addition, the possible identification of the buildings with the manifestation of the heavenly Jerusalem, the heavenly kingdom of God here rendered by extraordinary palaces, would be coherent with the identification of the dome's entire mosaic as the *parousia*, the manifestation of the kingdom of God.

Before iconoclasm, Thessaloniki seems to have been under the influence of the Church of Rome.<sup>260</sup> Here it can be hypothesized that the *Revelation* of John, so important for the iconography of the early Christian churches of Rome and for other early Christian mosaics of Thessaloniki,<sup>261</sup> also played a role in the design of the mosaic decoration of the Rotunda.

## **5.5 Elements within the architecture**

An analysis of the furniture, the animals, and the vegetal elements located in the architecture will help to define the buildings' nature and function.

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<sup>260</sup> DANIELOU AND MARROU 1964, 392; GOUNARIS 1999, 274.

<sup>261</sup> SNYDER 1967; KLEINBAUER 1972a, 90-92.

The objects visible in the buildings can be divided into few groups: lighting devices and censers, *kantharoi* and fountains, curtains, and decorative objects.

Among the lighting devices, there are lamp stands and hanging lamps.<sup>262</sup> The lamp stands are used here as candlesticks and are always located on the ground storey. They can be connected to examples of actual lamp stands of the sixth century, usually found in church contexts.<sup>263</sup> The use of this type of lamp stand is attested throughout the Mediterranean from the fifth to the seventh century.<sup>264</sup> Outside the church, its use is attested within monastic daily life.<sup>265</sup> It was probably also used in other contexts.

The function of the lamp stands in such a marvellous and bright setting is not for lighting; rather, it is linked to the importance of the candles. Candles were a luxury object in ancient times. Candle smoke had a particular value as an impalpable but real substance with a specific function for devotion and worship. It was used for the creation of invisible realities. For instance, when placed in front of icon, the smoke embodied

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<sup>262</sup> Lamp stands are present in the northern and southern panels (under the arches at the sides of the building), and north- and south-western panels (at the sides of the canopy). Hanging lamps are visible in the northern and southern panels (under the domes of second storey at the sides of the building), and north- and south-eastern panels (under a green curtain at the sides of the central pediment).

<sup>263</sup> The lamp stands from the Hama treasury, a group of sixth-century church vessels, are only 52 and 53 cm high, therefore they are much smaller than those in the mosaic (MUNDELL MANGO 1986, 25, and 96-103). A sixth-century lamp stand, now in the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, is 128 cm high and closely resembles the one in the Rotunda mosaics (GONOSOVÁ AND KONDOLEON 1994, 258-259).

<sup>264</sup> GONOSOVÁ AND KONDOLEON 1994, 259.

<sup>265</sup> MUNDELL MANGO 1986, 99.

the presence of the saint or scene represented in the table.<sup>266</sup> Here, all of the candlesticks are present on the first storeys of the buildings; they therefore seem to be connected with the Christological symbols at the centre of the exedras. The candles act to celebrate the sanctity and power of the elements that reveal the presence and the glory of Christ.

The hanging lamps seem to be made of glass, for they are entirely composed of blue and light blue cubes, with an red-orange flame in the centre.<sup>267</sup> A glass bowl fitted with a metal collar hangs by means of three chains. This kind of hanging lamp was used as a luxury object beginning in Roman times.<sup>268</sup> Their presence here is probably due to their value as luxury objects. Although they are located to the side of the central pediment in the north- and south-eastern panels, perhaps in order to point out its importance, their location on the second storey in the northern and southern panels probably emphasizes the preciousness of the small domes [figs. 30-31].

The censers hanging from the tops of the north- and south-western structures recall the aforementioned smoke symbolism [figs. 34-35]. Here, they hang above and on the axis formed by the ciborium and the closed book. The spirals of smoke emanating from the bodies of the censers seem

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<sup>266</sup> The miracles of St. Artemios provide a good reference for the importance of candles as a outstanding and expensive objects in Byzantium (*Miracula S. Artemii*, XXI, eds. V.S. Crisafulli, J.W. Nesbitt, Leiden 1997, 128-129). For their use in connection with icons, see: MATHEWS 1997, 26, 33-34.

<sup>267</sup> The profile of the hanging-lamps bowls is made of light-blue and white *tesserae*.

<sup>268</sup> A particularly precious example of hanging lamps had a cage cup instead of a normal bowl (WHITEHOUSE 1990, 105); another item dated to the fourth century is clad in mouldings (HARDEN 1987, 204-205, cat. no. 113).

to state the immanent presence of Christ, which is symbolised by the closed book. Moreover, they could be linked to the presence of the candlesticks on the side of the canopy.<sup>269</sup>

Two kinds of *kantharoi* and a fountain can be seen within the architecture. One type is evident on the top of the roof of the central upper structure in the northern and southern panels [figs. 32-33]. The other kind of *kantharos* is visible on the roof of the upper structure in the western panel [fig. 36]. These *kantharoi* are types widespread from antiquity onwards. Here, they could be linked to the water symbolism that is present in the stream surrounding the canopy in the northern and southern panel and in the fountains beneath the lateral aisles in the first storey of the western panel. A water source was present in the heavenly Jerusalem of the *Revelation*,<sup>270</sup> as well as in the paradise of *Genesis*.<sup>271</sup> It was a feature of the atrium in the early Christian church as well as in palatine architecture connected to the garden, in keeping with a paradisiacal setting.<sup>272</sup> In every panel, the objects have a certain relationship with one another and with the central Christological theme.

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<sup>269</sup> For examples of Byzantine censers, see the following pages on the web site of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York:  
<http://www.khm.at/system2E.html?/staticE/page1582.html>,  
[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/06/wae/hob\\_1986.3.1-15.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/06/wae/hob_1986.3.1-15.htm) (last accessed on 25.08.2005).

<sup>270</sup> *Rev.*, 21.6 and 22.1-2.

<sup>271</sup> *Gen.*, 2.6 and 2.10.

<sup>272</sup> For the presence of fountains in church architecture, see: KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 56-68 (with reference to the Constantinian church of St. Peter in Rome). For the fountain as an element of the Byzantine garden and for its symbolism, see: MAGUIRE 2002, 25-26.

A large number of curtains hang from the architecture.<sup>273</sup> They are of all different colours and are located in different positions within the buildings. They are all draped to the side and knotted in order to make the interiors visible while at the same time conveying a sense of mystery and holiness. For instance, they are drawn alongside the central pediment in the north- and south-eastern panels, giving special importance to that area of the building. In the western panel, they are embroidered with *orbicula* [fig. 36]. This rich decoration is consistent with the outstanding decoration of the buildings.

Curtains were commonly used to protect windows and doors from the Mediterranean sun or to ensure the intimacy of the buildings. They were also used inside buildings to separate different spaces. They saw widespread use in palaces, public and private buildings, and churches.<sup>274</sup> In the palaces, curtains served as to express solemnity and create an aura of mystery around the presence of the emperor.<sup>275</sup> In the churches, they hang from the chancel around the sanctuary. In the Old Testament, veils protected the Tabernacle; in the Christian church, curtains protected the

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<sup>273</sup> Light-green curtains hang from the arches at the sides of the central pediment in the north- and south-eastern panel; light-blue curtains are visible at the sides of the central upper structure in the north- and south-western panel; light-red curtains hang from the lateral upper structures in the north- and south-eastern panel; white curtains with *orbicula* are visible under the aisles of the first storey in the western panel.

<sup>274</sup> KAZHDAN 1991a, 2157-2158; MAZZOLENI 2000, 243; RIPOLL 2004, 169-170.

<sup>275</sup> Corippus, *In laudem*, III.255-256, ed. Av. Cameron, London 1976, 68, , see also ed. A. Antès, Paris 1981 ed. S. Antès, Paris 1981, 61. For another evidence for the use of curtains in imperial context, where they were also a decorative element in the private imperial apartments, see: MALALAS, *Chr.*, 14.4, ed. I. Thurn, Berlin 2000, 274.

sanctuary, where the Christian mystery takes place.<sup>276</sup> Curtains were used to protect sacred spaces or holy relics, hiding them from undeserved eyes and ensuring their mystery. In the case of the Rotunda mosaic, the curtains in centre of the composition add a certain aura of holiness and mystery to the scene. In contrast, the curtains on the sides of the upper storey in the north- and south-eastern panels seem to have an exclusively decorative purpose, merely filling an empty space.

In the north- and south-eastern panels, a jewelled crown hangs from the central arch of the lower storey [figs. 30-31]. There it is located just below the central pediment with the image of Christ risen in glory. Hanging crowns are used to point out the importance of a place or to emphasize the role of the figure standing below. On the reliquary of Samagher (c. 440-450), a jewelled crown is visible in the centre, above the *memoria* of Peter.<sup>277</sup> [fig. 69] On the sixth-century diptych of Magnus, a crown hangs just above the head of the consul.<sup>278</sup> [fig. 70] It is a sign of glory and victory of Roman derivation;<sup>279</sup> its decorative use outlines the importance of the place where it is located or of the object or figure below.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> The use of a veil protecting the Tabernacle is attested in the Ancient Testament (*Ex.* 26, 31-37).

<sup>277</sup> Now it is held at the National Archaeological Museum in Venice; see recently: LONGHI 2006.

<sup>278</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, n. 3267.

<sup>279</sup> For the role of the crown as an imperial primary insignia in Byzantium, see: PERTUSI 1976, 497-500, 520-523.

<sup>280</sup> From the fifth century a golden and jewelled crown is a common attribute of the members of the imperial family, saints, and martyrs (KAZHDAN 1991b, 554-555; SEVERINI 2000, 155-156).



Here, the crown is formed by a series of jewelled rosettes. It is an outstanding sign of honour. It is located above the head of Therinos and Leon in the north- and south-eastern panels [figs. 30-31]. However, its function is not to point out the importance of the martyrs. The martyrs are in the foreground, stepping outside the platform of the architecture, while the crown hangs from the central arch of the buildings behind them. The marvellous and precious stones of the crown heighten the importance of the building. In addition, the crown is located just below the bust of Christ as if to signify that the honour of the crown descends from the glory of Christ upon those who enter the building. The crown is thus another outstanding aspect of for the marvellous architecture of the panels and is not a sign of honour for the saint. The crown enhances the meaning of the whole building, giving it a character of royalty and sacredness.

A large number of birds is visible on the upper storeys of the architecture. We have already analysed the birds facing the cross in the north- and south-western panels. Two other kinds of birds, one of which might be a white-grey dove, are present on the roof of the central pediment and on the cornices of the northern and southern panels [figs. 32-33]. Another bird is standing on the cornice beside the apse of the western panel [fig. 36]. In the north- and south-western panels, two peacocks are visible beneath the architecture's lateral aisle [figs. 32, 33, 71]. It is here important to make a few considerations in addition to the possible identification of the birds.

The birds are always located within and above the structures of the upper storey. It is thus confirmed that the buildings have two storeys, since the upper storeys are those most commonly reached by birds. All of the birds are located to the sides of the central areas of the building; this is done according to the principle of symmetry that has been applied to the panels and that consequently focuses the attention on the centre of the architecture.

All of the birds appear to be floating in the air, although they are in standing poses. The birds' claws are separated from the surfaces of the buildings by a few golden *tesserae*. Whereas the crosses and *kantharoi* on top of the architecture are almost part of the buildings, they are clearly standing upon them; the birds float above them all. One exception must be made for the peacocks. In sharp contrast with all the other birds, the peacocks are the only birds standing firmly on the architecture and are thus the only birds intended to be part of the architectural ensemble [fig. 71]. Beginning in Roman times, the peacock carried an aulic connotation and became associated with supernatural and paradisiacal settings.<sup>281</sup> Here it is inserted in the north- and south-western panels, where the jewelled throne stands in its majesty and the doves face the crosses on the rooftops. The peacock's presence as a consistent part of the architecture conveys the imagery of eternal victory and a heavenly connotation for the building.

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<sup>281</sup> TESTINI 1985, 1125; CARR 1991, 1611-1612; HERRIN 2006, 3-4.

In the western panel alone, green tree branches are visible over top of and through the lateral aisles of the upper storey. They recall the presence of a garden behind the building. The combination of the magnificent bright building and the garden is reminiscent of palace architecture. During Late Antiquity, gardens played an important role in imperial and aristocratic residential architecture.<sup>282</sup> Here, the presence of a garden behind the building underscores the value of the architecture. Moreover, the pervading golden colour of the setting conveys the idea of a supernatural dimension. Indeed, the architecture and the gardens appear to be part of an heavenly palace. This recalls the saintly visions of the kingdom of God that were discussed in the first chapter. For instance, Saturus sees a beautiful garden and a palace in heaven, the walls of which are made of shining light. In early Christianity, Paradise is represented either as the garden of *Genesis* or as a heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>283</sup> While the garden of *Genesis* has an archetypal significance and is believed to be located on earth, heavenly Jerusalem has both archetypal and apocalyptic meanings and is the otherworldly kingdom of God that will become visible only in the last days. In the Rotunda mosaic, the portrayal of Paradise as a bright palace merges with the image of the garden; both the influence of the imagery that is also found in Saturus' vision and that of contemporary palatine architecture are thus evident.

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<sup>282</sup> For the garden as an element of the Byzantine palaces, see: MAGUIRE 1994, 181-197; LITTLEWOOD 1997, 13-38.

<sup>283</sup> HILHORST 1999. See above chapter I, pp. 85-87.

## **6. A view of the dome**

The dome's apex is clad in a mosaic medallion with a full-length depiction of Christ raising his right hand and holding a cross with the other; his dress is moved by the wind. All around the medallion, the decoration is developed in concentric circles. Unfortunately, much of the dome mosaic is lost. However, much of the decoration of the dome can still be understood from the preserved portions of mosaic and from the preparatory drawing that is still visible directly on the brickwork.

The medallion is surrounded by three decorative circles: one circle is filled with stars, the second displays a vegetal frieze full of different fruits, and the third depicts a rainbow. The three circles separated by gold decoration [fig. 29]. The surrounding frieze contains four winged angels, whose hands support the rainbow with Christ's medallion at the centre. On the east side of the angels' frieze, directly above the head of Christ in the central medallion, a head of a phoenix is still visible emanating rays of light. Other rays of light, the source of which is no longer visible, are found on the south side of the mosaic. As Torp points out, close examination of the charcoal preparatory drawing suggests that a cross was probably present in between two of the angels, on the north side of the angels' frieze.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> TORP 1963. This point is also underlined by KLEINBAUER 1972a and L'ORANGE 1970. This cross is no longer visible though.

Following the angels' frieze, a considerable portion of mosaic has been lost, including the next frieze in the sequence. Just above the architectural frieze, sandaled feet indicating a row of martyrs, angels,<sup>285</sup> or apostles are still visible, as are a few fragments of the figures' white tunics, evident against the green, garden-like background.

As we have seen, Grabar saw the iconography of the dome as a representation of the second coming (*parousia*) of Christ.<sup>286</sup> Later, Kleinbauer came to fully agree with Grabar, arguing an equivalent interpretation of the *parousia* on the basis of different evidence.<sup>287</sup> However, Torp has offered a different opinion, arguing that the mosaic decoration of the Rotunda would not have represented the second coming of Christ, but his ascension.<sup>288</sup>

The iconography of the second coming of the Lord and that of his ascension are closely related: according to *Acts* 1, 11, the *parousia* will take place in the same way as the ascension.<sup>289</sup> Within the mosaic programme of the early Christian church, a great variety of meanings

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<sup>285</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a and KLEINBAUER 1972b.

<sup>286</sup> GRABAR 1967, 59-81.

<sup>287</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a.

<sup>288</sup> TORP 2002b, 9,

<sup>289</sup> This point is underlined by Utro (UTRO 2000, 127-129). Similarities between the iconography of *parousia* and that of the ascension can be found from the sixth century onwards. Before, the ascension was rarely represented with Christ appearing in the sky inside in a *mandorla*. For instance if one confronts an ivory now in Munich, which has been dated at around the year 400, and a miniature from the Rabbula Gospel, the difference in the iconography of the ascension is evident. In the ivory Christ is climbing a mount while the hand of God is waiting for him in the sky, the sepulchre is opened and few women are crying in front of it. In the miniature (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Cod. Plut. I.56, f. 13v) Christ inside a *mandorla* is taken in the sky by a few angels while Mary and the apostle are looking at the scene from the ground (*Age of Spirituality*, p. 455, figg. 67-68).

merge together.<sup>290</sup> The iconographic theme represented in the Rotunda, however, finds an easier explanation as a *parousia* than as Christ's ascension. In addition to the points expressed by Grabar, a few considerations can be added.<sup>291</sup>

The presence of the empty throne carries an apocalyptic meaning that cannot be denied. In the body of this paper, the empty throne has been considered to be a symbol of God's presence, but its deep connections to an apocalyptic context seem to retain a certain validity, especially when emphasized by the presence of another symbol bearing apocalyptic significance, the phoenix. According to Matthew's Gospel, Christ will come from the east in the second coming, appearing in the sky in all his glory.<sup>292</sup> In the dome of the Rotunda, Christ's head is to the east, just above a radiant phoenix symbolizing death and resurrection.<sup>293</sup> The coming of the Lord will be anticipated by the appearance of his 'sign;' here, the sign is the cross that probably once stood on the north side of the angels' frieze.<sup>294</sup> Later, in the judgement scene, he will sit on the throne of his glory; as a judge, he will separate the pious from the damned. Here, the

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<sup>290</sup> This is demonstrated by Hellemo in relation to the poly-semantic meaning of the cross (HELLEMO 1989, 97-116).

<sup>291</sup> As we have seen, Grabar presents three points against the thesis of the ascension: firstly, the presence of the phoenix; secondly, the presence of too many people in the frieze in between the angels one and the architectural one; thirdly, in the ninth century the apse of the Rotunda was decorated painting Christ's ascension, it is hardly possible that the program of the apse was meant to reduplicate the theme of the dome. (GRABAR 1967, 59-60).

<sup>292</sup> *Matth.* 24.30; but also *Marc.* 13.26-27; *1 Thess.*, 4.16.

<sup>293</sup> AGAPITOS AND CUTLER 1991.

<sup>294</sup> *Matth.* 24.30. The importance of the cross in the *parousia* is well expressed by the words of St. John Chrysostom (JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *In Matthaëum Homilia*, 76.3-4, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, LVII, 41).

judgement scene seems to be anticipated by the empty throne standing in the middle of the marvellous building.<sup>295</sup>

As Kleinbauer and Nasrallah point out, this representation of the *parousia* is not based on one specific text.<sup>296</sup> Rather, elements from different texts with apocalyptic significance merge together. Besides the already mentioned passages from the *Acts* and Matthew's gospel, the influence of the first and second letters of Paul to the Thessalonians is underlined.<sup>297</sup>

The marvellous shining buildings whose brightness pervades the whole mosaic seem to have a reference in another text. Indeed, in the first letter to Timothy, Christ comes as a king living in an inaccessible light.<sup>298</sup> Here, one can find the ideal setting of the second coming of the Lord as it is shown in the Rotunda's mosaic. Christ comes in glory as a victorious king; his domain is a marvellous kingdom of light. These resplendent buildings suggests such a kingdom, bearing the features of both a palatine building and a temple and showing the signs of Christ's victory.

## **7. Conclusions**

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<sup>295</sup> *Matth.* 25.31-33.

<sup>296</sup> KLEINBAUER 1972a, 29; NASRALLAH 2005, 495.

<sup>297</sup> NASRALLAH 2005, 495, 497-505: the influence of St. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians on the written and visual evidence of the early Christian Thessaloniki is well shown by the author, however her interpretation of the architectural frieze as an intermediate dimension reproducing the church below as well as the heavenly church is not consistent.

<sup>298</sup> *1 Tim.* 6.14-16.

The pervading bright light that emanates from the buildings, the abundant use of gold, and the presence of peacocks are only a few of the features that suggest a supernatural and heavenly setting for the mosaic. An apocalyptic aura pervades the whole frieze. This is nonetheless connected to the manifestation of the extraordinarily valuable Christian symbols that are perfectly inserted within the architecture of the buildings. The *orantes*, whose earthly professions are recalled in the inscriptions, are saints standing outside the buildings as if praying so that they might enter the buildings and be admitted to the presence of God.

On account of their size and splendour, the buildings seem to be the real protagonists of the panels. They provide a sort of architectural enceinte for the event of Christ's coming and constitute a border between the earthly sphere below and the decoration of the dome, which carries a profound cosmic significance and is the place for the manifestation of God.<sup>299</sup> The buildings also have a very strong paradisiacal character that allows the frieze to be interpreted as heaven.

The buildings' monumental aspect and the comprehensive representation of space have often brought about an interpretation of the panels as churches or palaces. Due to the absence of an altar or ambo, and that the furnishings depicted are common to both churches and palaces, the exclusive interpretation of the buildings as a heavenly church must definitely be discarded here. The high frequency of domes and apses in the

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<sup>299</sup> BALDWIN-SMITH 1950, esp. 61-94; LEHMANN 1945.



form of canopies, vaults, and exedras emphasizes the high monumental value of the architecture. The multiplication of porticoes and colonnades qualifies them as perfectly inserted into late-antique architectural practice. The portico assumes an extremely important role within imperial palaces and aristocratic villas, for it connects different areas within the same building and is an element dedicated to the performance of court ceremonial and imperial processions as they progress between different symbolical spaces.<sup>300</sup> The longitudinal development as well as the presence of apsidal halls, typical of this architecture, is evident in examples of late-antique villas such as the one at Piazza Armerina (fourth century) or the so-called ‘governor palaces’ listed by Lavan,<sup>301</sup> and is expressed in extant monuments as for instance the palace of Diocletian at Split [figs. 72, 18]. Furthermore, the buildings’ exedral shape recalls very well known examples of aristocratic dwellings as we see, for instance, in the paintings of Pompei [fig. 72a].

All of these architectonic structures interlock in the mosaic of the Rotunda, leading to the creation of monumental buildings. The presence of apses, colonnades, and double-storey buildings in the panels could also be connected to late-antique church architecture, but the multiplication of these features within the space of each building is more comprehensible as a representation of palaces rather than churches, where such an abundance of structures within a specific building cannot be found until the sixth

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<sup>300</sup> BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 109-113.

<sup>301</sup> This survey includes a number of late-antique great *domus*, such as those of Cordoba, Serica, Ephesus, Aphrodisia, Apamea (LAVAN 1999).

century.<sup>302</sup> The Rotunda architectural frieze and the lowest frieze of the dome of the Orthodox Baptistry in Ravenna draws on a parallel concept [fig. 64]. However, the exedras in the Orthodox Baptistry provide the locations for the altar with the open books of the Gospels and the jewelled throne filled with a cross. The former directly recalls a church, where the altar stands for the sacrifice of Christ and his life is read in the gospels; the latter is the symbol of the immanent presence of God, as it has been stated above. In addition, the exedras of the Orthodox Baptistry are simple in their design: they are single storeyed structures formed by an apse with two lateral aisles. The apse, where the altars and the thrones are located,, and the two aisles respectively recall the apse and the lateral naves of a standard plan basilica. While the buildings of the Rotunda are much more articulated, the simplicity of the exedras of the Orthodox Baptistry points to the representation of a church; accordingly, the apses are filled with symbols that directly recall the rite celebrated in the church in the invisible presence of God. This interpretation is consistent with the function of the building as the baptistry of the cathedral: the cathedral of Ravenna was a large basilica and was nonetheless linked to the Episcopal palace. The buildings in the lowest frieze of the baptistry seem to celebrate the church, where the baptised are admitted after baptism. In this case, the Episcopal church is represented; this is evident in the symbols as well as in the buildings that are represented in the architectural frieze.

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<sup>302</sup> The multiplication of domes and colonnades and the creation of two storeyed central buildings is typical of the sixth century, when a certain experimental trend in church architecture begins (KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 201-203, 283-285, esp. 238-242).

The parallel between the mosaics of Rotunda and those of the Orthodox Baptistery has two consequences: firstly, the absence of an altar or an ambo and the appearance of the buildings of the Rotunda prevents the interpretation of the frieze as the depiction of a church; secondly, the representation of the buildings in the mosaic decoration of the two monuments, which carry different meanings but have close similarities nevertheless, might indicate contemporary dates.

The textual evidence confirms the pervading interconnection between the imperial and the religious realms for the imperial residence. Through a careful analysis, Teja was able to delineate the existence of a common vocabulary characterizing the imperial hall, where the emperor manifests himself, and the sanctuary of the church, where the Christian mystery is celebrated.<sup>303</sup> This brings about the existence of a common imagery within the imperial and ecclesiastical domain, which adds a character of holiness to the imperial realm and inserts imperial features into the ecclesiastical sphere.

The architectural frieze of the Rotunda seems to show the same conceptual context. There, palatial architecture in the form of great exedras provides the setting for Christian symbols with apocalyptic significance that is linked to the entirety of the dome decoration. If we admit that the decoration of Rotunda's dome represents the *parousia*, then the architectural frieze represents the kingdom of God at the end of time. The

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<sup>303</sup> TEJA 1993, 623.

buildings depicted here bear the features of the late-antique palace architecture and have a strong character of sacrality, which is consistent with the representation of the kingdom of God, a sacred dwelling that is both a divine residence and a temple. The abundant use of gold and gems connect the buildings with the representation of the heavenly Jerusalem of John's *Revelation*: both the buildings of the Rotunda and the heavenly Jerusalem are divine residences and are both constructed of precious stones and gold indicative of their otherworldly status.<sup>304</sup> At the same time, the use of gold and jewels is a feature of late-antique imperial art and architecture; indeed, the jewel encrusted columns are found only in works of art that are directly connected with the imperial house, such as the mosaic of Theodora in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna or the ivory diptych of Ariadne, now divided between the Museum of the Bargello in Florence and the *Kunsthistorisches* Museum in Vienna [figs. 37, 57, 58]. In the Rotunda, the representation of the buildings borrows the architectonic language of contemporary palace architecture so that the heavenly kingdom of God is represented as an imperial palace.

The scenes with the *orantes* standing in front of the buildings and the bright light emanating from the architecture is reminiscent of many late-antique visions of saints, which have been discussed in the first chapter. There, the setting for the appearance of God is a marvellous bright palace. The same image seems to be represented in the mosaic. The

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<sup>304</sup> Casartelli Novelli has argued that this is true for symbols as the jewelled cross and the throne, which are both primary symbols deriving directly from John's *Revelation* (CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987).

immanent presence of God and his coming is announced by the Christian symbols. Again, the decoration of the frieze seems to be perfectly inserted into a conceptual context in which the palace plays an important role. Its features echo an imperial realm that appears deeply interwoven with a Christian dimension in the representation.

In addition, the presence of the saints is connected to the representation of the kingdom of God where the martyrs are admitted after their martyrdom. Here the martyrs seem to be grouped in the panels according to the method of martyrdom. They are standing outside the buildings as if they were depicted in the moment of their admission to the heavenly palace. In addition, their identification in the inscription can be read as evidence of the presence of their relics into the church. The gathering of holy relics was a phenomenon spreading from the second half of the fourth century and that saw a great development in the fifth century. The saints represented here have their origin in several regions around the Mediterranean and do not belong to any church calendar known so far: all this points to the hypothesis that the church was a depository for their relics and the existence of their cult at the early Christian Thessaloniki. The Rotunda of Thessaloniki seems to be one of the first pieces of evidence for the cult of the warrior saints that spread throughout the late-antique world, especially from the fifth century onwards.<sup>305</sup> The presence of such a high number of warrior saints can be connected to the strategic

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<sup>305</sup> For the meaning and importance of the warrior saints cult, see: ORSELLI 1993 (with references).

position of Thessaloniki, located between Constantinople and the Italian peninsula. The city played such an important role in the defence of the Balkan area, which was under the constant threat of invasion during the fourth and fifth centuries, that became the seat of the Praetorian Prefect in 441. The soldier saints seem to embody the *militia Christi* of the heavenly Kingdom. The military imagery was probably very lively in the city; this seems to be confirmed by the cult of the famous warrior St. Demetrios who is attested in Thessaloniki from at least the fifth century.<sup>306</sup> The warrior saints of the Rotunda thus embodied the saintly model of the warrior, recalling the military class that was so important to the people of Thessaloniki.<sup>307</sup>

Despite the concern about the original function of the church, it is important to recall that the highly symbolic palatial architecture may be connected with the proximity of the Rotunda to the palace of Thessaloniki. When the building was converted into a church, the main entrance remained on the south and was considerably enlarged so that it could likely be used in triumphal processions.<sup>308</sup> The mosaic decoration of the church emphasized the importance of the south-north axis by means of a series of crosses. One cross rests on the vault above the southern entrance, another stands under a canopy in the southern and northern panels of the architectural frieze, one lost crosses probably stood in the northern part of

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<sup>306</sup> DANIELOU AND MARROU 1964, 392; SKEDROS 1999, 8.

<sup>307</sup> Nasrallah has drawn a similar conclusion (NASRALLAH 2005, 507).

<sup>308</sup> MOUTSOPOULOS 1984: during the early Christian phase of the building the entrance to the south was modified adding the ambulatory and two buildings on the sides of the access.

the intermediate frieze, and another was held by Christ in the key of the dome. The north-south axis of the church is centred on the theme of the cross. The cross at the apex of the dome is the only one on the east-west axis and creates a point of juncture for the two axes.

The cross on the southern barrel vault is very close to the cross in the central medallion in its shape and technique; both are golden and on a silver background. The orientation of the cross is north-south, pointing to the south, while the orientation of the cross on the medallion is east-west. The two crosses thus delineate the east-west and south-north axes. The crosses also make the presbytery and the main entrance into the main focal points. To the south of the church, one reached the palace area through a columned street. As a result, the palace could have possibly played a role in the choice of the decoration of the Rotunda, inspiring particular aulic details.

On the south side of the Rotunda area, a monumental road led to the arch of Galerius, which crossed the *Via Regia* at that point.<sup>309</sup> On the south side, the arch was connected to a large room<sup>310</sup> that was paved in mosaic and that has been interpreted as either part of the palace structures or as a public building.<sup>311</sup> The room likely linked the arch to the palace area, since

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<sup>309</sup> DYGGVE 1957, 80-81; DYGGVE 1958, 353-355; MENTZOS 2002, 60-61.

<sup>310</sup> ASIMAKOPOULOU-ATZAKA 1998, 183-185; TORP 2003.

<sup>311</sup> CAGIANO DE AZEVEDO 1979. The hypothesis of the presence of a public building in that location raises doubts. A monumental entrance preceded by large stairs was on the south of the building. On the *Via Regia* the access was possible directly through the southern side of the arch. If it was the case of a public building, the monumental access would be probably from an important street, but there is no trace of streets or squares either. Furthermore, the presence of an important city way parallel to the *Via Regia* cannot be supposed.

modern scholarship commonly interprets the impressive archaeological remains to the south as evidence of palace structures.

The connection between the Rotunda, the arch of Galerius, and the mosaic room through the columned street enables the definition of a southwards topographical axis that crosses the *Via Regia* in the proximity of the arch. Dyggve's hypothesis that the Rotunda could have functioned as a palatine church is fascinating, but seems to be justified only by the proximity to the palace area. The archaeological investigations of the area are far from complete and, at the current stage of the research, it is not possible to confirm that the Rotunda was a palatine church.

If the palace is linked to the church, then the marvellous architecture of the architectural frieze may recall it. It is impossible to claim the direct influence of the palace of Thessaloniki on the representation of palaces in the mosaic of the Rotunda, for there is no secure archaeological evidence of the palace or textual sources that relate the two. However, both the orientation of the axes of the church and the fact that one of the main entrances faces south towards the 'palace area' emphasize the importance of the connection between that area and the church.

As for the palace and urban topography, the early Christian history of Thessaloniki is still rather obscure. The historical and archaeological data at hand are very fragmentary and do not allow a secure reconstruction of the city's events. It is therefore impossible to define the specific



function or a secure dating for the Rotunda. However, on the basis of the architectural frieze of the Rotunda and the analysis of the furnishings and of the architectural details there evident, the mosaic seems to belong to the fifth century.

Both the church's monumentality and its topographical link with the palace area point to a certain connection to imperial court. The palace was still used by the members of the imperial dynasty in the fifth century; it is thus possible that the church was restored by imperial initiative. As Croke has clearly demonstrated, the imperial palace of Thessaloniki was still in use and was maintained according to the Theodosian law until 441, when the Praetorian Prefecture of Illyricum moved to Thessaloniki.<sup>312</sup> In 424, Valentinian III was probably crowned as *Caesar* in the palace of Thessaloniki. Theodosios II occasionally resided there, and Valentinian III later spent the whole winter of 437/438 in Thessaloniki, likely residing in the palace.<sup>313</sup> Moreover, the wedding of Valentinian III and Eudoxia, daughter of Theodosios II, was intended to take place at Thessaloniki, though was afterwards celebrated at Constantinople.<sup>314</sup> It can here be hypothesised that the Rotunda's mosaic decoration could be linked to that wedding. The great mosaic program of the church, as well as the expenses behind it, is well justified as preparation for an imperial wedding that would have linked the western and the eastern courts. Furthermore,

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<sup>312</sup> CROKE 1981.

<sup>313</sup> CROKE 1981, 478-479; HATTERSLEY-SMITH 1996, 16-18.

<sup>314</sup> MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chron.*, s.a. 438, ed. B. Croke, Sidney 2005, 82-83. For a discussion on this wedding with reference to the written sources, see: HATTERSLEY-SMITH 1996, 18-19.

Valentinian III, son of Galla Placidia, was familiar with building activities celebrating the dynastic glory of the imperial family. Galla Placidia was responsible for embellishing Ravenna with a considerable number of churches and secular buildings and promoted both restorations and new building projects in Rome. Her building activity was conceived as an outstanding celebration of her imperial lineage as well as an act of religious *philanthropia*.<sup>315</sup> In addition, the influence of the imagery of John's *Revelation* in monuments patronized by Galla Placidia is well known,<sup>316</sup> such as in the mosaic decoration of the so-called mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, a cruciform chapel attached to the narthex of the palatine chapel of Sta. Croce, built by Galla Placidia at the beginning of the fifth century.

If it is not related to the wedding of Valentinian and Eudoxia, it is possible that the Rotunda's mosaic dates to the period between 424 and 438, the year of Valentinian's crowning and the year that he and his wife spent the winter in Thessaloniki.

Scholarship has often underlined the Theodosian character of the mosaic.<sup>317</sup> In the Theodosian dynasty a certain conservative trend has led to the constant tribute to the founder, Theodosios I. This brought about a tendency for the continuous reproduction of earlier models with very little

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<sup>315</sup> For the meaning of Galla Placidia's building activity, see: PICCININI 1991, 32-36; BRUBAKER 1997.

<sup>316</sup> For the influence of John's *Revelation* on the early Christian mosaics with special reference to Ravenna, see: ENGEMANN 1979; MONTANARI 2002, 245-254, 313-346.

<sup>317</sup> As we have seen, this led the majority of the modern scholarship to date the Christian phase of the church to the time of Theodosios the Great.

innovation in art and architecture. Here, I have emphasized a fifth century dating based on many different elements. Accordingly, I propose to date the mosaic to the first half of the fifth century and hypothesise that it might have been directly linked to a member of the Theodosian dynasty, perhaps to Valentinian III.

## **Chapter III**

### **The apse mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana: palace and city**

The apse mosaic examined in this chapter occupies the apse in the western end of the church of Sta. Pudenziana in Rome [figs. 73, 74]. The church was built over pre-existent Roman structures in the Esquiline region of Rome, which were erroneously identified as the *thermae Novatianae* but have recently been reinterpreted as an open garden with fountains.<sup>1</sup> The church, built for the religious community of the *titulus Pudentis*,<sup>2</sup> was built in several phases during the early Christian period. When the garden was transformed into a church, covering the open space with a roof and the fountains with a mosaic floor, one of its curvilinear walls was destroyed in order to build the facade while the other was turned into an apse. This first phase can be most likely located during the tenure of pope Siricius (384-

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<sup>1</sup> The identification as a bath complex of the ancient structures that are now part of the church was due to the archaeological investigations carried out by Petrucci between 1928 and 1930 and then by Krautheimer and his team in the 1960s (PETRIGNANI 1934; KRAUTHEIMER, CORBETT, FRANKL 1971, 291-296). However it was recently discarded by Guidobaldi, who definitely disproved Krautheimer's claim that the church of St. Pudenziana was the only civil building converted into a church in Rome (GUIDOBALDI 2002).

<sup>2</sup> SAXER 2001, 17-18; GUIDOBALDI 2002, 1041-1043. For the *tituli* of Rome, see: GUIDOBALDI 2000.

399).<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the fifth century,<sup>4</sup> the apse was decorated with a monumental mosaic programme, which is the topic of this chapter.

### **1. Description of the mosaic**

The mosaic represents Christ, at the centre of the composition, with six figures – five apostles and a veiled woman – on his right and six other symmetrically on the opposite side. Behind them there is a portico with arched openings. In the background above Christ's head a jewelled cross arises from a hill, on both the sides of which an urban setting develops with a great variety of buildings. On the top of the apse the four winged apocalyptic creatures appear from the clouds in the sky, the lion and the man on the viewer's left side and the ox and the eagle on its left.

Christ is set upon a jewelled throne with a red cushion and an embroidered blue and golden backrest. [fig. 75] His right hand is stretched out, as in an act of blessing, while the left hand holds an open book with an inscription *Dominus Conservator Ecclesiae Pudentianae* ('Lord Protector of the Church Pudentiana').<sup>5</sup> The haloed figure of Christ has brown hair and a

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<sup>3</sup> Guidobaldi accepted the dates previously proposed by Krautheimer and generally accepted by modern scholarship (KRAUTHEIMER, CORBETT, FRANKL 1971, 302-304; GUIDOBALDI 2002, 1067)

<sup>4</sup> For the following phases of the building, see: KRAUTHEIMER, CORBETT, FRANKL 1971, 303-304.

<sup>5</sup> For a careful analysis of the inscription, see: SCHLATTER 1989. For the church's epigraphs, see: VAN MAELE 1965, 104-109.

beard. He is dressed in a golden tunic with two vertical light blue bands at the sides (*clavi*), folded around the body, showing the shape of his seated.<sup>6</sup>

On either side of the throne two bearded men, identified as Paul and Peter, project their right hands towards Christ. [fig. 76-77] The one on Christ's right, Paul, holds a codex with an inscription. The original inscription was replaced by a new one after the seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup> Behind them two veiled women bring wreaths, probably as offerings to Christ. Although the wreaths appear to be exactly above Paul's and Peter's heads, the two women seem to be turned towards Christ and offering him the wreaths.<sup>8</sup> The wreaths above the two apostles' heads emphasize the prominent position of Peter and Paul, both in the mosaic and Church history. The wreaths, gifts for Christ, thus also single out Peter and Paul.

All the other figures of the mosaic are located at the sides of Christ, in a lower register, and are visible from the chest upwards. Their heads form a triangle, at the summit of which sits Christ. While the figures on either side of the throne look at Christ, with their bodies turning towards the throne, all the other figures look in different directions.<sup>9</sup> Each figure is characterized by different facial traits and haircuts.

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<sup>6</sup> The folds of Christ's tunic are rendered with yellow and brown cubes.

<sup>7</sup> The original text reported the date of the transformation of the pre-existent building into a Christian church, under the pontificate of Siricius (384-399) and the consulship of Eutychius (398): SCHLATTER 1989, 155-156.

<sup>8</sup> On the position of the wreaths and on the role of the two women, see the acute remarks of Valentino Pace in the discussion on the paper delivered by Daniela Goffredo at the international conference *Ecclesiae Urbis*: GUIDOBALDI AND GUIGLIA GUIDOBALDI 2002, 1966.

<sup>9</sup> Only the heads of the apostles and the veiled woman at Christ's right are original: the mosaic underwent heavy restoration which changed its original iconography. For a discussion on the restoration, see below pp. 213-217.

They are surrounded by a circular portico the arches of which are supported by pilasters that are decorated in a vertical rectangular pattern, recalling the vertical fluting of a column. The spaces between the arches are decorated by two squares. A few cornices ending in a denticulate are visible just below the sloping roof that covers the portico.

Behind the portico, on the same axis as Christ, a huge jewelled cross arises from a mount and dominates the apse. It divides the architectural background in two sides [figs. 73, 78]. On the right of the mount is a circular arched building, behind which stands a sort of basilica and a longitudinal building [figs. 79-80]. On the left side of the cross is an arched octagonal – or hexagonal – building with a sort of *opaion* at the top of its roof, a crenellated tower-like structure pierced by arcades behind which a two-storey building is visible, and various crenellated porticoes developing towards the side of the apse [fig. 81].

Above the cityscape, the sky is clad in blue and reddish clouds against which the four winged apocalyptic creatures appear [fig. 73].

## **2. Centuries of restorations**

Over the centuries the apse mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana underwent considerable restoration that affected the original structure of the apse, damaging part of the mosaic as well as its iconography. While tracking the complete history of the mosaic's restorations is impossible, we can

nevertheless reconstruct a few phases with confidence.<sup>10</sup> A first restoration was undertaken under Pope Hadrian I (772-795), and it is recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis*.<sup>11</sup> It is not clear whether this intervention was limited to the insertion of Hadrian's monogram into the mosaic, as Matthiae claimed, or whether it involved some major works, as a passage of the *Liber Pontificalis* seems to suggest.<sup>12</sup> The suggestion that the jewelled cross resulted from this phase can be refuted beyond doubt on the basis of Matthiae's detailed analysis of the mosaic technique: the ground of the mosaic does not show any cut or irregularity in the area around the cross – as would be the case if the cross had been inserted at a later point – and the material and dimensions of the cubes used for the cross are completely homogeneous with those of the mosaic's most ancient parts.<sup>13</sup>

There is no indication of other changes until 1588, when Cardinal Enrico Caetani promoted heavy restoration of the mosaic, which had large lacunas especially in the area on the left of the central Christ. At that time the lacunas were filled with paintings, depicting the heads of sixteenth-century people in place of the original apostles. The veiled woman was also completely remade, as were the dress of Peter, the buildings in the cityscape, the ox and parts of the eagle in the sky.<sup>14</sup> The apostles' bodies

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<sup>10</sup> VAN MAELE 1965, 63-78; MATTHIAE 1967, 55, 406-407; SCHLATTER 1989, 155-156; TIBERIA 2003, 131-163. For the earliest history of the building, see: MILELLA 1999.

<sup>11</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, I, ed. DUCHESNE, 508: *Immo et titulum Pudentis, id est ecclesiae sanctae Pudentianae, in ruinas praeventam noviter restauravit*. For a discussion on these restorations, see: MATTHIAE 1967, 406.

<sup>12</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 55.

<sup>13</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 406.

<sup>14</sup> After the recent restorations of the mosaic (2001-2002), the apostles seated next to Peter were identified as pope Paul III (Alessandro Farnese), Pier Luigi Farnese and Giulia



and dresses on the opposite side were also completely remade.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, large areas on the edges of the mosaic were lost:<sup>16</sup> one apostle at the external side of each group disappeared from the representation during that phase, a fact almost never mentioned in the secondary literature.<sup>17</sup> Another portion, located just underneath the throne, was destroyed in 1711. According to some fifteenth-century sketches, whose accuracy is however questionable, that part of the mosaic included a dove and a lamb, depicted over a wall or a curtain.<sup>18</sup>

In the nineteenth century (1831-1832), the antiquarian attitude of rediscovery of the past that inflamed the intellectuals led to the replacement of the painted areas with mosaic and the filling of other lacunas. Finally, in recent years restorations and analysis had added new data, especially regarding the technical features of mosaic.<sup>19</sup>

Based on an attentive study of the mosaic paid particular attention to mosaic technique, Matthiae was able to create a map of the original parts of the whole composition [fig. 82], which was later confirmed by lab analysis and restorations in 2001-2002.<sup>20</sup> As the sketch shows [fig. 82], on Christ's

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Farnese, while the identification of the last apostle is doubtful (ROSINI 2006a and ROSINI 2006b).

<sup>15</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 407.

<sup>16</sup> Matthiae estimated a loss of 80-90 cm on the top and even a greater one on the bottom end of mosaic (MATTHIAE 1967, 407).

<sup>17</sup> In each group there are only five apostles. Montini, Hellemo and Tiberia are the only scholars who noticed it and ascribed the loss of the external apostle to the sixteenth-century restorations are (MONTINI 1959, 69; HELLEMO 1989, 19 n.5; TIBERIA 2003, 131).

<sup>18</sup> The sketch, drawn by Ciacconius and dated 1595, is discussed by Matthiae, who relied extensively on it for the reconstruction of the original composition (MATTHIAE 1967, 62 and 406; see also: TIBERIA 2003, 71, 82, 131).

<sup>19</sup> TIBERIA 2003, 123-129; POGGI 2003; VERITÀ AND VALLOTTO 2003.

<sup>20</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, Tavole, *S. Pudenziana*; TIBERIA 2003, 131-141.

left the mosaic was almost entirely remade. The only original parts *in situ* are the head of Peter and the crown above his head, parts of the portico roof and the octagonal or hexagonal building, part of another building at the extremity of the apse, the sky above them, part of the eagle's wing and the ox's body. The rest of the composition underwent at least partial restorations, namely Christ's tunic, all the apostles' bodies, a portion of the portico roof with the buildings above it, the arms of the winged human creature, fragments of the cross, the sky and the lion's wing. Thus, little is left of the original mosaic and the iconography of the replaced parts was heavily influenced by sixteenth-century artistic taste. Since no accurate sketch of the original apse decoration is available and the mosaic was probably lost when it was replaced with the sixteenth-century paintings, in 1831-1832 it was remade following the sixteenth-century decoration. It is commonly assumed that the overall elements forming the design did not change, although their shape and features were definitely modified. However an iconographical study, and particularly a study of buildings, should take into account these alterations.

Unfortunately the earliest sketches of the mosaic were made after the restorations of 1588, so they present the mosaic as it was after these major changes. Scholars have made extensive use of Ciacconius' drawing, dated 1595 (Cod. Vat. Lat. 5407), despite its not being very accurate.<sup>21</sup> [fig. 83] This drawing seems to concentrate most of its attention on the depiction of

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<sup>21</sup> For the sketch, see: SCHLATTER 1992, 278; STEEN 2002, 1940.

the figures, without any care for the buildings or the architectural background. It also shows the lamb and the dove resting on it, a group separated from the enthroned Christ by the monogram of Hadrian discussed above. Another sketch, from around 1630 and now in the Dal Pozzo Collection of the Windsor Castle (Windsor Castle, Royal Library, Inv. No. 9058), is much more accurate.<sup>22</sup> [fig. 84] Just like Ciacconius's drawing, it shows the dove and the lamb underneath Christ's throne, yet also gives a complete view of the buildings and a detailed depiction of the apse.

Other alterations of the mosaic occurred in 1711 as the construction of a new altar caused the loss of the lamb and the dove.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century minor works were promoted by cardinal Litta and, as mentioned above, restorations were carried out by Cammuccini in 1829-1832.<sup>24</sup> Later on, the eighteenth-century archaeological investigations promoted by De Rossi were followed by the first serious restorations of the mosaic under the direction of Petrucci in 1928-1930.<sup>25</sup> In 1937 the mosaic was cleaned and consolidated by Matthiae and, in 1960-1964 an archaeological investigation in the church gave new evidence for the understanding of the building and its decoration.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> OSBORNE AND CLARIDGE 1996, 307 fig. 142.

<sup>23</sup> BOVINI 1971, 103.

<sup>24</sup> BOVINI 1971, 103.

<sup>25</sup> PETRIGNANI 1934.

<sup>26</sup> KRAUTHEIMER, CORBETT, FRANKL 1971.

### **3. Interpretations: the scholarly debate**

The apse mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana is still an important example of early Christian art. Scholars have attributed it to a number of different periods on the basis of the iconography. However the testimony of Panvinus, who recorded a destroyed inscription running at the bottom side of the mosaic, made it possible to date the mosaic with certainty<sup>27</sup> and determine that it is the most ancient apse mosaic preserved, belonging to the time of Innocent I (402-417).

Its iconography has been variously interpreted and is still hotly debated among scholars. Reviewing the scholarly readings of the mosaic, we will follow the structure of Maria Andaloro's summary in her bibliographical update of Matthiae's work.<sup>28</sup> Skipping the secondary literature already discussed by Andaloro, we will concentrate on the most recent and relevant contributions, emphasizing the understanding of the buildings that are of particular interest in the present research.

The scholarly debate concentrates on the general meaning of the mosaic. The various interpretations can be divided into a few groups, according to their predominant character.<sup>29</sup> Thus some readings underline the parousiac nature of the representation while others point out to its

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<sup>27</sup> For the inscription reported by Panvinus, see: MATTHIAE 1967, 68, 75 n. 42; KRAUTHEIMER, CORBETT, FRANKL 1971, 283; SCHLATTER 1989, 155-156.

<sup>28</sup> See Andaloro's update in MATTHIAE 1987, 225-226. The most complete and up to date work on Sta. Pudenziana's mosaic can be found in: ANDALORO 2006. Since a discussion of previous bibliography can be found both in MATTHIAE 1967 and BOVINI 1971, only the contributions issued after the work of Matthiae will be discussed here.

<sup>29</sup> See Andaloro's update in MATTHIAE 1987, 226.

eschatological significance.<sup>30</sup> A few scholars focus on the understanding of Christ's kingship and his function as a judge (*Christus rex – Christus iudex*).<sup>31</sup> Finally, other scholars have interpreted the iconography as a celebration of the church on earth.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.1 Parousiac interpretations

According to Matthiae, the main theme of the mosaic is the representation of Christ among the apostles. Particularly, in his view, what takes place in the mosaic is the transition from the representation of the *Christus docens* to that of the *parousia*, the realization of the kingdom of God, a message that was addressed to the community of the *titulus Pudentianae* through the inscription in Christ's book (*Dominus Conservator Ecclesiae Pudentianae*).<sup>33</sup> In the mosaic, Christ is set as a judge among his followers as in a court of law. The presence of the apocalyptic creatures in the sky adds the features of the second coming to the scene.<sup>34</sup> However, Matthiae pointed out that the source for the representation is not John's *Revelation*, but the text of Ephrem the Syrian.<sup>35</sup> This is mainly due to Matthiae's identification of the cityscape in the background with the

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<sup>30</sup> For an interpretation of the mosaic as a *parousia*, see: MATTHIAE 1967; MATTHIAE 1987. The major supporter of the eschatological interpretation is Christe (CHRISTE 1971; CHRISTE 1972; CHRISTE 1973); other scholars understood the mosaic as an eschatological representation (DASSMANN 1970; KHUNEL 1987; SCHLATTER 1989; SCHLATTER 1992; SCHLATTER 1995A; SCHLATTER 1995B; PULLAN 1998; WISSKIRCHEN 1998; HEID 2001).

<sup>31</sup> BOVINI 1971; HELLEMO 1989.

<sup>32</sup> THÉREL 1973; STEEN 1999; STEEN 2002; MATHEWS 2003.

<sup>33</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 60; MATTHIAE 1987, 38.

<sup>34</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 58.

<sup>35</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 61-63.

historical Jerusalem with its sanctuaries, as it was rebuilt by Constantine.<sup>36</sup> Just like in Ephrem's text, the *parousia* takes place in Jerusalem, the throne of God being brought down where the cross stands, on the Golgotha, and the trinity appears for the final judgement.<sup>37</sup> At that time the kingdom of God and the universal church (here represented by the two veiled women) triumph, as shown in the mosaic.<sup>38</sup>

A few remarks can be added to Matthiae's interpretation, especially in order to understand the cityscape, an element of capital importance for the meaning of the whole mosaic, and its origin in the Syriac text of Ephrem. The author is aware that restorations corrupted large portions of the mosaic, especially in the area pertaining to the cityscape. However, he reads the mosaic in an 'archaeological way', as it was the correct topographical representation of a city and not the mosaic rendering of a determined iconography. He interprets the view as a picture of the historical Jerusalem on the basis of the two buildings located closest to the centre, on either side of Christ. Thus the rotunda on the right should be identified with the building of the Anastasis, represented here with the basilica-martyrion [figs. 79-80].

On the other side he sees an octagonal building that should represent another historical monument, which he could not however identify [fig. 81]. These are indeed the only two buildings that underwent minor works and are still visible in their original form. The buildings surrounding

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<sup>36</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 58-59.

<sup>37</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 61.

<sup>38</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 63; MATTHIAE 1987, 38.

them, however, have been reshaped in such a way that the structural connections between them have been altered. The façade of the basilica now visible next to the rotunda was completely remade, thus casting doubts on its interpretation as a basilica – rather than a portico, for example. In addition, the right side of the octagon was probably oblique, following the inclination of the line of the roof. In that corner of the mosaic the building underwent restorations that probably confused it, creating in the currently visible version of the mosaic a confusion with the crenellation of the building besides it. Moreover, the octagonal building has a squared *opaion* with a double cornice on the top [fig. 81]; the presence of a squared *opaion* into an octagonal roof is hard to understand. The hypothesis that the *opaion* is octagonal must be discarded here, because if it were the case the sides of the *opaion* would need to be oblique in the same way as the top of the building's walls, whereas they are trapezoidal like a square represented in perspective. The representation of the building thus does not seem particularly accurate. However the building represented was likely conceived as octagonal or even as hexagonal, since only three sides of it are visible as if looking at an octagonal or hexagonal building while standing in front of one of its sides.

Finally, the identification of the exedra behind Christ and the apostles to the porticoed *cardo* of Jerusalem, as it was represented on the Madaba map, raises a few doubts.<sup>39</sup> [fig. 85] On the Madaba map, as well as

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<sup>39</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 59.

in reconstructions of the original plan of the fourth-century Jerusalem,<sup>40</sup> the *cardo* runs straight, crossing the entire city without turns. Its evidently curved shape makes it very unlikely that the portico behind Christ represents the *cardo* of Jerusalem.

From these considerations, it is difficult to claim, with Matthiae, that the buildings are accurate representations of real buildings into an urban setting.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, an identification of the buildings to contemporary monuments of Jerusalem is very problematic. Rotundas and octagonal buildings were in fact widespread architectural types in the Roman empire, which had a tremendous increase in number in early Christian architecture due to the diffusion of the Anastasis model, for the rotundas, and as the preferred architectural type for baptisteries and mausoleums, for the octagonal plan.<sup>42</sup> This undermines the central element of Matthiae's interpretation of the mosaic as the *parousia* taking place in the earthly Jerusalem, the location in the historical Jerusalem. The influence of Ephrem in the iconography of the mosaic cannot be proved with certainty, lacking secure elements to identify the cityscape as the city of Jerusalem as it presumably appeared at the beginning of the fifth century.

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<sup>40</sup> For a reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem with reference to the Madaba map, see: TZAFRIR 1999.

<sup>41</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 58. These considerations can also bring perspective to Pullan's understanding of the mosaic as a representation of the city of Jerusalem. Her first reading involved a reflection on the ancient appearance of the city, although the author concludes by stating that the mosaic is intended to show at once the real and ideal Jerusalem (PULLAN 1998).

<sup>42</sup> For the diffusion of domed buildings in the urban cityscape of fourth-century Rome and their impact on the appearance of the late-antique city, see: GUIDOBALDI 2004, 266-267. The choice of octagonal shape for mausoleums and baptisteries was due to the symbolic meaning of the number 8: UNDERWOOD 1950. For baptismal buildings, see also: FALLA CASTELFRANCHI 1992, 214-216.



Arguing in favour of a complex and comprehensive character in early Christian representations, Engemann has defined several coexisting themes in the apse of Sta. Pudenziana.<sup>43</sup> In his view, Christ is both a *Christus docens* and a *Christus iudex*; likewise, the cross is Christ passion's cross as well as the sign appearing in the sky before the second coming (*Matt.* 24.30), and the city of Jerusalem is seen as both the fourth-century historical Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem of the end of times. Therefore the scene is not the representation of any particular event, but rather simultaneously holds different meanings and evokes several themes. In a later article, the author stated that the mosaic is a comprehensive representation incorporating features of a judgement scene, a *parousia*, and those of an a-temporal eschatology.<sup>44</sup> In Engemann's view, the link made by Christe between the scene of Sta. Pudenziana and the Roman imperial *adventus* should not be understood as excluding the theme of judgement. The comparison with medieval judgment scenes allows the author to support this point. The value of Engemann's contribution resides in the outline of the coexistence, in early Christian images, of different levels of meaning working together, an aspect that Hellemo has emphasized.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> ENGEMANN 1974, 34-36.

<sup>44</sup> ENGEMANN 1979. This paper sharply contrasted Christe's reading of the mosaic, that will be discussed later in this chapter (see pp. 224-227).

<sup>45</sup> HELLEMO 1989.

In a very short article, Betori has identified the late-antique character of the urban architecture represented in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana.<sup>46</sup> Without discussing the subject of the scene, which he essentially read as a *parousia*, the author has clarified the relation between the central buildings represented in the mosaic (the only elements which underwent minor restorations) and the representation of late-antique architecture. The author was able to demonstrate that, in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, the representation of the cityscape appears perfectly consistent with the appearance of late-antique cities. The article suggests a possible identification of the rotunda represented in the cityscape with the Anastasis-rotunda, but unfortunately does not discuss it in detail or offer any conclusion on the topic.

### 3.2 Eschatological interpretations

Dassmann's reading had a great impact on later scholarship about Sta. Pudenziana's mosaic, becoming an important reference for the understanding of the cityscape as a heavenly city, taking the shape of the earthly Constantinian Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> According to Dassmann the iconography has an eschatological futuristic character, consistent with a general tendency in early Christian art, which tended to express both theological speculation and the political situation of that time.<sup>48</sup> Following the Hellenistic tradition

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<sup>46</sup> BETORI 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Dassmann's interpretation was in fact followed by Khünel, Pullan and Heid (KHÜNEL 1987; PULLAN 1998; HEID 2001).

<sup>48</sup> DASSMANN 1970.

of god-kings, Christ is seated in the middle of the apostolic college as a king and ruler.<sup>49</sup> As contemporary patristic thought emphasizes the figure of Christ as a king and judge, so the mosaic portrays Christ with kingly attributes in a judgment scene.<sup>50</sup> The inscription held by Christ directly refers to the believers of the church, involving their participation in the event taking place in the apse.

In 1971 Christe made a clear distinction between the eschatological and the apocalyptic natures of the scene represented in the apse of Sta. Pudenziana.<sup>51</sup> In his view, the mosaic programme bears an eschatological significance, linked to the idea of heavenly triumph, not to be confused with the apocalyptic character of the *parousia*, which should be considered more as a procession or an *adventus* happening at the end of times.<sup>52</sup> The author was mainly concerned with the identification of the structural scheme of the scene and its antecedents, rather than with the understanding of the text from which this iconography may have originated.<sup>53</sup> The static and abstract character of the composition excludes the idea of motion entailed in the *parousia*, which happens in a determined way at the end of time and therefore bears an historical character, since it is announced in the gospel of

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<sup>49</sup> DASSMANN 1970, 73.

<sup>50</sup> DASSMANN 1970, 77-78.

<sup>51</sup> CHRISTE 1971.

<sup>52</sup> CHRISTE 1971, 34-35 nn.7-8.

<sup>53</sup> CHRISTE 1971,42.

Matthew (*Matt.* 19; 24; 25).<sup>54</sup> The mosaic thus represents a heavenly triumph that was made possible through the victory of Christ on the cross. This theophany arises from the scheme of imperial and religious images representing the triumph of the emperor or Christianity, achieved in the name of, or through the cross. As in imperial triumphal images, a cross, with or without victories, dominates one or more emperors surrounded by their court. In the same fashion, in the case of Sta. Pudenziana Christ is set on a throne under a cross raised on a mountain; he is encircled by the apostles, with two veiled women symbolizing the *Ecclesia ex gentibus* and the *Ecclesia ex circumcisione* in place of the victories.<sup>55</sup> [fig. 76] The idea of last judgement is perhaps implicit in the scene, especially through the presence of the four apocalyptic creatures, yet the main character of the mosaic is that of an heavenly triumph happening out of time.<sup>56</sup>

The importance of Christe's contribution lies in the definition of a structural scheme in the composition that derives from Roman and early Christian imperial images and that can be applied to the representation of both the emperor, after Constantine, and of Christ. While the cross standing above the emperor represents the sign of his victory in the name of Christ, the cross standing on the mount in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana represents the victory of Christ achieved by dying on the Golgotha. The rejection of

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<sup>54</sup> Christe argued against the identification of the gospel of Matthews as a source for the scene, proposed by Peterson and supported by Dinkler and Brenk (PETERSON 1945, 52; DINKLER 1964, 54-55; BRENK 1966, 64-65; CHRISTE 1973). On the same subject, see Christe's important reflections in: CHRISTE 1979.

<sup>55</sup> The derivation of the two veiled women from the Roman images of victories is demonstrated by Daniela Goffredo (GOFFREDO 2002).

<sup>56</sup> CHRISTE 1971, 36.

the possibility that the scene originates in the gospel of Matthew strengthens its meaning as a triumph taking place in heaven. In Christe's view, the location of the event is not an issue: the representation of Christ set among his court as an emperor with the sky as a background is atemporal, and is thus obviously held in paradise. Unfortunately Christe does not relate the event to the architectural background of the scene, and consequently does not identify the portico and the urban setting beyond, assuming these elements to be part of a representation of heaven. Moreover, the identification of the composition structural scheme, which is the main topic of the paper, unfortunately avoids any insistence on or discussion of a few details such as the posture of the apostles.

Among the apostles on Christ' right, whose heads are original, three figures look towards Christ while the others have their bodies turned toward Christ with their heads looking in the opposite direction. Their mouths are closed and they seem to look towards the nave. If the event taking place in the apse is a divine theophany, the attitude of the two apostle seems rather odd: why not look towards Christ? There are a few possible explanations. They might be looking at the Christians, to whom the mosaic is addressed, since the community of the church is explicitly mentioned in the open book held by Christ. In such a case their attitude would be like an appeal to participate to the theophany. It is also possible that theirs is an attitude of fear or deference, not daring to look at Christ perhaps because of the splendour emanating from his figure. Thus the attitude of the apostles can be

explained either as an appeal to the community of the church, or as an act of deference in front of the manifestation of God. Unfortunately, in the case of Sta. Pudenziana the apostles' bodies underwent restorations to an undetermined extent, thus opening the possibility that their attitude is misleading; this element of information can therefore not be used here. Such considerations on the apostles' attitude are consistent with Christe's interpretation of the mosaic and at the same time suggest a key of interpretation for the apostles attitude that is different from that of a court of law or judgement, prevalent in the scholarly opinion.

Following Dassmann's general interpretation of the apse mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, Bianca Khünel proposed a different reading of the urban background.<sup>57</sup> According to Khünel, the setting for the assembly of Christ is the earthly Jerusalem as it was rebuilt by Constantine. The appearance of the earthly city is used here to represent the heavenly city of God.<sup>58</sup> This view is based on the identification of elements that are typical of the heavenly Jerusalem of John's *Revelation* and of buildings that can be safely identified as the Constantinian monuments of Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup> She claims the influence of *Revelation* on the basis of the presence of the four winged animals and, more importantly, on the identification of the portico behind Christ and the apostles with the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, pierced by the twelve gates (*Rev.* 21.12). According to Khünel, only six of the twelve gates are

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<sup>57</sup> KHÜNEL 1987, 63-72.

<sup>58</sup> This is a view shared by Heid (HEID 2001, 176-188).

<sup>59</sup> KHÜNEL 1987, 65-66.

visible, two gates being obscured by the throne of God, another two by the two women and the last two lost during the restoration of 1588 that also took away the apostles near the margins of the composition.<sup>60</sup>

The identification of the urban setting with the Constantinian architecture of the earthly Jerusalem is based on the identification of the structures of the Holy Sepulchre. Khünel recognised the Anastasis-rotunda in the circular building and its annexes on the left side as well as the Golgotha hill at the centre with the cross built by Constantine and renewed by Theodosios I.<sup>61</sup> [figs. 79-81]

Khünel's thesis contains a few unresolved issues. With regards to the derivation of the four winged animals from the *Revelation*, their arrangement in the mosaic follows the order of the gospels as it was established by Jerome in the *Vulgata* rather than the order of appearance of the heavenly beasts in *Revelation* 4.7.<sup>62</sup> The derivation of the apocalyptic animals from *Revelation* can only be supported after a reflection on the visual structure of the iconography as a whole, which Khünel omitted. In particular the question arises as to whether or not an apse mosaic should be read from the right to the left. The apse being a curved surface, its decoration can hardly be read in the same way as that of a flat wall mosaic or as an inscription, the words of which follow the canonical right-to-left arrangement. The apse of Sta. Pudenziana has a strong central axis as a focal

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<sup>60</sup> Identifying the portico with the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation*, Thérél drew the same conclusions (THÉREL 1973, 107 n.1; KHÜNEL 1987, 65-66).

<sup>61</sup> KHÜNEL 1987, 66.

<sup>62</sup> This allows Matthiae to suppose the direct influence of the aristocratic circles linked with Jerome on the making of the mosaic (MATTHIAE 1967, 57-58; BOVINI 1971, 108).

point: the vertical alignment of the enthroned Christ, the mountain, and the jewelled cross upon it. According to this axis the whole decoration develops symmetrically, so that the princes of the apostles sit besides Christ, behind them the two women and then all the other apostles. The axis is the focal point of the composition, the line on which the most important elements are arranged: Christ and the cross. The other elements of the composition develop around it, decreasing in importance as the eye drifts away from the centre, following a certain conceptual and visual hierarchy [tab. 2]. Reading the mosaic starting from the focal point – the Christ-cross axis – the four apocalyptic beasts should be read starting from the ones which are next to the cross, the lion and the ox, and continuing with the ones which are farther, the human figure and the eagle. In this way their arrangement would follow exactly the order of appearance of the winged creatures in *Revelation* 4.7: the lion at first, followed by the ox, then the man, and finally the eagle.<sup>63</sup>

**man - lion - cross - ox - eagle**

Table 2: scheme reproducing the arrangement of the elements in the mosaic's upper register.

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<sup>63</sup> Bovini anticipated this point in 1971 (BOVINI 1971, 107-108).



Consequently, while the influence of John's *Revelation* on the disposition of the four winged animals and on this iconography is possible, it cannot be supported by Khünel's arguments.

The identification of the portico with the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation* is based only on the number of gates.<sup>64</sup> However, if the portico represents the heavenly Jerusalem, one should ask why its walls are not made of precious stones and its gates not protected by angels, as they are in the heavenly Jerusalem of John. The person who invented such an iconography, if he/she meant to represent the heavenly Jerusalem of John, could have depicted it as it is described in the text, without omitting the precious gems that are present elsewhere in the mosaic – in the throne and the cross – in order to be consistent with this representation.

Moreover, identifying the urban background as the city Jerusalem as it was rebuilt by Constantine is problematic. According to Khünel, the buildings represent, from left to right the Anastasis and the rotunda, the Golgotha hill with the cross, and the apse of the martyrium, identified with the octagonal structure on the right side in an exact representation of the Constantinian Jerusalem.<sup>65</sup> However Khünel assumed that the urban background represents the Holy Sepulchre, not taking into account that most of the represented buildings has been heavily altered by restorations. In addition, only late Latin writers attribute the cross on Golgotha to

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<sup>64</sup> KHÜNEL 1987, 65-66.

<sup>65</sup> KHÜNEL 1987, 66-67.

Constantine,<sup>66</sup> the first golden cross having probably been erected by Theodosios II around 420 – and not by Theodosios I. If, following Khünel, the representation of the Holy Sepulchre is an exact representation of the Constantinian complex, one would expect also the image of the cross to be an accurate reproduction. Since it is impossible to claim the existence of a jewelled cross on Golgotha before 420, the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana cannot be an accurate representation of the Holy Sepulchre or of the earthly Jerusalem, under Constantine. The whole iconography should not be seen as an accurate reproduction of reality, but should rather be interpreted as symbolic.

The greatest contribution of Khünel's analysis of the mosaic is found in her comparison between the portico that surrounds Christ and the apostles and the so-called 'city-gate sarcophagi', whose production is associated with the late fourth-century workshops of Rome.<sup>67</sup> All the city-gate sarcophagi are associated with the heavenly assembly of Christ and the apostles.<sup>68</sup> Christ is shown sitting or standing in the middle of the twelve apostles who stretch their arms towards him in sign of acclamation. The background is either a roofed portico or a series of arched city-doors. The structure behind Christ is most of the times an exedra or an arch, or a

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<sup>66</sup> FROLOW 1961, 155-158, 161-165; HOLUM 1982, 103 (with sources); MANGO 2004, 28-32 (with references).

<sup>67</sup> KHÜNEL 1987, 64-65. Van der Meer and Betori both emphasized the resemblance between the architecture of the portico in mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana and the city-gate sarcophagi (VAN DER MEER 1938, 76-77; BETORI 2000, 399). For a catalogue of city-gate sarcophagi, see: COLLI 1983a, 201-211. For references on these products of the workshops of Rome, see: BISCONTI 1996, 596-599.

<sup>68</sup> LAWRENCE 1927; SANSONI 1969, 79-82.

sumptuously decorated pediment on columns. It frames the figure of Christ, emphasizing his importance in the middle of the scene. The manifestation of Christ surrounded by the apostles or the association of the apostles' assembly with the *traditio legis* are themes whose the supernatural and heavenly character has for long been a subject of investigation of scholars.<sup>69</sup> The evidence of the columnar and city-gates sarcophagi is important to us because it indicates that the architectural background is the privileged place for the manifestation of Christ and his assembly in scenes of undoubtedly heavenly character. It therefore suggests the identification of the architectural background of the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana to a heavenly environment.

Schlatter has recently offered a new interpretation of the mosaic based on Jerome's reading of Ezekiel. He has developed the subject in a number of papers, taking into account the general meaning of the whole scene as well as specific subjects reviewed in the light of Jerome's texts and understanding of Ezekiel's vision.<sup>70</sup> Following Jerome's literary activity and connecting it to the history of Rome in the fifth century, he finally dated the mosaic to after 410 but during the pontificate of Innocent I, that is between 410 and 417. The starting point of Schlatter's thesis is the influence of Ezekiel's text in the intellectual circles of Rome at the beginning of the

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<sup>69</sup> Here we do not intend to discuss the political and religious value of these themes (SANSONI 1969, 77-79; KHÜNEL 1987, 64 and 186 n. 24 (with references); BISCONTI 1996, 596-604).

<sup>70</sup> SCHLATTER 1989; SCHLATTER 1992; SCHLATTER 1995a; SCHLATTER, 1995b.

fifth century. Beyond the impact of John's *Revelation* on the apse mosaics of the fourth century, the speculation on its antecedents, Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6, created an interest in Old Testament literature and its possible incorporation in church mosaic programmes. For Schlatter, the main source of the scene represented in the apse of Sta. Pudenziana is Ezekiel 40-48, with further references to other parts of the prophetic text as interpreted by Jerome.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, the figure seated on the throne is interpreted as the Father, the cross as alluding to the presence of Christ on a hill that could be Golgotha or the Mount of Olives,<sup>72</sup> and the clouds as the Holy Spirit.<sup>73</sup> The representation of the trinity and of the apostles, obviously absent in Ezekiel, is explained through Jerome's understanding of the prophetic text. The setting of the scene is the eschatological Jerusalem with a temple in the centre, as Jerome interprets the land of Israel as it was seen by Ezekiel from a mountain (*Ez.* 40.2).<sup>74</sup> The portico in particular would represent the western side of the atrium of the temple.<sup>75</sup> Through a detailed analysis of the lexicon utilized by Jerome in the description of the temple, Schlatter has been able to explain the features of the portico as if they were directly influenced by the text of Jerome.<sup>76</sup> In this context, the urban setting is seen as a representation of the heavenly Jerusalem but its main quality, just like

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<sup>71</sup> SCHLATTER 1992, 283.

<sup>72</sup> The Mount of Olives is mentioned in Jerome's reading (SCHLATTER 1992, 285-286).

<sup>73</sup> SCHLATTER 1992, 288-289.

<sup>74</sup> SCHLATTER 1995a, 64.

<sup>75</sup> SCHLATTER 1992, 284; SCHLATTER 1995a, 66.

<sup>76</sup> SCHLATTER 1995a, 67-69.

the temple, is to be an allegory of the church.<sup>77</sup> Thus the building structures are not physical nor real. In Jerome's thought the restored Jerusalem that Ezekiel saw in his vision describes the present and future reality of the church. In the words of Jerome there is a kind of realized eschatology that is to be found in the contemporary state of the Church as well as in the architectural setting of the scene of Sta. Pudenziana. It is difficult to determine whether the urban setting borrowed elements from a real city, such as the contemporary Rome or Jerusalem. Schlatter thus left the question open.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike the other readings of the mosaic, Schlatter has given a consistent interpretation that is deeply rooted in his knowledge of Jerome, without using motifs that may have been present in the lost portions of the mosaic.<sup>79</sup> We can however make some remarks to his thesis.

After the sack of 410, Rome was devastated by fire and destruction.<sup>80</sup> One of the major concerns after 410 was the rebuilding of the city, and the decoration of a apse would have been of secondary importance in comparison with the basic needs of the city and its people. Although Schlatter's thesis is consistent and captivating, reading the mosaic as an answer of the intellectual followers of Jerome to the devastation of Rome in

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<sup>77</sup> SCHLATTER 1995a, 73-75.

<sup>78</sup> SCHLATTER 1995a, 77-78.

<sup>79</sup> In this respect, see his careful discussion on the lamb and dove that were drawn in the sixteenth-century sketch of Ciacconius: SCHLATTER 1992, 286-288.

<sup>80</sup> Jerome gives an extremely vivid description of the events surrounding the incursion into the palace (*domus*) of the Roman aristocrat Marcella (JEROME, *Ep.* CXXVII, 12-13, ed. J. Labourt, Paris 1961, 146-147). Concerning the famine in Rome, see: ZOSIMOS, *Hist. Nova*, VI.11, ed. F. Paschaud, III.2, Paris 1989, 13-14.

410, it does not consider practical and economic problems that arose after 410. The making of the mosaic depended on available funds, condition that surely had to wait some years after the sack of Rome. The mosaic could have been a praise of the *titulus Pudentis*' Christian community to God who saved them and the church from pillage;<sup>81</sup> in which case it is more probable that it pertained to the last years of the pontificate of Innocent I, some time after the sack. For the creation of literary works, such as the texts of Jerome and Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, does not involve money, nor people, that at that time would have been probably occupied in the rebuilding of the city.

Continuing the analysis of the sacred topography represented in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, Pullan proposed a new interpretation of the buildings in the cityscape of the mosaic.<sup>82</sup> Based on the assumption that the mosaic represents the heavenly Jerusalem in the form of the earthly city of Jerusalem, the scene is interpreted as simultaneously portraying the Christian dimensions of time and history and the kingdom of God. In Pullan's view, earthly and heavenly domains continuously merge in the mosaic, and the representation of the earthly city of Jerusalem mediates between the two.

Pullan identified the rotunda, the portico, and the octagonal building with the three major monuments of fourth-century Jerusalem, respectively the Imbomon or church of the Ascension, the Anastasis-rotunda, and the

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<sup>81</sup> As Schlatter has interpreted the inscriptions written in the book of enthroned figure in the mosaic: SCHLATTER 1989, 161-162.

<sup>82</sup> PULLAN 1998.

church of the Nativity in Bethlehem .<sup>83</sup> [fig. 79-81] The author explained this identifications on the basis of archaeological and textual evidence, however on the back of her unquestioned assumption that the cityscape must represent that of Jerusalem. She read the urban setting as an accurate and mimetic representation, without providing a justification. Although the author is aware of the alterations of the mosaics, she limited her analysis to the current representation, identifying the church of the Nativity and the Imbomon on the basis of the architectural connections between the central and surrounding buildings. In her view, the scene represented in the mosaic takes place inside the Anastasis-rotunda. This is very unlikely. As will be explained later in this chapter, one element, which scholarship has never carefully observed, excludes any possibility that the scene occurs inside a building: the green colour of the hill on the top of which is located the throne of Christ. This colour is reminiscent of a garden-like setting, which is a common feature for the representation of Christ in the early Christian apses, and excludes the possibility that the scene takes place indoors.

Concluding that the mosaic represents the earthly mission of Christianity and its tendency towards an eschatological future, Pullan stated that the portico's roof is a boundary between 'sacred and profane' realms.<sup>84</sup> However, why should the apse of a church represent both 'profane and sacred' realms? Into the church building the apse is the most sacred place, where only the churchmen can enter; there God manifests Himself in the

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<sup>83</sup> PULLAN 1998, 409-413.

<sup>84</sup> PULLAN 1998, 415.

Eucharist and is portrayed in the decoration of the apsidal conch.<sup>85</sup> The ambiguous character of the scene notwithstanding, it is hardly conceivable that the apsidal mosaic, where Christ is represented as an emperor on a throne among the apostles, holds any profane feature.

Pullan's understanding of the mosaic is mostly based on untested assumptions, however it is worth noting that her interpretation excludes any relation between, on the one hand, the buildings of Jerusalem and Bethlehem<sup>86</sup> that she sees as represented in the mosaic and, on the other hand, the representation of the two cities at the sides of early Christian triumphal arches. The two cities are in fact images of the two Churches (of the Jews and of the Gentiles), which in Sta. Pudenziana are represented through the figures of the two veiled women and thus they have no reason to be reproduced also in the buildings of the cityscape.<sup>87</sup> However a few other considerations exclude the possibility that Jerusalem and Bethlehem may in any way be represented in the mosaic. When they are depicted, the two cities are always accompanied by an inscription indicating their names, but in the apse of Sta. Pudenziana such an indication is nowhere to be found. The two cities are also always represented by means of high walled enceintes, with gates and lateral towers, enclosing buildings. They are also

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<sup>85</sup> DEMUS 1947, 46; IHM 1960; KRAUTHEIMER 1986b, 40.

<sup>86</sup> Pullan's interpretation of the octagonal building as the Nativity church in Bethlehem is based on textual evidence, where the caves of the nativity, the ascension and the resurrection are regarded as sacred caverns (PULLAN 1998, 412-413). In the identification of the octagonal building with the Nativity church of Bethlehem, Pullan has however opposed Conant, who also based his reconstruction of the Holy Sepulchre on the representation of the apse of Sta. Pudenziana stating that the octagonal building had surely to be identified with the Nativity church in Bethlehem (CONANT 1956, 6-7; CONANT 1958, 19, 21-23; PULLAN 1998, 411 n.50).

<sup>87</sup> PULLAN 1998, 412.



made of gold and jewels, as in Sta. Maria Maggiore (432-440) [figs. 86-87], the earliest example of the representation of the two cities; their image, influenced by *Revelation* (21, 18-22), is thus idealized and turned into a symbol.<sup>88</sup> In the triumphal arch of Sta. Maria Maggiore, the city of Jerusalem is characterized by a circular domed building which has been identified with the Anastasis-rotunda;<sup>89</sup> we argue that this feature, although referring to the real city of Jerusalem, is insufficient evidence to claim that the city represented is the real Jerusalem. The presence of a domed circular building is a constant characteristic of Jerusalem, belonging to the appearance of the real city and becoming a sort of epithet that distinguishes the representation of Jerusalem itself, both as the real Jerusalem and as the symbol of the church. It is still portrayed in the arch of Sta. Maria Maggiore where Jerusalem becomes a symbol, in a matching pair with Bethlehem. The two cities represent the end and the beginning of Christ life and thus become the epitome of the two Churches, points of departure and arrival for all the people of Israel.<sup>90</sup> The cities are made of gold and jewels, and are thus ideal and symbolic. They nonetheless hold earthly features of the

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<sup>88</sup> CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1996, 663-664; CASARTELLI NOVELLI 2000.

<sup>89</sup> BETORI 2000, 403.

<sup>90</sup> It is worth noting that in the arch of St. Maria Maggiore the lambs stand in front of the city-gates, as if they were entering the city, whereas in the later examples, such as the apse decoration of Sts. Cosmas and Damian (sixth century), they depart from the cities at the sides of the composition converging towards the centre, where an haloed lamb stands on a hill. However, in St. Maria Maggiore the lambs are the result of a restoration, thus it is doubtful that they stood in the same position in the original iconography. For an interpretation of the lambs as the people of Israel, with further reference to the Scriptures, see: THÉREL 1973, 109-110. For an interpretation of the lambs as the apostles, see: FARIOLI CAMPANATI 1999, 174.

original cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, pointing out to the significance of these two cities in the history of Christianity.

Their position within the church decoration is also meaningful. In church buildings the images of the two cities occupy the sides of the triumphal arch or the bottom frieze of the apse decoration, and never the centre of the apse.<sup>91</sup> They originate from an earthly domain and are then idealized, becoming symbols of the history of Christianity. Their location in early Christian church decoration seems consistent with such a meaning, since they are placed at the base of the apsidal conch or on the triumphal arch, as if making the transition into the sacred space of the apse where Christ or deep Christian symbols are represented. In the image of the two cities, several meanings overlap, as they are significantly connected with the earthly history of both Christ and Christianity. They are the places where two of the most important events of Christ's life took place, the resurrection and the incarnation. At the same time they symbolize the two Churches, original symbols of the people of Israel, the *ecclesia ex circumcissione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, which were converted and grouped together by Peter and Paul. The location of each element within the whole decoration is important to convey different meanings. Thus they are not located in the apsidal conch, the place reserved to the manifestation of Christ and divine realities, but rather on the base of the apse decoration or on the apsidal arch, where the earthly church is represented as a gate to heavenly realities. This

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<sup>91</sup> For a detailed list of the images of Jerusalem and Bethlehem both in early Christianity and in early Christian Rome, see: COLLI 1983c; BALLARDINI 2000b, 260-271.

is another argument against the intention to represent Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the apse decoration of Sta. Pudenziana, where there is no inscription indicating the name of the two cities and their representation differs from that of walled jewelled cities.

In 1998 Wisskirchen read the mosaic as a judgement scene, the antecedents for which can be found in the Mediterranean tradition and particularly in the early Christian art of Rome.<sup>92</sup> The author interpreted Christ and the apostles as an apostolic *college* that would have been directly related to the clergy of the church and interacting with it during the liturgy. In this way Christ and the apostles were represented in a judgement scene and mirrored by the clergy below. Finally the inscription in the hands of Christ related the scene to the community of the *titulus*, creating an active interaction between judgement iconography and the congregation.

In his monograph on the cosmic value of the cross and Jerusalem, Heid has interpreted the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, emphasizing the value of the scene as a simultaneous representation of the eschatological and real Jerusalem.<sup>93</sup> In his view the mosaic depicts heavenly Jerusalem in the form of the earthly Jerusalem as it was rebuilt by Constantine.<sup>94</sup> Through the image of the real Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem acquires a concrete character that is consistent with the representation of the cross and the

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<sup>92</sup> WISSKIRCHEN 1998.

<sup>93</sup> HEID 2001, 176-188.

<sup>94</sup> HEID 2001, 179.

enthroned Christ, all symbols of protection towards the Christian community and the earthly Church. As Christ defends Rome, so the cross protects Jerusalem. Rome and Jerusalem are both holy cities benefiting from the protection of God, symbolised by the cross. The mosaic is however interpreted according to the words of Isaiah 2.2-3: the law of God comes from Sion and the words of the Saviour from Jerusalem. In this context the twelve apostles and the two veiled women, personifications of the two Churches, symbolize the apostolic mission that is carried out on earth by the Church itself, the new Jerusalem.<sup>95</sup>

The value of Heid's contribution resides in his understanding of the cityscape as a representation of a real city that is intended to symbolize a spiritual reality, the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>96</sup> The use of 'concrete' architectural forms to portray a heavenly environment is important to us because it shows that the heavenly kingdom could be represented only by means of the well known image of a late-antique city. However, as we stated above, there is no reliable evidence that identifies the cityscape of the mosaic with the city of Jerusalem. The identification of the two central buildings in the background as the Holy Sepulchre and the church of the mount of Olives is hypothetical at best.<sup>97</sup> Heid seems aware of this, but nevertheless sees an image of the real Jerusalem in the cityscape.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> HEID 2001, 179-184.

<sup>96</sup> In this sense Heid follows Khünel's interpretation of the cityscape (KHÜNEL 1987, 63-72).

<sup>97</sup> This interpretation was proposed by Pullan (PULLAN 1998).

<sup>98</sup> HEID 2001, 187-188.

### 3.3 Christ's kingship in the apostolic college

In 1971 Bovini interpreted the mosaic as a celebration of Christ in the middle of the apostolic college.<sup>99</sup> In his view, the setting for the manifestation of Christ and the apostles is the heavenly Jerusalem, depicted in the form of an earthly city but without reproducing Rome or the Holy Land's monuments.<sup>100</sup> The author took into account archaeological issues on the church as well as the iconographical debate on the mosaic, clarifying the current state of research. Although this contribution does not add new evidence to the speculation on the mosaic, it is thus important as a summary and a discussion of the previous bibliography.

Discussing the prevailing eschatological interpretation of fourth- and fifth-century pictorial programmes, Hellemo argued for various interpretative possibilities and opposed a unidirectional reading of late-antique art.<sup>101</sup> Ambiguity – deriving from the overlapping of different meanings within the same work of art – is considered as a typical feature of late-antique pictorial programmes.<sup>102</sup> Reading the apsidal mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, Hellemo therefore defined several levels of significance expressed by the iconography. The central theme of the mosaic is Christ as a king among the apostolic college. The second theme is the definition of the

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<sup>99</sup> BOVINI 1971.

<sup>100</sup> BOVINI 1971, 106-107.

<sup>101</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 17.

<sup>102</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 17, 54.

earthly or heavenly character of the composition and thus of the ecclesiological character of the scene. A third theme relies on the representation of the cross and on the definition of Christological motifs.

The kingship of Christ is particularly expressed in the jewelled throne upon which he sits [fig. 75]. According to Hellemo, the throne is different from a *sella curulis*; it has its roots in eastern monarchical ideology and as such is an attribute of absolute sovereignty and almighty power. Here Christ is set upon it as a king and ruler.<sup>103</sup> However, Hellemo does not take into account the important parallels that the jewelled throne, as it is depicted in the mosaic, finds in the imperial late-antique art. The throne of ivory now in the *Kunsthistorisches* Museum of Vienna, dating around 500, is a perfect representation of the same kind of throne that in this case was the seat of an empress, probably of Ariadne.<sup>104</sup> [fig. 58] Both the thrones have legs encrusted in gems ending in two globes, encrusted *suppedanea* and big cushions; only the backrests of the thrones are different: the ivory one seems to reproduce a lyre-backed throne whereas that of Sta. Pudenziana is large and embroidered. Although their features are different in patterns, the two thrones pertain to the same imperial sphere.

According to Hellemo, the figures surrounding Christ are depicted making acclamation gestures as well as in an act of thanksgiving.<sup>105</sup> This allows the author to state that the mosaic depicts the transition from a

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<sup>103</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 41-44.

<sup>104</sup> See: <http://www.khm.at/homeE3.html> (last accessed 16.07.2006); BRECKENRIDGE 1979a.

<sup>105</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 44-49.

teaching scene to an acclamation scene, which can be connected to the thanks offering and worshipping of *Revelation* as well as of imperial acclamation scenes.<sup>106</sup> It is possible to understand the attitude of the veiled women offering wreaths to Christ as an act of thanksgiving, although the same does not seem to be apply to the apostles, whose bodies have been totally remade. Since the only original parts of their bodies are the heads of the apostles seated on Christ's right, only their gaze could be interpreted. Only some of them look at Christ, the others turn their heads in the opposite direction. It is consequently quite difficult to state that they are acclaiming Christ.

The apostolic *college* can perhaps be read as a reference to the arrangement of the clergy around the *synthronon* during the divine service, thus having an ecclesilogic meaning.<sup>107</sup> However, no evidence of the *synthronon* was found during the archaeological works at Sta. Pudenziana. The church was not an episcopal seat, but a *titulus*; given its character as a congregational church, it was not supposed to have a *synthronon*.<sup>108</sup> The author also warned that this confuses the understanding of the apostolic *college*, attributing to it an earthly character as a personification of the church on earth. As Hellemo admitted, there is no evidence to state an earthly dimension for the apostles, to be opposed to the heavenly dimension

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<sup>106</sup> The author saw a close connection among the scene of Sta. Pudenziana, the thanks offering of *Revelation* 4.7, and the imperial acclamations (HELLEMO 1989, 45).

<sup>107</sup> The association between the arrangement of the apostles in the mosaic and the clerics set around the curve of the apse on the *synthronon* has been accepted by Mathews (MATHEWS 1993, 113-114).

<sup>108</sup> For the *synthronon*, see: KRAUTHEIMER 1986b, 102; JOHNSON AND CUTLER 1991.

of Christ. According to the author, the personification of the churches and the inscription on Christ's book suggest an involvement of the earthly church and the community of the *titulus* in the scene, while the representation of Christ as a king involves a judgement theme, thus implying a tension between the earthly and heavenly church.

According to Hellemo, the urban setting of the scene is a representation of fourth-century Jerusalem with special emphasis on the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>109</sup> However, as we stated earlier, the urban background does not seem to be very specific. There is no evidence suggesting that the cityscape represented is Jerusalem, even if there is a cross standing on a mountain at its centre.<sup>110</sup> The mountain may recall Golgotha, but both its centrality and its isolation in the scene – it rises behind Christ and the portico, and before the buildings, with no apparent connection to the cityscape – support a symbolic rather than topographic interpretation of the cityscape. For Hellemo, the connection between the mountain and Jerusalem recalls some passages from the New Testament and the heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation*.<sup>111</sup> However, the historical Jerusalem should not be confused with the new heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation*. In *Revelation* the mountain is the location from whence the heavenly vision comes, while here the mountain stands behind the manifestation of Christ and supports an important element, the cross. This strongly suggests an interpretation of the mountain as connected to the mystery of the cross and the victory of Christ

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<sup>109</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 51.

<sup>110</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 51.

<sup>111</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 52.



achieved through his death on Golgotha. The significance of the hill in the two scenes is different and can hardly be connected. In Sta. Pudenziana the hill simultaneously recalls both the Golgotha and the mountain from which heavenly visions, such as that of John in *Revelation*, are seen. However the lack of any connection between the mountain and the cityscape prevents from interpreting it as a real element of the city of Jerusalem. Several different concepts are symbolized in the mountain, without necessarily finding a counterpart in the topography of the late-antique city.

In the mosaic the Christological theme is brought about by the arrangement of the elements in the apse. The cross, the hill and Christ on the throne divide the apse into two sides, creating a visual link between those elements, and connect the kingship of Christ with the symbol of his crucifixion. Again, the four apocalyptic animals in the sky give the scene a cosmic significance that is nonetheless linked to the division of the apse into two by the cross-mountain-throne axis. Here the arrangement of the elements functions as an apocalyptic-eschatological reference and enriches the scene with cosmic significance. Still, this axis was originally linked to the lamb standing under the throne of God and recalling another Christological theme, the allegory of Christ as a sacrificial lamb. Thus all the elements play a role in the rendering of different concepts, all linked one with another.

The most important aspect of Hellemo's contribution lies on the definition of different levels of meaning within the mosaic. Besides a

general interpretation of the scene, the great variety of symbols, which interlock one with another, extends the meaning of the composition and creates a web of elements communicating a number of significations.

### 3.4 A celebration of the church

According to Thérél, the scene in the apse of Sta. Pudenziana has an eschatological character, which involves the representation of Christ as an emperor and of the Church as a heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>112</sup> In Thérél's view, the inspiration for the scene was drawn from the *traditio legis* scenes, a suggestion mainly based on the location of Paul on Christ's right. The author substantiated her explanation with references to other *traditio legis* scenes.<sup>113</sup> Her interpretation generally followed Grabar's identification of imperial elements in the scene. However, her understanding of the cityscape is substantially different: the city represented in the mosaic is not the earthly Jerusalem, as it was rebuilt by Constantine, but rather the heavenly Jerusalem, the paradisiacal city described in John's *Revelation*. For Thérél, the heavenly city is a representation of the Church, making the mosaic a celebration of Christ as well as of the power achieved by the church of Rome at the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>114</sup> The heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation* is interpreted as the Church of God, which is portrayed as a city in the buildings depicted in the mosaic. However, as we have observed, the

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<sup>112</sup> THÉREL 1973, 105-109.

<sup>113</sup> THÉREL 1973, 106.

<sup>114</sup> THÉREL 1973, 107-109. Sta. Pudenziana was a titular church. Its role within Roman fifth-century rite is obscure; therefore it is hard to follow Thérél's interpretation.

city of the mosaic substantially differs from the imagery of the heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation* in that it is not made of gold and jewels. The influence of *Revelation* on Christian iconography has already been proved in images such as the jewelled cross, and also affected the representation of the cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem made of jewelled walls.<sup>115</sup> The use of gold and jewels is one of the major features of the Christian images which were inspired by *Revelation*: gold and jewels become the terms of a determined lexicon which belongs to *Revelation*. Thus if the city of the mosaic is intended to be the heavenly Jerusalem of John, its depiction as a city made of white stones or marble is difficult to understand. The author failed to address this issue, thus rendering groundless her interpretation of the cityscape as the heavenly Jerusalem and, ultimately, as the Church of God.

According to Steen the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana is a celebration of the earthly Church based on the spreading of Christ's teaching.<sup>116</sup> This thesis is rooted in a reflection on a few points of the mosaic's iconography considered in comparison with two other monumental mosaics of fifth-century Rome, located in the western wall of the nave of Sta. Sabina and on the triumphal arch of Sta. Maria Maggiore. In Steen's view the apostles' attitude represents the teaching of Christ and, by extension, they symbolize the church that spreads Christ's message on earth [figs. 76-77]. The two

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<sup>115</sup> CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987, 143-145. For the influence of *Revelation* in early Christian monumental decoration, see: CHRISTE 1979; ENGEMANN 1979; KINNEY 1992.

<sup>116</sup> STEEN 1999; STEEN 2002.

veiled women are identified, in connection with Peter and Paul, as the personifications of the *Ecclesia ex gentibus* and the *Ecclesia ex circumcisione*, joined together in the teachings of Christ's. Finally, the four apocalyptic creatures in the sky are here interpreted as the symbols of Christ's work on earth, and thus linked with his teaching. The author does not discuss the architectural background of the mosaic.

As was shown in the discussion that followed the paper, Steen's contribution compares three iconographies that contain similar elements yet arrange these elements differently within each composition.<sup>117</sup> Whereas, in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, the two veiled women stand over Peter and Paul, in the scene of Sta. Sabina it is the two apostles that stand above the veiled women. This inversion in the composition, which may indicate a different meaning, is ignored by Steen. Furthermore, Steen's interpretation of the mosaic does not consider any of the eschatological nor imperial aspects that have been discussed above, so that it is difficult to understand whether this interpretation of the mosaic (as the celebration of the earthly church through Christ's teaching) is a primary theme or just an allusion implicit in such an iconography. Interpreting the four apocalyptic animals in the sky as the symbols of Christ's work on earth is very problematic. The apocalyptic animals are always associated with God's manifestation, both in Ezekiel (1.4-14) and *Revelation* (4.5-8). As Hellemo correctly demonstrated, in the earliest representations they bear no attribute and are

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<sup>117</sup> See remarks of De Spirito in GUIDOBALDI AND GUIGLIA GUIDOBALDI 2002, 1964-1965.

always connected with the sky and located on apses, domes or other prominent elevated positions,<sup>118</sup> and thus linked with cosmic representations and heavenly realities. In later representations they hold a book, making clear their association with the four gospels. However in the earlier period, as in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, their main characteristic is their being heavenly creatures introducing heavenly apparitions, with no connection to the earthly world. Therefore at Sta. Pudenziana they should be interpreted as elements of the heavenly manifestation of Christ.

Finally, the attitude of the apostles is quite difficult to define. Their bodies have been so heavily restored that their original posture is almost impossible to determine. As we mentioned earlier, only some of them look at Christ and, since their mouths are closed, they do not seem to be speaking or arguing one with another. Therefore Steen's analysis, while perhaps supported by texts from the New Testament, hardly matches with the actual iconography of the mosaic.

Arguing against the 'Emperor Mystique' in early Christian art, Mathews devoted an entire chapter of his book to the analysis of the apse mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, claiming the absolute absence of imperial references from this iconography and concluding that the representation constitutes propaganda 'for the divine origins of the ecclesiastical authority'.<sup>119</sup> The author discussed the dress of Christ, the halo, and the throne in relation with

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<sup>118</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 60-62.

<sup>119</sup> MATHEWS 2003, 98-114.

the imperial realm. He claimed that Christ and the apostles are seated as a group of philosophers, in the same way as the bishop was supposed to sit on the *cathedra* among the clergy arrayed around him on the *synthronon* of the church, just below the mosaic. Although, as we have seen, there is no evidence that Sta. Pudenziana had ever had a *synthronon*. To Mathews, the scene is thus a celebration of Christ's teaching, continued by the church, and a commemoration of the divine authority of Christ.

However the author's denial of any imperial reference in the mosaic is not very convincing, especially because it avoids discussing some details of the iconography that could recall imperial scenes. In the mosaic, Mathews has claimed, the typology of Christ's throne derives from the representation of Jupiter's throne. However, as he openly admitted, the same throne typology was also sometimes used in imperial representations.<sup>120</sup> Even though the origin of elements such as Christ's throne and halo can be traced back to the traditional representation of pagan deities, those attributes were adopted both by some emperors, for imperial display, and in early Christian iconography: they were used for representing the emperor as well as Christ.<sup>121</sup> They should therefore simply be read as common means or attributes for the display of power, imperial or divine. The careful analysis of the different features of these attributes in the imperial and religious realms should not lead to the conclusion that there is no influence of the imperial iconography in the mosaic, but rather as evidence that Christ and

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<sup>120</sup> MATHEWS 2003, 209-210 n. 25.

<sup>121</sup> This is clearly recognized by the author (MATHEWS 2003, 101, 209-210 nn. 16, 25)

the emperor pertain to two different realms and they should not be confused.<sup>122</sup> The use of throne and halo, elements with a long tradition in the display of power, in both religious and imperial iconography of the early Christian realms is a case of transmigration of symbols: while these elements retain the same meaning of power, they are used in different contexts and the type of power signifies should be interpreted accordingly. They represent imperial power in some cases and divine power in others. Rather than making any homology between the two realms, they illustrate the relation between the two realms: imperial power was in fact legitimized only if exercised in the name of the Christian God, from whom it derived.

Mathews' main justification for discarding any influence of imperial iconography on the scheme is his observation that Christ and the apostles are all seated, whereas it was not allowed to sit in front of the emperor.<sup>123</sup> This point is used to oppose Grabar, who read the mosaic as a representation of Christ as an emperor, comparing it with the *largitio* panel in the arch of Constantine [fig.88]. However the author does not pay attention to the posture of Constantine donating money to the people on the same arch: seated on a throne – what Mathews has identified as a *sella curulis* – Constantine stretches his right hand to throw coins while holding his left hand, just like in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana where Christ stretches is

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<sup>122</sup> In Late Antiquity, Eusebios (Fourth century) as well as Agapetus the deacon (Sixth century), both private advisors of the emperor, clarified the role of the emperor as a minister of God on earth, discarding any possible confusion between the imperial figure, who is human and acts in the name of God, and God or the trinity (EUSEBIOS, *De laud. Const.*, VII.12, ed. I.A. HEIKEL, Leipzig 1902, 212; AGAPETUS, *EKΘΕΣΙΣ*, 37, 46, 61, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, LXXXVI, 1176, 1177, 1181).

<sup>123</sup> MATHEWS 2003, 100-101.

right hand towards the apostles and holds the book on his left hand. There is a close parallel between the gestures of Christ and of Constantine in these two representations, as if Christ was giving something to the apostles, perhaps his teachings or the words written in the book. Furthermore, if the bodies of the apostles on Christ's right reflect the original iconography of the mosaic,<sup>124</sup> even the attitude of the apostles seems to be borrowed from the people represented in the *largitio* scene on the arch of Constantine: just like the people in the lower register of the scene stretch their right arms towards Constantine in order to receive money, so do the apostles, located in a level lower than that of Christ, stretch their right arms to receive something from Christ [figs. 88, 76]. However, as we have repeatedly observed, the only original parts of the apostles are the heads of the group on Christ's right. Even the body of Paul has been completely remade, and may have been reshaped. The original attitude of the apostles was lost with the arbitrary restorations of the sixteenth century, thus destroying any foundation for Mathews' remark that the apostles in the mosaic are sitting while the people represented the arch are standing.

Finally, by disregarding the presence of the two veiled women, Mathews has misunderstood the scheme of the composition. The lower register of the scene is occupied by the apostles arranged in a sort of triangle

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<sup>124</sup> We may recall that, only the heads of the apostles at Christ's right are original, their body having been restored along with the other group of apostles in 1588. The drawing of Ciacconius, which is not very accurate and dates from 1595, reproduces the iconography of the mosaic after the restoration. The two groups of apostles as they are now can therefore not be considered as evidence for discussion, since the arbitrary character of the sixteenth-century restoration does not allow for any analysis of their iconography.



leading to the enthroned Christ on a higher level. [fig. 76] The two veiled women behind Paul and Peter, near the top of the triangle just below Christ, recall Roman examples of victories bringing crowns to the emperor.<sup>125</sup> This reference is implicit in the scheme of the composition and does not affect the interpretation of the veiled women as the two Churches, but should be considered as a sort of subliminal message intrinsic to the whole scene, creating another reference to imperial representations.

Apart from the general interpretations of the mosaic just discussed, a few elements of the mosaic have been the subject of different contributions. Following and updating Andaloro's bibliographical review, we will now discuss the literature on single elements, such as the cross or the two women.

### **3.5 The veiled women**

The two veiled women had been often confused with the saints Pudenziana and Prassede who were, according to legend, the daughters of Pudentis, eponymous founder of the church.<sup>126</sup> [fig. 76] This interpretation has now been generally discarded, due to the legendary character of the saintly acts of Pudenziana and Prassede and to the iconography of the mosaic, which finds parallels in the two veiled women depicted in the

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<sup>125</sup> This was already noticed by Matthiae and it is discussed at length by Daniela Goffredo (MATTHIAE 1967, 63; GOFFREDO 2002).

<sup>126</sup> For the Acts of the saints Pudenziana and Prassede, see: VAN MAELE 1968, 1061-1065. For a discussion on earlier bibliography identifying the veiled women with the two saints, see: BOVINI 1971, 104; SCHLATTER 1995b, 3.

western wall of the nave in the fifth-century church of Sta. Sabina (Rome). They have been accordingly interpreted as personifications of the two Churches, the *Ecclesia ex gentibus* and the *Ecclesia ex circumcisione*, converted to Christianity by Paul and Peter.<sup>127</sup> This interpretation relies on the letter of St. Paul to the Galatians, where the role of Peter and Paul in the conversion of the two Churches is clearly stated.<sup>128</sup>

However, Schlatter argued against New Testament origins for these two figures, even though he has supported their identification as the two Churches.<sup>129</sup> Schlatter pointed out that since the iconography of the women of Sta. Pudenziana is different from that of the figures in Sta. Sabina, and concludes that the source that inspired them must have been different.<sup>130</sup> Instead he argued that the source for personification of the Churches is to be found in the Old Testament, specifically through Jerome's exegesis. This reading is consistent with the whole analysis of the mosaic according with Jerome, which Schlatter pursued in a series of contributions. However his disclaimer of any other source of inspiration, than the Old Testament and Jerome, excerpts the two figures, as well as the mosaic, from the artistic environment that generated their iconography and precludes a real understanding of the composition.

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<sup>127</sup> MATTHIAE 1967, 57; GOFFREDO 2002, 1950-1952; STEEN 2002, 1942-1943.

<sup>128</sup> *Gal.*, 2.7-8.

<sup>129</sup> SCHLATTER 1995b.

<sup>130</sup> In the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, the women are part of a scene, whereas in Sta. Sabina they are isolated in two different panels. Their position in relation to Peter and Paul is inverted. Still, their physical details are totally different, and while in Sta. Pudenziana they hold wreath, in Sta. Sabina they hold codices (SCHLATTER 1995b, 5).

In a recent contribution, Daniela Goffredo has traced back and contextualized the iconographic tradition to which the two women seem to belong.<sup>131</sup> The author was able to show that the personifications of the Church derive from different images, which developed from the winged victories surrounding the imperial portraits and were reinterpreted in a Christian way as a representation of Christ's victory. This contribution finds its value in the author's attempt to demonstrate the antecedents of the two figures and to contribute to the understanding of the iconographical scheme of the composition as a whole. As the winged victories of the classical tradition bring crowns to the emperor, here the two women bring crowns to Christ on the throne. The representation of the Churches is thus affected by classical antecedents that enhance the meaning of the mosaic as a celebration of Christ.

#### **4. The portico**

Behind the assembly of Christ and the apostles, a roofed portico in the form of an exedra runs through the apse mosaic, creating a setting for the scene [fig. 73]. It contains a series of pillars that alternate with arched openings partly screened by lattices at the top. The decoration of the structure is very simple: vertical lines form a series of rectangular cornices inserted one into another to decorate the pillars. Two squares fill the space

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<sup>131</sup> GOFFREDO 2002.

between the arches above the cornices and crenellated eaves run along the roof's lower edge. The whole portico seems to be made of white stone or clad in marble. The sloping roof, of which only one side is visible, and the door screens shine in a yellow-golden colour, reminiscent of gilded bronze tiles and lattices. A blue light pervades the inner side of the portico, where no other structure is visible.<sup>132</sup>

Before defining the heavenly character of the setting, which will be discussed later in this chapter, we must first concentrate the character of this porticoed exedra that surrounds the scene. The artist, or rather the mind who conceived such an iconography, probably borrowed from his/her own experience to create the background for this representation. A scenery that is so rich in architecture and reproduces a cityscape is in fact conceivable only on the basis of visual memories of buildings that existed in reality. Thus to understand the meaning of the background, and particularly of the exedra, we should look at the late-antique architecture that was probably a source of inspiration.

Porticoed structures, arches and exedras were typical features of Roman and late-antique urban and aristocratic architecture.<sup>133</sup> Long porticoes connected different urban spaces, creating monumental passageways in Roman as well as late-antique cities.<sup>134</sup> In Roman villas

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<sup>132</sup> In the left side of the mosaic the cubes that fill the arched openings of the portico are blue, while on the opposite side, where the mosaic was restored, they are almost black.

<sup>133</sup> WATKIN 1990, 36.

<sup>134</sup> The abundance of monumental porticoes in Rome is exemplified by some 30 pages dedicated to the listing of *porticus* in the *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*; they were located in public buildings as well as in private imperial structures: *LTUR*, IV, Rome 1999,

they connected rooms with different functions or inner and outer spaces; or they surrounded gardens and open places as *peristilia*.<sup>135</sup> In late-antique aristocratic and imperial architecture, they increased in dimension, becoming almost processional ways.<sup>136</sup> In church architecture, arcades and porticoes surrounded the atrium of the church, and even the naves or the narthex of the Christian basilica could be considered as sorts of inner arcades.<sup>137</sup> Porticoes sometimes had the form of exedras in both urban and domestic aristocratic architecture, and sporadically in church architecture.<sup>138</sup>

The decoration of the portico represented in the mosaic is quite basic, yet the abundance of frames and details on the homogeneous white stone or marble that covers the walls allows us to interpret the exedra as a monumental arcade. The lattice screenings of the openings are features that could be found in private as well as public architecture, as can be seen in the buildings sculpted on the sides of the sarcophagus from Rome that is now at

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116-153. For Byzantine Constantinople, where *sigma* porticoes are testified from the reign of Theodosios II onwards, see: MUNDELL MANGO 2001. For eastern cities, see: SEGAL 1997, 5-53; LAVAN 2006. For the importance of the *porticus* in the Christian city: ORSELLI 2003b, 871; ORSELLI 2006, 18.

<sup>135</sup> WATKIN 1990, 47.

<sup>136</sup> BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 112-113 (with references).

<sup>137</sup> *EAG*, 667-668.

<sup>138</sup> For instance round porticoed *fora* can be found in the late-antique cities of Gerasa and Caričin Grad (MANGO 1999, 19 fig. 17, 20 fig. 23). Examples of round porticoes are visible in the plan of the villa at Piazza Armerina [fig. 72]. Examples of late-antique villas and *domus* with round porticos surrounding gardens include the fourth-century villa of Cercadilla near Cordoba (MARQUEZ, HIDALGO, MARFIL 1992; ARCE 1997, with bibliography), the villa of Montmaurin (FOUET 1969), the so-called ‘palace of the Giants’, a fifth-century villa near the agora of Athens (FRANTZ 1988, 112-110-116, fig. 52-54; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 157-158). For other examples, see: MULVIN 2002, 210 fig. 97 (Valentine, Carcassonne, France), 2218 fig. 109 (Teting, Metz, France). To my knowledge, the only reference to a circular portico in late-antique church architecture is found in the basilica of Lechaion (surroundings of Corinth), built between the second half of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth century (KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 153 fig. 38).

the museum Pio Cristiano in Vatican City (350-375).<sup>139</sup> [fig. 89] Here, however tiles and screens are made of yellow-golden cubes reproducing a gilded bronze roof – or a bronze roof reflecting the light radiating from Christ – and precious door-screens that can be found only in imperial architecture.<sup>140</sup> The preciousness of the portico is indicated by the contrast between its gilded roof and the roofs of the buildings in the background,<sup>141</sup> the tiles of which are made of brownish-greyish *tesserae*, reproducing clay tiles. Only monumental buildings had roofs covered in metal tiles, whose use was very limited in Roman architecture and only became common in Byzantine monumental structures, such as imperial buildings and great churches.<sup>142</sup>

Considering the extremely rare presence of circular atriums in church architecture, especially in late-antique Rome where church buildings usually had square atriums, it is hardly conceivable that the portico represented in the mosaic represents the atrium of a church. Since the porticoed structure has all the features of a late-antique exedra and seems to depict a real building, the hypothesis that it represents the apse of a church cannot be demonstrated and has no basis.<sup>143</sup> The monumental building was

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<sup>139</sup> GARRUCCI 1879, 44-47; WILPERT 1929, 170-171 and tab. CXXI/2 and CXXI/3; DEICHMANN-BOVINI-BRANDEBURG 1967, 274-277, tav. 106 n. 677/2-3.

<sup>140</sup> For the use of the lead in the roof of the basilica in the Constantinian complex of the Holy Sepulchre, see: EUSEBIOS, *De Vita Const.*, III.36.2. For gilded roofs at Constantinople, see chapter V, pp. 382-385.

<sup>141</sup> Here we are considering the roof of the rotunda and its annexes, which were not altered by restorations.

<sup>142</sup> ADAM 1988, 330.

<sup>143</sup> For examples of exedras in the urban architecture of Rome, see: BAUER 1999 (in the *forum Nervae* the central space the *porticus absidata* seems however to have been roofed); GUIDOBALDI 1999b. For Asia Minor, see: SEGAL 1997, 5-53; LAVAN 2006.

thus probably borrowed from secular architecture, where round porticoes were a common feature in private aristocratic architecture as well as public buildings.<sup>144</sup>

The ground of the area delimited by the portico is no longer visible, due to the unfortunate loss of the lower part of the mosaic. However Christ and his throne are located upon a small green hill, a detail that recalls a garden-like setting [fig. 75]. Thus, the assembly of Christ and the apostles was likely imagined as taking place in a garden encircled by a monumental portico. In Ciacconius' sketch and, in greater detail, in Eclissi's,<sup>145</sup> a lamb was standing on the slopes of the hill, below Christ. [fig. 83-84] The whole ground is uniform in colour with the hill, and was thus probably also depicted in green. This adds an important element to our understanding of the original scene and allows us to begin defining it as a paradisiacal setting.<sup>146</sup>

The heavenly setting for Christ and the apostles is thus a garden encircled by a portico, the monumentality of which is augmented by its circular shape. The circle has a strong cosmic significance, linked with the vault of the sky and primary cult forms.<sup>147</sup> In Roman and late-antique architecture, semicircular forms such as apses and exedras became fundamental elements for the representation of power and authority in

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<sup>144</sup> WATKIN 1990, 45-49.

<sup>145</sup> Windsor Castle, Royal Library, Inv. No. 9058 (OSBORNE AND CLARIDGE 1996, 307 fig. 142).

<sup>146</sup> For the representation of paradise as a garden in early Christian art, see: BISCONTI 1992, 101-109; BISCONTI 1996, 590-591; BISCONTI 2000b.

<sup>147</sup> BALDWIN SMITH 1950, especially 61-94.

monumental spaces.<sup>148</sup> They were typical elements of aristocratic reception halls and their monumentality increased in the imperial *aulae regiae*.<sup>149</sup> In Sta. Pudenziana mosaic, the cosmic significance of the exedra is made clear and emphasized by the blue light coming out of the arched openings. Liz James points out the importance of gold and blue as manifestations of the divine light radiated by God.<sup>150</sup> In the mosaic, Christ's tunic is made of golden *tesserae* and decorated by two light blue *clavi*. In the same way, the exedra is covered by a gilded roof and blue light comes out from its openings. The portico is part of that heavenly setting where the assembly of Christ and the apostles takes place. Its heavenly character is expressed by its circular form and monumentality, its colours, and its function as the structure surrounding the manifestation of Christ and the apostles in a heavenly garden. As a result the portico can be defined as heavenly architecture.

In imperial and late-antique Rome, urban space was heavily built up and public green areas were almost totally absent.<sup>151</sup> The garden encircled by the exedra is thus more likely to be found in examples of the contemporary aristocratic *domus* rather than in the urban appearance of contemporary Rome. Guidobaldi underlines that the late-antique *domus* in

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<sup>148</sup> LAVIN 1962.

<sup>149</sup> For the diffusion of apsidal halls in the aristocratic *domus* of late-Roman Rome, see: GUIDOBALDI 1986, 206-209, 453-454 n. 92; GUIDOBALDI 1993, 72-74; GUIDOBALDI 1999a, 53-54 nn. 6-7. For the form of the *aulae regiae*, see: KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 37, 68 n. 8, 69 n. 13; for their significance, see: LAVIN 1962.

<sup>150</sup> JAMES L. 1996, 67-68, especially 106-107, 121 (with further bibliography).

<sup>151</sup> GUIDOBALDI 1999a, 56.



Rome had small gardens with fountains surrounded by linear porticoes,<sup>152</sup> but exedras surrounding open spaces and gardens were elements of imperial Roman architecture, such as the ‘open theatre’ of Hadrian’s villa in Tivoli and the gardens of the *Domus Aurea*.<sup>153</sup> Similar examples of exedras can be found in the fifth-century palace of Antiochos,<sup>154</sup> an outstanding urban residence of Constantinople. The imagery to which the architectural structures of the mosaic refer is thus probably imperial architecture rather than urban Rome. This would also be consistent with the representation of Christ sitting like a king on a jewelled throne and surrounded by his followers. As the image of Christ on a jewelled throne is reminiscent of kingship and power, the location of the scene in the middle of a garden surrounded by an exedra can be traced to the same imperial setting, recognizable in the imperial monuments of late-antique Rome.

## **5. The cityscape**

As we have seen, the cityscape in the background was greatly altered during the several restorations of the mosaic. It is clear from a comparison of the building represented in the mosaic with the drawing by Antonio

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<sup>152</sup> GUIDOBALDI 1999a, 56.

<sup>153</sup> For the *porticus absidata* of the *horti Commodiani*, which however seems to have been an internal space, see: GUIDOBALDI 1999b. For the use of the space in Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli and the *Domus Aurea*, with particular attention for the gardens, see: SALZA PRINA RICOTTI 2001, 232-258; CHAMPLIN 1998; MOORMAN 1998; MACDONALD AND PINTO 2006, 213-228. Salza Prina Ricotti also outlined the way in which the villa’s gardens enhanced the figure of the owner (SALZA PRINA RICOTTI 1998, 363).

<sup>154</sup> MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 238-239; BARDILL 1997.

Eclissi now in the Royal Library that the cityscape changed considerably.<sup>155</sup> Unfortunately it is doubtful that the drawing is an accurate reproduction of the original mosaic. It was made between 1630 and 1644, after the mosaic had already undergone restorations in 1588. The drawing was produced by the artist Antonio Eclissi for the collection of Cassiano Dal Pozzo, a rich seventeenth-century patron who, according to the trend of the time, had a special interest in antiquities [fig. 84]. The drawing, which seems to reproduce the mosaic after the restorations, is much more accurate than Ciacconius' [fig. 85]. The proportions and the different elements of the scene are carefully reproduced and, in general, the drawing seems to be an accurate reproduction, yet it has attracted little attention in modern scholars.<sup>156</sup> If the sketch accurately reproduces the cityscape, then the right half of the mosaic may have shown a sort of arcade, an octagon, a crenellated tower-like structure and a few other buildings. The left half may have depicted another arcade, symmetrical to the one on the right, a rotunda, a basilica and other buildings. Since it is not possible to evaluate the accuracy of the drawing, the sketch should be considered as a possible representation of the original iconography. However it is worth noting that, in the drawing, no building seems to be connected with another and all the structures appear to be independent elements of a cityscape.

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<sup>155</sup> Windsor Castle, Royal Library, Inv. No. 9058 (OSBORNE AND CLARIDGE 1996, 307 fig. 142).

<sup>156</sup> Only the *Corpus basilicarum Christianarum Romae* reproduces the sketch (KRAUTHEIMER, CORBETT, FRANKL 1971, 290 fig. 248).

The original structures represented in the cityscape are on the left the rotunda, part of the buildings around it, and fragments of some other buildings, and on the right part the central building a crenellated structure. There is no visible connection between the rotunda and the structures around it, and no structural connection can be distinguished in any other building.

This cityscape seems to borrow from contemporary late-antique architecture. As we pointed out earlier, centralised buildings such as rotundas and octagons were widespread in Late Antiquity.<sup>157</sup> Crenellations were often seen in walls and fortifications; thus the crenellated building on the far right end of the mosaic might be identified with a walled enceinte.<sup>158</sup> The identification of the other structures with specific buildings is impossible; any attempt to determine which cityscape is represented here is bound to remain an unproven hypothesis. Yet the presence of a rotunda, octagon and probably city walls allows us to identify the buildings with certainty as the representation of a late-antique city. In the mosaic of the southern wall of the nave of St. Apollinare nuovo in Ravenna (sixth century), behind the depiction of the palace, the city of Ravenna is represented by means of rotundas, central buildings and basilicas encircled by the walls [fig. 99]. This mosaic will be discussed in the next chapter, but it is important to mention it here since it bears the same elements that are depicted in the cityscape of the scene in the apse of Sta. Pudenziana.

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<sup>157</sup> See above, pp. 219-221.

<sup>158</sup> For the walls of Rome, see: TODD 1978; MANCINI 2001. For Byzantine fortifications, see: FOSS AND WINFIELD 1986.

Although the buildings can be recognized in real contemporary architecture, there is no ground to identify the city represented here with a real city, either Jerusalem or Rome. The author could have borrowed from reality to depict an ideal cityscape. If the cityscape was intended to reproduce an ideal city, the artist assumedly used personal experiences in order to depict the city on the basis of memories and conventions. A few considerations help to clarify the character of the cityscape.

In the mosaic the skyline is not sharply defined, as the buildings seem to merge into the sky. Where the mosaic is original, the walls and especially the roofs of the structures are mixed with blue *tesserae*. The soft colours of the buildings – white for the walls and brown-grey for the roofs – create no contrast with the colours of the sky. This is not just the product of a stylistic or aesthetic consideration since the use of colours is important to convey the meaning of the image. In Byzantium, colour was an important aspect of any particular element, whose intrinsic quality and character it contributed to define by connecting it with particular symbols and concepts.<sup>159</sup> The colours of the buildings and of the sky are quite homogeneous, as if reproducing the same conceptual environment. In a similar fashion, the hill is made of different shades of blue, light green and golden *tesserae*. Its shape and the fact that it supports the cross make it possible to identify it as at least evoking Golgotha, yet its colour is hardly conceivable as the real colour of an earthly mountain. The cloudy sky is

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<sup>159</sup> JAMES L. 1996, 139-140.

mostly made of different shades of blue, brown, and white cubes. The use of golden, orange and red *tesserae* is limited to the areas next to the four winged animals, as if the clouds were reflecting their shining light. The four creatures are in fact associated with fire and light in the vision of Ezekiel (1.4-14) as well as in the *Revelation* of John (4.5-8).<sup>160</sup> In this respect the use of the colours in the mosaic recalls the image of the four animals in the Scriptures.

The colour scheme of the cityscape and of the hill is homogeneous with that of the sky, where the four animals appear in a heavenly vision, and we should thus consider the whole scene as representing a single heavenly environment. In the mosaic, the pervading use of blue and gold, which are connected with the representation of God, idealises the scene and recalls heavenly settings.

## **6. Reflections on the urban and architectural background**

We have determined the heavenly character of the exedra and the cityscape behind it. However the two elements are separated one from another by the outline of the exedra roof, composed of a row of black and of two rows purple cubes. The firmness of this distinction emphasizes the blurred character of the separation between the buildings and the sky. The exedra functions as the architectural element encircling the assembly of God

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<sup>160</sup> In Ezekiel the four animals shine with burning fire, while in *Revelation* they surround the throne resplendent of light.

and the apostles; the cityscape and the hill with the cross develop behind it. At a first sight the exedra seems to separate the heavenly assembly from the urban background but, as we are about to see, the scene is not intended to represent two different realities but rather to translate concepts pertaining to the role of Christianity into a mosaic.

The roof of the exedra is mostly made of golden cubes with purple cubes outlining the tiles, yet light blue cubes often intermix with the golden ones. This allowed the mosaicist to render the circular movement of the exedra which runs in a curve from one side of the mosaic to the other . The light blue cubes are conceptually linked both to the blue light of the portico's interior below and to the blue cubes sporadically appearing in the walls and the roofs of the buildings in the cityscape above. Again, the use of the blue connects the different structures of the scene to convey the idea that all these elements come from the same heavenly environment.

The cause for such a marked outline of the exedra roof relates both to an attempt to create depth in the scene, and to the meaning of the mosaic. The fact that gold is used for the sky and almost absent from the cityscape is intended to create a certain perspective and the illusion that the cityscape develops in the background. All the elements in the foreground are made of golden *tesserae*, which emphasize their shining light and make them resplendent. The only way to create a third dimension was to limit the use of gold to certain areas, in this case the foreground. The portico therefore seems to separate from the background while the cityscape and the sky

appear to extend beyond the exedra and to develop in depth. However, the abundance of gold in the foreground and its limited use in the background do not change our statement concerning the heavenly nature of the cityscape and the sky as a setting, since the use of blue there is widespread and replaces the use of gold – bearing, as we have seen, the same meaning – and likewise recalls the shining heavenly light coming from Christ.

As we pointed out earlier, the exedra creates a specific and privileged place for the appearance of Christ and the apostles. It surrounds the heavenly garden where they are assembled and where Christ manifests himself on a jewelled throne. In this scene the throne is associated with the cross above, also made of gemstones and gold.<sup>161</sup> The cross symbolizes the victory of Christianity that was achieved through the victory of Christ over death. In the same way the throne symbolizes God's sovereignty over the world, made possible by Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The exedra is related to the throne. The spread of apsidal reception rooms in late-antique architecture, from the apsidal rooms of aristocratic villas to imperial and episcopal reception halls, might have affected the choice of a semicircle to represent the appearance of Christ seated as an emperor on a jewelled throne.<sup>162</sup> The semicircle, which has a strong cosmic

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<sup>161</sup> As noticed in the literature review, in her semiotic reading, Casartelli Novelli has shown that John's *Revelation* is the primary text for the representation of the jewelled cross and throne, symbols that are connected in the mosaic as well as in the text by their substance – jewels and gold – and meaning (CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987, 143-145)

<sup>162</sup> For the diffusion of apsidal halls in late-Roman Rome, see: GUIDOBALDI 1986, 206-209, 453-454 n. 92. For the form of the *aulae regiae*, see: KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 37, 68 n. 8, 69 n. 13; ĆURČIĆ 2006. For the significance of apses and domes, see: LEHMANN 1945; LAVIN 1962.

significance since it recalls the vault of the sky, is the most appropriate place to represent Christ and his sovereignty over the world. Furthermore, the semicircle is a portico, a structure associated with monumentality. The exedra could thus represent, in a sort of synecdoche, the much greater structure that is the heavenly abode of God. The arcade, with its blue light, is part of the heavenly setting of the manifestation of Christ and creates a link with the background, connecting the paradisiacal garden area that is encircled by monumental structures like the garden of a palace with the heavenly city behind.

Such a connection between portico and urban background, as part of the same heavenly realm, is found in other monuments in Rome. [fig. 91]. The paintings of the hypogeum of the Aurelii (230-250), in particular, constitute one of the first and unusual representations of the kingdom of God in a form that strongly anticipates the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana.<sup>163</sup> There, the walls of the second room are decorated with frescoes depicting syncretistic and 'crypto-Christian' versions of the heavenly city.<sup>164</sup> In one painting, God is shown sitting among his followers in the middle of a square porticoed court, beyond and around which a city develops, with its walls, gardens and buildings. It has all the features of a real city yet it is the place

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<sup>163</sup> For an extensive bibliography concerning the hypogeum of the Aurelii, see: BISCONTI 1999, 276-277; BALLARDINI 2000a, 13. The monument has been restored and investigated as part of recent archaeological campaigns (BISCONTI 2004, 14-16; MAZZEI 2004).

<sup>164</sup> BISCONTI 1985, 897-903; BISCONTI 1989, 1313-1317; BISCONTI 1996, 594-596; BISCONTI 2000b, 241.



for the manifestation of God.<sup>165</sup> The fact that an earlier example of Christian art in Rome represents the kingdom of God with the characters of a court inserted into a real city is important because it creates a link both between the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana and the early Christian art of Rome, and between the representations of a city, depicted in vivid details as a real city but nonetheless heavenly, and the kingdom of God.

The representation of Christ and his assembly against an urban background is also found in the so-called city-gate sarcophagi.<sup>166</sup> There, the background of city gates or porticoes on columns is once again the privileged place for the representation of Christ. Earlier scholarship has pointed out that, in this scene, Christ is represented in a heavenly context, although the background takes the shape of real urban or architectural structures.<sup>167</sup> Other examples of early Christian funerary art in Rome offer a very basic representation of heaven, depicting it as a simple exedra or a space framed by columns.<sup>168</sup> These should be seen as simple representations – signs – of the kingdom of God.

In the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, just like in the wall paintings of the hypogeum of the Aurelii and in the city-gate sarcophagi, the urban background is a heavenly setting playing a double role for the beholder. It is a heavenly setting since it is the privileged place for the representation of

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<sup>165</sup> Bisconti has recently identified three figures among those surrounding God as the three Aurelii from whom the hypogeum takes its name (BISCONTI 2004, 31).

<sup>166</sup> LAWRENCE 1927; SANSONI 1969 (with earlier bibliography); COLLI 1983a, 201-211 cat.no.95-116 (with references).

<sup>167</sup> SANSONI 1969, 79-82; THEREL 1973, 182-192.

<sup>168</sup> BISCONTI 1989, 1317-1321.

Christ as a king among his followers, thus making the scene a cosmic representation of Christianity. In its attempt to suggest a heavenly reality, however, the setting borrows from the reality of earthly cities. This is presumably because the only form of kingdom or abode that the artisans had experienced was the earthly reality, and they simply offered an augmented version of their own reality, increased in size and magnificence, in their attempt to represent the kingdom of God. This process is part of a neo-platonic understanding of reality that was widespread in Late Antiquity, according to which earthly realities have their perfect counterpart in heavenly archetypes.<sup>169</sup> The representation of the kingdom of God against an urban or architectural background leads to two possible responses in the beholder: in addition to providing a concrete base to imagine a divine residence and convey the meaning that the kingdom of God is perceptible, it also reminds the viewer of the essentially urban nature of Christianity.<sup>170</sup> The word of Christ was spread by Peter and Paul, who travelled from the city to city around the Mediterranean in order to convert people to Christianity. The importance of their activities, and consequently the making of the Church, is symbolized in this mosaic by the emphasis on the figures of the two apostles as well as those of the two women, personifications of the two Churches. Furthermore, the representation of the kingdom of God as a court set within a city is related to the inscription held

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<sup>169</sup> For the impact of neo-Platonism on early Christian art, see: GRABAR 1962.

<sup>170</sup> Starting with the apostolic mission of Peter and Paul, Christianity first spread among the urban communities.

by Christ (*Dominus Conservator Ecclesiae Pudentianae*).<sup>171</sup> Christ is the *dominus*, here represented on a jewelled throne as a king, and as such protects and preserves (*conservator*) the community of the *titulus*. The combination of such a direct reference to the community of the church and the depiction of the city behind lead the viewers to superpose the image of the heavenly city of God, represented in the mosaic in vivid and real details, and the image of their city, Rome. In Late Antiquity, Christianity was an everyday reality, observable in the sacralization of the urban space by means of the building of churches and the sacred geography created by relics, with their importance in the development of the cults of saints and the religious processions in the city.<sup>172</sup> As the mosaic represents the heavenly kingdom of God, the viewers are led to connect that vision with their own reality as Christians living in Rome, which was reshaped into a Christian space by considerable urban and architectural transformations.

## **7. Conclusions**

We have established the heavenly character of the exedra and the cityscape behind it. In the mosaic the meaning of the scene and the character of the different elements are rendered through the careful use of the *tesserae*

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<sup>171</sup> This is the only original inscription in the mosaic.

<sup>172</sup> For the city as a Christian space: ORSELLI 1994; ORSELLI 1996; ORSELLI 1999; BRUBAKER 2001. For the role of saintly relics and shrines in the Christian city: ORSELLI 1988; ORSELLI 2003b. Within the huge bibliography on the city in Late Antiquity, see with references: DEMANDT 1988, 211-271; LIEBESCHUETZ 1992; CRACCO RUGGINI 1989, 256-266; BROGIOLO AND WARD-PERKINS 1999; HALDON 1999. With reference to the archaeological evidence of the Christian city in Late Antiquity: PANI ERMINI 1994.

and the combination of colours. Such an interpretation is made possible by the great abundance of blue and gold *tesserae* used in the original parts of the mosaic, and represents a new approach to the understanding of the scene. Because so few fragments of the original mosaic remain *in situ*, it was necessary to analyze them in detail in order to determine which are the original features of the apse decoration. Earlier scholarship was apparently misled by the general effect of the whole scene, which seems to be mainly made of gold. But a careful analysis of the original parts of the mosaic reveals the great concentration of golden cubes in the foreground and their use in combination with blue cubes. Since gold outshines blue, the whole scene seems mostly made of gold and shining colours. This, however, is an optical illusion; the original portions of the mosaic are made of blue as well as gold *tesserae*. The shining of the gold across the whole picture makes it appear to be the only colour used in the mosaic and makes the scene look quite flat.

The mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana thus represents Christ as a king, on a jewelled throne, with his assembly of apostles in a setting that reproduces God's heavenly kingdom. The kingdom of God is rarely described in texts or represented in images in early Christian art, although it often assumes the form of a city when it is. Such is the case, for example, in the Old Testament vision of Ezekiel (*Ez.* 40.2) as well as in the *Revelation* of John (*Rev.*

21.10).<sup>173</sup> In both texts it is a holy structure, a city-temple for Ezekiel and a city-palace for John; in both cases it bears the holy quality of a temple and the marvellous character of a palace. In heavenly visions, it is always depicted from a hill appearing in the sky. In this kingdom God dwells among his followers, surrounded by the four apocalyptic animals.<sup>174</sup> The mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana bears all these features. Thus Christ is represented as a king in his holy city, which is simultaneously a temple holding the heavenly assembly and a palace with a monumental exedra around a garden-like ground, set against a city. The mountain from which this vision of the kingdom of God has to be observed stands, in this mosaic, at the centre of the composition. It also holds the cross, thus creating an allusion to Golgotha, the place where the crucifixion allowed the victory of Christ over death and the victory of Christianity. As Hellemo underlined, a number of different meanings referring both to the reality of Christianity on earth and to the cosmic significance of true faith are simultaneously represented in early Christian apses, overlapping and constituting different levels of meaning.<sup>175</sup> It certainly is the case in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana.

Schlatter emphasized the influence of the vision of Ezekiel, mediated by Jerome's reading of the text,<sup>176</sup> yet it is impossible to deny the impact of the *Revelation* of John, as we have shown earlier in this chapter. The

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<sup>173</sup> For a discussion on the symbolic representation of the late-antique and medieval city, see: ORSELLI 1994, 421-423; ORSELLI 1996; ORSELLI 2003a; see also BERTELLI 1999.

<sup>174</sup> *Rev.* 4.4-8.

<sup>175</sup> HELLEMO 1989, 15-17.

<sup>176</sup> SCHLATTER 1995a.

representations of the cross and the throne, both covered in gold and jewels, are direct references to *Revelation* since this text conveys in visual yet concrete terms – using the metaphor of gold and precious stones – the deep meaning of the heavenly reality that is the kingdom of God.<sup>177</sup> As Casartelli Novelli underlines, gold and precious stones are part of the same written and visual language in the *Revelation*, conveying purity and light that are both fundamental characteristics of the heavenly kingdom and of the word of God.<sup>178</sup> In the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, the cross and the throne are made of jewels just like the heavenly Jerusalem of the *Revelation*, thus both referring to the victory and sovereignty of Christianity.

Every attempt to link the mosaic to one single particular text has proved fruitless. We would rather suggest that the mosaic translates in visual terms a number of texts that spread the message of Christianity in the conceptual environment where this iconography was created. The influence of Jerome on the aristocratic circles of Rome, even when he was away from the capital at the beginning of the fifth century, has been already demonstrated.<sup>179</sup> Casartelli Novelli has demonstrated the influence of *Revelation* in the apse decoration of fifth-century Rome.<sup>180</sup> The *Revelation* of John was known, but only gained acceptance and recognition as a canonical text during the papacy of Innocent I (402-417). The latter's name,

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<sup>177</sup> Silvana Casartelli Novelli has shown that the jewelled cross and the throne are primary symbols deriving directly from John's *Revelation* (CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987).

<sup>178</sup> CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987, 143-145.

<sup>179</sup> SCHLATTER 1992, 279.

<sup>180</sup> CASARTELLI NOVELLI 1987. Other important considerations on the apse decoration or the early Christian basilicas of Rome can be found in: ANDALORO AND ROMANO 2002.

incidentally, was recorded in the inscription at the base of the mosaic, thus confirming a link among the clergy of the church, the bishop and the decoration of the church.<sup>181</sup> In the same years Augustine wrote *The city of God*, where he defines the *civitas dei* (as opposed to the *civitas deabuli*) as a moral concept that could be expressed in visual terms, thus possibly having some influence on the representation of the kingdom of God as a city. Furthermore, for Augustine the kingdom of God is a meta-historical reality;<sup>182</sup> just as the heavenly Jerusalem, and ultimately as the visual expression of Christ as a king in a heavenly kingdom of light is a meta-historical representation of the eternal victory of Christianity.

This heavenly city-temple-palace can thus be defined as a heavenly Jerusalem, a divine heavenly abode. However the presence of the inscription *Dominus Conservator Ecclesiae Pudenticianae* allows the beholder to create a connection between that heavenly city, which is meta-historical – existing beyond the reality of the time of the world – and the reality of the community that lives at a specific time and in a specific place. The heavenly Jerusalem, where Christ dwells as a king on his throne, thus becomes a real possibility because the vision is actualised through this inscription and directed towards that specific Christian community. The translation of the heavenly Jerusalem into a court inserted into a city, whose walls are white – and not made of precious stones – and whose architecture follows well-

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<sup>181</sup> PETRIGNANI 1934, 6; KRAUTHEIMER, CORBETT, FRANKL 1971, 283.

<sup>182</sup> VAN OORT 1991, 102-107, 151-153.

defined late-antique architectural forms, allows the viewers to connect the representation of the city with their own urban imagery.

Sta. Pudenziana was build on land donated by a rich family to the Church of Rome.<sup>183</sup> It is located on the Esquiline, an area that in the fifth century underwent a significant transformation into a Christian space due to the creation of the bishop's seat in the area of the Lateran and to the building of Sta. Maria Maggiore.<sup>184</sup> As Pani Ermini explained, the churches and especially the *tituli* of Rome became the *monumenta*, the public buildings framing the topography of the Christian city, bearing a capital importance for the new Christian appearance of the city.<sup>185</sup> The iconography of the mosaic was influenced by an intellectual environment that was aware of contemporary Christian exegesis and speculation, probably the ecclesiastical circle of Innocent I, whose name was recorded in an inscription at the bottom of the mosaic. The city and the exedra are depicted as made of white stones, probably in simulation of the white stones and marble cladding the ancient monuments of Rome that must have been extant in fifth-century Rome. For example, despite the sack of 410,<sup>186</sup> the area of the *fori* was still in a good shape at the end of the fifth century. At that time the biographer of the North African bishop of Ruspe Fulgentius compared the splendour of imperial Rome to the heavenly kingdom of God.<sup>187</sup> Since such monuments constituted the primary reference for the appearance of a

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<sup>183</sup> On the *tituli* on the Esquiline, see: SAXER 2001, 16-24.

<sup>184</sup> PANI ERMINI 1999, 48-51; KRAUTHEIMER 2000, 33-58.

<sup>185</sup> PANI ERMINI 1999; see also: PANI ERMINI 2000.

<sup>186</sup> PANI ERMINI 1999; PANI ERMINI 2000; PANI ERMINI 2001, 261-262 (with references).

<sup>187</sup> FERRANDI DIACONI, *S. Fulgentii*, XIII.27, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, LXV, 130-131.



city to a Roman, we can assume that the designer of the mosaic or mosaicist was a local inhabitant.

Likewise, gardens surrounded by monumental porticoes existed in imperial Rome. The *Domus Aurea* or the so-called ‘sea theatre’, a round exedra surrounding an artificial lake in the gardens of the villa of Hadrian at Tivoli, were still visible at that time and may serve as references. These few examples clearly show why, despite its heavenly character, the heavenly Jerusalem represented in Sta. Pudenziana constituted a vivid representation of a city. The city of Rome was not meant to be represented in the mosaic, since the subject is the representation of Christ in his heavenly kingdom. But it may have influenced the designer, because it was probably the only example of ‘city’ known to him/her.

Yet it was probably the imperial architecture of Roman palaces that most influenced the scenery surrounding the representation of Christ and the apostles. As the garden has a paradisiacal character, so do the exedra and the city behind that belong to the same heavenly setting. The connection between the garden framed by the portico – here used as basic elements in the representation of the abode of God – and the city is of capital importance to understand the conception of the palace as an antitype of the kingdom of God. Imperial residential architecture, with its structures and gardens, was chosen to depict the setting of the heavenly kingdom. It probably follows that in contemporary imagery it was conceived as a mirror of the kingdom of God. This correspondence between the imperial palace

and the heavenly kingdom reveals the fundamental role that Christianity played within the imagery of the time as well as the parallel that was made between the imperial sphere and Christianity. The Christian empire reflected itself in the palace, where the emperor manifested himself to the court, and in the imperial cities that displayed the *basileia* in their monuments and the Christian faith in their Christian geography. Conversely, the abode of God was represented as an imperial structure inserted into a heavenly city.

In the same period, at the beginning of the fifth century, St. John Chrysostom used the same concepts while describing the heavenly court of God: God is set upon His throne in a vestibule, sitting like a king amidst his court of angels and saints.<sup>188</sup> The text depicts an imperial audience hall as the setting for the heavenly appearance of God. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, just like in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana, imperial architecture is the most appropriate setting for the appearance of God. Furthermore, describing a scene that seems to occur in an audience hall, St. John Chrysostom calls this heavenly palace ‘the city of God’ (*ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ πόλις*), pointing out to the deepest symbol of the heavenly kingdom, a city. Likewise, in the mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana the exedra and the city behind it belong to the same heavenly environment. The city is thus the epitome a sacred space, that of the manifestation of God and Christianity. In St. John Chrysostom the heavenly abode of God is represented through the lexicon of palatine architecture and through the image of a heavenly city. In Late

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<sup>188</sup>JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *In Matthaëum Homilia*, 2.1, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, LVII, 23.

Antiquity the palace was indeed the location for the manifestation of the emperor to his court, a location inserted in the urban topography of the capital that reflected the splendour of the *basileia* in its Christian geography. Even when Rome was no longer the seat of the emperor, who from Arcadius onwards resided almost continuously in Constantinople, the palatine architecture and the city itself continued to be seen as the most appropriate place for the representation of Christ to the people of the *titulus Pudentis*. In the context of fifth-century Rome, this could have been influenced by the creation of the bishop's palace, whose form and conception are strongly connected with imperial architecture.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, this reveals that a common understanding of the kingdom of God as a heavenly city, that prevailed from Rome to Constantinople at that time. The city is a sacred space, transformed into a Christian city, and at the same time the kingdom of God is figured as a sacred space inserted into a heavenly city.

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<sup>189</sup> PALLAS 1968; MÜLLER-WIENER 1989; TESTINI, CANTINO WATAGHIN, PANI ERMINI 1989, 58-91; LUCIANI 2000; MILLER 2000, 16-52.

**Chapter IV**

**The *palatium* in the mosaics**

**of St. Apollinare nuovo:**

**the palace and its representation**

The mosaic representing the *palatium* occupies the western side of the southern wall in the nave of St. Apollinare nuovo at Ravenna, which was originally dedicated ‘*in nomine Domine nostri Jesu Christi*’.<sup>1</sup> [fig. 92] It belongs to the first phase of the church, built by Theoderic next to his palace as a palatine chapel sometime before his death in 526.<sup>2</sup>

**1. Description of the mosaic**

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<sup>1</sup> AGNELLUS, *Lib. Pont.*, c. 86, ed. C. Nauwerth, Freiburg 1996, 330-331.

<sup>2</sup> BOVINI 1966a, 51. According to Duval, the identification of St. Apollinare nuovo with the palatine chapel of his palace is doubtful (DUVAL 1978b, 32-35). For the architecture and archaeology of the building, see: DEICHMANN 1969, 171-175; DEICHMANN 1974, 125-138.

Located at the west end of the southern wall of the central nave, the mosaic represents a building raised on columns [fig. 93]. At the centre, three arches on four columns support a pediment. And at both sides of the central structure, there are two aisles with symmetrical features and structure. These aisles are two-storey constructions that consist of arched colonnades with a series of screened windows above. The central pediment is higher than the lateral aisles and its columns and features are much richer in detail.<sup>3</sup> Sloping roofs made of reddish tiles cover the aisles as well as the central pediment.

The central structure is formed of three arches each supported by four columns. The columns stand on decorated bases and support four compound capitals and impost blocks [fig. 94]. The capitals are formed of double rows of acanthus leaves and an abacus, each with a rosette in the centre. Crosses decorate the centre of the impost blocks and a crenellated cornice frames the pediment and the arches. Above the arches, the entablature shows the inscription *palatium*. The spandrels have a golden background and are decorated in green garlands held by two winged figures, which stand on a green ground directly above the columns. The central arch, framed by a lintel, is filled in vegetal spiral garlands that unfold from a central flower-like element. While wreaths are suspended from the centres of the lateral arches; the pediment, the

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<sup>3</sup> On the columns of the central building is possible to distinguish the impost block, a typical feature of the eastern church architecture that spread in Ravenna in the fifth century, one of the first use of the impost block in Ravenna was in the colonnades of the church of St. Giovanni Evangelista, built by Galla Placidia.

central arch and the entablature, together with the areas between the arches, are all filled in golden *tesserae*. The central opening is also clad in golden cubes and framed by grey stripes. In addition, the double stripe along the bottom side consists of two different shades of grey. While this stripe is reminiscent of two steps, the stripe at the sides resembles the shadows. Curtains cover each entrance. While central curtain is richly decorated with golden inserts and embroidered with vegetal elements; the others are covered in reddish rosettes. Lastly, the arches spanning the lateral aisles are also covered with curtains, here drawn at the centre but decorated with similar patterns.

At the sides of the central structure two grey stripes, perhaps shadows, separate it from the lateral aisles, which are symmetrical in shape and decoration [fig. 95-96]. Their columns, bases and capitals are similar to, but smaller than, those of the central structure. The pattern of the capital appears simplified compared with the capitals of the central structure. Although there is no impost block, the abacus reproduces the same central rosette. As in the central structure, spandrels have a golden background and are decorated in green garlands linked to circles – located directly above the centre of the arches – and held by winged figures standing on a green ground directly above the columns. The winged figures at the sides of each aisle are slightly turned while the others stand in a frontal position.

Above the colonnades, the entablature frames a series of arched windows which are separated by white small columns with flat bases and imposts. The windows have a lower area with two reddish panels and an upper area screened by a square patterned grid. A dotted cornice frames the wall above the window that is clad in golden *tesserae* decorated with the same winged figures holding green garlands.

As noted above, between the columns of the aisles curtains are hung and tied with a knot at the centre. The curtains are decorated in the same floral pattern as the lateral curtains of the central structure. The colonnade emits a dark-purple light and only the central opening in the central structure is clad in golden cubes.

## **2. Restorations**

The mosaics of St. Apollinare nuovo have two initial phases: the first one dating the time of Theoderic (died in 526), and the second one occurring few decades later, at the time of Agnellus the bishop (556-569). After 561, Agnellus obtained an edict from the emperor Justinian, under which all the goods of the Arian church were transferred to the Orthodox church.<sup>4</sup> At that time the mosaic decoration of the church changed considerably; and, as a consequence of a real *damnatio memoriae* carried out by the Orthodox, parts of the mosaic decoration

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<sup>4</sup> BOVINI 1966a, 51.

were removed and replaced by new mosaics. The mosaic was replaced shortly after the first decoration of the church. At the time of the archbishop Agnellus, the mosaicists remade the upper preparatory layer and the cube surface of the mosaic, leaving the two layers below intact. Technical differences are visible: both the size and the rows material of the cubes used at the time of Agnellus are different from the original ones.<sup>5</sup>

While the friezes of the martyrs and the virgins, the figures of the Magi are in fact replacements of the original mosaic,<sup>6</sup> the scene with Christ, the angels and the virgin Mary, the images of Classe and Ravenna, and the *palatium* are ascribed to the first phase.<sup>7</sup> However, only limited areas of the *palatium* and the *civitas Classis* underwent some restorations. Human figures were removed and replaced by an aniconic decoration.<sup>8</sup> Round outlines are still visible among the columns of the lateral aisles of the *palatium* right above the curtains; and human hands are still depicted on the columns' shafts, which offer evidence that people were previously represented in the colonnades.<sup>9</sup> [figs. 100-103] The arch of the city-gate on the right side of the *palatium* was first investigated in 1932. At that time, Bartoccini made detailed observations regarding the

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<sup>5</sup> BOVINI 1966a, 54-55, 64-70.

<sup>6</sup> BOVINI 1952A, 103-104; BOVINI 1966a, 54-56, 64-70.

<sup>7</sup> BOVINI 1966a, 51, 64-70.

<sup>8</sup> In this respect, Bovini has significantly used the term 'purging'. For the figures once standing in the *civitas Classis* mosaic, see especially: BOVINI 1951.

<sup>9</sup> Reading the mosaic from the left to the right side, only four human hands are visible; they are located on the first and third columns of the colonnade at the left side, on the first column of the central building, and on the third column of the colonnade at the right hand side.



surface of the mosaic. In the central area of the arch, the cubes were placed in a different way compared with the rest of the cubes in the same area and they were greenish in colour.<sup>10</sup> After the detachment of the mosaic, Batoccini noticed that a figure standing in the middle of the arch had been removed, as had the other figures standing in the middle of the arches of the *palatium*. He speculated that this may have occurred at the time of the archbishop Agnellus.<sup>11</sup>

In the *palatium*, another anomaly was visible on the golden surface of the pediment. This was detached during the consolidation works of 1950 and it was discovered that another image had been removed at the time of Agnellus.<sup>12</sup>

In the second half of eighteenth century the whole mosaic decoration of St. Apolinare nuovo underwent substantial changes, largely due to the questionable methodology of the person in charge of the restorations, Felice Kibel.<sup>13</sup> Fortunately, the mosaic of the *palatium* was touched by these restorations in only a few areas, such as the lower zone of the central opening.<sup>14</sup> [fig. 97]

The mosaic has been consolidated and restored in the winter 2006 by the Soprintendenza per Beni Archeologici della Provincia di Ravenna, in particular the Scuola per il Restauro del Mosaico. The work

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<sup>10</sup> BARTOCCINI 1932, 168.

<sup>11</sup> BARTOCCINI 1932, 169.

<sup>12</sup> BOVINI 1966a, 75-77.

<sup>13</sup> Kibel's restorations occurred between 1852 and 1872. On Kibel's restorations in the church of St. Apollinare nuovo, see: BOVINI 1966b; ANTONELLINI 2002. The latter is an awkward apology of the figure of Felice Kibel and his work in the church.

<sup>14</sup> BARTOCCINI 1932, 169.

has been directed by Cetti Muscolino in collaboration with Claudia Tedeschi.<sup>15</sup>

### **3. Literature and scholarly debate**

In his study on Roman palaces, Swoboda interpreted the *palatium* of St. Apollinare nuovo as the external façade of a late-antique palace.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the mosaic represented the central entrance of the palace, facing the street with its porticoes. The central pediment on columns projected outwards and preceded the row of the lateral arcades. Arguing for an interpretation of the image as a long façade, the author compared the *palatium* with the representations of villas in the mosaics of Tabarka, the Trier ivory, and the façade of the church of San Salvatore in Ravenna, which was then erroneously interpreted as the palace of Theoderic.<sup>17</sup>

Later, believing that an architectural form is chosen in relation to the meaning and the function of a given space,<sup>18</sup> he changed his view under the influence of Dyggve's reading of the image.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, he suggested that the mosaic represented a flat and two-dimensional view

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<sup>15</sup> This information was provided by Claudia Tedeschi that we thank very much for the great courtesy.

<sup>16</sup> SWOBODA 1924, 256-261. This interpretation was previously advanced by Ricci (RICCI 1933, 43-44).

<sup>17</sup> Later Dyggve discussed in length Swoboda's points contrasting his interpretation of the image as a façade (DYGGVE 1941b, 11-15). For the church of San Salvatore, see below p. 291 n.34.

<sup>18</sup> SWOBODA 1961, 78.

<sup>19</sup> SWOBODA 1961, 82.

of an open court. The reconstruction of the *palatium* as an open court allowed the author to interpret the two-dimensional motif as an image of the imperial palace, which was also used for representing God's palace and the heavenly palace.<sup>20</sup> Swoboda later publication lists the *palatium* as an example of palatial representation among others; but it does not discuss it in detail or relate it to other images.

In 1941 Dyggve dedicated a monograph to the *palatium*, arguing in favour of a reading of the mosaic as the courtyard of the palace that had been 'opened' and levelled so that it might be represented on the wall. Before this important contribution, the mosaic had been mostly seen as a façade, which could be internal or external.<sup>21</sup> Here, Dyggve interpreted this as reproducing an inner space, developing some previous theories and arguing for a new interpretation.<sup>22</sup> In his view, the mosaicist opened the building and levelled it onto a surface representing its walls one beside another in order to render a three-dimensional space on the flat mosaic surface.<sup>23</sup> While the grey shadow at the sides of the central colonnade was interpreted by Swoboda as the depth of a projecting central pediment; for Dyggve it allowed the transition from the central structure to the aisles that, in the real model, were

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<sup>20</sup> SWOBODA 1961, 82.

<sup>21</sup> For discussion, see: DYGGVE 1941b, 8-15.

<sup>22</sup> HAUPT 1909, 150; EBERSOLT 1910, 165-166; BENOIT 1933, 54.

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that Dyggve did not distinguish between the mosaicist and the designer of the mosaic, as they were the same person (DYGGVE 1941b, 19).

perpendicular, while here they were flattened onto a wall.<sup>24</sup> After a stylistic analysis of the features of the building, which allowed a dating at the beginning of the sixth century, the author compared the image with the open court of the palace of Diocletian at Split [fig. 21]. In his view, the image of the *palatium* represents an open space analogous to the open court of the palace of Diocletian at Split. The *palatium* and the open court at Split are two ‘ipetral basilicas’ for ceremonies.<sup>25</sup> According to this reconstruction, the open basilica of Ravenna differed from that of Split in that it was a three aisled basilica, with galleries used as *gynecaea*. However, as also noticed by Duval, the upper floor of the mosaic has openings screened by grids in the upper part and double windows in the lower part, so that the openings cannot be directly compared with the galleries of a church such as the basilica of Hagios Demetrios at Thessaloniki.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the evidence does not support Dyggve’s idea that the galleries would have functioned as *gynecaea* for the court ladies and his speculations on the development of court ceremonial.<sup>27</sup>

Dyggve assumes that Theoderic and the court were represented in the mosaic. While this is possible, it is unsupported by evidence. The central arch, where Theoderic was supposed to have been shown seated

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<sup>24</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 25.

<sup>25</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 30-31.

<sup>26</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 24 and 26; DUVAL 1960, 353; DUVAL 1978a, 100.

<sup>27</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 31.

on a throne, does not seem to be touched by restoration.<sup>28</sup> The other figures once standing in the colonnades are unknown: possibly they were members of the court, but again the hypothesis lacks evidence. Dyggve assumed that the king and his court were represented in this mosaic, rendering a representative picture of the court. This idea, which, as we will see, was then developed in the following literature, is fascinating and probable. However, the only evidence of the figures is the shadow of bodies over the curtains on the lateral aisles and a few human hands left on the columns.<sup>29</sup> All the extant human hands are right hands with the palm stretched outwards, as if the figures were indicating something happening on the right hand side of the *palatium* or as if they were shown in pose of *orantes*.<sup>30</sup> While both possibilities are likely, there is insufficient evidence to regard them as anything more than hypotheses.

The reconstruction of the *palatium* as an open basilica allows Dyggve to define the representation as the ‘art of power’, suggesting that the image is a glorification of the emperor and court ceremonial, with high symbolic content.<sup>31</sup> Since the inscription identifies the image

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<sup>28</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 32-33 and 35 n .1. According to Duval, this arch was originally left empty, as we see it today (DUVAL 1978a, 97).

<sup>29</sup> Reading the mosaic from the left to the right side, only four human hands are visible; they are located on the first and third columns of the colonnade at the right side, on the first column of the central building, and on the third column of the colonnade at the right hand side. Since no left arm is visible, there is no evidence to claim that they were in pose of *orantes*; rather they seem gesturing towards the centre of the nave or the sanctuary.

<sup>30</sup> De Francovich and Deichmann supposed that they were indicating the cortege of Theodoric leaving the palace and moving towards the apse of the church (DE FRANCOVICH 1970, 57; DEICHMANN 1974, 144).

<sup>31</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 34-36.

as the representation of a palace, this could be interpreted as a representation of power, especially since it is inserted in the foreground of the depiction of the *civitas Ravenna*. The *palatium* in the foreground of the image of the city shows the centrality and capital importance of the palace for the city of Ravenna and for the identity of the city itself. The importance of Ravenna was augmented and amplified by the presence of the palace within its walls. However, Dyggve focussed on court ceremonial, which in his view was represented in the mosaic. But in this image there is no court. The windows on the upper floor are closed, which poses a significant challenge to the interpretation of the latter as a gallery. His assumption about the courtly representation finds no justification in the image.

Yet, Dyggve suggested that the structure of the central building – a pediment supported by four columns – and the iconostasis of the Christian basilica were both a derivation of imperial architecture.<sup>32</sup> In Dyggve's view, this parallel served to justify the supposed presence of an apsidal room behind the central building of the mosaic. Instead of developing this point in detail, the author put great emphasis on his reconstruction of the palace of Theoderic and neglected a deep discussion of the image represented in the mosaic, where indeed there is no evidence of any room behind the structures of the building. Although

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<sup>32</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 38-39.

these points were neither developed nor accurately explained in Dyggve's book, they were largely followed by later scholarship.<sup>33</sup>

Dyggve assumed that the mosaic was the accurate reproduction of a real building, and particularly of the building that he identified with the palace of Theoderic. This site was interpreted in a variety of ways: as the palace of Theoderic, as the palace of the Exarch, and, finally and most likely, as the church of San Salvatore.<sup>34</sup> The misinterpretation of this site and its similarities with Dyggve's reconstruction of the palace are connected to a reading of the ninth-century historian Agnellus and Cassiodorus that seems rather forced; and, as Duval suggested, that is not correct.<sup>35</sup>

Due to the destruction of the palace of Theoderic – the remains identified with it are still the subject of a lively debate<sup>36</sup> – it is not possible to evaluate the accuracy of the image. Thus the comparison with Diocletian's palace at Split and the reading of the *palatium* as an open court (*basilica discoperta*) are hypothetical and have been largely dismissed in the following scholarship.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For the early Christian iconostasis, see: ORLANDOS 1954, 509-538.

<sup>34</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 27, 42-48. On the so-called palace of Theoderic or palace of the Exarch or church of San Salvatore, see: GEROLA 1921, 90-93; VERZONE 1938, 201-211; MAZZOTTI 1955, 81-86; RUSCONI 1971, 475-506; THODERMANN 1974, 23-40; ORTALLI 1991, 170-176; PORTA 1991; DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997, 69-82.

<sup>35</sup> DUVAL 1960, 359-361; DUVAL 1978a, 100.

<sup>36</sup> For the most recent contributions on the remains identified with Theoderic palace, with discussion of the previous views, see: RUSSO 2004; AUGENTI 2005. In the site was found part of a large late-antique villa that, given its location near the church of St. Apollinare nuovo, was identified with the palace of Theoderic.

<sup>37</sup> See especially: DUVAL 1960; DUVAL 1978a. Several authors argued in detail against Dyggve's reading of the peristyle in the palace of Split as *basilica discoperta* (SCHNEIDER

In several papers, many of which presented technical analyses of the mosaic, Bovini offered another reading of the mosaic. The *palatium* was identified with that of Theoderic on the basis of textual evidences and, more precisely, it was understood as a representation of the internal north façade of the atrium discovered during the excavations of the so-called palace of Theoderic in Ravenna.<sup>38</sup> The author collected those few texts that, from Ricci onwards,<sup>39</sup> are generally considered evidence to identify the *palatium* with the palace of Theoderic in Ravenna. Herein, a passage from Cassiodorus, in which the author describes winged victories decorating the palace of the Theoderic, a text of John the Deacon in which are praised the long porticos of the palace, together with a passage of Andreas Agnellus, in which an equestrian image of Theoderic was said to be depicted at the entrance of his palace among the personifications of Rome and Ravenna.<sup>40</sup> Although the first two passages do contain features represented also in the *palatium*, the long porticoes are, as we have seen, a typical attribute of palaces. The victories on the wall of the palace, as we will see, are connected with the glorification of the emperor. These could also be a feature of the palace,

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1950, 131-139; PRANDI 1953, 425-435; GERKAN 1966, 143-146; DE FRANCOVICH 1970, esp. 8-15 with extensive bibliography).

<sup>38</sup> BOVINI 1952b; BOVINI 1966a; BOVINI 1970, 138-140.

<sup>39</sup> RICCI 1933, 44-45.

<sup>40</sup> BOVINI 1952b, 206; BOVINI 1966a, 72. Johnson discussed the passage written by Agnellus, clarifying that the text was describing two images of Theoderic: one located on the vestibule, with the personifications of Rome and Ravenna, and another one which was probably an equestrian portrayal (JOHNSON 1988, 86 n. 134).



but this is not enough to suggest that the picture is an actual representation of the palace of Theoderic. The first two texts characterize the imagery of the palace as an outstanding residence with porticoes and winged victories, which are indeed present both in the text as well as in the depiction of the palace, but they cannot evidence the claim that the *palatium* is an actual representation. Agnellus's text has often been used to identify the depiction with the *Chalké* of Ravenna, the entrance to the palace of Ravenna, which will be discussed below. However, we should add that we do not know what was represented on the pediment. Given that it was removed during the first restoration of the mosaic, it was probably an image connected with Theoderic, but even this is not enough to associate it with the one described by Agnellus.

Finally, the identification of the *palatium* with the northern façade of the internal atrium of the palace of Theoderic is a hypothesis that is supported by neither secure textual or archaeological evidence. As the ruins identified with the palace of Theoderic are visible only in old pictures showing portions of the walls, this hypothesis cannot be proved without further archaeological investigation.

Duval's contribution to the understanding of the *palatium* was developed in several articles that appeared from 1960 to 1979. With the passing of the time he reviewed his first interpretation reaching the

conclusion that the mosaic was a ‘synthetic representation’ of a generic palace intended to represent the royal power and specifically the throne hall.<sup>41</sup> He supposed that the presence of the inscription *palatium* was due to the fact that the beholder would be not able to recognise the palace in the mosaic.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the mosaic could not represent the internal or external façade, which would have stand for the palace itself to the beholder.<sup>43</sup> In his reading of the mosaic, he applied the methodology developed a few years before in a study of the drawings of the Utrecht psalter.<sup>44</sup> As in the Utrecht psalter, the depiction of the building would be the result of the dissection and subsequent rearrangement of different elements of the model; in this sense the author intended ‘synthetic representation’. At first, the building was leveled as if on a flat surface, it was then projected in the foreground and opened towards the interior.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the upper store of the building represented in the mosaic would be the depiction of the external view of the three sides of a basilica, while the lower floor would represent the two internal colonnades of a basilica and a central triumphal arch preceding the apse in the main nave.<sup>46</sup> In Duval’s view, the mosaic is neither intended to reproduce the real appearance of the palace or it is imaginary

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<sup>41</sup> DUVAL 1978a.

<sup>42</sup> According to the author, the inscription *palatium* could not be original, rather pertain to a subsequent phase (DUVAL 1978a, 94). This was not however proven by any scientific analysis of the mosaic.

<sup>43</sup> In this regards, Duval opposed all the previous theories identifying the palace as an internal or external façade that attempted at connecting the representation with the appearance of the palace of Theoderic in Ravenna (DUVAL 1978a, 94-102).

<sup>44</sup> DUVAL 1965.

<sup>45</sup> DUVAL 1978a, 112-114.

<sup>46</sup> DUVAL 1978a, 115.

architecture. Rather it is a compound of outstanding elements that were assembled here to convey the idea of a throne hall and did not necessarily belong to the palace of Ravenna.<sup>47</sup> For the author, both the architecture and decoration of the building represented in the mosaic cannot be attributed to the palace of Theoderic in Ravenna. Instead, they are typical features of late-antique architecture and internal decoration that have been adapted and connected together in this image.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the building would have a merely generic character and would have functioned here as an architectural frame for the people originally standing in the colonnades.<sup>49</sup>

Duval's comprehension of the structure of the image adds new evidence to the debate about the representation of the palace. However, it also raises a few problems. In the mosaic, the inscription *palatium* identifies the building as the palace; the reason why the mosaicist, or better the designer of the mosaic,<sup>50</sup> felt the need to put an inscription identifying the palace could have several explanations. If, following Duval, we admit that the beholder could not identify the building as a palace, this could be because the palace was a separate entity from the

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<sup>47</sup> DUVAL 1978a, 114.

<sup>48</sup> DUVAL 1978a, 102.

<sup>49</sup> DUVAL 1978a, 118.

<sup>50</sup> It is worth noticing that Duval has never distinguished between the artist who made the mosaic and the designer who conceived it, as they were the same person. In antiquity they were different people: the mosaicist was merely the artisan, while the iconography of a building was likely conceived by someone else, aware of doctrinal and political issues and connected to the circles that contributed the expenses for the building (BARRAL I ALTET 1986).

city, where only a few were allowed.<sup>51</sup> Thus the beholder might have not known its appearance, especially if, following Duval again, what is represented is not an external façade open to a public area, but a compound of outer and inner spaces. However, inscriptions identify all the places represented in the church decoration; this is the case of the *civitas Classis* and of the *civitas Ravenna* [figs. 98-99]. It is slightly improbable that even though the lack of inscriptions the beholder could not recognise the two cities, since both are represented by means of representative attributes, such as the boats on the water for Classe and the walled enceinte encircling monumental buildings for Ravenna. Therefore, in the whole decoration the inscriptions serve to stress the names and the identification of the places to the beholders, and not to guide them through the mosaic with an explanation. Thus, given that inscriptions identify all the places, even though they are clear representations of cities, Duval's claim that the inscription *palatium* led the beholder to identify the building, since its appearance did not allow them to do so, cannot be accepted.

The building was intended to represent the *palatium* of Ravenna. Unfortunately, there is no extant palace to compare with this image in Ravenna. Accordingly, it is not possible to evaluate the extent to which the representation is generic. The inscription identifies it as an imperial palace; this image is the only extant depiction of an imperial palace, and

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<sup>51</sup> For the palace as a entity separate from the city, indeed a city in the city, see pp. 22-24, 358, 377-378.

therefore we should consider it purely as it is indicated in the inscription: as a representation of the palace, however idealised. While the accuracy of the image cannot be estimated, and we cannot neither suggest that is a generic depiction nor that is not.

The figures once standing within the colonnades were erased, leaving the building vacant. However, this representation is extremely detailed, so it is very unlikely that it was merely conceived as a setting. Such a detailed representation of a building could hardly be an architectonic frame to set the figures. More likely, it held a meaning that goes beyond that of an outstanding architectural frame. It is the image of an exceptional building where the details and the way they are arranged need to be analyzed to discover their connection and their meaning in the context. A reflection on this should not be avoided and the assumption that the architecture is merely a background for vanished people cannot be retained. The setting on which the figures were represented surely had some connections with those figures. Moreover, when the figures were removed, the palace was left as if its representative function was not diminished by the absence of the figures. Duval's reconstruction of the building as an apsidal hall is thus possible, and should be considered alongside the other interpretations. Nevertheless, the comparison of the *palatium* with the image of the *ecclesia mater* of Tabarka is puzzling. The two mosaics are very different in conception and style: the mosaic of Tabarka is not

symmetrical and is quite rough. Comparing the central pediment on columns of the *palatium* with the triple arcade preceding the apse in the mosaic of Tabarka is somewhat forced. While the triple arcade preceding the presbytery is a peculiarity of early Christian church architecture in northern Africa,<sup>52</sup> we are without evidence of a triple arcade preceding the apse either in northern-Italian early Christian architecture or in the very few examples of late-antique apsidal reception rooms. It is not possible to state that the pediment on columns of the *palatium* was preceding an apse. Though it is possible, no apse or circular building is in fact connected with the main structure in the foreground of the *palatium*.

The lateral colonnades could be both inner spaces and outer spaces. External facades were sometimes decorated in mosaic.<sup>53</sup> It is possible that a palace bore precious golden mosaics in an external space. However, considering that no real evidence of a late-antique palace is left, the claim is unsubstantiated.

Duval's identification of the building as a 'synthetic representation' of a basilica is of great importance. As in his previous study on the illustrations of the Utrecht psalter, Duval concluded that the model used for depicting the Temple of Jerusalem, the king's palace,

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<sup>52</sup> KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 191.

<sup>53</sup> This is the case of the façade of the sixth-century cathedral at Poreč or the seventh-century Great Mosque of Damascus. At Poreč the Episcopal church had the façade and the area above the apse's roof all clad in mosaic (MOLAJOLI 1943, 33 fig. 33-35; PRELOG 1957, 100 fig.170; BOVINI 1974, 43). Bovini outlined that also St. Peter at the Vatican, St. Lawrence at Caesarea, and St. Probus at Ravenna had the external façade decorated in mosaic (BOVINI 1974, 43; see also: MOLAJOLI 1943, 33).

and the *ecclesia* is an apsidal basilica.<sup>54</sup> The use of the same model to represent three buildings, each with its own specific function, provides strong evidence of the existence a common conception. The image is an icon that stands for a concept. In this case, the same kind of image stands for the representation of three different buildings: the temple of Jerusalem is conceived as the house of God, the imperial palace is the residence of the emperor, and the Christian basilica houses the Christian community. All share connotations that allow them to be represented in the same way and thus conceived as analogous in the common imaginary. This leads to Duval's conclusion that late-antique architectural representations are purely conventional. However, the basilica was an architectural space widely used throughout the Mediterranean in imperial residences as well as for the Christian churches of the first centuries. Thus the model represented in the Utrecht psalter existed in reality and was used in secular and religious architecture. This is in contrast to the claim that late-antique architectural representations are purely conventional. The fourth-century great basilica of Trier was used as an imperial hall, as well as the basilica of Maxentius in Rome. In the remains of the site called the palace of Theoderic at Ravenna, there was a basilical hall ending in an apse. All around the Mediterranean the basilica was the most common type of church building, which was changed according to different

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<sup>54</sup> DUVAL 1965, 254.

geographical areas with the passing of the time. As Ćurčić has recently demonstrated, secular imperial architecture and church architecture share many common features in Late Antiquity, but the same architectonic elements in a church or imperial secular basilica have different functions.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the imperial hall and the *ecclesia*, which were apparently depicted in the same way, also had similar architectural forms. Furthermore, as Teja demonstrated with a detailed textual analysis, the imperial hall and the sanctuary of the church were described utilizing a common vocabulary, which expressed their holy character and conceptually connected the nature of the two spaces.<sup>56</sup> These few considerations clarify that analogous representational schemes and architectural forms correspond to spaces conveying analogous conceptions, which are nonetheless different in function and characterization. Duval identified distinctive elements displaying the character of the architecture in the objects filling the buildings.<sup>57</sup> The decoration plays the same function in this context. However, admitting with Duval that the buildings are purely conventional representations framing the backgrounds diminishes and even ignores the nature of the buildings themselves and can thus lead to the misinterpretation of the whole scene.

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<sup>55</sup> ĆURČIĆ 2006.

<sup>56</sup> TEJA 1993, 623, see also TEJA 1996.

<sup>57</sup> DUVAL 1965, 241.



In 1970 De Francovich argued against Dyggve's reading of the *palatium* and the concept of 'architecture of power'.<sup>58</sup> His book is an attempt to demolish any possible reconstruction of the mosaic and especially Dyggve's and Duval's, claiming that the function of medieval representations of buildings is merely decorative. The author showed macroscopic problems in Dyggve's theory, following Duval's critique of the reconstruction of the building as a *basilica discoperta*, and outlined Dyggve's unfamiliarity with imperial ceremony..<sup>59</sup> Through an accurate structural and topographic analysis of the peristyle of Split, he was able to demonstrate that no public appearance of the emperor was possible in that space. Therefore the hypothetic reconstruction of the *palatium* as a *basilica discoperta* following the model of Split could not give evidence of a space for the development of imperial ceremonial.<sup>60</sup> [fig. 21]Next, the author argued against Duval's theory on the visual rendering of late-antique architecture as it was developed in Duval's study on the Utrecht psalter.<sup>61</sup> Through the comparison of the psalter's illustrations with a number of architectural representations dating variously from Late Antiquity to the eleventh century, he attempted to demonstrate that the architectural representations are fantastic images of improbable non-real

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<sup>58</sup> DE FRANCOVICH 1970.

<sup>59</sup> Later Duval harshly outlined De Francovich's slavish use of his own arguments, arguing against De Francovich throughout a long paper (DUVAL 1978). In the 1950s also Von Simson argued for the affinities between the *basilica discoperta* and the open courtyard on the model of Split (VON SIMSON 1948, esp.116-117).

<sup>60</sup> DE FRANCOVICH 1970, 8-15. Duval had already expressed a sceptical view on the possible development of court ceremonial in the palace of Split, which was built as a private residence of the emperor Diocletian in his last years, thus as an unofficial residence (DUVAL 1961; DUVAL 1961-1962).

<sup>61</sup> DUVAL 1965.

buildings, distorted and deformed in order to be inserted into the composition as mere decorative frames.<sup>62</sup> However, there is no reason to ‘deform’ architecture, if it is fantastic and does not exist in reality and was inserted into the composition only for recalling an architectural setting – an architectonic structure could be ‘deformed’ only if it existed in reality.

The author discarded Duval’s reconstruction of the *palatium* claiming that the mosaic was clearly meant to represent the façade of the palace of Theoderic in Ravenna. Here, at the centre of the columnar façade, a projecting arched structure that followed the model of the western wall of the Great Mosque of Damascus may have reproduced the aspect of the *Chalké* of Constantinople.<sup>63</sup> Even if the façade of the Great Mosque of Damascus and the image of the *palatium* do show similarities, it is difficult to establish the Byzantine antecedents of the mosque, and these have been the object of lively scholarly debate.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the derivation of the Great Mosque façade from the *Chalké* is certainly unjustified and even a little astonishing given that it is proved neither by written nor visual evidence. The real appearance of the *Chalké* is quite obscure. Its location at the centre of the southern side of the *Augusteon* was established by Mango on the basis of an accurate

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<sup>62</sup> DE FRANCOVICH 1970, esp. 31-55.

<sup>63</sup> DE FRANCOVICH 1970, 57-63. The derivation of Damascus’ Great Mosque from the *Chalké* of Constantinople was first advanced by Thiersch (THIERSCH 1909, 211-216; see also CRESWELL 1969, 151-210).

<sup>64</sup> Flood proposed a new reading of the ‘Byzantine influences’ on the Great Mosque of Damascus, which Fowden however defined ‘highly speculative’ (FLOOD 2001, 229-236; FOWDEN AND KEY FOWDEN 2004, 134 n.81).

study of the textual evidence.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, De Francovich, who preferred Vogt's reconstruction of the imperial palace of Constantinople to support his somewhat untenable arguments, rejected it.

The value of De Francovich's work lies in the attempt to discuss all the existing literature on architectural representations and especially on the *palatium*. Unfortunately, his rather critical discussion was rooted in the idea that the architectural representations were, in the great part, ideal and fantastic frames with no connection to reality, the only purpose of which was to embellish the composition.<sup>66</sup> He approached the study of ancient architectural representations as if they reproduced accurate depictions of real buildings, concluding that no building with such an architectonic structure could exist in reality. Accordingly, architectural representations were fantastic frames. He also argued that only some architectural representations are reproductions of real buildings that are not absolutely accurate but correct depictions, taking into account the model of Hagia Sophia in the hand of Justinian, as it is portrayed in the mosaic on the southern door of the narthex of Hagia Sophia for instance.<sup>67</sup> This argument, which, as we will see, is rather inconsistent, allows the author to claim that the *palatium* was a correct reproduction of Theoderic's palace façade. The model of the church in the Hagia Sophia's mosaic is most likely intended to recall the building, but it does not reproduce it. Rather, it only gives an idea of the real church covered

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<sup>65</sup> MANGO 1959, 7-35.

<sup>66</sup> DE FRANCOVICH 1970, 22, 32-54.

<sup>67</sup> DE FRANCOVICH 1970, 55-57, esp. 57.

by its huge dome. It does reproduce the major feature of the church, the huge dome, but it also lacks all the semi-domes that are connected to the central dome of the church, not allowing a reconstruction of the real building. Therefore, it is not a correct reproduction. It does, however, convey the image of the church with its major element, as contemporaries saw it. The function of that model is to represent the church built by Justinian; and as such, it is represented as a gift in the emperor's hands. The *palatium* has a completely different function: originally several human figures were depicted in its colonnades. Thus it was the setting for a scene. Furthermore, if the depiction borrowed from a real building, the model itself is lost. Thus, it is impossible to evaluate the accuracy of the depiction. Yet, the author did not take into account a major point of discussion: probably the purpose of these images was not to be accurate reproductions. These points are at odds with De Francovich's arguments, and suggest that the image of the *palatium* cannot be with certainty considered to be a correct reproduction of a real building.

De Francovich's analysis poses many methodological problems. The author applies a modern sensibility in reading the image. He does not consider that antique images were probably made according to different perceptions, and, consequently, used a different way of representing, and generated a different kind of reception. The author continuously talks about the 'sensibility of the artist'. Unfortunately, the

definition of ‘artist’ as a person who expresses himself/herself through the making of various kinds of works of art is a modern concept that should not be applied to the medieval times.<sup>68</sup> In Late Antiquity or in the Middle Ages, the making of a work of art such as a mosaic implied many people among whom there was a strict differentiation of tasks: a designer who made the project, several mosaicists who made the surface of cubes of the mosaic, one or several people who made the three preparatory layers of the mosaic.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, we lack the evidence to cast light on the exact tasks of these artisans or on their world. However, what is certain is that the concept of artist as we know it – and as was developed during the Renaissance – did not exist and that ‘a work of art’ was the product of the combined work of several people.

De Francovich believed that architecture has a primary role, which is purely functional and denotative, overtly discarding the communicative aspect of architecture as a compound of deliberately chosen forms for a determinate purpose.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, the architectural representations within the composition lose all purpose except the purely decorative one. In this conviction, De Francovich did not notice that in all the architectural representations taken into account there is a constant repetition of the same architectural forms: pediments, domes, arches, and porticoes. These were not used because in late-antique and medieval

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<sup>68</sup> For the ‘artist’ in medieval and Byzantine times, see: CLAUSSEN 1991, 546-547; CUTLER 1991, 551-553.

<sup>69</sup> For the role of the ‘artist’ in Late Antiquity, with special regard to the mosaicist, see: BALMELLE AND DARMON 1986; BARRAL I ALTET 1986; OIKONOMIDES 1986.

<sup>70</sup> DE FRANCOVICH 1970, *passim*, esp. 68-69.

times no other architectural forms were known; rather they were the primary elements of the lexicon of monumental architecture. Within the composition they acted to create a location for the development of the scene, conveying the idea of a monumental architecture for the setting and pointing out the position of a particular figure or element within the composition. Therefore, they had reached a further level of significance that was linked to the meaning of the scene.

Considering only the functional aspect of the architecture, the author neglects both the understanding of the architectural representations as well as the context in which the compositions were inserted. If architecture is represented, it loses its original functional role and becomes one element of the composition among others. As such it acquires several purposes: firstly, a denotative one, providing a setting for the scene; secondly, a connotative one, playing a role within it; and thirdly, outlining the importance of particular elements or figures that establish the context – such as urban or suburban, poor or rich, etc. – thus providing further factors to read and understand the image itself.

In 1974 Deichmann proposed to interpret the mosaic in the ‘simplest way’: as a façade.<sup>71</sup> After a technical analysis of the mosaic,<sup>72</sup> the author emphasised the similarities between the representation of the *palatium* and the façade of the church of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople

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<sup>71</sup> DEICHMANN 1974, 142-143.

<sup>72</sup> DEICHMANN 1969, 304-305.

before Justinian's reconstruction.<sup>73</sup> These resemblances permit an understanding of the image of the *palatium* as an existing architecture. The author claimed that the mosaicist portrayed the *palatium* in the 'simplest way', thus representing its façade, which was visible to his eyes.<sup>74</sup> In Deichmann's view, such an interpretation was proven by the written sources on the entrance of the palace of Ravenna, which, as we have seen, tell of the victories, the long colonnades of the structure, and the portrait of Theoderic on the pediment.<sup>75</sup> The author noticed that the only evidence for the figures standing under the colonnades, the arms, all point toward the centre of the nave, perhaps indicating a procession or a movement of people that was approaching the apse from the palace.<sup>76</sup>

Deichmann's contribution, which was extensively discussed by Duval,<sup>77</sup> represents the clearest interpretation of the *palatium* as the façade of the palace.

In 1981, in a monograph on the imperial *adventus* in Late Antiquity, MacCormack contributed an important interpretation of the *palatium* in the context of the decoration programme of the church and,

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<sup>73</sup> DEICHMANN 1974, 144.

<sup>74</sup> DEICHMANN 1974, 143.

<sup>75</sup> DEICHMANN 1974, 141. Duval argued against the identification of the portraits on the pediments with the image of Theoderic on a horse as it was interpreted by Deichmann (DUVAL 1978a, 95-96).

<sup>76</sup> DEICHMANN 1974, 145.

<sup>77</sup> DUVAL 1978a.

more widely, of Ostrogothic ideology.<sup>78</sup> MacCormack probably never saw the mosaic, stating repeatedly that the colonnades are filled with blue light<sup>79</sup> – while it is actually purple-black, except in the arcade of the city gate. However, her reading is of great importance, in that it emphasized the role of the palace within late-antique imagery and also the function of this image in the context of the church decoration. As in Cassiodorus' writings, the palace is the symbol of the imperial power, the *palatium* of St. Apollinare nuovo is empty – even after Agnellus' restorations the central portal was left empty. Thus, it shows the state of the residence before the king-emperor takes possession of it. The palace is one of the primary attributes of imperial sovereignty. In this case, its emptiness presupposes that the king emperor was about to take possession of the palace with a ceremony. As with the image of the empty throne, the empty palace involves the necessary concept of the imperial presence and power, thus is a primary element for the definition of the empire.

On the southern wall of the central nave of the church the image opposite the *palatium* is an enthroned Christ with his angelic court in the eastern end. On the northern wall of the nave, the image of the *civitas Classis* faces the *palatium* and an enthroned Virgin faces Christ. In the church decoration the heavenly sphere was represented in the eastern side, next to the sanctuary, and it was collectively balanced, in a

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<sup>78</sup> MACCORMACK 1995, 355-362.

<sup>79</sup> MACCORMACK 1995, 357 and 359.



harmonic order, by the earthly sphere, represented by the *palatium*, the residence of the king, and the city of Classe, together with the productive harbour of Ravenna on the opposite side. As Christ was mirrored by the emperor, here symbolized in the *palatium*, so the Virgin was often associated with the city.<sup>80</sup> The balance between these opposite realms was rendered by a sense of longitudinal processional development, which was evident if looking at the two edges of the naves. Changing the view from the west to the eastern end of the nave covered a long distance that made the ceremonial content of the church decoration explicit.<sup>81</sup> Originally, members of the courts probably filled the colonnades and stood with their right arm stretched outwards in direction of the nave. This gesture implied a movement, perhaps a procession towards Christ, and recalled a procession of entry or triumph, a regal-imperial liturgy. According to MacCormack, the presence of palace, city, probably of the court, and of Christ and the Virgin at the east end of the nave gave evidence of the important link between the city and the court, and also of the ideological relationship between heavenly and earthly realms together with the role of the emperor-king within the city.

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<sup>80</sup> MACCORMACK 1995, 360. Notice that in the mosaic decoration of the church the image of the Virgin is balanced by the image of the *civitas Classis* in the western side of the northern wall of the nave.

<sup>81</sup> MACCORMACK 1995, 360.

In 1983 Frugoni proposed another interpretation of the mosaic that it is of capital importance in that it emphasizes the broader ideological meaning of the composition.<sup>82</sup> The author read the mosaic as a façade with a central projecting pediment. The figures previously standing in the mosaic were hypothetically understood either as Theoderic's wife and her female court or as a series of statues, such as in the colonnades of the buildings that decorated the column of Arcadius.<sup>83</sup> These hypotheses cannot be demonstrated, but it could be excluded that the figures represented statues since few fragments of their garments are left on the arms.

The value of this contribution, as has been said, lies in its emphasis on the ideological meaning of the *palatium*. Themes such as those contained in the lunette of the *civitas Ravvenna* find extraordinary parallels in the written and visual evidence that identifies the Byzantine emperor as the victorious ruler for God. Yet, the *palatium* and the buildings on Arcadius' column share similarities that should be interpreted in the light of Theoderic's admiration for the emperor. The location of scenes from the ascension of Christ directly above the mosaic enhanced the *palatium* and the city of Ravenna to the status of elected city. In Theoderic's ideology Ravenna was associated with Constantinople, which in the sixth century acquired the status of new Jerusalem. Thus, Ravenna was associated with the new Jerusalem itself.

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<sup>82</sup> FRUGONI 1983a; FRUGONI 1983b, 44, 55-57.

<sup>83</sup> FRUGONI 1983a, 286 and 289.

From the city the king was probably moving in procession towards Christ on the opposite side of the nave connecting a holy city with the kingdom of God and expressing its value as a Christian capital.

In 1988 Johnson contributed to the understanding of Theoderic's building programme with an accurate and detailed study, which also cast new light on the geography and purpose of the area of the supposed palace of Theoderic.<sup>84</sup> Johnson saw a clear mimesis of imperial and, more precisely, Constantinopolitan models in Theoderic's building activity. His contribution represents the first complete and accurate reading of the remains commonly identified with the palace of Theoderic, which, as shown by the author, should be recognised as a small part of the real residence of Theoderic in Ravenna.<sup>85</sup> Accordingly, St. Apollinare nuovo is identified with the palatine church and the mosaic of the *palatium* as a faithful representation of the entrance of the palace, the *Chalké* of Ravenna.

This paper is a great scholarly contribution to the understanding of Theoderic's ideology and also to the study of the early sixth-century topography of Ravenna. However, the interpretation of the *palatium* is not completely exhaustive. The author explained the representation as a

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<sup>84</sup> JOHNSON 1988.

<sup>85</sup> JOHNSON 1988, 81-86. After Johnson's article, a new scholarly interest on the palace brought about new archaeological and textual studies, which cast light on the remains as well as on the literary sources (PORTA 1991; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 1997; DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997; MANZELLI 2000, 142-149; RUSSO 2000; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 251-258; MANZELLI AND GRASSIGLI 2001; RUSSO 2004; AUGENTI 2005).

view of the main entrance of the palace consisting of a *fastigium* that projects from a two storey arcaded façade.<sup>86</sup> In particular, the façade would reproduce the appearance of the *Chalké* of Ravenna, which reproduced the *Chalké* of Constantinople as it was before Justinian's reconstruction.<sup>87</sup> Originally, members of the court and of the imperial family stood within the colonnades while an imperial procession was moved from the palace to the presbytery of the church.<sup>88</sup> The *palatium* was interpreted as the *Chalké* of Ravenna because the palace main entrance has a great representative function as the most significant part of the palace. Accordingly, it was most likely represented here.

In the author's view, the text of Agnellus provides further evidence for this interpretation. Agnellus reported that on the *Chalké*'s entrance was an image of Theoderic standing between the personifications of Rome and Ravenna.<sup>89</sup> The mosaic on the pediment was removed during the first restorations of the mosaic, thus it is assumed that it was a portrait of Theoderic. While this is possible, it is not certain. The last piece of evidence supporting the author's thesis is also improvable. The lunette of the *civitas Ravenna* is said to represent the image of Constantine and his two sons in the act of killing a dragon, which, following Eusebios, was displayed somewhere in the vicinity of

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<sup>86</sup> JOHNSON 1988, 90.

<sup>87</sup> JOHNSON 1988, 91-92.

<sup>88</sup> This interpretation has a long tradition among scholars (JOHNSON 1988, 91 n. 172: with references).

<sup>89</sup> AGNELLUS, *Lib. Pont.*, 94, ed. Nauerth, Freiburg 1996, 356-357; JOHNSON 1988, 86 and 92.

the imperial palace of Constantinople.<sup>90</sup> However, this attribution for the image of the lunette is rather forced. Nothing on the panel gives evidence of imperial portrayals. The image represents three figures in white tunics, the one at the centre holding a cross and stepping onto a snake. They are three saintly figures on a background of gold and flowers, a setting that emphasizes their sanctity. Furthermore, they are depicted on the city-gate and not somewhere in the palace area, discrediting this hypothesis.<sup>91</sup> Rather, this representation enhances the meaning of Ravenna as a Christian city, which is protected against the devil in name of the cross.

In his reading of the mosaic as an image of the *Chalké* the author did not take into account the relationship between the palace and the city as they are represented here. The *civitas Ravenna* surrounds the buildings behind the palace with its walled enceinte. Its city gate with the inscription is located next to the palace in the foreground of the image, emphasizing the role of the palace and the city doors in the display of the city itself. The palace is one of the major features of the city of Ravenna and the city itself is represented through its image and its walls. The buildings behind the palace can be considered as Theoderic's foundations;<sup>92</sup> but no element insists on this interpretation.

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<sup>90</sup> EUSEBIOS, *Vita Const.*, III.3, ed. I.A. Heikel, Leipzig 1902, 78.

<sup>91</sup> Mango emphasized that the location of the imperial panel portraying Constantine in the *Chalké* is not certain, rather the panel was located in the vicinity of the entrance (MANGO 1959, 23-26).

<sup>92</sup> In this the author followed Testi-Rasponi's interpretation of the cityscape (JOHNSON 1988, 88).

Rather they constitute the cityscape of Ravenna and are displayed in the background as if they were the other parts of the image, constituting the identity of the city itself, after its primary element, the palace.

In 1997 a monograph was entirely devoted to the study of the palace of Theoderic taking into account written as well as visual evidence.<sup>93</sup> This work aimed to contribute a new interpretation of the mosaic of St. Apollinare nuovo. In doing so, the authors analysed the archaeological material concerning the site of the palace of Theoderic as well as that of the church of San Salvatore with the purpose of clarifying the archaeological evidence.<sup>94</sup> The source for the representation of the *palatium* was found in none of these monuments that did not appear to pertain to the age of Theoderic.<sup>95</sup> The authors understood the *palatium* as an actual representation of the palace with Theoderic and his court standing in the colonnades.<sup>96</sup> Theoderic would have been represented seated on a throne in the central entrance, while the other members of the court would have been standing in act of *acclamatio*. This theory can be criticized on the basis of a technical and stylistic reflection. The authors stated that the *tesserae* of the central arch are different from

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<sup>93</sup> DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997.

<sup>94</sup> DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997, 60-82.

<sup>95</sup> This conclusion was discarded by Augenti's recent analysis of the remains and excavations' papers, which defined several building phases and a great building activity at the time of Theoderic (AUGENTI 2005). To the opposite, with a study of the archive papers reporting of the pavements' layers, Russo attributed the great part of the complex to the time of Honorios (RUSSO 2004).

<sup>96</sup> DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997, 40-41.

those of all the other arches. This is true, but does not support this thesis. The arches were all altered during archbishop Agnellus' remodelling of the mosaic. To the opposite, the central arch does not seem to be restored and the disposition of the golden cubes closely resembles that of the original areas of the mosaic: the central entrance was in fact not touched during the restorations. The act of *acclamatio* presupposes the right hand raised in front of the body, as in the panel on the north face of the arch of Constantine where the emperor address the audience.<sup>97</sup> The right hands of the people in the arcades of the *palatium* are all stretched outwards pointing to the apse of the church. If they were acclaiming Theoderic seated in the central arch, they would have all pointed to the centre of the *palatium*.

Yet, according to a peculiar reading of the text of Agnellus on the palace of Theoderic in Pavia, the authors interpreted the *palatium* as façade with a central *laubia*, an open court of justice that was typical of Germanic societies.<sup>98</sup> In this case, the court would be an internal space with a garden in front of it, and would be a special *laubia cum solarario*, a reception hall. The people in the colonnade and the seated king in the centre would confirm the juridical character of the scene and of the building. Leaving aside the question of the presence of a figure in the middle of the central arch, the interpretation of the *palatium* as a court of justice is unlikely. Here, the authors may not have taken into account the

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<sup>97</sup> On the *acclamatio*, with particular reference to the imperial *adventus*, see: MACCORMACK 1995, 118, 31-32, 55, 255-365-369.

<sup>98</sup> DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997, 109-115.

different role of the halls in the late-antique imperial-kingly palaces. *Palatium* was the term used for the imperial residence, which as the imperial palace of the Palatine hill, was a compound of several buildings dedicated to different functions and did not qualified the building with a juridical feature only. Furthermore, even considering the Byzantine culture of Theoderic, the authors emphasized his Germanic and ‘barbaric’ aspect, which is noticeable neither in any of his portrayals in the sources nor in his historical figure.<sup>99</sup>

#### **4. The *palatium***

##### **4.1 Visual rendering**

The central structure of the building, which is formed of a pediment on three arches, is prominent, but the structural connections to the whole of the building are quite difficult to define and, as we have seen, gave rise to different interpretations among scholars.<sup>100</sup> [figs. 93-96] This structure is outstanding both in size and decoration. Its capitals, columns, and bases are bigger than the ones in the lateral arcades. Unlike the other structures of the building, a crenellated cornice frames the arches and the pediment and an additional impost is placed between the capitals and the above wall. The central arched structure seems to project outwards from the line of the lateral aisles. This is not only due

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<sup>99</sup> JOHNSON 1988; CARILE A. 1999.

<sup>100</sup> See above pp. 287-317.



to its size, but also to a stripe of grey cubes that separate the central structure from the lateral arcades. This is visible in the areas between the lateral columns of the central structure and the columns of the porticoes. It is not clear if this grey stripe is meant to recall the shadow of the central structure or other columns standing behind the lateral columns of the central structure. A similar grey border frames the central opening: there the area between the columns and the golden opening, with the curtains drawn aside, is framed by the same grey stripe and in the bottom it has two different shades of grey stripes, as if recalling two steps.

In the central opening, the curtains hang from a thick grey-blue bar that is placed at the high of the arch-imposts. This is in contrast with the location of the bars from which hang the curtains covering the lateral entrances, at the height of the capitals. Unlike the curtains covering the lateral arches, the central curtains seems to belong to the first phase of the mosaic,<sup>101</sup> and likely they were suspended from an architrave, recalled in the thick grey-blue stripe at the height of the arch-imposts, examples of which can be found in several early-Christian church portals in Ravenna.<sup>102</sup> The different shades of grey stripes at the bottom of the central openings and the fact that a grey stripe also frames the

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<sup>101</sup> Duval claims that no figure was replaced in that area (DUVAL 1978a, 97). The central curtain do not seem to be affected by restoration and it is different from all the other ones – perhaps because it was located on the central arch, the most important, or perhaps because it pertains to a different phase – thus we can consider it as original.

<sup>102</sup> These are still visible in the central portal of St. Apollinare in Classe for instance, whereas holes for the hangings have to be found on the north-east portal of San Vitale and in the central portal of St. Agata.

limits of the curtains in the central opening allows us to interpret the grey stripe as reminiscent of other concrete structures extant behind the columns rather than as a shadow [fig. 94].

The similarity between the grey stripes of the central opening and those at the sides of the central structure leads to the conclusion that the grey stripes at the side of the central structure stand for other walls or architectonic elements behind or beside the central area. These details of the mosaic can be considered as attempts of the mosaicists to give depth to the central area of the building and to simulate a third dimension in a two-dimensional image.

The lateral aisles have two storeys; in the lower one a row of columns supports arches forming a colonnade, in the upper one there are five arched windows separated by colonnettes [figs. 95-96]. A sloping roof made of red tiles covers the building, of which only one slope is visible. The lateral aisles recall the central building in the columns, the golden walls decorated by winged victories and green garlands, and the sloping roof. The connection between the lateral aisles and the central structure is not clear; however, the designer attempted to create continuity between the different parts of the building. This is visible not only in the decoration and the architectural elements of the colonnade; but also in the architectural design of the whole buildings. The architrave supporting the windows of the second storey is in fact at the same height as the abacus of the central-structure's capitals. In the same

way, the lower line of the sloping roof is at the same height as the lateral upper edge of the central-structure's roof. The lateral aisles are structures smaller than the central building and their roof seem to continue behind the central structure, preventing a reading of the building represented here merely as a façade.

These considerations help to define the pertinence of the lateral aisles to the whole of the building; at the same time they allow us to understand the central structure and the lateral aisles as three different parts of the same building, which were not necessarily connected in reality – if the building was meant to reproduce a real building – but have been placed side by side in the mosaic to convey the idea of the whole building.

Scholars have repeatedly attempted at reconstructing the appearance of the building, which probably served as a model for the representation of the palace in St. Apolinare nuovo. Here, we argue that, instead of attempting a hypothetical reconstruction, it is important to consider the three elements that constitute the building – the central pediment on three arches and the lateral porticoes – themselves. They were chosen among other architectonic structures and placed side by side here to reproduce a palace, to convey the idea of a palace. They might have been intended to reproduce a real model, but this is just a hypothesis that cannot be proved. Nevertheless, scholars have repeatedly attempted at giving a shape to the palace of Theoderic in Ravenna or to

recognise it in the ruins of the villa that is commonly known as the 'palace of Theoderic'.<sup>103</sup> [fig. 17]

These three elements that are indeed two, the pediment on arches and the portico, should be considered themselves as meaningful elements. The pediment rises on huge columns, with capitals, imposts and bases the features of which are extremely well defined, and, as we shall see, are linked to contemporary architectonic sculpture; while the decoration of the central structure is extremely rich.<sup>104</sup> This structure has a prominent character, emphasized by its dimensions and its symmetrical decoration that centres the attention to the central opening. The two porticoes develop symmetrically at the sides of the central structure, again drawing the attention on the central pediment. Their columns and their dimensions accentuate their longitudinal development, the two storeys and their rich decoration notwithstanding.

We certainly have enough evidence to confirm the existence of porticoes and arched entrances in the extant examples of late-antique palace architecture.<sup>105</sup> This is important to us in that it confirms the architectonic model in which this representation may be rooted. At the same time, the connections between this evidence and the representation of the *palatium* should not be considered as the proof that the mosaic is

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<sup>103</sup> Johnson likely read the ruins as the real palace of Theoderic in Ravenna in a very detailed analysis of the site in relation to the ancient topography of the area (JOHNSON 1988, 80-86).

<sup>104</sup> For a survey on late-antique palatial architecture, see: BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 117-322: catalogue of late-antique *domus*.

<sup>105</sup> See for instance the catalogue of Baldini Lippolis (see n. 104).

an accurate and exact representation of a palace. Rather, they testify that porticoes and arched openings were so important in the structure of palatial buildings that they were reproduced in this representation. The porticoes and the huge central arched opening have a primary role in this image as representational architectonic structures that put together constitute *the* palace. In this sense they are major terms of the late-antique and residential architectonic language: in fact the two major phases of the mosaic can be surely dated at the sixth century, and of course the inscription identifies the building as a *palatium*.

## **4.2 Features and details of the building**

In the mosaic of the *palatium* the artist created a very detailed image, the features of which have two aspects. These can be inserted in the chronological context in which the mosaic was produced and are connected to lavish contexts. In the following we will discuss the elements of this architecture emphasizing these two aspects.

### **4.2.1 Architectonic decoration**

The most striking element of the buildings is the columns [fig. 93]. They constitute the predominant element of the whole building and create a longitudinal rhythm. They enrich the building allowing us to define it as a columnar architecture. They are composed of bases, column-shafts, and capitals, the features of which are very carefully

rendered. The columns of the lateral aisles reproduce the column-type of the central structure. Nevertheless, they are much smaller than the latter and they lack of the arch's impost [figs. 95-96]. The arch impost, which is present only above the capitals of the central structure, is an important element in that it is a typical feature of late-antique eastern architecture and of the city of Ravenna. It was a typical element of early Christian architecture in Greece, which became frequent in the sixth-century churches of Constantinople. In Ravenna it was a typical element of the late-antique architecture of the city.<sup>106</sup> Since the early fifth century the impost block was used in the colonnades of imperial churches of Ravenna founded by Galla Placidia.<sup>107</sup>

Scholars have previously identified the capitals with the lyre-type capital.<sup>108</sup> The two rows of acanthus leaves, the lateral spirals, and the abacus with a rosette in the centre are elements of fifth-century composite capitals of the Theodosian style as well as of the lyre-type capitals, which was widely spread in first half and towards the end of the fifth century. The capitals represented in the mosaics seem consistent with contemporary examples. However, due to the two-dimensional representation, they cannot be used as secure elements for dating.

The crenellated cornice of the central structure is a typical element of late Roman and late-antique architecture, examples of which are widespread across the whole Mediterranean world. Here, it enriches

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<sup>106</sup> KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 184; RUSSO 2003, 4.

<sup>107</sup> See for instance the church of St. Giovanni Evangelista.

<sup>108</sup> DYGGVE 1941b, 20-21.

the central structure emphasizing its prominent character in the whole of the building.

As Duval noted, the colonnettes separating the windows can be found in the sixth-century church of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople. In the façade of the church of St. Spirito, which was built at the time of Theoderic as the Arian cathedral, there is a triple arcaded window with the same colonnettes.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, again they are consistent with the sixth-century artistic and architectonic context and qualify the palace represented in St. Apolinare nuovo as a late-antique structure.

#### **4.2.2 Wall decoration**

The walls of the *palatium* are all covered in golden mosaic. As we have seen above, this allowed scholars to claim that what is represented in the mosaic is actually an inner view of the building. Generally late-antique architecture is characterized by a very bare outside and extremely rich inside decoration. However, the church of Poreč provides evidence of a sixth-century outside decoration.<sup>110</sup> The outside decoration of late-antique palaces is totally unknown, and the evidence of inside decoration is very poor. Nevertheless, the possibility that palaces also had a rich outer decoration cannot be completely disclaimed. In any case, the building represented here could stand for

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<sup>109</sup> DEICHMANN 1974, 245-255; RUSSO 2003, 47-51.

<sup>110</sup> The mosaic was altered by many restorations, but its first phase is dated to the sixth-century (MOLAJOLI 1943, 33 fig. 33-35; PRELOG 1957, 100 fig.170; BOVINI 1974, 43).

inner spaces as well as outer spaces, and also inner open spaces.<sup>111</sup> The roof that covers the structures is homogeneous with all the other roofs covering the buildings in the background. The roof itself is not evidence that the mosaic reproduces an outer view of the *palatium*. Its function is to characterize the building as part of the *civitas Ravenna*, of which it is the most important structure. As was discussed above, Dyggve's identification of the building represented in the mosaic as a *basilica scoperta* was long ago opposed and disclaimed, and is generally discarded here. The building seems a compound of different architectonic structures. Accordingly, it could even pictures inner and outer views of the same building here put together in a comprehensive representation, the aim of which is to convey the idea of the *palatium*. The accurate relationship of the image to a model, the definition of which is not certain, is unknown.

The pediment had been filled in plain gold as a result of the earliest restoration, which removed original elements of the composition [fig. 105]. Scholars have repeatedly attempted to identify these elements with an image, which is said to have decorated the entrance of the palace as described, though disputably, in the text of Agnellus. The text seems to describe two images: one of Theoderic standing on the central arch between the city of Ravenna and Rome; and the other, an equestrian portrait of the emperor that was probably standing in the area of the

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<sup>111</sup> See: DYGGVE 1941b. Against Dyggve, see: DE FRANCOVICH 1970; DUVAL 1978a.



*Chalké* of Ravenna.<sup>112</sup> Previous analyses of the mosaic was only able to define the perimeter of these element. The image could not be reconstructed from the traces left, but it was generally believed to be a portrait of Theoderic.<sup>113</sup> Nowadays, Cetty Muscolino and Claudia Tedeschi are carrying out new analysis and restorations of the mosaic. It is hoped that they will be able to provide new evidences to reconstruct the original appearance of the mosaic.<sup>114</sup>

Winged female figures holding vegetal garlands and branches stand on the walls above the capitals and the second storey colonnettes [figs. 95-96]. They are represented in a frontal position with open arms holding the garlands. Only the ones at the sides of the lateral colonnades are turned, holding the garland with the outer hand and a branch in the inner arm. They are all dressed in light blue tunics, save the two figures on the western portico, who's tunics are light green. The tunics are all bare armed and clasped upon the left shoulder, leaving the right breast bare. The figures in colonnade's walls stand on a thin row of green cubes, as on grass.<sup>115</sup> They are winged victories, or, figures connected with the triumph of the Roman emperor and Rome, which were widespread in imperial representations on coinage and sculpture in the Roman empire and continued to be associated with the victory of the

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<sup>112</sup> JOHNSON 1988, 86 and n. 134.

<sup>113</sup> BOVINI 1976a, 75-71.

<sup>114</sup> In the fall 2006 the mosaic will undergo a new restoration, followed by analysis of mortars and cubes (information provided by the restorator, Claudia Tedeschi).

<sup>115</sup> In the central structure one of the figurines lacks this green row of cubes under its feet.

Christian emperor in Byzantium.<sup>116</sup> A similar winged victory is shown in the diptych of Anastasius dating 517.<sup>117</sup> [fig. 106] These figures significantly aid us in contextualizing the image of the *palatium*. The decoration of the palace is perfectly inserted in, and indeed consistent with, the age in which it was produced. Moreover, the ivory diptych of Anastasius was produced in Constantinople, the capital of the empire. This suggests that the use of winged victories in the sixth century was widespread in the Byzantine Empire and could come directly from the capital. More than a provincial motif, it constitutes a major trend and connects the seat of Ravenna with Constantinople itself. Furthermore, the rhythmic repetition of this motif across the walls of the *palatium* increases the character of the building as the representation of the residence for a victorious ruler.

In the central structure, two wreaths hang from the lateral arches [fig. 94]. Each is suspended from a golden chain hanging from the centre of the arch by means of a ribbon – two small bells seems to be inserted in the ribbon. Two garlands surmount the wreath hanging from the same bow. Similar to the garlands, the wreaths are made of green leaves that shine in a very bright colour and produce a golden shade. At the centre

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<sup>116</sup> MCCORMICK 1990, 4 and n. 12; MACCORMACK 1995, 47-48, 116. From the reign of Anastasios (491-518) at least to that of Justinian (527-565) the *tremissis* verso of coins struck in the mint of Constantinople and Ravenna showed a very similar winged victory holding a wreath and a *globus cruciger* (BELLINGER 1966, 9-10, 37, 75, pl. I cat. no. 10a and 10b, pl. VII cat. no. 4.1 and 4.4, pl. XIII cat. no. 19.3). For the derivation of angels from the winged victories, see: BRUSSAGLI 1995, 63-73; PEERS 2001, 25-31 (with previous bibliography).

<sup>117</sup> Victories were decorating the arms of the *sella curulis* in many sixth-century consular diptychs. For the diptych of Anastasius: SWIRN 1979, 97-98 (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 368-1871); GABORIT-CHOPIN 1992a, 54-56 (Paris, Cabinet des Médailles).

of the wreath there is a red gem on a golden pave. The inner side of the wreath, which is visible in the image, is made of an orange-yellow band. Laurel wreaths were glorification elements, gifts for the emperor in *adventus* ceremonies. In imperial portraits and panegyrics, these were often given by a victory, which further emphasized their triumphal attributes.<sup>118</sup> They were also used as decorative elements to embellish the cities on particular occasions, such as imperial or church ceremonies.<sup>119</sup> They were also placed under arches or major entrances in order to emphasize the importance of the people standing underneath. In a consular diptych from Constantinople dated around 518, and thus contemporary with the mosaic of St. Apollinare nuovo, the consul Magnus is seated under a laurel wreath and garlands.<sup>120</sup> [fig. 70] In the *palatium* wreaths and garlands had a double function: their location outlined the importance of the figures previously standing underneath; and, at the same time, they embellished the palace with glorifying elements.<sup>121</sup> In the context of the palace decoration, they, together with the winged victories, enriched the palace with glorifying elements and enhanced the triumphal aspect of the building. Both were important

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<sup>118</sup> MACCORMACK 1995, 47-48.

<sup>119</sup> KOLARIK 1991, 2205; MACCORMACK 1995, 205-206. For the use of garlands in antiquity, see: TURCAN 1971.

<sup>120</sup> ANDERSON 1979, 50 cat. no. 49 (Milan, Castello Sforzesco, Civiche Raccolte d'Arte Applicata e Incisioni, 8); GABORIT-CHOPIN 1992b, 56-58 cat. no.16 (Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, Inv. 55 n. 296 bis).

<sup>121</sup> Reading the mosaic from the right to the left, the hand of a human figure was left on the first column, proving that originally human figures stand in these arched openings.

decorative parts of the image, which aid our understanding the building as an outstanding residence inhabited by a glorious ruler.

The second storey of the lateral aisles is formed by rows of arched windows [figs. 94-95]. These have two screens made of orange-red *tesserae*, with mouldings outlined in red cubes. In their upper part frames with an orthogonal lattice pattern close the arches. The lower part seems to depict wood screens while the lattice in the upper part recalls the frame glass windows. As Duval noticed,<sup>122</sup> similar windows can be found only in Hagia Sophia at Constantinople, where lower screens and upper orthogonal lattice grids form some of the original windows dating from the sixth century. The frame of the windows was made of marble, and the screens had two or more openings protected by glass.<sup>123</sup> The screens could be closed either by glass or wooden panels.<sup>124</sup> The mosaic of the *palatium* seems to reproduce a simplified type of windows that is still visible in Justinian's Hagia Sophia. This type of window can be traced back to earlier models and can be found only in imperial buildings.<sup>125</sup> Again, this aids the contextualization of the mosaic as belonging within the tradition of sixth-century imperial architecture. As already noted, similar window types may be found in the sixth-century imperial church of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople. The only example of window frame from Ravenna was found in the church of St. Apollinare

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<sup>122</sup> DUVAL 1978a, 100.

<sup>123</sup> For a complete study of the windows of Hagia Sophia, see: GUIGLIA GUIDOBALDI 2004.

<sup>124</sup> FLAMINIO 2004, 87.

<sup>125</sup> MESSINEO 1998.

in Classe, where the architectonic decorations originates from Constantinople; however, it is made of wood, thus is different from the window type that seems to be recalled in the *palatium*.<sup>126</sup>

### 4.3 Curtains and lost figures

As mentioned earlier, human figures once stood in the arcades of the palace [figs. 94-95]. Evidence of the existence of these figures may be found in the hands left on the column shafts and outlines of human forms that are still visible in the surface of the mosaic in the colonnade [figs. 100-103]. Reading the mosaic from the left to the right side, human hands are visible in the first and third columns of the colonnade at the right side, on the first column of the central building, and on the third column of the colonnade at the right hand side.<sup>127</sup> These are all right hands of figures that were likely to have stood with the right arm extended and the palm facing upright. They do not seem to have worn rings or bracelets. However, in the third column of the left colonnade, the arm of a dress is partly visible. It is covered in a very elaborate cuff, with floral embroidery and a border of white and red pearls. It is likely that these figures were dressed in rich costumes. Only the right arms remain on the columns shafts, and these were probably pointing to something happening in the nave mosaic or in the sanctuary of the

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<sup>126</sup> MAZZOTTI 1954, 108-109.

<sup>127</sup> A fragment of a left feet might still be visible in the first arch of the left colonnade. Nor the survey *in situ* or the pictures taken confirmed its existence: only a closer view could determine that is a feature of the mosaic and not a debris of the masonry resting on the cornice that runs underneath the mosaic.

church. However, we should not discount the possibility that the people were represented in pose of *orantes*, with both arms stretched outwards.

Round traces of the heads of these figures are still visible in the mosaic directly above the curtains and at the height of the capitals. This detail suggests that the figures represented were quite tall and not proportionate with the architecture in which they were inserted. However, also in the ivory diptych of Ariadne, which is now in the Bargello museum in Florence, the empress's head is at the same height of the capital [fig. 57]. The ivory represents the empress under a canopy, which is a much smaller structure compared with a palace. Nevertheless, the surviving evidence of original baldachins, such as those in the church of Poreč, suggests the canopies were not so small. Together with, the mosaic of the *palatium*, the ivory represents a very detailed architecture, which presumably had its own importance in the context of the image. This suggests that, in both the mosaic of the *palatium* and the ivory, the relative size of architectonic structure was governed by the space required for the human figures, which were major elements of the scene, and maintained bigger proportions. However, in both cases, the architectonic structure is not merely a frame. Indeed, it is so abounding in details that it enriches the scene represented and thus provides its appropriate setting. The architecture ultimately gives the whole scene its *raison d'être*, inserting the subject of the scene in the more appropriate context.

When the figures were removed, their outline was hidden by inserting richly embroidered curtains in the arches. In the sixth-century mosaics of Ravenna, a similar pattern is found in the dress of the second lady at Theodora's left side in the famous scene of the empress in the church of San Vitale, which was dedicated in 547/548.<sup>128</sup> [fig. 105] This is evidence of both the preciousness and the spread of this pattern in the sixth century. Furthermore, it helps locate the mosaic in a specific chronological context and enhances the imperial character of the scene, even after Agnellus' restorations. Apart from being a device useful to the task of the mosaicists, the curtains were also appropriate to the palace. The scene picturing Theodora and her court in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna also offers evidence of the use of curtains for screening doors and entrances [fig. 37]. As we have seen elsewhere, the use of curtains was widespread in Mediterranean architecture, in both rich and modest private residences, as well as in monumental buildings.<sup>129</sup> In palaces and churches, curtains were used not only for practical and functional reasons; they also enriched the monumental spaces with a mysterious character, which was connected to the idea of protecting the inscrutability of a sacred space and the appearance of divine realities.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> RUSSO 2003, 52.

<sup>129</sup> RIPOLL 2004.

<sup>130</sup> For the meanings of *vela* in imperial contexts, see: CARILE A. 2003c, 618; TEJA 1993, 623-624.

Besides curtains hanging vertically from walls and entrances, awnings were also used in open courtyard of palaces.<sup>131</sup> In the case of the *palatium* curtains, these were of small help in establishing the colonnade as exterior or interior; but they do aid to the contextualization of the architecture as intended to reproduce a late-antique palace, even after Agnellus' remodelling of the church decoration.

### **5. The *civitas Ravenna***

Beside the *palatium*, a huge crenelleted city-gate is depicted. The gate has two towers at the sides, each of which has two arched windows at the top and red conical roofs.<sup>132</sup> [figs. 98, 106] The gate's arched opening was probably filled with a human figure, which was removed and of which only the outline is still visible on the surface of the mosaic.<sup>133</sup> In the upper part, the lunette of the arch is decorated with a mosaic representing three figures on a golden background: in the mosaic three men dressed in white tunics stand on green ground with two bushes covered in flowers at the sides. The central figure steps on a snake and bears a cross on his right shoulder. The mosaic has usually been interpreted as a representation of Christ with two apostles.

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<sup>131</sup> Recently Maguire has drawn the attention on the role played by hangings and curtains in the representation of palatial contexts and in the definition of interior-exterior space (MAGUIRE 2006, 381-388).

<sup>132</sup> The city-gate of Ravenna is a typical example of late-antique representations of walled cities (EHRENSPERGER-KATZ 1969).

<sup>133</sup> This figure was supposed to represent the *tyche* of the city (RICCI 1933, 52-53; DEICHMANN 1974, 145). For a study on imperial *tyche*, see: SHELTON 1979, 27-38.



However, some scholars have read it as a representation of Constantine with his two sons.<sup>134</sup>

Above the door, there is an inscription *Civitas Ravenn(ae)*. The city-gate represents the city of Ravenna. The city's crenellated walls, which develop from the gate, encircle several buildings behind the *palatium*, and reach its left corner [fig. 93]. The upper parts of several structures are visible behind the *palatium*. On the left side, there is a central-plan building with an ambulatory and a longitudinal basilica ending in an apse [fig. 107]. On the right, there is a dome covering a cylinder with arched windows, a pediment and a longitudinal building ending in an apse [fig. 108]. The centralized-plan structures and the basilicas were typical features of both late-antique architecture and the cityscape of Ravenna. In the mosaic, the centralized-plan buildings seem to be rotundas of cylindrical shape. Nevertheless, in Ravenna, late-antique centrally planned buildings have polygonal shapes, and sometimes, as in the case of the Arian Baptistery, these were surrounded by ambulatories. Thus, it is impossible to say whether the rotundas here represented were general representations of centralized-plan buildings or were meant to reproduce real rotundas, which might have actually existed in the sixth-century Ravenna. The accuracy of the representation cannot be evaluated.

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<sup>134</sup> For the first reading, see: RICCI 1933, 51; GERKE 1972, 202-203; VERDIER 1982, 36-38; QUACQUARELLI 1974 and QUACQUARELLI 1975. For the second interpretation, see: JOHNSON 1988, 92 (with further bibliography).

Here, there are three examples of basilicas: the one on the left side has an apse, a lateral nave and a central nave, both of which have windows and an easily visible façade. The façade is preceded by a projecting structure with three windows and has a pediment pierced by an oculus at the centre. The second basilica is located between a rotunda and a third basilica on the right side of the mosaic. Only part of its façade and sloping roof are visible. The lower part of the façade is pierced by a large arch, above which there is a row of three windows and a pediment. The basilica on the right side has a peculiar structure that does not allow a clear understanding of the whole building. Its walls are covered in a series of windows set into blind arcades that are separated by pilasters. At the edge of the walls, there is brick cornice. The roof forms a curve above the two windows on the far left side, as if it was covering an apse or turning into a sloping roof. The structural connections between the roof and the wall below, which seems to be a representation of the upper side of nave, are not clear. However, an apse with windows and a round roof are clearly visible on the opposite side. We can submit several hypotheses regarding the shape of this structure. The odd shape of the roof could be due to the need for showing the façade of the basilica beside it. Thus, the roof would have been ‘cut’ regardless of the visual effect. Alternatively, the roof may have been the frontal sloping roof of a basilica, but without a pediment. Finally, the shape could be the result of a mistake of the mosaicists, who forgot to

depict the front side of the basilica. As previously noted, it is impossible to reconstruct the exact shape of these buildings, which probably were not meant to reproduce actual structures in detail, but rather to convey an image of the city.

In the image, there is an attempt to create a third dimension and a kind of elementary perspective by depicting some buildings as they were located behind others and also by showing all the major elements of the basilicas, with the front, the naves and the apses easily visible. In the mosaic of St. Apollinare nuovo, as in other architectural representations, the idea of a building or a city is expressed by representing all its components, as these were all important in the definition of building or of city themselves. However, the contemporary techniques, which lacked the understanding of perspective, produced only awkward buildings where the architectural connections are difficult to understand. What is important here, however, is not the exact reconstruction of the buildings, but the consideration that within these awkward representations of buildings there is great care to reproduce details. The features of these buildings allow a clear understanding of the structures as a late-antique cityscape.

The abundance of windows both in the central buildings and in the basilicas of Ravenna is well documented: windows, which lightened the inside of the structures, pierced all apses, naves and ambulatories. There are two types of windows in the mosaic: those with marble

frames, visible in the buildings at the left side of the image, and those with wooden frames, which are represented in the building at the opposite side. Although marble frames have not been preserved in Ravenna, however they are documented in Constantinople and elsewhere. Therefore, their existence cannot be discarded in Ravenna. Examples of wooden frames have been found in the church of St. Apollinare in Classe and provide very important evidence for late-antique architecture.<sup>135</sup>

Windows inserted into blind arches and separated by pilasters are still visible in buildings from the time of Theoderic in Ravenna. The same can also be said for the brickwork at the edge of the rotunda and the lateral basilica at the right side. This kind of decoration is typical of the fifth- and sixth-century monuments of Ravenna and can be seen in the church of St. Apollinare nuovo itself. Finally, in Ravenna there is no evidence of the use of lid roofs except that at San Vitale. Thus, the roofs of both the palace and the buildings behind are consistent with the image of the early monuments of Ravenna, which framed the cityscape in the early sixth century.

The buildings do not seem to be heavily restored in the ancient or the most recent restorations, and the marble windows of the structures on the left end side are original. Since they are of the same type of the palace windows, and thus very different from the other buildings, it

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<sup>135</sup> MAZZOTTI 1954, 108-109.

could be supposed that they belong to other structures of the palace or that they were meant to represent buildings contemporary with the palace. However, these are only speculative remarks. Moreover, the buildings on the left side are different from those at the right hand side in both structure and features. These, perhaps, were meant to represent two different phases of building in of Ravenna. But, again, we should be wary of speculating about the identification of these buildings with extant monuments of Ravenna .<sup>136</sup> We simply do not know if the *palatium* was a faithful representation or not. As such, the view of the palace and its location within the ancient topography of Ravenna remains unknown. But what is important is that the designer attempted to create differences within the buildings and in the cityscape, thereby reproducing a variety that was probably visible to his own eyes.

## **6. Conclusions: the *palatium* and the *civitas Ravenna***

Ravenna had several palaces: the palace of Honorios utilised since 402 when the court established its residence in Ravenna, the palace of Valentinian III, located somewhere in the vicinity of the so-called palace of Theoderic, and the palace of Theoderic.<sup>137</sup> The latter was part of a

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<sup>136</sup> For a summary of the hypotheses on the attribution of these buildings, see: DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997, 38-39 n. 66.

<sup>137</sup> For the palace of Honorios, see: GELICHI 1991, 157-158; FARIOLI CAMPANATI 1992, 157-158. For the palace of Valentinian III, see: DEICHMANN 1974, 42, PORTA 1991, 269-271 (with previous bibliography). For the palace of Theoderic, see: ORTALLI 1991, 170-176; PORTA 1991; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 1997; DIEGO BARRADO AND GALTIER MARTI 1997;

large building program of Theoderic, *rex Italiae* for the Byzantine court of Constantinople, and reflected the traditional ideals and tastes of the court of Constantinople, where Theoderic was raised.<sup>138</sup> The mosaic of St. Apollinare nuovo, the palatine church of Theoderic, obviously represented his palace and likely his court in the colonnades.

The *palatium* is an important part of the *civitas Ravenna*, both visually in the mosaic of St. Apollinare nuovo and conceptually in the context of the late-antique city. In the representation, it constitutes the front side of the city, leaning on the city-gate on the right side and bounding the circuit of the city walls on the left side, behind which the city develops with its buildings. Both its location in the foreground of the image and its dimensions occupy the great part of the mosaic. The palace is emphasized in the context of the city and at the same time introduces the city behind as the primary element within and of the city. The city-walls and the buildings develop behind it, as if conceptually less important than the palace, but also important elements for the image of the city itself. This representation has a high ideological value that is connected with the importance of the palace and with its conception in late-antique cities.

In Late Antiquity and especially between the fourth and the fifth century, gradually the palace of Constantinople replaced the multiplicity

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MANZELLI 2000, 142-149; RUSSO 2000; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 251-258; MANZELLI AND GRASSIGLI 2001; RUSSO 2004; AUGENTI 2005.

<sup>138</sup> On the role of Theoderic in Italy within the Byzantine politics of the period, see: CARILE A. 1999. The court culture of Theoderic might have had some impact in the regal iconography of the monuments of Ravenna (PASI 1989).

of imperial residences as the residence of the emperor.<sup>139</sup> However, the cities of the empire that had imperial residences retained great importance and occasionally, as we have already seen for Thessaloniki, they were still used by the emperor during his movements throughout the empire.<sup>140</sup> The multiplicity of imperial residences was linked to the need of the emperor to manifest his being wherever it might be needed. However, as in the words of Cassius Dio, every palace became an imperial residence if it happened to host the emperor, and so did the cities that held those palaces.<sup>141</sup> As we have already seen,<sup>142</sup> in the sixth century Prokopios reaffirmed this concept, showing that it retained its validity throughout the centuries.

The idea that the palace is wherever the emperor might be together with the presence of imperial residences in all the major cities of the empire may have influenced on Theoderic's building activity.<sup>143</sup> Theoderic built a number of palaces throughout Italy, certainly at Ravenna Pavia, Verona, Monza, perhaps at Spoleto and Terracina, and even villas at Galeata and St. Maria in Palazzuolo.<sup>144</sup> As Cassiodoros, an

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<sup>139</sup> For a survey on the imperial journey in the fourth century, see: DAGRON 1974, 78-86.

<sup>140</sup> See above, pp. 2-21, 25-31.

<sup>141</sup> CASSIUS DIO, *Hist. Rom.*, 53.16.5-6, ed. E. Cary, VI, London 1917, 234-235. For a discussion on Cassius Dio words, especially in relation to late-antique palaces, see: ĆURČIĆ 1993, 67-68. For the residence of Theoderic at Verona, see: CAVALLIERI MANASSE AND BRUNO 1999, 53; LUSUARDI SIENA 2002, 121. For the palace of Theoderic at Galeata, see: VILICICH 2004, 132-133 (with references). On the villa at Palazzuolo and on the palace of Theoderic at Ravenna, see: ORTALLI 1991, 170-177.

<sup>142</sup> See above pp. 2-5.

<sup>143</sup> For a complete summary of Theoderic's building activities in Italy, see: LUSUARDI SIENA 1984, 513-548; but also FRUGONI 1983, 37-54.

<sup>144</sup> JOHNSON 1988, 76-78 (with references). For Theoderic's building activity, see also: LA ROCCA 1993.

intellectual of the court of Theoderic, suggests, the palace displayed the empire and conveyed the power of its dweller.<sup>145</sup> Cassiodorus is extremely important to the understanding of the palace in Theoderic's time and ultimately in Byzantium. The palace was a means of displaying the power of the empire. Its appearance also played an important role in conveying the outstanding status and authority of the ruler. From this perspective, the presence of the *palatium* in the palatine church of Theoderic is evidence of the central role of the palace in expressing the presence of the emperor-king, even if he was probably not depicted in the building. Furthermore, the *palatium* is also representative of Theoderic's political programme of connecting him with supernatural and Christian realities and giving a comprehensive image of the cosmic order. The fact that the central opening of the *palatium* was left empty and no image of Theoderic was shown therein, also enhances the importance of the *palatium*. Even if the emperor-king is not represented, the image of his palace stands for the emperor himself. In the mosaic, the inscription *palatium* identifies the building as the imperial-kingly residence. Theoderic was probably not represented in his palace. However, the palace itself conveyed the presence of the king. If the palace is wherever the emperor is, when the emperor is not visible – as in the mosaic – the palace itself stands for the emperor. As in the words of Cassiodorus, the appearance of the residence conveys the power and

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<sup>145</sup> CASSIODORUS, *Variae*, VII.5.1, ed. T. Mommsen, Berlin 1894, 204; see also above, Introduction, p. 31.



sovereignty of the king to the beholder (*talis dominus esse creditur, quale eius habitaculum comprobatur*).<sup>146</sup> The palace alone is the image of the emperor. In the mosaic Theoderic is thus represented through the image of the *palatium*. He is not absent. Rather, the image of the palace expresses his presence and the inscription indisputably identifies him with his residence.

As MacCormack emphasised the representation of Christ and the Virgin's majesty on the east end of the nave was balanced by that of the *civitas Ravenna* with the *palatium* and the *civitas Classis* on the west end of the nave. Similarly, in the Christian ideology, the heavenly realm was balanced by the earthly realm of the Byzantine emperor, and in this particular case by Theoderic himself, who ruled on behalf of the Byzantine emperor.<sup>147</sup> The cities of Ravenna and Classe represented the prosperity and wealth of Theoderic's capital. As such, they were the image of his kingdom, within which the palace represented his authority. Theoderic contributed new buildings and promoted several restorations in Ravenna, renewing the city and enhancing its appearance as a capital.<sup>148</sup> The construction of his residence in the city was connected to a mimesis of Constantinople; the intention and political meaning of this

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<sup>146</sup>CASSIODOROS, *Variae*, VII.5.1, ed. T. Mommsen, Berlin 1894, 204).

<sup>147</sup>MACCORMACK 1995, 358-361.

<sup>148</sup> For a summary, see: JOHNSON 1988, 78-80; LA ROCCA 1993.

policy, which scholars have already underlined, mirrored the identification of Theoderic with the Byzantine emperor himself.<sup>149</sup>

The term *palatium* on the walls of the palace in the mosaic of St. Apollinare nuovo is important. It identifies the building as a residence, which was intended as a mimesis of the imperial palace itself. The question of the accuracy of the image is much less significant than the ideological content of the representation. As we have seen, the texts relating to the palace of Theoderic offer some elements that are recognizable in the depiction without allowing a certain identification of this image with the real appearance of the palace. However, what is important is that the written evidence for the palace of Theoderic balances the visual evidence of the *palatium*. In this way, the victories, the long porticoes and the columns become means of representation for the palace through visual and written documents, which are in turn a visual representational language evident in the high pictorial value of the descriptions, in this depiction of the palace, and probably in the architecture and decoration of the palace itself.

Shortly after its making, the mosaic was altered with archbishop Agnellus' remodelling of the church's decorations.<sup>150</sup> At that time, in the

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<sup>149</sup> PICCININI 1991, 40-50 (with references). It should be emphasized that in the mosaic programmes of the early Christian churches of Ravenna the emperor was always represented in the sanctuary. This is the case of San Vitale. In the lost decoration of San Giovanni Evangelista too, in the apse were represented the emperors emphasizing the imperial rank of the founder Galla Placidia. Likely in St. Apollinare nuovo Theoderic was perhaps represented in the proximity of the apse.

<sup>150</sup> For the historical and political significance of the activity of the archbishop Agnellus, see: URBANO 2005.

image of the *palatium* the building underwent minor restorations. The elements connecting it with Theoderic, Arian ruler, were removed, leaving the rest almost unaltered. In the new decorative programme, the palace kept its significance as representative of an earthly imperial domain, now orthodox, from which the row of martyrs approached the enthroned Christ. So too did the *civitas Ravenna* and the *civitas Classis*, undoubtedly Christian cities, the orthodoxy of which was testified by the martyrs and the virgins who leave their walled enceinte to approach Christ and the Virgin on the opposite side of the nave.

The golden background of the cities, consistent with that of Christ and the Virgin – and with the walls of the *palatium* – is evidence of the idealised representation of the cities. The cosmic order was represented on the walls of the nave at Theoderic's time as well as Agnellus'. The imperial ideology that characterized the original representation was only transformed into a religious perspective. The political content of the palace was retained: as well as the background of these cosmic representations, the walls of the palace and the light coming from its central door are golden, emphasizing the role of the imperial palace as a mirror of the heavenly kingdom on earth.

## **Chapter V**

# **The imperial palace of the Byzantine emperors at Constantinople: a heavenly Jerusalem on earth**

### **1. The imperial palace of Constantinople**

The palace occupied a great area on the easternmost side of Constantinople [fig. 113]. It was built on the slope of a hill between the hippodrome and the south-eastern shores of Marmara. As we have seen, very little remains of the palace of Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> [fig. 10] The great bulk of the evidence is under the modern district of Sultanahmet. Due to the topography of the area, the ground was levelled creating a series of terraces on which the palace developed over the centuries.<sup>2</sup> All the palace's

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction, pp. 11-13.

<sup>2</sup> Pioneering the archaeological investigation of the palace of Constantinople, Mamboury and Wiegand first outlined the presence of various terraces (MAMBOURY AND WIEGAND 1934: Mamboury and Wiegand's plan first appeared in SCHNEIDER 1936, pl. 10). Their theory has been widely followed by Eugenia Bolognesi Recchi Franceschini, who is now involved on the creation of a difficult (if not impossible) archaeological park project in the area of the palace (BOLOGNESI RECCHI FRANCESCHINI 2000).

buildings were connected by means of galleries and passages, some of which – the substructures – are still partly extant under the modern city.<sup>3</sup>

There are numerous obstacles to the study the palace, largely because the archaeological research does not provide complete or secure evidence and the texts do not offer any accurate description of the palace. The site has been heavily built up and is now occupied by a lively tourist area. Scattered spots of the ancient remains are continuously found and a great excavation is currently being carried out by the Istanbul Archaeological Museum in the eastern side of Hagia Sophia square in the garden of the Four Seasons Hotel, where several rooms of different dating have been discovered.<sup>4</sup> The most impressive remains of the palace are to be found in a vast peristyle, connected with an apsidal room and paved in an excellent quality mosaic floor, to the south-east of Sultanahmet Cami. The site has been variously dated from the fifth to the seventh century, on the basis of archaeological and stylistic considerations that however could be reversed by the finding on new evidence in the area.<sup>5</sup> [fig. 114] Another important site is that of the *Boukoleon* palace with the so-called house of Justinian, which is a complex of structures connected to the maritime

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<sup>3</sup> In the summer 2000 while working at the archaeological survey led by Bolognesi Recchi Franceschini, it was possible to visit some of those galleries and subterranean rooms.

<sup>4</sup> For these excavations, see: TUNAY 2001, 223-224 (a brief summary of the findings); PASINLI 2001a; PASINLI 2001b; PASINLI 2002; PASINLI 2003.

<sup>5</sup> For this remains, named after the Walker Trust of the University of St. Andrews, which funded the first archaeological works, see: BRETT, MACAULAY, STEVENSON 1947; TALBOT RICE 1958; BARDILL 1999a. With regards to the mosaics' restorations and interpretation: TRILLING 1989; JOBST AND VETTERS 1992; JOBST, ERDAL, GURTNER 1997; PODGORSCHKE 1999; JOBST 1999. In a comprehensive study of the actual state of the research, Bardill has recently warned on the relativity of this dating, which is due to the meagre archaeological knowledge of the area (BARDILL 2006, 20).

walls.<sup>6</sup> [fig. 115] Apart from those, much evidence remains unpublished while others sites await major investigation.<sup>7</sup>

As the palace developed in an enormous area and underwent great changes over time, it cannot be studied as a unity. At the beginning, the first main structures were located to the south-east of the hippodrome [fig. 10]. This area, identified with the ‘upper palace’,<sup>8</sup> contained the residence of Constantine (*Daphne*) and several other buildings, which were added by following emperors.<sup>9</sup> Constantine was said to be responsible for the military area, where special troops responsible for safety of the palace were located – *scholarii, excubitores, candidati*<sup>10</sup> –, and also for the monumental main entrance (*Chalké*),<sup>11</sup> the great state hall of the *Daphne* (*Augusteus*), which played a great role in the crowning ceremonies,<sup>12</sup> the ‘*triklinion* of nineteen couches’,<sup>13</sup> the church of the Lord and other chapels,<sup>14</sup> Constantine was also

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<sup>6</sup> For the maritime walls, see: VAN MILLINGEN 1899, 269-287: although very old, Van Millingen’s work is extremely important, because the author surveyed the walls before the modern destructions and restorations. For the *Boukoleon* palace and annexes, see: MANGO 1995 (for the use of spolia); MANGO 1997; BARDILL 2006, 24-28.

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of the discoveries in the area of the palace, see: BARDILL 2006, 5 n. 3 (with references).

<sup>8</sup> In a recent symposium Bardill and Featherstone identified an ‘upper palace’, the most ancient area of the palace located on a higher terrace, and a ‘lower palace’, an area that developed after the sixth century on the slope towards the Marmara sea. This classification, which is merely conventional, seems to appear from the geography of the area, levelled in a series of terraces, and from the reading of the sources such as the *Book of Ceremonies* (BARDILL 2006, 6-7; FEATHERSTONE 2006, 47-50). On the boundaries of the palace with references to the *De Cerimoniss*, see: BOLOGNESI RECCHI FRANCESCHINI AND FEATHERSTONE 2002.

<sup>9</sup> For a reconstruction of the palace of Constantine, which however is not fully convincing, see: KOSTENEC 1998.

<sup>10</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 14 and n. 80, 26

<sup>11</sup> The most complete study on the *Chalké* is still: MANGO 1959; see also: JANIN 1964, 110-112; JANIN 1964, 110-112; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 248-249; and with reference to the Justinian’s building and its decoration: ZERVOÛ TOGNAZZI 1996; BRUBAKER 1999a.

<sup>12</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 81-82.

<sup>13</sup> JANIN 1964, 113; KRAUTHEIMER 1966.

<sup>14</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 26-29, 32-33, 64-68.

responsible for the area dedicated to the official meetings of the emperor and his imperial council (*Konsistorion*),<sup>15</sup> probably a large semicircular hall (*Sigma*)<sup>16</sup>, probably baths (*Thermastra*),<sup>17</sup> and possibly even a private hippodrome for the emperor's use.<sup>18</sup> Tradition also attributes the *Magnaaura* palace to Constantine, which was built on an elevated position to the north of the imperial palace.<sup>19</sup> This was a great basilica with three aisles terminating in three apses, with the throne of Solomon on a podium in the central apse. This building was a reception hall for embassies. Constantine also built the imperial tribune in the hippodrome, the *kathisma*, which was connected to the palace by means of stairs and rooms. It was such a great structure – with galleries, rooms, and a *triklinion* – that it was regarded as a palace itself.<sup>20</sup> As we shall see, ancient authors had the tendency to attribute foundations to Constantine in an attempt to glorify and legitimize a structure. However, the oldest area of the palace, which dates from the time of Constantine, was the complex of *Daphne*. This complex contained reception halls, *triklinia*, a main entrance, baths, and imperial chapels, following the Roman palatine tradition.

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<sup>15</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 53. Guillard pointed out that in this hall a canopy covered the throne, which was raised on a platform with three porphyry steps.

<sup>16</sup> Following the textual evidence, Guillard attributed the first phase of the building to Constantine and its renewal to Theophilus (829-842) (GUILLAND 1969, 94-95). For mid-Byzantine phase of the *Sigma*, see: BERGER 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Guillard noticed that the *Patria* attributed to Constantine two baths, one of which was the bath of the *Oikonomeion* (GUILLAND 1969, 128 n. 17, 201 n.53). However Magdalino pointed out that this bath is surely a later structure likely built after 876-877 (MAGDALINO 1988, 99).

<sup>18</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 166, 178, 199: this hippodrome surely existed until the reign of Irene (797-802).

<sup>19</sup> JANIN 1964, 117-118; GUILLAND 1969, 141-150. For the function of the *Magnaaura* in imperial court ceremonial, see recently: BAUER F.A. 2006, 156-157.

<sup>20</sup> GUILLAND 1957 and GUILLAND 1969, 462-498.

The emperor Theodosios II (408-450) contributed new buildings to the palace. In that period, a polo field (*tzykanisterion*) was built, which functioned until the reign of Basil I (867-886).<sup>21</sup> In 428, Pulcheria, sister of the emperor, founded St. Stephen of *Daphne*, a church that had great importance in the development of the court ceremonial and became the major palatine chapel.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Theodosios II is probably responsible for the building of the *Boukoleon* palace, a series of buildings on the Marmara sea that marked the south-eastern boundary of the palace. These had various functions, such as housing members of the imperial family, holding prisoners in a special area functioning as a prison, and providing access to the port of the *Boukoleon*, which was a private beach of the imperial house.<sup>23</sup>

The name of the emperor Marcian (450-457) is linked to a portico running at the east of the hippodrome and Anastasios I (491-518) probably rebuilt part of a military area called *Noumera* and that was located not far from the hippodrome and the *Chalké*.<sup>24</sup>

Great changes are known to have happened in the palace after the Nika revolt (532), when Justinian I (527-565) repaired the damages of a fire. At that time, the *Chalké* was rebuilt on a new plan and the military quarters,

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<sup>21</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 166.

<sup>22</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 189.

<sup>23</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 249-293. For an archaeological study of the area and the identification of some remains of the palace, see: MANGO 1997; and more recently, with references and discussion: BARDILL 2006, 23-40.

<sup>24</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 130-131 and 42-44.



which were also destroyed, were reconstructed.<sup>25</sup> Justinian is also responsible for a series of passages connecting the palace directly to the church of Hagia Sophia through the palace of *Magnaura*.<sup>26</sup> The boundaries of the imperial residence were considerably enlarged under Justinian, through the addition of a former imperial house, the house of Hormisdas.<sup>27</sup> Later emperors extended the palace towards the south-east, creating a 'lower palace'. Justin II (565-578) in fact built the *Chrysotriklinos*, a new throne-room, with a series of annexes in that area. Other major building activities were undertaken by Justinian II (685-695, 705-711), Theophilos (829-842), Michael III (842-867), and Basil I (867-886), but these extend beyond limits of the present research.

Scholars have made several attempts to reconstruct the appearance of the palace, but without reaching any agreement or producing a definitive plan. In the pioneering works of Labarte, Paspates, and Ebersolt, all hypotheses were based on textual evidence, and principally on the tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies*.<sup>28</sup> While the first reconstructions have been widely criticised for their inaccuracy, the study of the text, and thus the reconstruction of the imperial spaces, was considerably advanced by Janin, Vogt, and especially Guillard, which in turn contributed to the more precise hypothetical plans of Vogt and Miranda.<sup>29</sup> Recently, Kostenec has proposed

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<sup>25</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 42 and 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 145.

<sup>27</sup> GUILLAND 1969, 263.

<sup>28</sup> LABARTE 1859; PASPATES 1893; EBERSOLT 1910.

<sup>29</sup> Ebersolt reading of the text was more accurate of Labarte's and Paspates', however scholarship has much advanced the knowledge of the text since that publication (EBERSOLT

new solutions and tri-dimensional reconstructions of the palace.<sup>30</sup> These had largely been dismissed by Bardill, who proposed a new schematic plan of the rooms' hypothetical location, by combining an attentive reading of the text with the archaeological evidence in the area of the palace.<sup>31</sup>

### **1.1. The imperial palace and the topography of Constantinople**

The palace had an enormous importance to the cityscape. As we have seen, it covered an extensive area within the Constantinian as well as the Theodosian city, and its architecture, although known only through the written sources, was evidently extremely lavish and impressive. Its great dimensions were not only extraordinary in their wide expanse, but also in their height. Scholars have not attended to this detail in studying the palace in itself. However, it is of great importance when we consider the impact of the palace on the cityscape. Indeed, the height of the building cannot be estimated and comparison with other late-antique buildings, such as the Rotunda at Thessaloniki or San Vitale at Ravenna, can help us to reckon the height and great size of the palace's structures. In addition, when looking at the plans of ancient buildings – the only trait that is often left of their original appearance – there is a tendency to ignore the possibility that they

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1910 and remarks in JANIN 1964, 107). Janin's work is still very important as first outline of the main spaces of the palace, however it has been widely overcome by Guillard's accurate textual readings (JANIN 1964, 106-122; GUILLAND 1969). Vogt first published an edition and commentary of the *De Cerimoniis*, proposing a reconstruction of the palace, which was often revised by following scholars (VOGT 1967, plan). Miranda's plan was corrected by the author himself shortly after its publication (MIRANDA 1966 and MIRANDA 1969).

<sup>30</sup> KOSTENEC 1998 and KOSTENEC 2004; for the tri-dimensional reconstruction see:

<http://www.byzantium1200.com/greatpalace.html>; and

<http://www.byzantium1200.com/daphne.html> (last accessed on 27.02.2007).

<sup>31</sup> BARDILL 2006, esp. 9 fig.1.

could have developed to a height of two or more storeys. At Constantinople, the presence of great and strong substructures underground in Sultanahmet is evidence of the great dimensions of the buildings that they supported [fig. 116]. On the terraces on the slopes towards the Marmara, the structures likely developed to a significant height and probably supported several storeys.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore eighteenth- and nineteenth-century drawings and pictures representing the *Boukoleon*'s area show the remains of upper structures of the palace on the maritime walls, which demonstrates that they actually developed in height [fig. 115]. These buildings were surely visible when approaching Constantinople by boat from the Mediterranean, and their roofs perhaps dominated the cityscape behind the hippodrome and visible from the highest spots of the city.<sup>33</sup>

The significance of the palace was emphasized in relation to the topography of the town. Its main entrance was on the *Augusteon*, a large square occupied by the church of Hagia Sophia at the north, the senate house at the east, and probably by a portico called *regia* at the south, behind which were located the bath of Zeuxippos.<sup>34</sup> [fig. 10] Many hypotheses on

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<sup>32</sup> Recently Polci has pointed out that in late-antique and early Medieval times dining rooms were often located in the upper storey of private dwellings (POLCI 2003, 89-106). This is evidence of the importance of the upper story in the development of every day life, where the banquet had an enormous social impact as a mean of displaying the status of the owner.

<sup>33</sup> We should consider that the *kathisma* was a palace itself, having an imperial lodge in the hippodrome and several rooms behind it, connecting the latter the other buildings of the palace (GUILLAND 1957 and GUILLAND 1969, 462-498).

<sup>34</sup> The senate house in the *Augusteon* was attributed to Constantine, but most likely seems to be Julian's foundation. Constantine was probably responsible for the Senate house on the *Forum Constantini*. For the Senate house, see: JANIN 1964, 154-156; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 248; BERGER 1995 (with bibliography). For the baths of Zeuxippos, a Constantinian public bath, with a great collection of ancient statues, see: MANGO 1959, 37-42; GUILLAND

the exact location of the *Chalké* have been advanced; but it was most likely around the south-eastern corner of the square, beyond the *regia*.<sup>35</sup> The *Augusteon* was adorned with columns and statues, ancient *spolia* and new statues of the emperors, which enhanced the figures of Constantine and the royal house and linked them to the past Roman tradition.<sup>36</sup> At the south-western corner of the square, a great honorific arch, called the *Milion* listed the distances of the empire's major cities from Constantinople and opened into the main urban way, the *Mese*. The *Mese* was a colonnaded street that crossed Constantinople and reached the Constantinian *Capitolium*, and then continued – probably with a different name – towards the major gate on the city walls, the Golden Gate.<sup>37</sup> [fig. 113] The main city squares marked the *Mese* with honorific monuments.<sup>38</sup> Not very far from the *Milion* was the forum of Constantine, with the porphyry column that is still visible today.<sup>39</sup>

The forum of Theodosios I followed it with an enormous triumphal arch that

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1966; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 51; BASSET 1996; BASSET 2004, 51-58 (with reference to the collection of statues).

<sup>35</sup> For the various phases and appearance of the *Chalké*, see especially: MANGO 1959, 21-35. See also: JANIN 1964, 110-112; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 248-249; ZERVOÙ TOGNAZZI 1996; BRUBAKER 1999a.

<sup>36</sup> For the statues of the *Augusteon*, see: MANGO 1959, 42-47, 56-60; JANIN 1964, 77-78; MANGO 1990c, 26-27; BASSET 2004, 89-92 (with reference to the appearance of the square in the fifth-century).

<sup>37</sup> For the *Milion*, see: MANGO 1959, 47-48; JANIN 1964, 104-105; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 216-218. For the *Mese*, see: MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 269-270; BERGER 2000, 161-162; MANGO 2000b, 176-180; MUNDELL MANGO 2001, 30-31, 45-47; BERGER 2001a (with reference to the use of the *Mese* and other streets as processional ways). In recent years Bardill has dated the Golden Gate to Theodosios I, with new and revealing evidence, contrasting the traditional attribution to Theodosios II and discussing earlier bibliography (BARDILL 1999b).

<sup>38</sup> For an overview of the squares on the *Mese*, see: MANGO 1990c, 25-26, 28, 43-45; BERGER 2000, 167-168. With reference to the ceremonial role of the layout of Constantinople, see: BOMPAIRE 1986 (with reference to Constantinople as it appears from *De Ceremoniis*); BERGER 2001b (especially for imperial processions in Late Antiquity).

<sup>39</sup> For the Forum of Constantine, see: JANIN 1964, 66-69; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 255-257; KRAUTHEIMER 1987, 83-86; BERGER 2001b, 31-32; for the porphyry column of Constantine: FOWDEN 1991; for the ancient statues of the square: BASSET 2004, 68-71.

made a significant contribution to the monumental aspect of the street.<sup>40</sup> The next squares were the *fora Amastriani* and *Bovis*, which are not mentioned in the *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae*, and thus must be dated later than 425.<sup>41</sup> These two *fora* were followed by the *Philadelphieion*, a large crossroad, from which the *Mese* split in two branches: one running northwest, and the other to the Golden Gate at the southwest. On the latter branch was the forum of Arcadius, which was also adorned by a huge column.<sup>42</sup> Through the Golden Gate, the road continued to the Hebdomon, a district outside the city walls where a military outpost and a palace of the imperial house were located.<sup>43</sup>

In the sixth century, arriving at Constantinople from the coast road, and thus through the Golden Gate, one would have passed through the major squares and the monumental memories of imperial power in an almost rhythmic succession that concluded at the hippodrome and the palace, which constituted the beating heart of the city. However, if coming from the *via Egnatia*, one of the major imperial roads connecting main cities such as Thessaloniki and Adrianopolis, through the Adrianopolis Gate (Edirne Kapı), one would have reached the *Mese* just before the forum of

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<sup>40</sup> For the forum of Theodosios, so-called *Forum Tauri*, see: JANIN 1964, 69-72; NAUMANN 1976 (with a reconstruction of the forum with its honorific arch); MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 258-265 (with references); BERGER 2000, 167-168 (on the extension of the forum in regards to the streets layout); BERGER 2001b, 37-38.

<sup>41</sup> While the *fora* of Constantine, Theodosios, and Arcadius can be located with certainty, the *fora Bovis* and *Amastriani* are known only from the written sources (MANGO 1990c, 25-26).

<sup>42</sup> For the forum *Arcadii*, see: JANIN 1964, 75-76; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 250-253 (with references); MANGO 1990c, 45; BERGER 2001b, 38 (for its value within imperial processions).

<sup>43</sup> JANIN 1964, 137-139.

Theodosios, after having passed the aqueduct of Valens and the church of the Holy Apostles, the church of imperial burial. Again, the visitors would find their way marked by great imperial and civic achievements, before entering the *Mese* and continuing on to the palace and the hippodrome. As we shall see, all around the major urban roads, the cityscape was dotted with churches located near houses, residences, and the productive centres of the city.<sup>44</sup>

In the accounts on the foundation of Constantinople, the palace is listed among the great symbols of the city. In the fifth century, Sozomen wrote that Constantine built the city walls and magnificent dwellings, and listed the hippodrome, the fountains, the porticoes, the senate house, and the churches among his greatest buildings.<sup>45</sup> The Christian author also mentioned the major elements of the city of Constantine: the walls, which were an important urban symbol; the imperial residences; the hippodrome and the senate, monuments with a strong civic value; fountains and porticoes, adornment of a late-antique city; and the major buildings of a Christian city, the churches, demonstrations of the faith and religiosity of the town. Zosimos considered the forum, the city walls, and the hippodrome along with the palace, as being the scarcely inferior to the palace of Rome.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mango provided a topographical and geographical study of late-antique Constantinople that is still of capital importance for the comprehension of the city (MANGO 1990c; see also: BERGER 2000). For the topography of early Medieval Constantinople, see: MAGDALINO 1996; BRUBAKER 2001. For the commercial areas of late-antique Constantinople, see: MUNDELL MANGO 2000, 189-198. For residential areas and aristocratic dwellings, see: BALDINI LIPPOLIS 1994; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 182-188; MAGDALINO 2001.

<sup>45</sup> SOZOMEN, *Hist. Eccl.*, II.3, ed. J. Bidez, Paris 1983, 237-241.

<sup>46</sup> ZOSIMOS, *Hist. Nova*, II.30-31, ed. F. Paschaud, I, Paris 2000, 102-105.

The *Chronicon Paschale*, followed by John Malalas, cited the city walls, the palace, and the hippodrome, stressing the architectonic connection between the residence and the imperial lodge in the hippodrome (*kathisma*) through a spiral stairway (*kochlias*).<sup>47</sup> Beside the palace and the hippodrome, it also mentioned the forum of Constantine, the *regia* – a monumental colonnade that from the entrance of the palace led to the forum – the senate house, the *Augusteon* square with its monuments, and the bath of Zeuxippos. As noted earlier, the palace was regarded as one of the most important features of the city. It is mostly cited along with the hippodrome. This is of capital importance because the two monuments represented the poles of the political identity of the city itself. The hippodrome was an open space in which the emperor manifested himself to the citizens in public appearances. By contrast only a few people were admitted to the palace, which represented the closed space of the empire.<sup>48</sup> The imperial residence was a closed sacred space, where the *basileia* enacted ceremonies opened only to a few elect following a rigid and determinate order of precedence and etiquette.<sup>49</sup> The hippodrome and the palace respectively represented the outer and inner, visible and invisible aspects of the imperial display.<sup>50</sup> As

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<sup>47</sup> *Chr.Pasch.*, s.a. 328, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, XCII, 708-709, see also commentary in WHITBY M. AND M. 1989, 15-17 nn. 53-54; MALALAS, *Chr.*, 13.7-8, ed. I. Thurn, Berlin 2000, 245-246.

<sup>48</sup> Teja emphasized the role of the hippodrome as an open space in contrast to the closed space of the palace (TEJA 1993, 628-629). For a picture of the hippodrome as it appears from *De Cerimoniis*, with text edition and commentary, see: DAGRON 2000.

<sup>49</sup> For the hierarchy of the Byzantine court, see: CARILE A. 1998b.

<sup>50</sup> DAGRON 1974, 311; CARILE A. 1996; VESPIGNANI 2002, esp. 81-100.

such they were opposite but connected in a hendiadys, a compound, conceptually and architectonically.

Together with the palace and hippodrome, the other major buildings that constituted the core of Constantine's city were located in the *Augusteon* and its neighbourhoods. In this square, adorned with columns, statues, and porticoes, were the baths of Zeuxippos, an astonishing and well furnished public building that, held a great importance in the ancient civic life as a meeting point for the citizens. Completing this building with columns and works of art, Constantine followed in the Roman imperial tradition: in ancient Rome the building of great baths for the citizens represented a visible product of the imperial patronage. In the *Augusteon*, Constantine is attributed with the building of the senate house – which was probably a later addition<sup>51</sup> – a public building for the senate that was recreated in Constantinople in continuity with Rome and represented there the ancient Roman state tradition. The *regia* was a monumental way that connected the *Augusteon* to the forum, another important urban element for the city. There, again, the great architecture of the square, with a porphyry column and a statue of Constantine at the centre, enhanced the imperial figure. Visually and conceptually, the columns and statues of the *Augusteon* were linked to the statue of emperor in the forum.<sup>52</sup> In the *Augusteon*, the images

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<sup>51</sup> Constantine was probably responsible for the Senate house on the *Forum Constantini*. For the Senate house, see: JANIN 1964, 154-156; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 248; BERGER 1995 (with bibliography).

<sup>52</sup> Emphasizing the supposed antiquarianism of Constantine, Basset did not fully consider the high ideological value of displaying ancient statues along with new imperial images and



of Constantine and his mother Helena celebrated the imperial house and its founders. Proceeding down the *Mese*, in the centre of the forum, the rayed figure of Constantine standing at the column's top was an important political representation of the Roman emperor in the form of the Sun-Helios, symbolizing the imperial and divine power of the *basileia*.<sup>53</sup>

All these monuments had a great impact on the cityscape and an enormous significance in representative terms. With their splendour, they carried the wealth of the empire. In a continuous celebration of the emperor, they also made the empire visible to the eyes of all. Symbolically, they should be considered as strongly representative elements that qualified the urban topography as imperial. As Vespignani emphasized, with particular reference to the hippodrome, they had a great value as symbolic 'images of authority' in the cityscape.<sup>54</sup>

In this context, the urban setting interacted with the palace. As we have seen, all the major city ways naturally led to the *Augusteon*, with all the great squares and urban main elements structured in a crescendo. There the empire was itself manifested through the monuments, the palace and its great entrance. In this way, the urban setting of the city was conceived as interacting with the palace. The rhythm of the main elements of the city emphasized the palace and its location among the major urban poles. Within the city, the palace thus acquired characteristics that have been defined as

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the effects that this had in the promotion of the imperial figure (BASSET 2004, 50-78; 89-92; arguing against Basset, see: RICCI A. 2006, 195 nn. 3 and 11).

<sup>53</sup> For the political significance of this monument, see: KRAUTHEIMER 1987, 83-86; FOWDEN 1991.

<sup>54</sup> VESPIGNANI 2002, 81-82.

‘urban’:<sup>55</sup> its walls and main entrance reproduced the great symbols of the city, the walls and the city door, while the city layout was structured according to its position; thus represented the core and the *raison d’être* of the entire city.

## **2. Constantinople and the new Jerusalem**

Having defined the value of the palace within the imperial and civic topography of Constantinople, we will now move to delineate the religious character of the city. This, as we will see, involves a reflection on the image of Constantinople as Jerusalem and it will finally lead to a further, but most important, level of significance for the palace, its symbolic identification with the heavenly Jerusalem.

### **2.1 Constantinople as a second or new Jerusalem**

Describing Constantine’s building activity in the Holy Land, Eusebios interprets the intentions of the emperor.<sup>56</sup>

‘New Jerusalem was built at the very Testimony to the Saviour, facing the famous Jerusalem of old, which after the bloody murder of the Lord had been overthrown in utter devastation, and paid the penalty of its wicked inhabitants. Opposite this then the

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<sup>55</sup> Ćurčić read this process among the fourth-century major palaces and imperial cities, pointing out its occurrence especially at Constantinople (ĆURČIĆ 1993, esp. 71-72).

<sup>56</sup> EUSEBIOS, *De Vita Const.*, III.25-44, ed. F. WINKELMANN, Berlin 1962, 94-102.

Emperor erected the victory of the Saviour over death with rich and abundant munificence, this being perhaps that fresh new Jerusalem proclaimed in prophetic oracles, about which long speeches recite innumerable praises as they utter words of divine inspiration.’<sup>57</sup>

The Holy Sepulchre was meant to symbolize the new Jerusalem. It was the symbol of Christ’s victory, and at the same time, the symbol of a new city: Jerusalem, the city that sacrificed the saviour, was now adorned and rebuilt by Constantine and Helena to create a new geography of monuments and sanctuaries commemorating the victory of Christianity. Thus, Jerusalem itself became the new Jerusalem, a city-temple on earth celebrating the glory of God. Later, the building activity of the empress Eudokia, wife of Theodosios II, contributed new sanctuaries to the development of the Christian topography of Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup>

According to the life of St. Daniel, Constantinople, the second (new) Rome, became the second (new) Jerusalem in the sixth century. In 446, when the passage to Jerusalem was dangerous, St. Daniel was sent to Constantinople instead. In the life of St. Daniel, St. Symeon the Elder himself spoke these words, in which he defined Constantinople as the

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<sup>57</sup> EUSEBIOS, *De Vita Const.*, III.33.1-2, trans. by CAMERON AND HALL 1999, 135.

<sup>58</sup> HUNT 1982, 238-239; HOLM 1982, 218-219.

second Jerusalem: ‘..go to Byzantium and you will see the new Jerusalem, Constantinople’.<sup>59</sup>

The sixth-century text clearly expresses the value of Constantinople as a second Jerusalem, a new Jerusalem.<sup>60</sup> In a process of reduplication and multiplication that is common during Late Antiquity, I will argue that, given the progressive creation of holy places within the capital and to the symbolic meaning they acquired,<sup>61</sup> Constantinople itself acquired value analogous to Jerusalem in the Christian faith.<sup>62</sup>

When Egeria, in her journey back from the Holy Land, visited Constantinople in 384, the number of churches and *martyria* in the city impressed her.<sup>63</sup> The *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae* (425) lists only fourteen churches within the city. However, Christine Angelidi points out that the *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae* does not take into account the area between the Constantinian and the Theodosian walls, nor does it consider the *martyria* as churches or places of worship; thus the text is limited in this respect.<sup>64</sup> During the fifth century, the successors of Constantine embellished the city with many additional buildings. An important aspect of this policy was the building of new churches and

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<sup>59</sup> VITA S. DANIELIS, 10, ed. H. Delehay, Bruxelles-Paris 1923, 12: ‘ἀλλ’ ἄπελθε εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ βλέπεις δευτέραν Ἱερουσαλήμ, τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν’.

<sup>60</sup> This has been already noticed: DAGRON 1974, 409 n. 3; FRUGONI 1983b, 50; ORSELLI 1994, 419-450; ANGELIDI 1996, 62-63; MARAVAL 1985, 92 n.55; TALBOT 2002, 60; MARAVAL 2002, 70; ORSELLI 2003b, 865-866. For a different point of view on the importance of this text, see: OUSTERHOUT 2006.

<sup>61</sup> DAGRON 1989; ORSELLI 2003b, 860-871.

<sup>62</sup> For an interesting point on the association of Constantinople and the new Jerusalem as from the reference in the Life of St. Daniel, see: OUSTERHOUT 2006.

<sup>63</sup> EGERIA, *Itinerarium*, 23.7-9, ed. P. Maraval, Paris 1982, 232-233.

<sup>64</sup> ANGELIDI 1996, 73; JANIN 1969, XII. For a survey on the churches that were probably built in the fourth century: DAGRON 1974, 388-409.

monasteries, many of which were patronised by the members of the imperial house – and especially by women of imperial rank such as Pulcheria, Verina, Ariadne, Juliana Anicia<sup>65</sup> – as well as by non-imperial aristocrats.<sup>66</sup>

The new foundations were accompanied by translations of relics that sanctified the churches themselves and the city, creating a web of holy places within the cityscape, with high symbolic value in the development of the cult of saints. The importance of the translation of holy relics is expressed in fifth-century texts by attributing the translation of relics of the apostles Timothy, Andrew, and Luke into the church of the Holy Apostles to Constantine the Great.<sup>67</sup> However, the textual evidence is not consistent. It alternatively attributes the translation to either Constantine the Great or to his son Constantius II. Modern scholarship is almost unanimous in attributing it to Constantius II in 356 and 357.<sup>68</sup> Here, it is important to stress that the attribution to Constantine of the translation of relics and of the building of a number of churches in the capital is an idea of fifth-century authors and was assumed in later literature.<sup>69</sup> In this way, the building activity of the Theodosian dynasty and of Justinian was justified as a

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<sup>65</sup> For the patronage of women of imperial rank in the fourth and fifth centuries, see: BRUBAKER 1997; JAMES L. 2001, 148-163; JAMES L. 2005, 150-152.

<sup>66</sup> Aurelian, *praefectus praetorius* and *consul* in 400, built a church dedicated to St. Stephen (ANGELIDI 1996, 72-73; MANGO 2004, 28, dating the church at the period 414-416). Kyros, *praefectus praetorius* in 426 and 439-441, built a church dedicated to the Mother of God (MANGO 2000a, 19).

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion supporting a possible translation at the time of Constantine: MANGO 1990b, 434. It should be noted that the seventh-century *Chronicon Paschale* anticipates the translation while speaking about Constantine's funeral, then records the translation of Timothy's relics in 356 and the one of Luke's and Andrew's in 357: *Chronicon Paschale*, s.a. 337, 356 and 357, in Migne, *PG*, XCII, 717 and 733.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion on textual evidence and earlier scholarship see: DAGRON 1974, 405-406 (405 n. 2); MANGO 1990a, 52-54 and MANGO 1990b, 434.

<sup>69</sup> DAGRON 1974, 390-391; MANGO 1990c, 35-36.

perpetuation of a tradition of church foundations inaugurated by Constantine himself. Notwithstanding, the translation of relics into the Holy Apostles was mentioned in late-antique texts as the first translation of relics into Constantinople and as one of the first translations in Christianity.<sup>70</sup> Late-antique authors stress that Constantine (or Constantius II) was responsible for bringing the bodies of the apostles into the church which was also designated for imperial burials and thus created a symbolic association between the emperor and the apostles,<sup>71</sup> and honoured the imperial city by providing it with an apostolic heritage. This translation was followed by a number of others that combined to reshape the image of the city, and to enhance the meaning of the Christian capital, making it, as Dagron and Orselli have argued,<sup>72</sup> into a new Jerusalem. Relics also ensured the power of the city and protected it.<sup>73</sup> The relics worked with the churches in Constantinople, to sacralize the cityscape and convey the idea that the city was transformed into a sanctuary,<sup>74</sup> thus into that new Jerusalem identified in the life of St. Daniel.<sup>75</sup>

Relics of martyrs, of prophets and of the passion, were transferred to Constantinople from the reign of Constantius II. In 360 relics of St.

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<sup>70</sup> MANGO 1990a, 52.

<sup>71</sup> DAGRON 1974, 406-407: Dagron outlined the ambiguity of Constantine's burial into the Holy Apostles. The emperor's aim was to be considered as a thirteenth apostle as well as to be assimilated to Christ.

<sup>72</sup> DAGRON 1974, 409; ORSELLI 2003b, 864-865 and nn. 29-30. See also: GURAN 2006, 17-21.

<sup>73</sup> With reference to Rome, see: MACCORMACK 1990, 19-20.

<sup>74</sup> This image is expressed by Socrates while speaking about a procession through the city at the time of Theodosios II: SOCRATES, *Hist. Eccl.*, VII.22.17-18, ed. G.H. HANSEN, Berlin 1995, 370. For the ceremonial of translation and its meaning in Constantinople, see: MACCORMACK 1972, 747-748; HOLM AND VIKAN 1979; CANETTI 2002, 148-163.

<sup>75</sup> For a reflection on the space in the life of St. Daniel, see: KAPLAN 2001.

Pamphylos were translated from Antioch for the dedication of the church of Hagia Sophia;<sup>76</sup> in 406 the relics of the prophet Samuel were brought to the same church in a procession headed by Arcadius.<sup>77</sup> In 415 for the inauguration of the Theodosian building of Hagia Sophia, the relics of the prophet Zachariah and Jacob, Joseph's son, were brought from Palestine.<sup>78</sup> Pulcheria was responsible for finding the relics of the forty martyrs from Sebaste, which were located in the church of St. Tyrso during the patriarchate of Proklos (434-446),<sup>79</sup> as well as for the translation of the relics of St. Lawrence and of the prophet Isaiah.<sup>80</sup> In 439 Eudokia brought to Constantinople remains of St. Stephen that Pulcheria housed in the church of St. Lawrence.<sup>81</sup> Probably during the reign of Leo I (457-474) and his wife Verina the *maphorion* of the Virgin was brought to Constantinople and housed in the complex of the *Theotokos Chalkoprateia*.<sup>82</sup> According to Prokopios in the new church of the Holy Apostles, Justinian embellished the tomb of the saints with great splendour, ascribing to them their deserved honour.<sup>83</sup> Following Prokopios, Justinian built or rebuilt thirty-three sanctuaries in Constantinople, and was particularly anxious to gather relics.<sup>84</sup> The martyrs' sacrifices witnessed salvation in the name of Christ,

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<sup>76</sup> EBERSOLT 1951, 5. For a summary of the translations of relics into Constantinople during Late Antiquity, see: DELEHAYE 1933, 55-57; MARAVAL 1985, 92-100.

<sup>77</sup> In 411 the relics were translated into a church dedicated to the saint at the Hebdomon: *Chronicon Paschale*, s.a. 406 and 411, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, XCII, 784 e 786.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion on the attribution of these relics see: ANGELIDI 1996, 76-77.

<sup>79</sup> SOZOMEN, *Hist. Eccl.*, IX.2, ed. HANSEN, Turnout 2004, 1060-1067.

<sup>80</sup> HOLM 1982, 137: with sources.

<sup>81</sup> MANGO 2004, 28, 33-34.

<sup>82</sup> ANGELIDI 1996, 81-83; CAMERON AV. 2000, 3-15; MANGO 2000a, 19-20.

<sup>83</sup> PROKOPIOS, *De aed.*, I. IV.22, ed. H.B. DEWING, London 1940, 12-13.

<sup>84</sup> MARAVAL 1985, 96-97; MANGO 1990c, 32.

thus their relics had a high value as a real testimony to the Christian faith. Relics of the prophets connected Constantinople with biblical history and thus with the Holy Land. Old Testament relics as well as passion relics acquired an important role in this context: they were part of the whole story of salvation, from the beginning of the world to the culminating crucifixion of Christ, the son of God.<sup>85</sup> In the doctrinal disputes of the fourth and fifth centuries, relics of the Virgin Mary had an enormous weight as evidence of the human nature of Christ, particularly after the council of Ephesus (431), where the role of Mary as the ‘bearer of God’ (*Theotokos*) was recognized.<sup>86</sup>

Old Testament builders had a certain influence in the association of Constantinople with Jerusalem, especially Solomon, the king who built the great Temple of the God of Israel in Jerusalem. The direct reference to Solomon in the inscription of the church of Hagios Polyeuktos, which was founded by Juliana Anicia, grand-daughter of Valentinian III,<sup>87</sup> as well as the words pronounced by Justinian himself in the legends of the *Patria*,<sup>88</sup> indicate that the imperial house was aware of following Solomon’s model, and we may also see this as another indication of the attempt to link Constantinople with the new Jerusalem. The link between Hagios Polyeuktos and Solomon’s temple was clearly intended from the start and

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<sup>85</sup> The Byzantine calendar starts from Adam and Eve.

<sup>86</sup> KALAVREZOU 1990, 166-168.

<sup>87</sup> The inscription is recorded in the *ANTHOLOGIA GRAECA*, I.10, ed. W.R. Paton, London 1969, 12; HARRISON 1989, 33-41; HARRISON 1986b, 5-7.

<sup>88</sup> On the sentence attributed to Justinian, see: CAMERON AV. 1993, 204-205 (commentary to Corippus’ work in praise of Justin II); DAGRON 1984, 207-208, 303-313; DAGRON 1996, 125, 129, 220, 365 n.58.



this association was also, at least by the ninth century, extended to Hagia Sophia. These monuments and especially the motivation behind their patronage contributed to making Constantinople into a second Jerusalem, a new Christian capital and a temple of Christianity on earth.

As we have seen, in Eusebios' words the historical Jerusalem was transformed into a new Jerusalem by Constantine. The monuments celebrating the glory of Christ on earth were thus, to Eusebios, the actualization of the earthly future Jerusalem of the prophets. Eusebios celebrated the work of Constantine as an achievement of the great glory of God on earth, a monument of Christ's victory and the heavenly kingdom.<sup>89</sup> Eusebios' new Jerusalem is the celebration of the historical place where the story of salvation took place. It is the holy place where the presence of Christ is real and evident through the monuments celebrating his death and resurrection. This new Jerusalem has the dimension of the most holy place on earth and should not be confused with the apocalyptic heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>90</sup>

In this context, we may ask if the homology Constantinople-new Jerusalem expressed in the life of St. Daniel refers to the future Jerusalem or to the heavenly Jerusalem. The new city of Jerusalem with the complex of the Anastasis became a model that was copied and reproduced in medieval cities to recall the historical Jerusalem, the archetypal place of salvation.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, Constantinople was regarded as a new Jerusalem: it became

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<sup>89</sup> EUSEBIOS, *De laud. Const.*, XVIII.3, ed. I.A. HEIKEL, Leipzig 1902, 259.

<sup>90</sup> ORSELLI 2003b, 862-863.

<sup>91</sup> OUSTERHOUT 1990; ORSELLI 2003b, 861-863: with extensive bibliography.

the reduplication of the historical city of salvation through the gathering of holy relics and the power that the relics bestowed to the city and the *basileia*.<sup>92</sup> As from the time of Constantine onwards, the historical Jerusalem became a new Jerusalem, celebrating Christ's victory over death in its monuments. Thus, Constantinople, equally framed for its sacred geography, also became a locus of Christian worship and a goal of pilgrims. The sentence from the life of St. Daniel is important to us because it reveals that by the sixth-century the sanctity of Constantinople was such that it could be perceived as a new Jerusalem.

Constantinople was not only the imperial capital, rather it was the capital of the Christian empire, the emperor of which was the minister of God on earth.<sup>93</sup> This bestowed a particularly high value on Constantinople that exceeded the political importance of the city and incorporated a symbolic meaning with a deep religious connotation. After its foundation by Constantine, Constantinople underwent great changes during the first centuries.<sup>94</sup> A new geography of sanctuaries and holy relics affected its meaning and gave it the character of a temple celebrating Christianity on earth.<sup>95</sup> Following Eusebios and the life of St. Daniel, it is clear that Constantinople could be experienced as a second Jerusalem, a reduplication of Eusebios' 'future Jerusalem' achieved by Constantine in the earthly

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<sup>92</sup> ORSELLI 2003b, 864-867 and nn.

<sup>93</sup> EUSEBIOS, *De laud. Const.*, VII.12, ed. I.A. HEIKEL, Leipzig 1902, 212. In the sixth century the deacon Agapetus described the nature of the *basileia* of Justinian: AGAPETUS, *EKΘΕΣΙΣ*, 37, 46, 61, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, LXXXVI, 1176, 1177, 1181.

<sup>94</sup> MANGO 1990c.

<sup>95</sup> BALDOVIN 1987, 257-259.

Jerusalem with the building of the Holy Sepulchre. Constantinople thus became a city-temple, and this respect further reflected the image of ‘a second Jerusalem’. However, one of its monuments in particular, the imperial palace, also bears features that go beyond its character of the new or the future Jerusalem.

### **3. The palace of Constantinople as a heavenly Jerusalem**

The increased importance of the city of Constantinople as a new Jerusalem involved substantial changes in the imperial palace. The palace of the emperor was sacralised by the presence of holy relics and the incorporation of churches.<sup>96</sup> In 420/421 or 427/428, the empress Pulcheria was responsible for the translation of the holy hand of St. Stephen from Jerusalem into a chapel dedicated to the saint, which was located somewhere within the complex of Daphne in the imperial palace.<sup>97</sup> Some years later she built a chapel dedicated to the *Theotokos Protoktistos* (‘first founded’) in the same area of the imperial palace.<sup>98</sup> Under Zeno (474-5 and 476-491) a gospel of Matthew that St. Barnabas was believed to have copied was brought into St. Stephen of Daphne.<sup>99</sup> Justin II (565-578) built many

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<sup>96</sup> MANGO 1972, 193. In accordance with a number of written evidence, the literature on the palace’s relics and churches mainly focuses on the mid-Byzantine period (EBERSOLT 1951, 17-30; KALAVREZOU 1997; MERGIALI-SAHAS 2001; KLEIN 2006; MARINIS 2006).

<sup>97</sup> JANIN 1969, 473; HOLUM 1982, 103-104; MANGO 2004, 29-33; on St. Stephen’s relics and the cult of relics in the palace of Constantinople, see: KALAVREZOU 1997; and with a different point of view, MANGO 2004, 30; on the cult of St. Stephen in the late-antique Africa, see: SAXER 1980, 245-279.

<sup>98</sup> HOLUM 1982, 143.

<sup>99</sup> EBERSOLT 1951, 18; JANIN 1969, 473; MARAVAL 1985, 96; MANGO 2004, 29-30.

chapels around the *Chrysotriklinos*, where holy relics were sheltered.<sup>100</sup>

Fragments of the holy cross were believed to have been housed in the palace since ancient times. According to a legendary account, Helena, mother of Constantine, sent part of the true cross to Constantinople.<sup>101</sup> Other fragments of the cross were brought to the court of Theodosios II.<sup>102</sup> Justin II is responsible for collecting parts of the true cross as well as for distributing them as gifts, making Constantinople a centre of diffusion for the holy relic: in 574 he brought to Constantinople a huge fragment of the cross, before held at Apamea in Syria, and later he gave a fragment of the cross and other relics to St. Redegonda of Poitiers.<sup>103</sup>

Since the time of Constantine, the emperor prayed in the palace. Eusebios reports that the emperor worshipped God praying in the secret rooms of his palace.<sup>104</sup> Probably the palace with its chapels and churches soon became the location for specific stops, which were followed by prayers to God during the development of the imperial ceremonies, which are described in the tenth-century text of Constantine Porphyrogenitos.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Moses' rod was housed in the chapel of St. Theodore, near the *Chrysotriklinos*: EBERSOLT 1951, 22. For the *Chrysotriklinos*, see: JANIN 1964, 1964, pp. 115-117; MÜLLER-WIENER 1977, 231; KAZHDAN 1991c, 455-456.

<sup>101</sup> FROLOW 1961, 73. This is certainly a later invention, since the first association of Helena, mother of Constantine, with the finding of the true cross is recorded in 395 in Ambrose's *In obitu Theodosii*, 40-49. For the importance acquired by the figure of Helena, especially in regard to the display of women of imperial rank, in the late fourth and fifth centuries, see: BRUBAKER 1997, 52-75; on the same subject, but with a different point of view: SPIESIER 2002, 594-602.

<sup>102</sup> FROLOW 1961, 73 and 170 (cat. 16).

<sup>103</sup> FROLOW 1961, 73 and 179 (cat. 33).

<sup>104</sup> EUSEBIOS, *De Vita Const.*, IV.17 and XXII.1, ed. F. Winkelmann, Berlin 1962, 126 and 128; EUSEBIOS, *De laud. Const.*, IX.11, ed. I.A. Heikel, Leipzig 1902, 218.

<sup>105</sup> DAGRON 1996, 106-115; CAMERON AV. 1987.

Thus the multiplication of churches, an important aspect of late-antique urban development,<sup>106</sup> did not affect only the city. It also affected the imperial palace. Here, the increasing number of churches and chapels gave evidence of the Christian faith of the emperor and proved the centrality of the Christian cult in imperial life. Moreover, the chapels and churches of the palace held holy relics, with which the emperor and his court came into contact on a daily basis. Relics such as Moses' rod and the trumpets from the fall of Jericho connected the imperial house with pre-Christian times, emphasizing the eternal legitimacy of the Christian emperor.<sup>107</sup> Christ's relics, from the cross fragments and nails to Christ's sandals, reinforced the connection of the emperor with Christ and his victory over death. The link between the emperor and Christ, emphasized by the passion relics,<sup>108</sup> also connected the emperor to God and thus established a chain of power: God, through his son Christ, legitimated the power of the Byzantine emperor over the world.

The gathering of holy relics and the building of churches in the palace displayed the sacred Christian character of the imperial residence. However, the palace's sacrality was reflected also in other respects that ultimately involved ideal and heavenly conceptions. These were intrinsic

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<sup>106</sup> DAGRON 1977, 6-8.

<sup>107</sup> On Moses' rod: PERTUSI 1976, 515-516; DAGRON 1996, 106-107, 114, 224; CARILE A. 2000b, 84. On the trumpets from the fall of Jericho: DAGRON 1996, 248 n. 162, 301. On the significance of the Biblical relics in the imperial ceremonial: DAGRON 1996, 114-115, 224.

<sup>108</sup> Passion relics were particularly linked to the imperial house: MARAVAL 2002, 70; JAMES L. 2003b, 49-50.

features of the *basileia* and had a significant impact on the imperial palace itself.

As already mentioned, little is known about the appearance of the original palace of Constantinople. Through an attentive analysis of the textual sources, Amore was able to trace the origins of a passage in the Latin *Acts of St. Thomas* to the palatine architectural tradition of the fourth-century.<sup>109</sup> This text – that was well known by Lavin, and that represented a source of inspiration for his work on triconchs and late-antique palace architecture<sup>110</sup> – describes an ideal heavenly palace, made of twelve main structures, among which are found: an audience hall (1) with an inner space (2), an area for the first reception (3), a hall for official meetings (4), a triklinion in a trilobate form (4), a winter and a summer residential quarter (5 and 6), an area refreshed by special perfumes (7), baths (8), a gymnasium (9), a kitchen (10), a nymphaeum (11), and a hippodrome (12). As Amore explained, this ideal palace was reproduced in the episcopal residence at the Lateran, the model of which most likely derived from Constantine palace at Constantinople; it was then applied to the palace of Charlemagne at Aquisgrana, and in a number of other kingly, episcopal, and monastic residences.<sup>111</sup> In the written tradition, such a model has have been traced back and ascribed to Eusebios himself. Thus, the palace of Constantine was – or better was represented – as a compound of twelve structures. As Amore stressed, the occurrence of the number twelve is not casual: in the

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<sup>109</sup> AMORE O. 2005.

<sup>110</sup> LAVIN 1962, 2-3.

<sup>111</sup> AMORE O. 2005, 566-575.

description of this ideal residence – that however had an important and concrete forerunner in the imperial palace of Constantinople – the number twelve directly refers to the heavenly Jerusalem and to the Old-Testament tradition. In the heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation*, the number twelve and its multiples are applied to the twelve doors for the twelve tribes of Israel and then to the dimension of the city-temple-palace. In the Old-Testament tradition, the twelve tribes of Israel descending from Jacob were responsible for the whole history of the nations. In this way the ideal palace, which was, however, the representation of the historical palace at Constantinople, was strongly connected to this heavenly model, the heavenly Jerusalem. In short, with the passing of the time the palace of Constantine at Constantinople became regarded as a reproduction on earth of the heavenly palace. Thus, it was assimilated with a heavenly Jerusalem and as such became a model for the following residences.

Even though the pertinence of the model of the palace in the Latin version of the *Acts of Thomas* to the palace of Constantine cannot be proved, other main features of the imperial palace point to the ambiguous character of the imperial residence as a real but ideal place at the same time.

A few scattered references to the architecture and decoration of the palace at Constantinople convey an idea of its greatness and splendour. In the sixth century, Prokopios describes the *Chalké* as a great building with a central dome on four pillars, as high as heaven (*οὐρανομήκεις*).<sup>112</sup> It was

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<sup>112</sup> PROKOPIOS, *De Aed.*, I.10.11-20, ed. H.B. Dewing, London 1940, 84-87.

entirely clad in marble up to the dome, which was decorated with scenes recalling the victory of the emperor over the Vandals and the Goths. The emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora were represented at the centre of the whole scene, victorious and surrounded by the senate. As Prokopios pointed out, these images were of fine and colourful mosaic, the cubes of which bestowed ‘on the Emperor honours equal to those of God, because of the magnitude of his achievements’.<sup>113</sup> This passage clearly expresses the value of architecture and decoration in the celebration of the emperor. What is more, it suggests that they played a great part honouring the emperor as they honoured God. The description of the colourful mosaic ‘rejoicing’ could have only a literary aim of enriching the passage with an animated image. However, it also implies that architecture, marbles, and mosaics, all had a great role not only in the representation of the wealth and power of the emperor; but also in enhancing the superiority of the emperor as they enhanced that of God.<sup>114</sup> Architecture and decoration were thus applied to honour the emperor in the same way as they were utilized in the celebration of God. The great attention to the active role of the colours in the celebration of the emperor could be a key to understanding the taste for colourful marbles and stones as it appears in many descriptions of palaces – that we have seen in the first chapter – and in the interiors of late-antique buildings as Hagia Sophia at Constantinople, San Vitale in Ravenna, or in

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<sup>113</sup> PROKOPIOS, *De Aed.*, I.10.19, ed. H.B. Dewing, London 1940, 86-87.

<sup>114</sup> For the importance of the marble decoration in the age of Justinian, see: FOBELLI 2005, 187-190 and FOBELLI 2006 with particular reference to the use of the marbles in Hagia Sophia and the *ekphrasis* of Paul the Silentiary.



the apse of the basilica at Poreč. These colours and materials seem to have a celebrative role, emphasizing the splendour of the glorified person.

Furthermore, the marbles had another property: they reflected light, which was an important element in the development of imperial ceremonies. On the anniversary of the inauguration of Constantinople, soldiers bearing candles escorted the procession of the gilded statue of Constantine.<sup>115</sup> on the famous Trier ivory, which shows an imperial procession the occasion and date of which are still hotly debated, dignitaries holding candles and people with censers also accompany the imperial parade.<sup>116</sup> [fig. 118] The light, which was reflected in the shining marbles cladding the palace, was a central element in court imagery.

This appears again in the decoration of the palace. Even though all the other references to the palace interiors are much later – and thereby depict the palace after the period considered in this research<sup>117</sup> –, the indication that Constantine VII (913-959) repaired the golden ceiling of the ‘triklinion of the nineteen couches’ is of some interest because it tells that this old structure, which, in its first phase, belonged to the time of Constantine, had a gilded ceiling.<sup>118</sup> As mentioned earlier, gold has a highly

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<sup>115</sup> *Chr. Pasch.*, s.a. 330, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PG*, XCII, 709, see also commentary in WHITBY M. AND M. 1989, 17-18 n. 56; MALALAS, *Chr.*, 13.8, ed. I. Thurn, Berlin 2000, 247.

<sup>116</sup> For the Trier ivory, see: SPAIN 1977; HOLUM AND VIKAN 1979; SANDERSON 1979; WORTLEY 1980; WILSON 1984; DE' MAFFEI 1986, 128; BRUBAKER 1999a; PAPADEMETRIOU 2002.

<sup>117</sup> The major sources on the palace of Constantinople are found in works that however were not primarily aimed at depicting its appearance, and namely the legends of the *Patria*, Theophanes and the continuators of his text, the tenth-century *De Cerimoniis*, and the accounts of foreign embassies such as that of Liutprand of Cremona.

<sup>118</sup> THEOPH., *Chron.*, ed. C. De Boor, New York 1980, 367.

symbolic meaning as a colour associated with royalty and divinity and principally expresses a light symbolism.<sup>119</sup>

These glimpses into the imperial palace attest to its great decoration and architecture that had both a symbolic value and played a role in the expression of the *basileia*. The palace was the setting for the development of court ceremonial. However, we should not think of it as a mere container. The ceremonies developed in the enormous extension of the palace, with determinate stops that had symbolic and precise meanings.<sup>120</sup> The various rooms and areas of the palace with their structure, architecture, and decoration were acting in the ceremonial's performance. There domes, porticoes, gardens, peristyles came one after another creating an enormous complex and participating in the ceremonial itineraries. The shining marbles and metals, together with the works of art that decorated these spaces, made them shining and colourful. All these features were coordinated to enrich the court ritual itself and act with it. A procession in the palace is, in fact, not even conceivable without porticoes and passages linking one space to another. The stops in determined rooms were dictated by a stratified tradition and by the symbolic meaning attached to the different areas of the

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<sup>119</sup> For the symbolism of gold and its use in Byzantine art, see especially: BRENK 1972, as an introduction to the topic that is well developed in: AVERINCEV 1979 and JANES 1996. For the light symbolism in relation to the Merovingian and Carolingian royalty, see: BÜHRER-THIERRY 2004.

<sup>120</sup> This is well expressed in the *De Cerimoniis*. In collaboration with a team of scholars working on a new edition of the text, Dagron published the most recent, but partial (focussing on the hippodrome), study of this text (DAGRON 2000). For the importance of the court ritual, see also: CAMERON AV. 1987, esp. 130-137.

palace.<sup>121</sup> A ceremony, as a performance with high symbolic value and meaning, is not conceivable outside its appropriate setting. The rooms and spaces of the palaces were the necessary location for the development of court ceremonial, while their architectural layout and decoration created the distinctive aura of the ritual.

The role of the spaces of the imperial residence is best visible in the architectural and decorative setting of the ninth-century *Chrysotriklinos*.<sup>122</sup> This major throne room, built by Justin II (565-578), was an octagonal structure with a great dome and a main apse for the throne.<sup>123</sup> A ninth-century epigram describes the new pictorial programme installed by Michael III.<sup>124</sup> The image of Christ surmounted the imperial throne. Above the entrance was a representation of the Virgin as ‘divine gate and guardian’. The emperor Michael III (842-866) was depicted on the walls along with the patriarch Photios and their followers. On the walls all around the building, apostles, martyrs, and saints were represented ‘like guards’. This description reports the appearance of the hall as it was in the ninth century – this could have however reproduced earlier and pre-iconoclastic pictorial programme<sup>125</sup> –but it remains extremely important in that it reveals

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<sup>121</sup> For a recent overview on the subject with regards to *De Cerimoniis*, see: FEATHERSTONE 2006.

<sup>122</sup> For the *Chrysotriklinos*, see: CAMERON AV. 1979, 17; FEATHERSTONE 2005; BAUER F.A. 2006, 157-160; FEATHERSTONE 2006, 50-53. For the decoration of the *Chrysotriklinos* and its ideological significance, as it is explained in this chapter, see: BRUBAKER 1999b, 148-149 (with previous bibliography).

<sup>123</sup> The *Chrysotriklinos* underwent several restorations: it was decorated under Tiberius II (578-582), probably renewed during the iconoclastic controversy, and then again under Michael III (842-867) (JANIN 1950, 115-117; BAUER F.A. 2006, 157-158).

<sup>124</sup> *ANTHOLOGIA GRAECA*, 1.106, ed. W.R. Paton, I, London 1969, 44-46.

<sup>125</sup> For the pre-iconoclastic pictorial program, see: CAMERON AV. 1979, 17 with references.

the deepest concerns of the palace architecture and decoration. The depictions on the walls played with the setting and the event enacted in the room in a comprehensive representation. Christ was depicted above the emperor's throne, conveying the protection of God on the Christian emperor in visual terms. A depiction of the Virgin above the main door protected the entrance, just as the Virgin protected the Christian *basileia* itself.<sup>126</sup> The emperor was represented along with the patriarch symbolizing the concordance of empire and Church, as it was after the reestablishment of the Orthodoxy. The apostles, martyrs, and saints protected the *basileia* and also represented the benevolence of God to the Christian emperor, through Christ and the heavenly court- Similar to the notion of the apostles, martyrs, and saints living with Christ in the heavenly kingdom of God, in the *Chrysotriklinos* two courts were represented: the heavenly one, with Christ and the apostles, martyrs, and saints; and the earthly one, blessed and protected by God, with the emperor, the patriarch and their followers. This representation shows the fundamental Christian character of the *basileia* and connects the imperial and the heavenly realms. In this great domed room, Christ was represented in the highest position, just above the imperial throne and headed the court of God. This representation reflected the order of the earthly court in the imperial audience chamber, with the emperor in the key position, just beneath the representation of Christ.

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<sup>126</sup> For the protective role of the Virgin on Constantinople, see: CAMERON AV. 2000 and MANGO 2000a.

We do not know if this ninth-century representation reproduced earlier models. However, representing the heavenly court above the earthly imperial court in the room clearly expresses the idea that the heavenly court was a model for the earthly court. Thus, the decorations and settings of the palace's rooms are significant. at least by the ninth century, the display halls, such as the *Chrysotriklinos* – the major throne room – expressed the value of the earthly court as a living reproduction of the heavenly court. Therefore, the palace, as the privileged setting for the manifestation of the emperor with his court, ultimately reproduced on earth the heavenly model for the imperial court, the kingdom of God. In this representative system, as the earthly order reproduced the heavenly order, so too the palace with its architecture and decoration within reproduced the heavenly kingdom of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, on earth.

As discussed in the first chapter, saintly visions of the heavenly kingdom have an enormous importance in the comprehension of the palace as a heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>127</sup> As in the Old Testament appearances of God, in all the saintly visions God and his heavenly kingdom are bright and shining of pure light. The light symbolism was central also in the palace, particularly in the ceremonial use of candles and in the decoration of the rooms. Candles always accompanied religious and court ceremonies. Colourful marbles and precious stones decorated the palace, emphasizing

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<sup>127</sup> Namely the visions of Saturus (third century), Dorotheos (probably fourth century), Apa Mattheaus the Poor (probably second half of the fourth century), St. Salvius (last quarter of the sixth century), St. Marta (late sixth or early seventh century), for the bibliography of which, see chapter II, pp. 80-88.

the shining light radiating from the structures, thus creating themselves a shining vision of light .<sup>128</sup>

Yet, the heavenly kingdom had often the form of a radiant bright building. From the third-century vision of Saturus onwards, the palace of God had bright walls and luxurious gardens. Similarly, inside the enceinte of the imperial palace the various buildings were connected by passages and open air areas with gardens.<sup>129</sup>

With the passing of the time, the palace of God was increasingly described as huge complex of buildings. In the fourth-century vision of Dorotheos, the kingdom of God is an enormous compound of interconnected walls, gates, courtyards and porticoes that were heavily guarded and protected. Indeed, this seems to be a representation of the imperial palace that, since the age of Constantine, had three corps of special soldiers – *scholarii*, *excubitores*, *candidati* – to ensure its safety. The *candidati*, the special guard of the emperor, were dressed in white, just as in the heavenly court of God the elects surrounding him were also dressed in white.<sup>130</sup> In the earthly realm, they represented the *militia Christi* that surrounds God in the heavenly kingdom. In the heavenly palace of Dorotheos, the members of the court of God acquired precise titles and

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<sup>128</sup> As in *Revelation*, the imagery of which is largely borrowed in the vision of Apa Matthaëus the Poor and echoed in the gold and silver of the heavenly palace in the vision of St. Salvius, so the palace was made of the most precious stones, abounding in gold, silver and bronze.

<sup>129</sup> The evidence of gardens at the imperial palace is quite late, but scholarship has largely agreed that they existed in Late Antiquity as well. Furthermore, the paradisiacal symbolism of gardens seems to become very clear in later literature (MAGUIRE 1994, 181-197; LITTLEWOOD 1997, 13-38).

<sup>130</sup> GUILLAND 1976. On the value of the white tunic of the *candidati* and of the heavenly court, see: LABARRE 2003, 149-150.

functions that corresponded to those of the imperial hierarchy.<sup>131</sup> It is clear that Dorotheos' heavenly palace was actually drawn from the imperial court. This establishes a homology between the imperial and the heavenly realm, and also expresses the conception of the *basileia* on earth as being an image of that in the sky. Depicting the kingdom of God as an imperial palace means to apply imperial schemes to the representation of God and also conveys the idea of the imperial realm as a supernatural reality.

In the sixth- or early seventh-century vision of St. Martha, heaven is a compound of marvellous palaces. Indeed, in sixth-century Constantinople, the palace had been extended and this trend continued on into the following centuries. Thus, the palace became an enormous complex of different buildings, each of them a palace itself.<sup>132</sup> In this ethereal vision, heaven is represented as a multiplication of palaces, just as in the sixth century the imperial palace of Constantinople was a multiplication of palaces grouped into one.

From *Revelation* onwards, the kingdom of God is described as being faraway, 'on high' or 'in the highest sky', and is accessible only by the elect or in saintly visions. Similarly, the palace of Constantinople was a city in

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<sup>131</sup> These titles were the subject of a lively debate between Bremmer and Livrea (BREMNER 1988 and LIVREA 1990).

<sup>132</sup> The author of the life of St. Martha has been identified as monk acquainted with the environment of St. Symeon and his mother (VAN DEN VEN 1962, I, 77-78). The relationship between St. Simeon the younger and the court are not clear, however his life reports of his friendship with the patriarch of Constantinople and several visions and miraculous events in which the emperor Justin II was involved (*VITA S. SIMEONIS*, 206-211). It is not clear whether the image of sixth-century Constantinople was known to the writer. If this was the case, connections between the palaces of St. Martha's vision and the actual palace of Constantinople – from which the imagery of St. Martha's heaven possibly draws – could be claimed. Nevertheless, this are just observations that cannot find any solutions here.

the city, a faraway reality protected by walls and guards, accessible only to a few people, according to a rigid and strict court ceremonial.<sup>133</sup>

In all of the heavenly visions considered in this research, the throne is a central element of the heavenly palace, and so too was the throne one of the major insignia of imperial power in Byzantium.<sup>134</sup> The throne was also an attribute of the representation of Christ in early Christian art.<sup>135</sup> As we have seen, this is evident in the representation of Christ in the fifth-century mosaics in the apse of the church of Sta. Pudenziana (402-417) [fig. 75] as well as in the church of Sta. Maria Maggiore (432-440) [fig. 119], where a bright jewelled throne is again the seat of the infant Christ. This pattern of representation was also reflected in the depiction of the Virgin. In a late sixth-century Sinai icon, the Virgin Mary appears set upon a throne and surrounded by the warrior saints George and Theodore, in a scene that recalls the representation of an empress in court.<sup>136</sup> The throne, which is often the centre of the palace in the ethereal visions of the heavenly Jerusalem, was an imperial symbol as well as an attribute of God.

As in the palace of Dorotheos, heavenly visions of the palace of God include the singing of hymns along with emanations of wonderful perfumes, just as at the earthly court songs and music played important roles in

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<sup>133</sup> CARILE A. 1996, 111-112; CARILE A. 2002a; CARILE A. 2002b. In the same way the appearance of the emperor was allowed only to a few dignitaries and determined by a strict selection (CARILE A. 2003b; CARILE A. 2003c, esp. 604-607).

<sup>134</sup> CARILE A. 2003c, 612-618.

<sup>135</sup> This was clearly demonstrated since the important work of André Grabar, nevertheless it is contested by Thomas Mathews (GRABAR 1971; MATHEWS 2003, 3-22).

<sup>136</sup> CORMACK 2000, 262-263 (with earlier bibliography).



imperial rituals and ceremonies.<sup>137</sup> Perfumes were also spread in imperial houses since the time of Nero and were used also in Byzantium, where they had themselves a role in the imperial reception.<sup>138</sup>

All this expresses the image of the palace as the most sacred place on earth, a mirror of the heavenly Jerusalem of the skies. The palace of Constantinople was in fact the holy abode of the emperor, commonly regarded as a 'sacred residence', the greatest features of which were, in the words of Eusebios, its holiness and impenetrability.<sup>139</sup>

When, in the age of Justin II (565-578), the court poet Corippus celebrated the imperial appearance, he expressed its value as a real epiphany.<sup>140</sup> Accordingly, the palace, and particularly the throne room, with its retinue of court dignitaries was represented as an ordered cosmos, bright with shining light, resonating with music, similar to the ordered sky and its stars.<sup>141</sup> In the throne room, which constituted the sacred centre of the palace, the holy appearance of the emperor was set against an extraordinarily lavish setting. The centre of the palace, where the throne was

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<sup>137</sup> For the role of the music in imperial ceremonies, see: CARILE A. 2001; BERGER 2006.

<sup>138</sup> Suetonius, *De vitae caesarum. Nero*, 31, ed. H. Ailloud, Paris 1932, 175.

<sup>139</sup> *PANEGYRICI LATINI*, IX, 16.5, ed. D. Lassandro and G. Micunco, Torino 2000, 313. Eusebios, *De laudibus Constantini*, prologue. 4, ed. I.A. Heikel, Leipzig 1902, 195.

<sup>140</sup> For the sacred character of the imperial manifestation, with particular reference to the text of Corippus, see: CARILE A. 2003a; CARILE A. 2003b; CARILE A. 2003c.

<sup>141</sup> Corippus, *In laudem*, III.179-190, ed. Av. Cameron, London 1976, 66, 187-188 (commentary), see also ed. A. Antès, Paris 1981 ed. S. Antès, Paris 1981, 60. The value of the sky with the stars as a cosmic order is emphasized also in the *Iohannis* – a poem written by Corippus to celebrate the courage of Justinian's general Iohannes Troglyta in the war against the native tribes of Africa – where the extremely frequent references to the ordered sky with its stars contrast the untidy state of the earth disrupted by the war.

set under a round canopy, was sacred, just as the emperor and the *basileia*.<sup>142</sup>

Corippus' passage clearly parallels the imperial order, the earthly cosmos, with the heavenly cosmos. The imperial palace was thus a mirror of the heavenly palace and its architecture made possible the appearance of the emperor as a heavenly epiphany. The palace of Constantinople, a real palace, was the privileged place where real and ideal realities mingled. The sacred spirit of the *basileia*, manifested itself in the palace, transformed the imperial palace of the emperors into a *sacrum palatium*, a real palace on earth that was however ideal in that it reflected the heavenly kingdom.. As the imperial *basileia*, which God ensured and emanated, reflected the heavenly order, equally the imperial palace reflected the heavenly kingdom of God.<sup>143</sup> In the words of Corippus, the sacred palace of the emperors, with its hugely complexes and high rooms, its roofs shining in gilded bronze, imitated on earth the heavenly 'Olympus'.<sup>144</sup> Thus, in the cityscape of Constantinople, the gilded roofs of the palace shining in the sun were the visible image of an heavenly Jerusalem on earth. Just as the heavenly Jerusalem was the distant and bright heavenly kingdom of God, so too was the imperial palace at Constantinople the impenetrable residence of the

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<sup>142</sup> CORIPPUS, *In laudem*, III.194-214, ed. Av. Cameron, London 1976, 66-67, 188-189 (commentary), see also ed. A. Antès, Paris 1981, 60-61.

<sup>143</sup> For the correspondence between the heavenly cosmos and the imperial order, see especially: CARILE A. 1998.

<sup>144</sup> CORIPPUS, *In laudem*, III.179-180, ed. Av. Cameron, London 1976, 66, 187 (commentary), see also ed. A. Antès, Paris 1981 ed. S. Antès, Paris 1981, 60. As it appears from *Iohannis*, in Corippus the word 'Olympus' stands for the heavenly kingdom of God. In a heavenly vision the general in fact saw his father coming from the 'lofty Olympus, clothed in a white robe of stars' (CORIPPUS, *Iohannis*, I.259-260, ed. J. Diggle and F.R.D. Goodyear, Cambridge 1970, 13, and trans. SHEA 1998, 71).

emperor, resplendent over the city with his bright roofs. While the palace's interior was inaccessible<sup>145</sup> to the eyes of the common people, the high structures of the imperial palace were visible from afar and bright with their gilded roofs. Thus, to their eyes, the palace was a distant and bright vision of light, just as the heavenly Jerusalem of the saintly visions.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Since the Constantinian foundation of the city, the palace of the emperors at Constantinople had a great impact on the topography and the identity of the city itself. In this chapter, we attempted to explain the conceptual value of the palace within the urban topography of the city. The layout of Constantinople seems to have been designed – or was manipulated to appear as it were – for the celebration of the empire.

The transformation of Constantinople into a new Jerusalem, indeed a 'future Jerusalem' through the modelling of the cityscape and the gathering of holy relics, also effected the palace of the emperor. The palace, which ancient authors listed among the main urban symbols, was not only the residence of the emperor and the symbolic political centre of the empire; but also the theatrical setting for a major performance. The representation of the heavenly kingdom of God as an imperial palace invests, in turn, a heavenly character to the palace of the Byzantine emperors.

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<sup>145</sup> The secret character of the imperial rooms is well expressed in Teja's analysis of the lexicon used to define them (TEJA 1993, 639-642).

The attribution of imperial elements to the representation of Christ and the image of the heavenly kingdom of God as an imperial palace reveals a direct homology between the imperial palace and the heavenly kingdom. This concept seems to have been common in late-antique thought, since it is reported in saintly visions, in court poetry and in late-antique literature.<sup>146</sup> Thus, in Byzantine imagery, the palace was seen as the residence of the emperor, but also as an antitype of a heavenly residence.

Constantinople was not only a *new* Jerusalem, it had a heavenly character too in that it held the imperial palace, a *heavenly* Jerusalem. The heavenly kingdom of God, which was envisaged in the New Testament and appeared in the *Revelation* of John, seems to be symbolized in the imperial palace of Constantinople. The Byzantine emperor is the minister of God on earth: as he mirrored the power of God on earth, his court mirrored the court of God, and his palace the heavenly residence of God.

The palace was the setting for manifestations of the Christian *basileia* of the emperor, which occurred inside the walls of the palace in private ceremonies open to few elects, but was also visible outside the palace in the appearance of the imperial palace itself. Outside, the structures of the palace conveyed the same light symbolism that was created inside the palace during imperial receptions. The manifestation of the *basileia* as a divine appearance, such as described by Corippus, finds a parallel in the

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<sup>146</sup> For instance, as we have seen, in the visions of Dorotheos and Satorus, in the poetical work of Corippus, but also in Eusebios, where the heavenly kingdom is portrayed as an imperial palace (EUSEBIOS, *De Laud. Const.*, I.2, ed. I.A. HEIKEL, Leipzig 1902, 197).

expression of the palace as a heavenly Jerusalem. The gilded roofs of the palace, celebrated by Corippus and later mentioned by Kedrenos in relation to the *Chalké*,<sup>147</sup> shone brilliantly in the light of the sun, just as the heavenly Jerusalem was a bright kingdom of light.

The real and ideal palace combined in the *sacrum palatium* that was, in turn, the visible and thus real reproduction of the bright heavenly palace of God, the ultimate paradise, the highest ideal example of perfection. Just as in saintly visions, the palace itself was a distant vision of light recalling the ultimate kingdom of light and eternal peace, the heavenly Jerusalem of the Christian God.

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<sup>147</sup> KEDRENOS, *Hist. Comp.*, ed. I. Bekker, I, 647. A late fifth-century anonymous epigram of the *Palatine Anthology* had already celebrated the gilded roofs of the *Chalké* of Anastasios comparing them with those of Jupiter Capitolinus' temple at Rome (*ANTHOLOGIA GRAECA*, IX.647, ed. W.R. Paton, IV, London 1977, 362-364; MANGO 1959, 24: commentary on the passage).

## **Epilogue**

This research has attempted to clarify the image of the imperial palace in Late Antiquity. The palace of the emperors was a real and concrete element in the cities, an architectonic expression of imperial power. However it also had a strong abstract character in that it echoed an ideal place, the heavenly Jerusalem, the heavenly kingdom of God. This was concealed but by no means insignificant. The palace's homology to the heavenly Jerusalem in fact relied upon, and relayed, the holy character of the imperial power in Late Antiquity and Byzantium.

Applying kingly models to the representation of God and divine realities has a long tradition.<sup>1</sup> Conversely representations of the emperor often assumed divine traits. In Late Antiquity and especially in Byzantium the imperial appearance was depicted as a real epiphany, and accordingly, as we have seen, the imperial residence was associated in various ways with the divine kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Grabar and L'Orange contributed early but still important works on this subject (GRABAR 1971; L'ORANGE 1982).

The evidence for the imperial palace is extremely meager, however its fragments – physical in the archaeological remains and visual sources, and literary in the texts – show the indescribable splendour of these residences. Lavish and great spaces were the most suitable place for the manifestation of the *basileia* as a legitimate power deriving from God. As the appearance of the emperor had overtones of a divine epiphany the palace on earth evoked a divine palace. The visual evidence is of capital importance in this context because it shows the continuous ambiguity and constant interlacing of religious and secular domains.

All the main evidence analyzed in this research was in fact found into churches. This depends on fortuitous circumstances: while palaces were robbed and destroyed and no longer exist, church buildings continued to be in use over the centuries. The continuity of cult in the area of the Byzantine empire brought about the use of the buildings from ancient times to the present. In our main visual sources all the buildings recall sacred residences, without representing explicitly a church. In two cases – the dome's lower decoration in the Rotunda at Thessaloniki and the apse mosaic of Sta. Pudenziana in Rome – the buildings seem to represent divine palaces, whereas the *palatium* of St. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna was probably an idealized representation of a real imperial palace. Architectural forms, colours, and details of the decoration continuously play with religious and secular dimensions, conveying the idea of a sacred space that however is not a church. The buildings represent sacred spaces in the form of palatine

architectures. As in the *sacrum palatium* of the Byzantine emperors imperial power was legitimated by God, and thus had a divine character, so the representation of these buildings has a strong sacred feature.

The variety of written sources analyzed in this research demonstrate the impact of palace imagery on the representation of the kingdom of God as a palace and of the imperial palace as a divine abode. Far from being overt, the homology between the imperial palace and the heavenly kingdom of God was quite nuanced and reflected the internal ideology of the imperial power in Byzantium. Court poets and literati, well acquainted with imperial power, contributed to the diffusion of this image that then developed, leading to the more explicit representations of the heavenly kingdom as the palace and the city of Constantinople from the ninth century onwards.<sup>2</sup>

This research has attempted to show the value of the imperial palace as a heavenly Jerusalem in Late Antiquity, a conception that was concealed but seems to have had its first development in Byzantium at that time. Then it spread to various contexts, leading in the multiplicity of palaces depicted in the Great Mosque of Damascus or in the church of San Juan Los Prados at St. Ander, the analysis of which would go far beyond the limits of the present research and will be left for future study.

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<sup>2</sup> Between the tenth and the eleventh century in texts such as the vision of the monk Kosmas, the life of St. Basil the younger, or the vision of Anastasia, the heavenly kingdom is seen as a palace or even a city, which have likely been assimilated with the imperial palace and the city of Constantinople, where various ceremonies take place (ANGELIDI 1982 and 1983; BAUN 2007).





## Abbreviations:

-	AISCOM	Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico
-	<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
-	<i>CA</i>	<i>Cahiers Archéologiques</i>
-	<i>CARB</i>	<i>Corsi di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina</i>
-	CISAM	Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo
-	<i>DACL</i>	<i>Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie</i>
-	<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
-	<i>EAG</i>	<i>Enciclopedia dell'Architettura Garzanti</i>
-	<i>EAM</i>	<i>Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale</i>
-	<i>FR</i>	<i>Felix Ravenna</i>
-	ICCM	International Committee for the Conservation of Mosaics
-	<i>LTUR</i>	<i>Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae</i> , E.M. Steinby (ed.)
-	<i>MEFR</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome</i>
-	<i>MEFRA</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité</i>
-	<i>MEFRM</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Moyen Age</i>
-	<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
-	<i>ODB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , A.P. Kazhdan, A.M. Talbot, A. Cutler, T.E. Gregory, N.P. Ševčenko (eds.)
-	<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
-	<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
-	<i>RbK</i>	<i>Reallexikon für byzantinischen Kunst</i>
-	<i>RAC</i>	<i>Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana</i>



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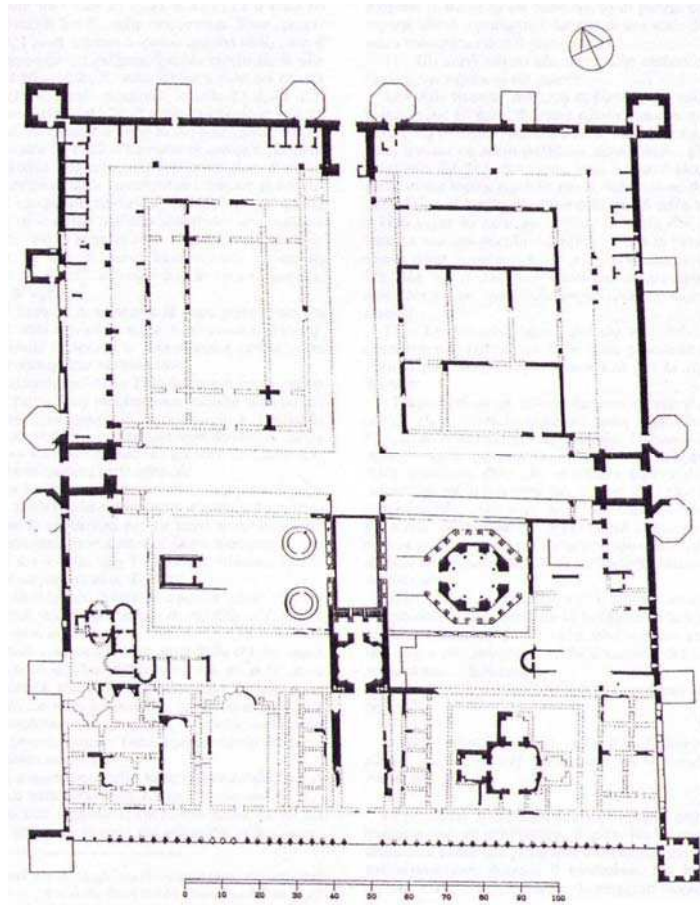
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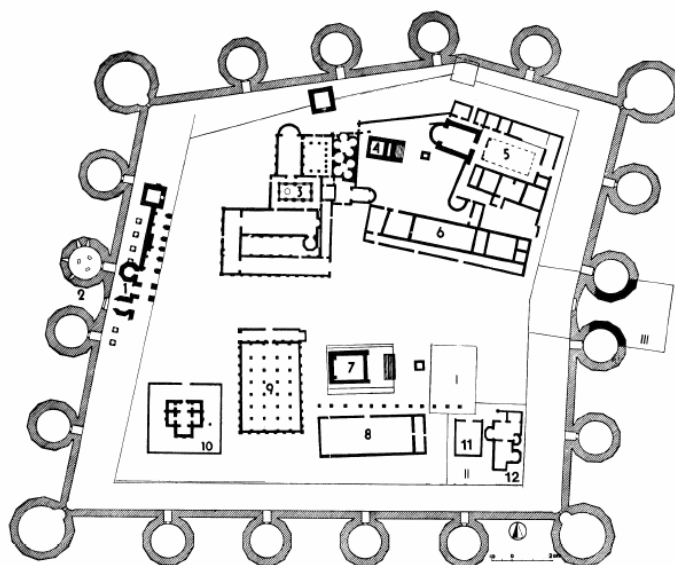


## **Figures**

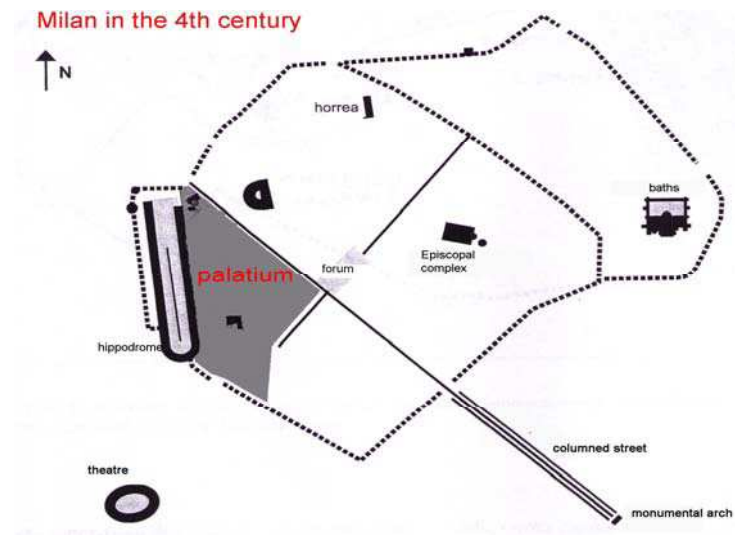




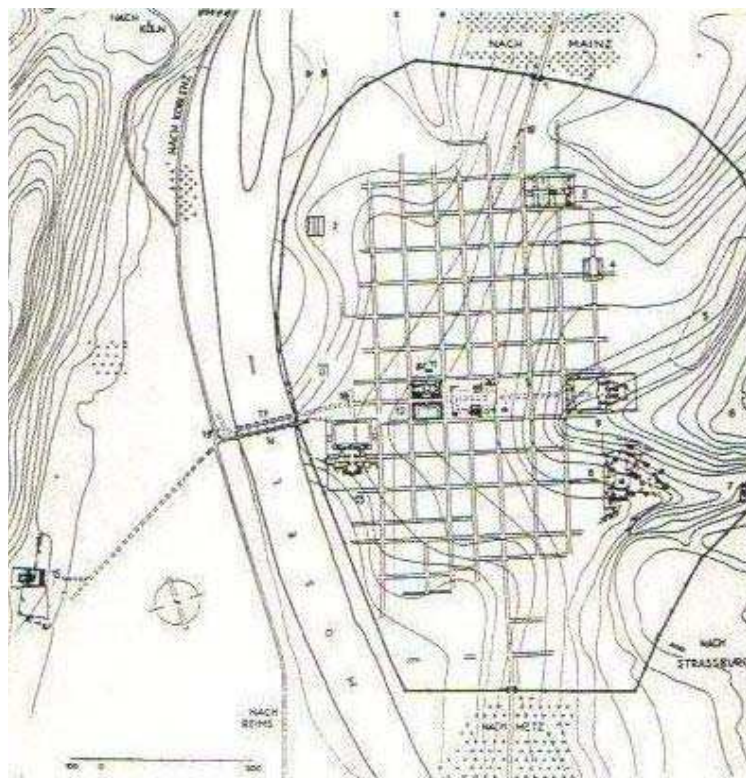
**Fig. 1 Split: plan of the imperial palace, upper level.**



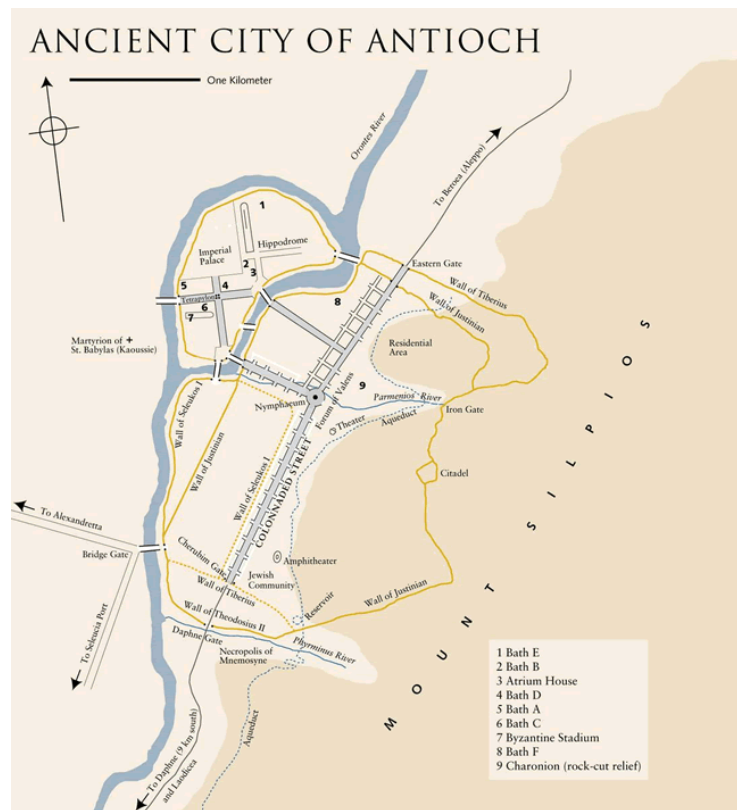
**Fig. 2 Romuliana (Gamzigrad): plan of the imperial palace.**



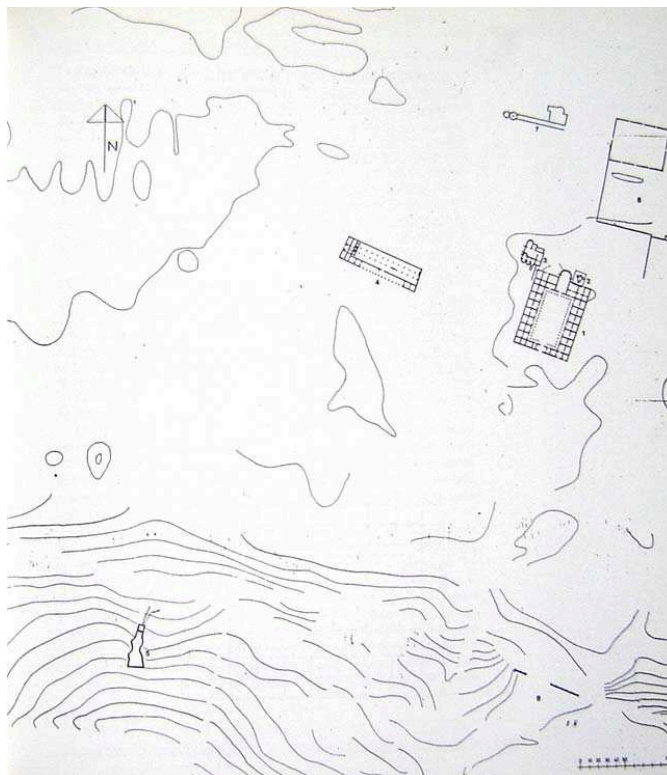
**Fig. 3 Milan: late-antique city.**



**Fig. 4 Trier: plan of the late-antique city.**

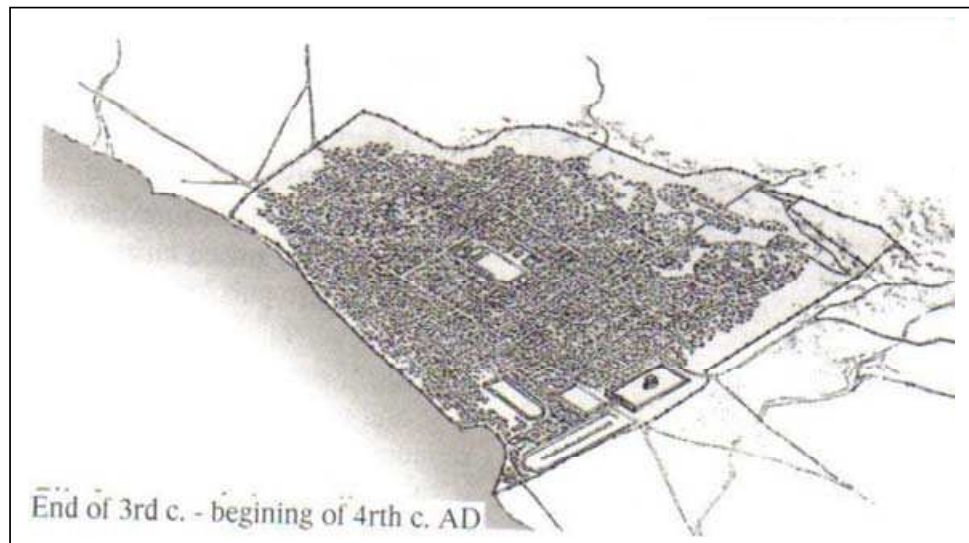


**Fig. 5 Antioch: plan of the late-antique city.**

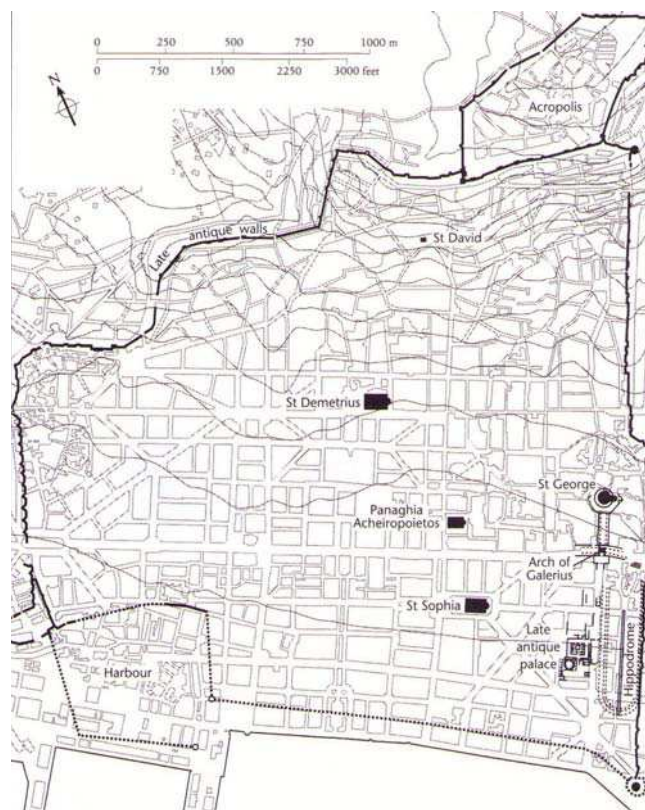


**Fig. 6 Mediana, Naissus (Niš): plan of the remains.**

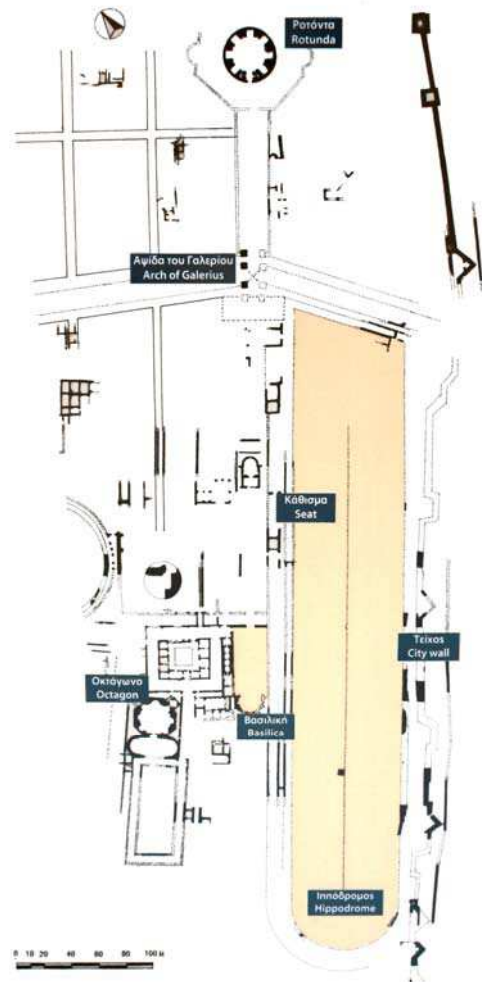




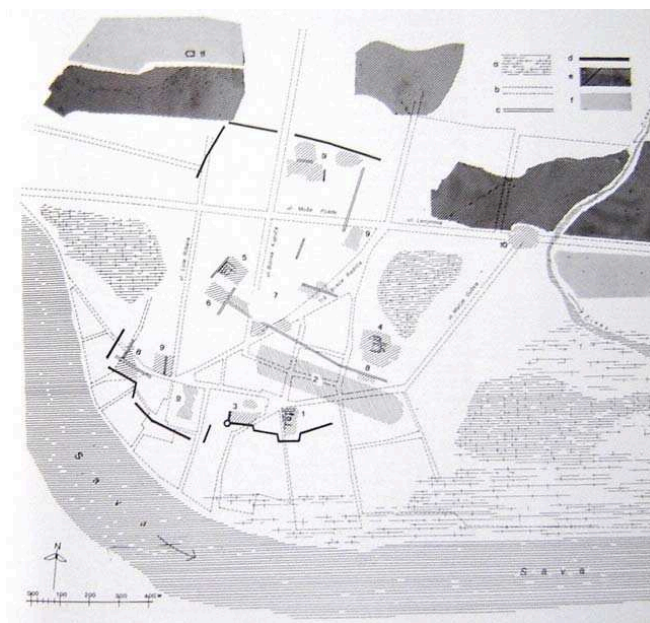
**Fig. 7a Thessaloniki: reconstruction of the late-antique city.**



**Fig. 7b Thessaloniki: plan of the late-antique city.**



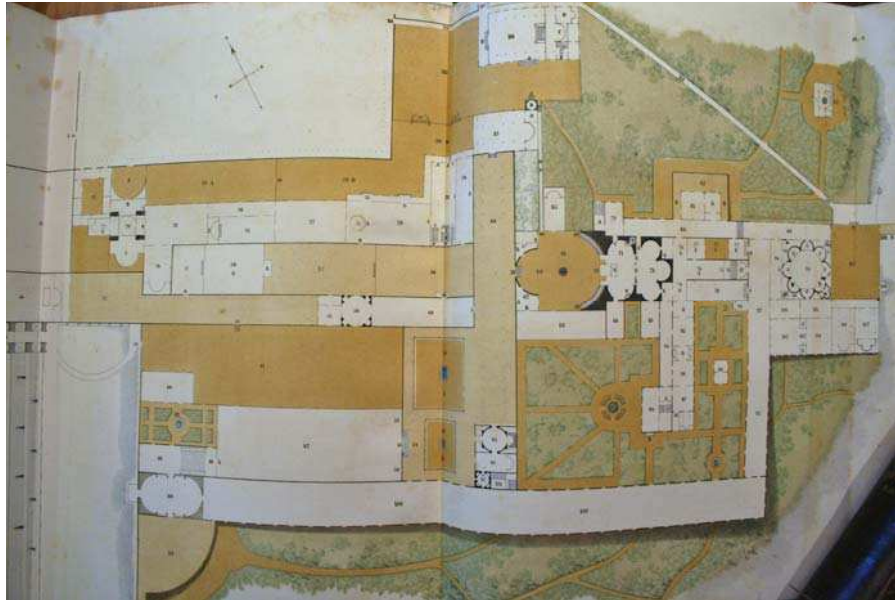
**Fig. 8**  
**Thessaloniki:**  
**plan of the**  
**palace area.**



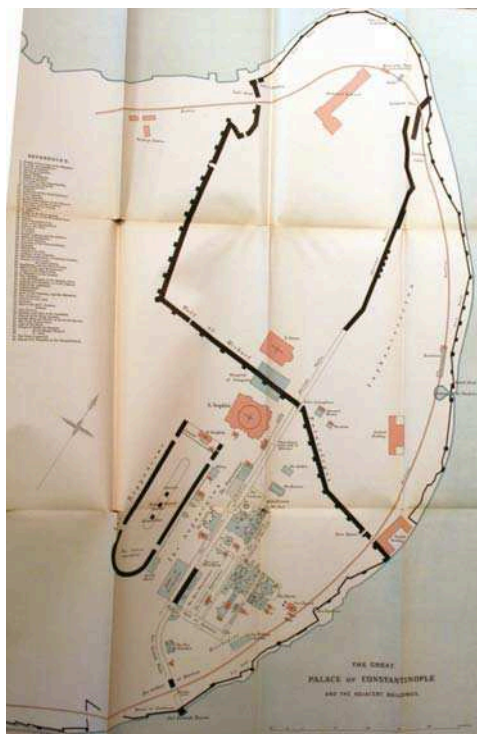
**Fig. 9 Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica): the late-antique city.**



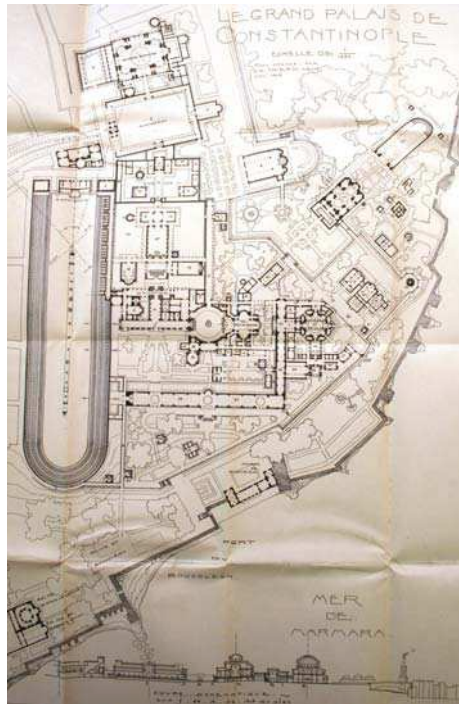




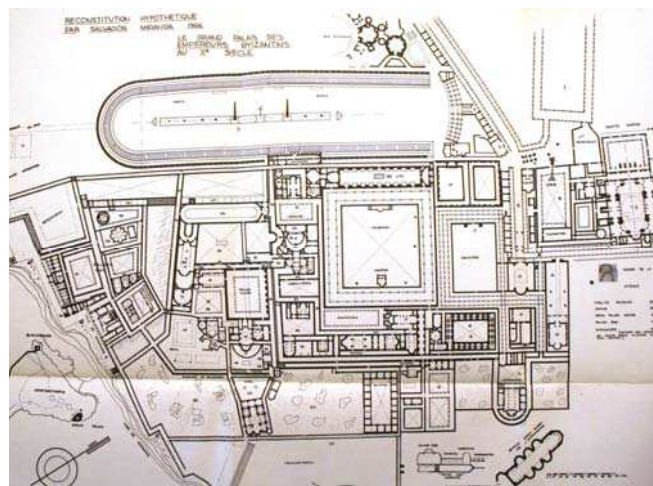
**Fig. 11 Labarte's reconstruction of the palace of Constantinople.**



**Fig. 12 Paspates' reconstruction of the palace of Constantinople.**



**Fig. 13 Ebersolt's reconstruction of the palace of Constantinople.**



**Fig. 14 Miranda's reconstruction of the palace of Constantinople.**

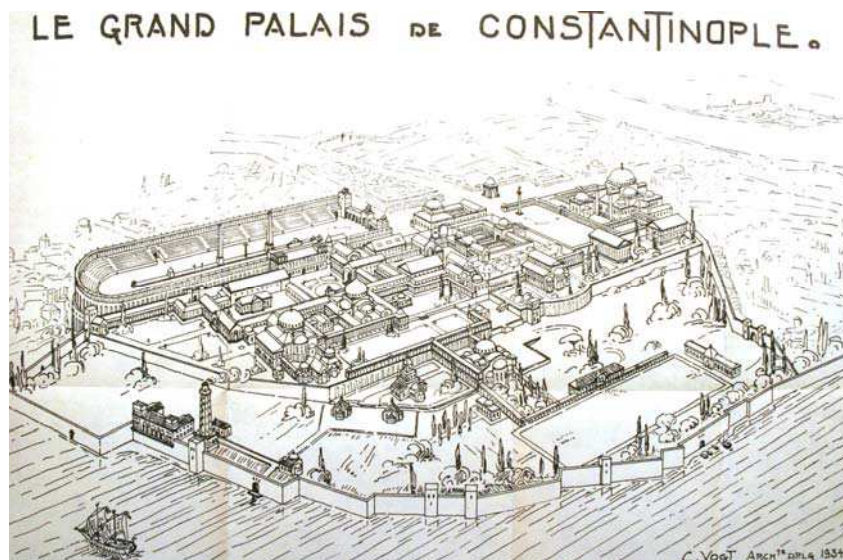


Fig. 15 Vogt's reconstruction of the palace of Constantinople.

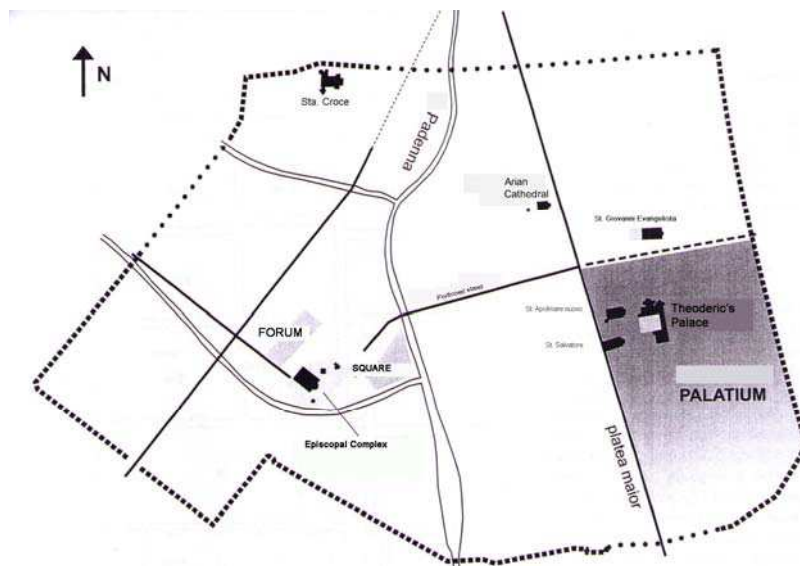
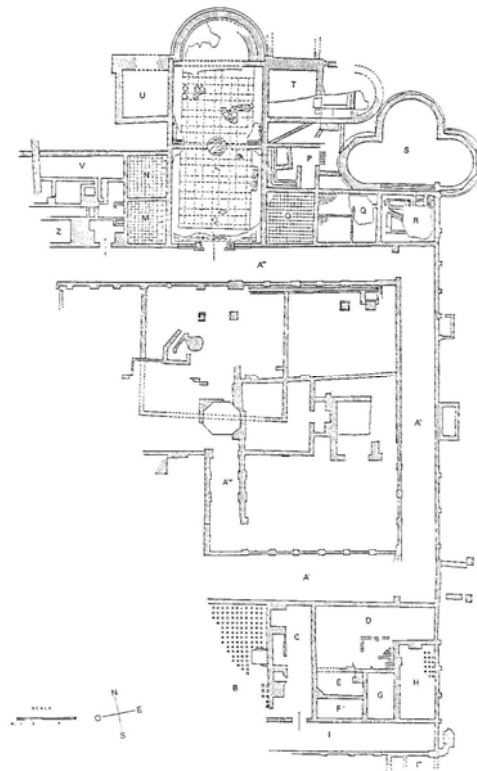
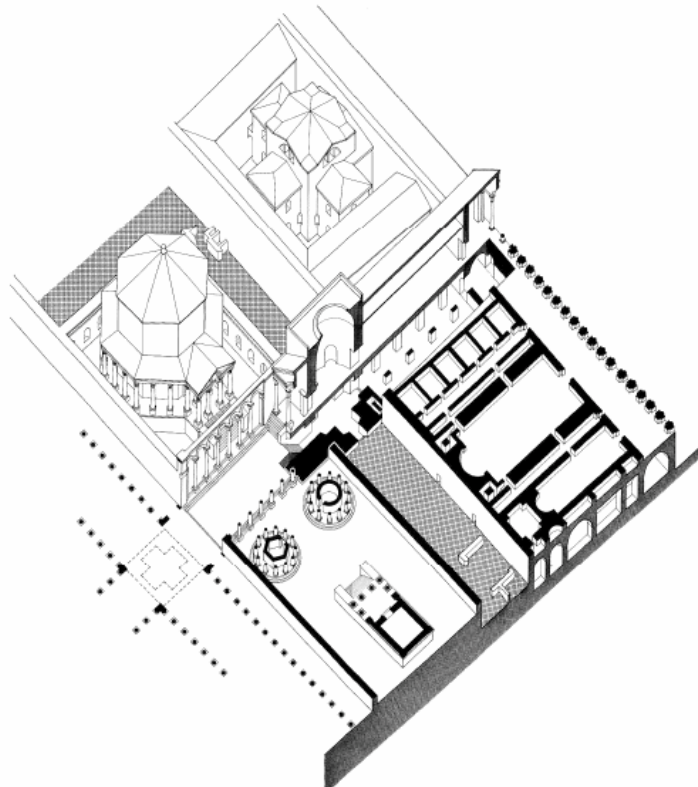


Fig. 16 Ravenna: the late-antique city.



**Fig. 17 Ravenna: plan of the palace remains.**

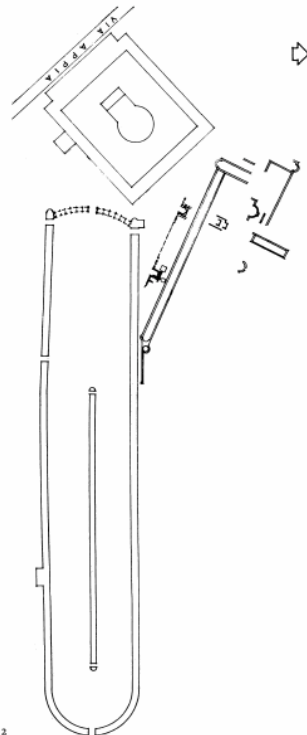
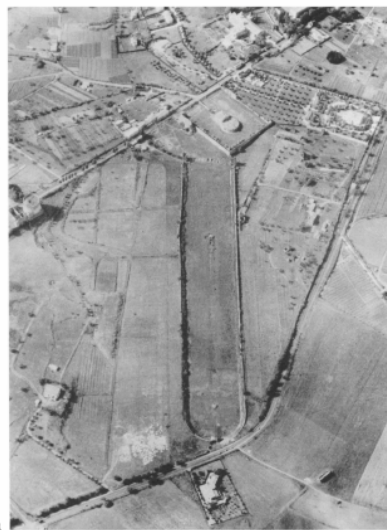


**Fig. 18 Split: axonometric view and reconstruction of the palace's private area.**





**Fig. 19 Trier, Constantinian basilica.**



**Fig. 20 Rome: aerial view and plan of the palace of Maxentius.**





**Fig. 21 Split: access to the private apartments of the palace, open court (before 1916-1917).**



**Fig. 22 Thessaloniki, Rotunda, southern façade.**



**Fig. 23 Thessaloniki, Rotunda, eastern side, aerial view.**



Fig. 24 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior.

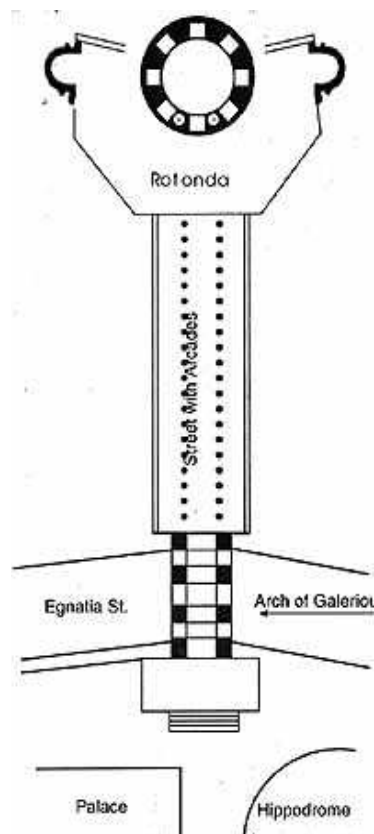
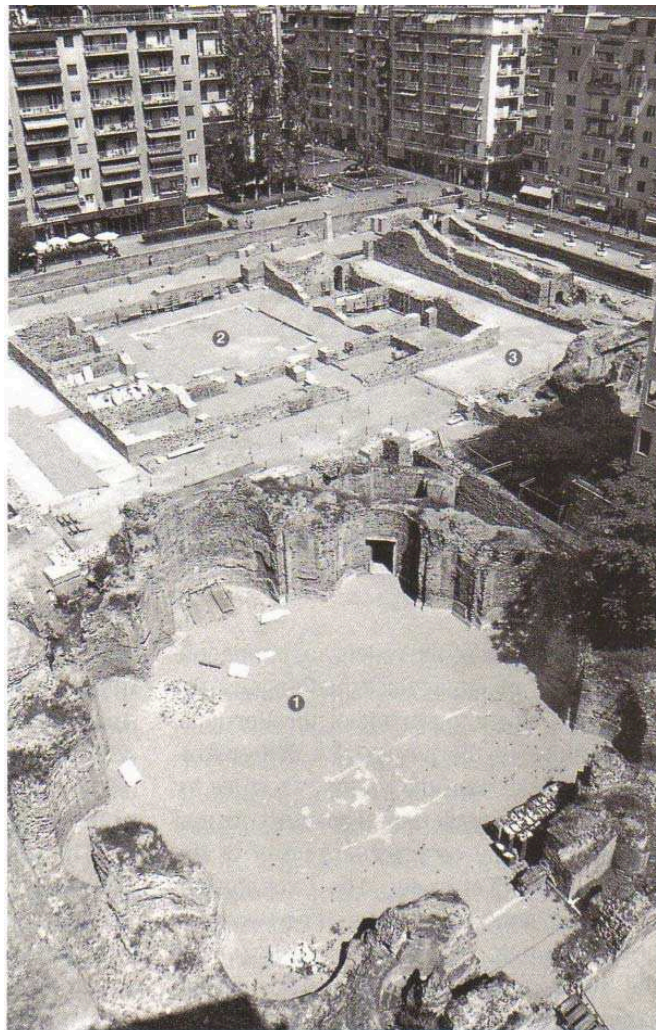


Fig. 25 Thessaloniki: area Rotunda - arch of Galerius, plan of the ancient urban setting.



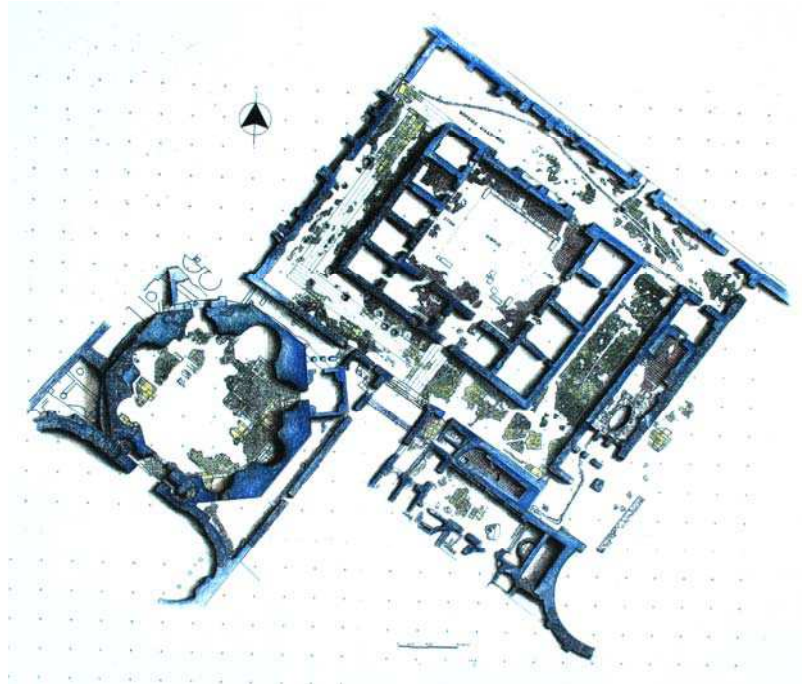


**Fig. 26 Thessaloniki: Plateia Navarinou, remains of the palace, looking southwards.**



**Fig. 27 Thessaloniki: Plateia Navarinou, remains of the palace, looking north-east.**





**Fig. 28 Thessaloniki: Plateia Navarinou, plan of the greatest remains with the indication of the mosaic floors.**



**Fig. 29 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, mosaic at the apex of the dome.**



**Fig. 30 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, north-eastern panel.**

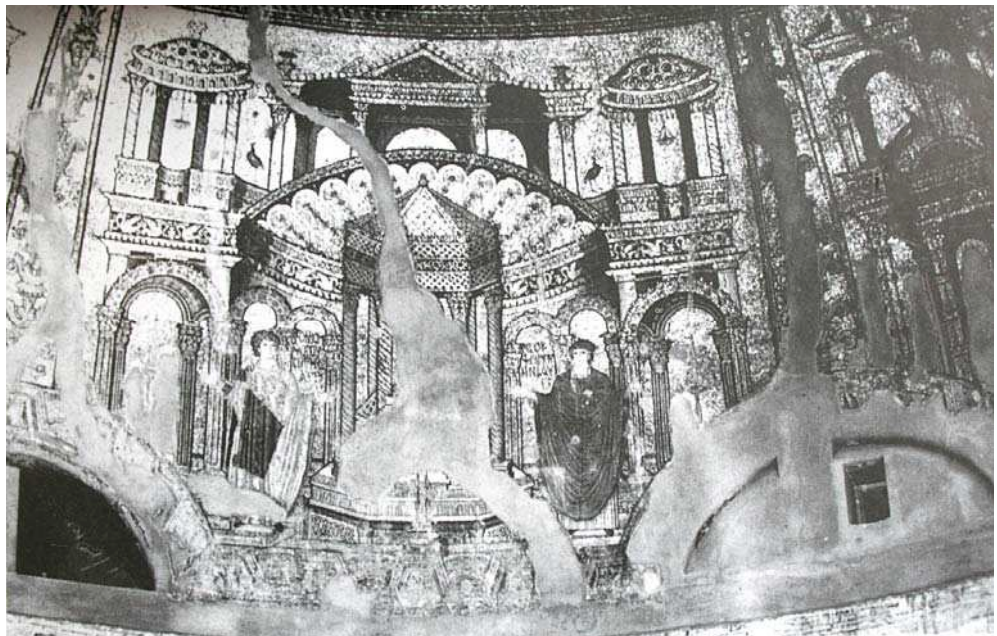


**Fig. 31 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, south-eastern panel**

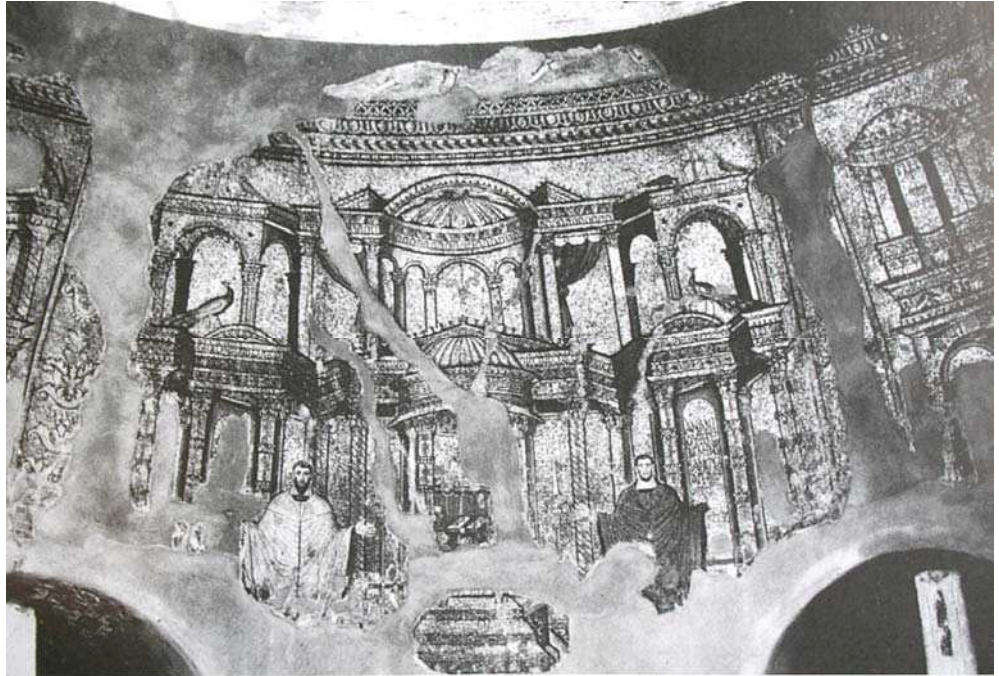




**Fig. 32 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, northern panel.**



**Fig. 33 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, southern panel.**

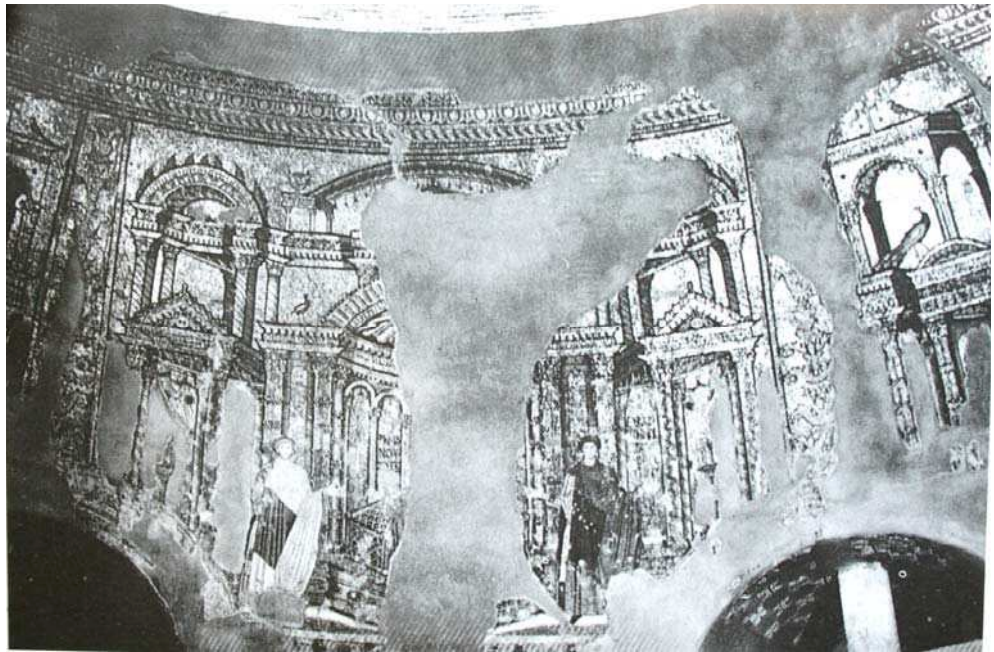


**Fig. 34 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, north-western panel**



**Fig. 35 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, south-western panel.**





**Fig. 36 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, western panel**



**Fig. 37 Ravenna: San Vitale, interior, sanctuary, imperial panel.**





**Fig. 38 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, phoenix.**

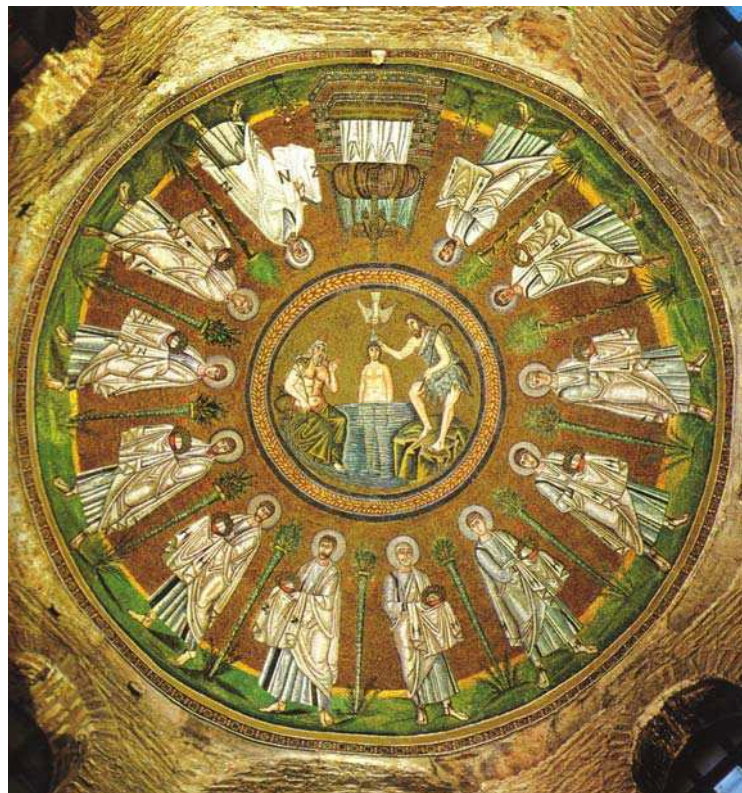


**Fig. 39 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, southern bay's barrel vault, mosaic.**



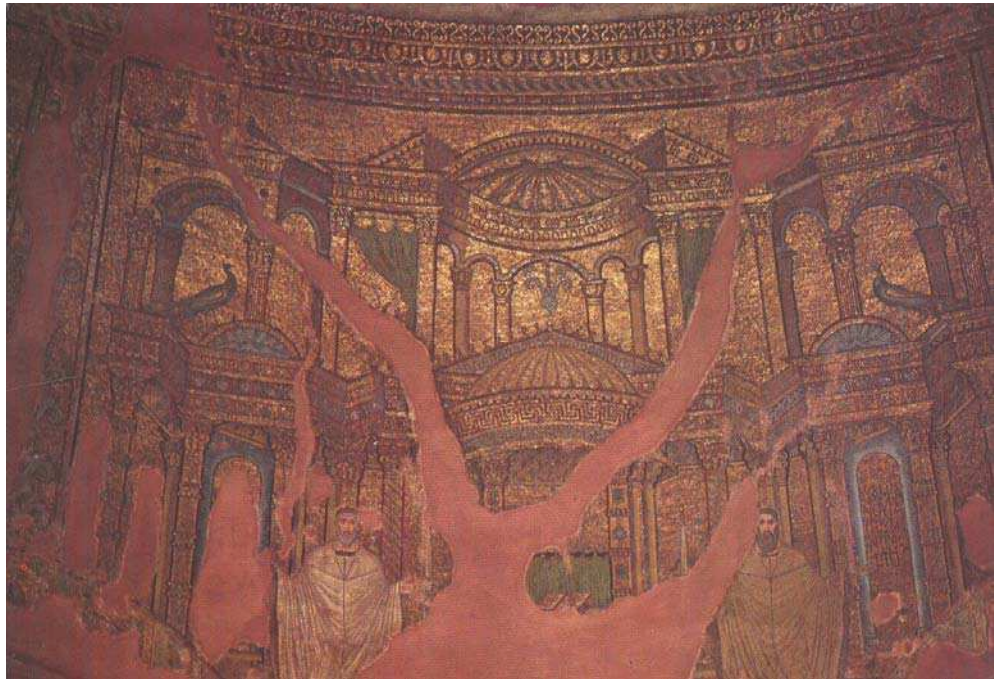


**Fig. 40 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall.**

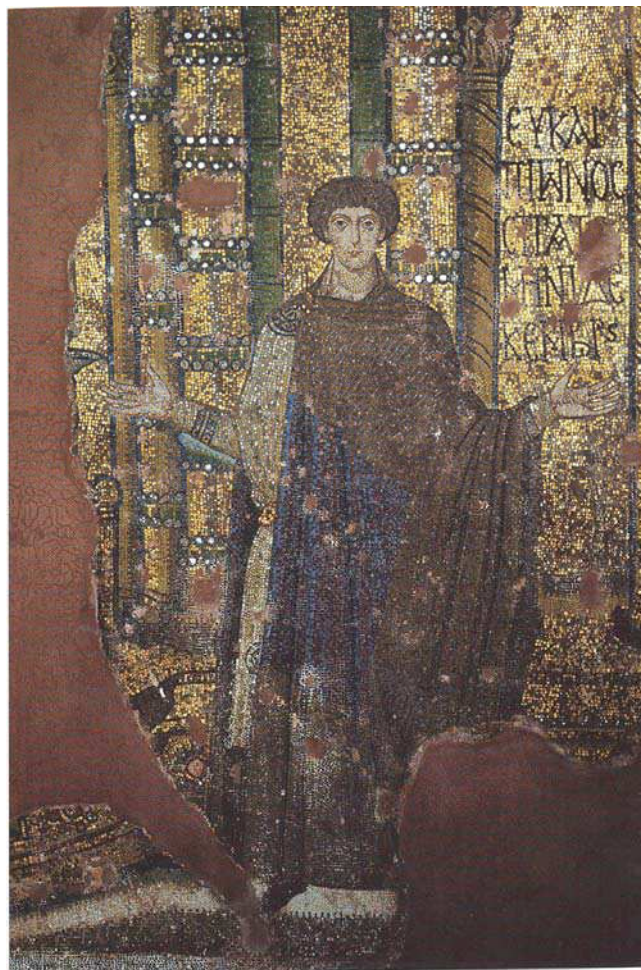


**Fig. 41 Ravenna: Arian Baptistery, interior, dome mosaic.**





**Fig. 42 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, south-western panel.**



**Fig. 43 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, western panel, Eukarpios.**



**Fig. 44 Monza: Tesoro della Cattedrale, diptych of Styliko.**

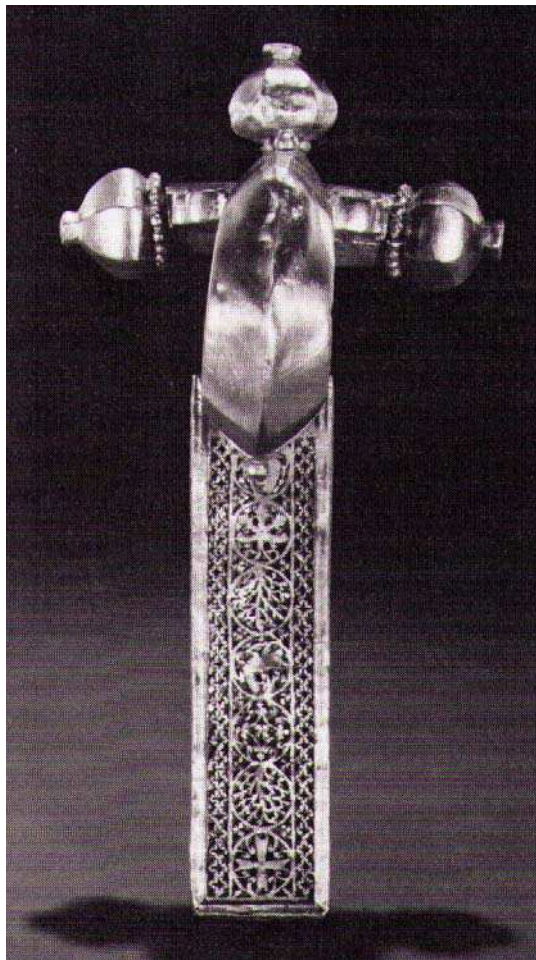


**Fig. 45 Novara: Museo del Duomo, diptych of a patrician.**

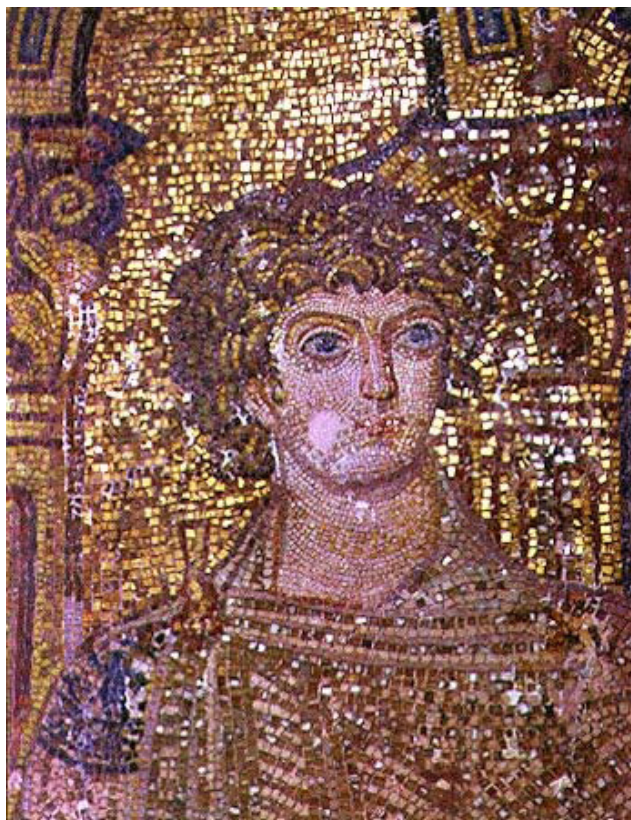




**Fig. 46 Ravenna: San Vitale, interior, presbytery, imperial panel of Justinian, detail.**



**Fig. 47 Reggio Emilia: museum, fibula.**

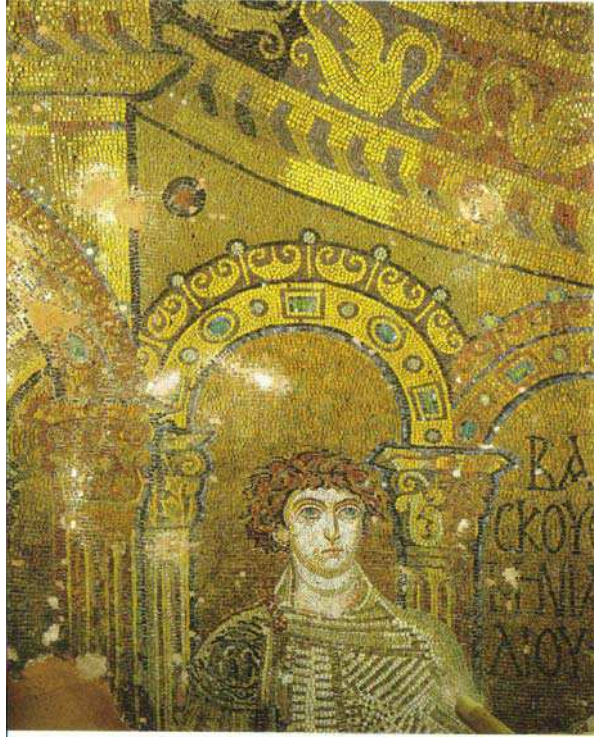


**Fig. 48 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, southern panel, Onesiphoros.**



**Fig. 49 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, southern panel, Porphyrios.**



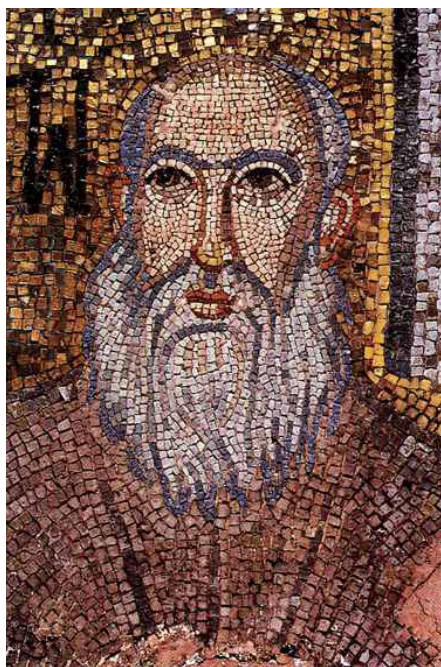


**Fig. 50 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, northern panel, Basiliskos.**

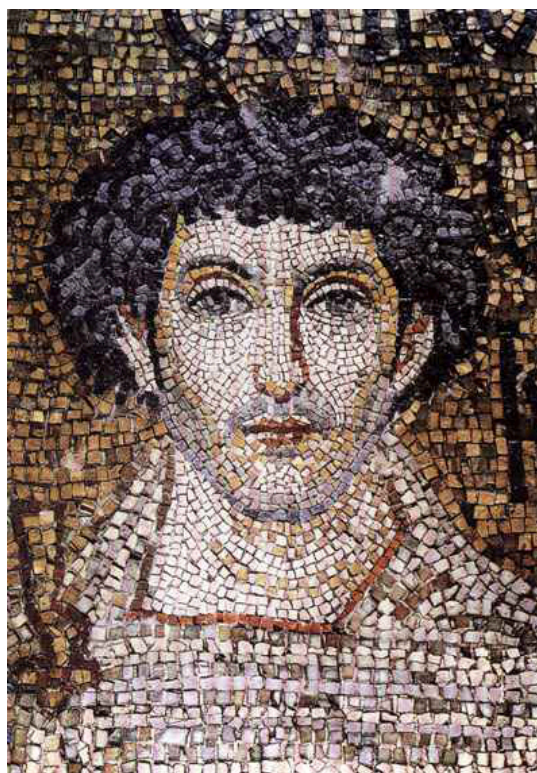


**Fig. 51 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, northern panel, Priskos.**





**Fig. 52** Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, north-eastern panel, Philippos.



**Fig. 53** Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, north-eastern panel, Therinos.



**Fig. 54 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, south-eastern panel, Leon.**



**Fig. 55 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, Dome mosaic, western panel, details of the building and unknown saint.**





**Fig. 56 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, interior, dome mosaic, northern panel, details of the building.**



**Fig. 57 Florence: Museo del Bargello, Ariadne Ivory.**



**Fig. 58 Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Ariadne Ivory.**



**Fig. 59** Istanbul: Archaeological Museum, inlaid column from Hagios Polyeuktos (6<sup>th</sup> century).





**Fig. 60 Ravenna: San Vitale, presbytery, Jerusalem.**



**Fig. 61 Ravenna: San Vitale, presbytery, Bethlem.**



**Fig. 62 Ravenna: San Francesco, sarcophagus.**



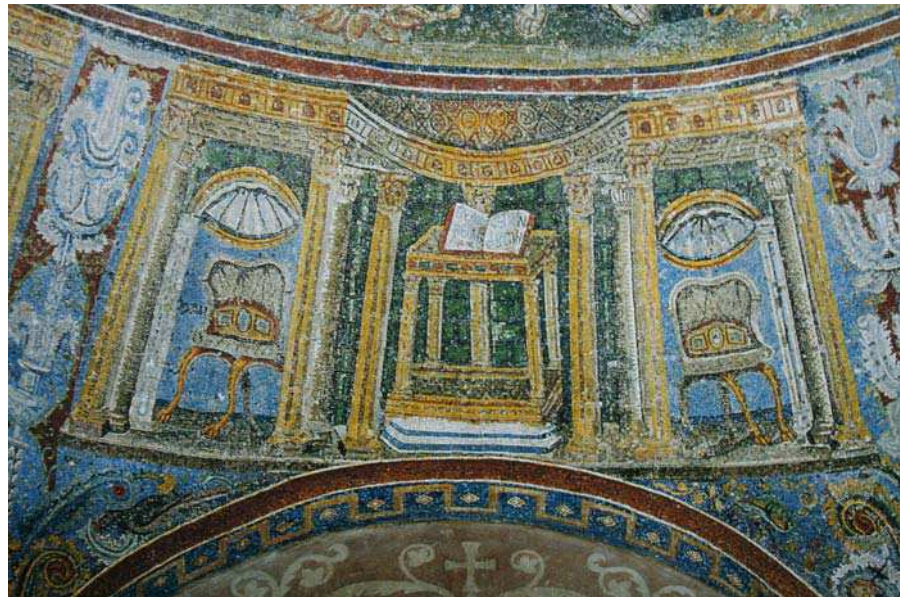


**Fig. 63 Ravenna: Orthodox Baptistery, dome mosaic, detail of the lower frieze.**



**Fig. 64 Ravenna: Orthodox Baptistery, dome mosaic.**





**Fig. 65 Ravenna: Orthodox Baptistery, dome mosaic, detail of the lower frieze.**



**Fig. 66 Monza: Tesoro della cattedrale, Holy Land ampulla.**



Fig. 67 Vienna: Kusthistorisches Museum, monogrammatic cross.



Fig. 68 Rome: Catacomba of St. Sebastiano, epigraph (*ICUR*, V, 13229).





**Fig. 69 Venice: National Archaeological Museum, reliquary of Samagher.**



**Fig. 70 Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, diptych of Magnus.**



Fig. 71 Thessaloniki: Rotunda, dome mosaic, lowest frieze, detail.

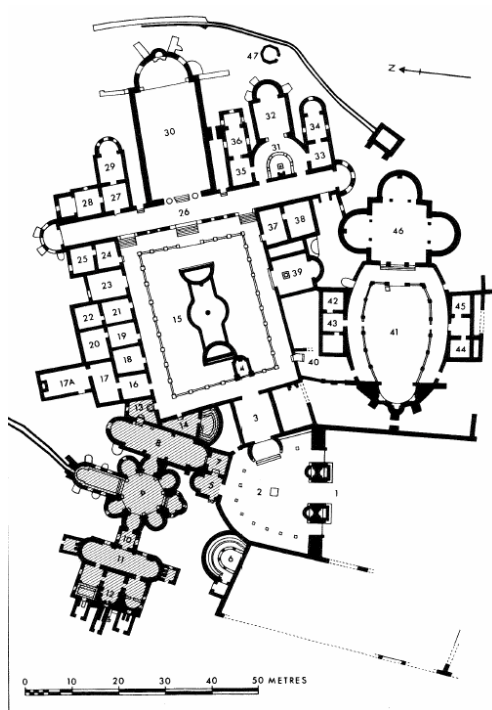


Fig. 72 Piazza Armerina: late-antique villa, plan.

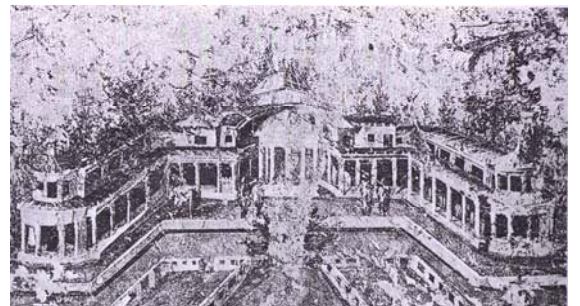


Fig. 72a Pompei: wall painting,

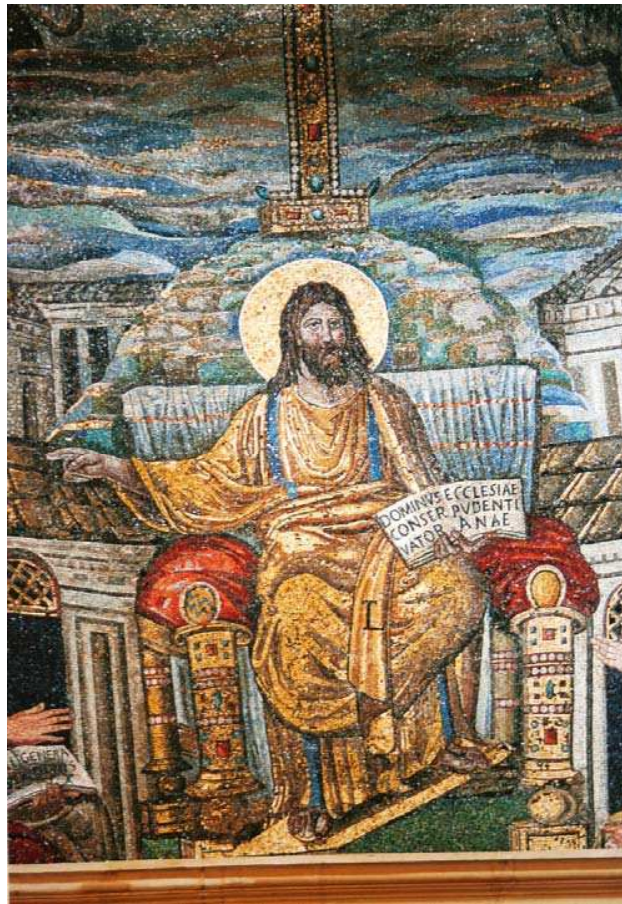




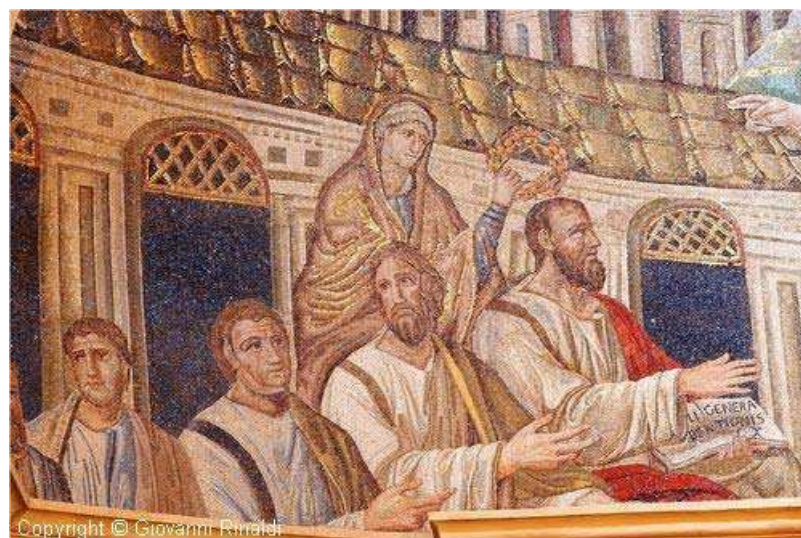
**Fig. 73 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic.**



**Fig. 74 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, nave.**



**Fig. 75 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, Christ.**

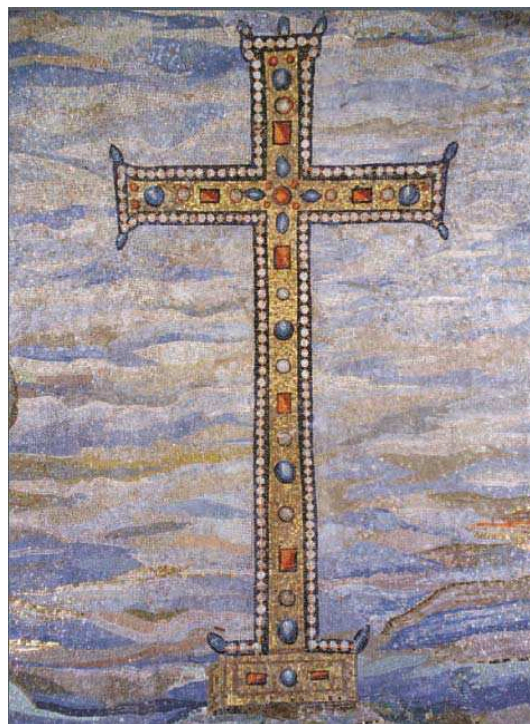


**Figure 76 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, apostles on Christ's right.**

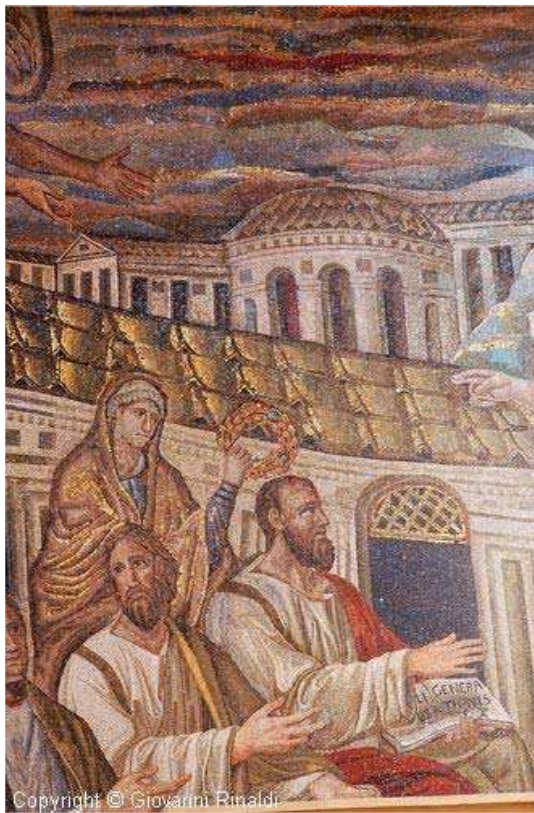




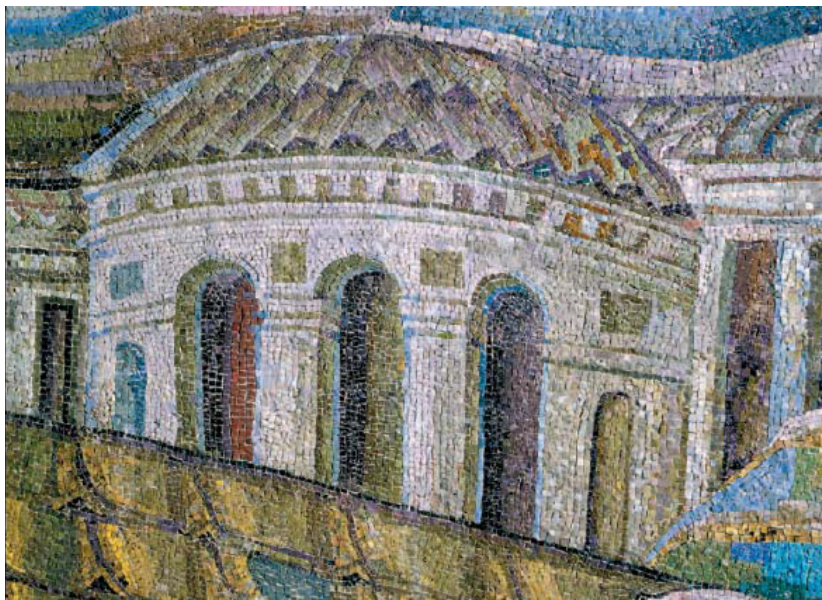
**Fig 77 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, apostles on Christ's left.**



**Fig. 78 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, jewelled cross.**



**Fig. 79 Rome:  
Sta. Pudenziana, apse  
mosaic, buildings.**



**Fig. 80 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, circular building.**





**Fig. 81** Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, octagonal or hexagonal building with *opaion*.



**Fig. 82** Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, Matthiae's drawing indicating the original parts of the mosaic in white.

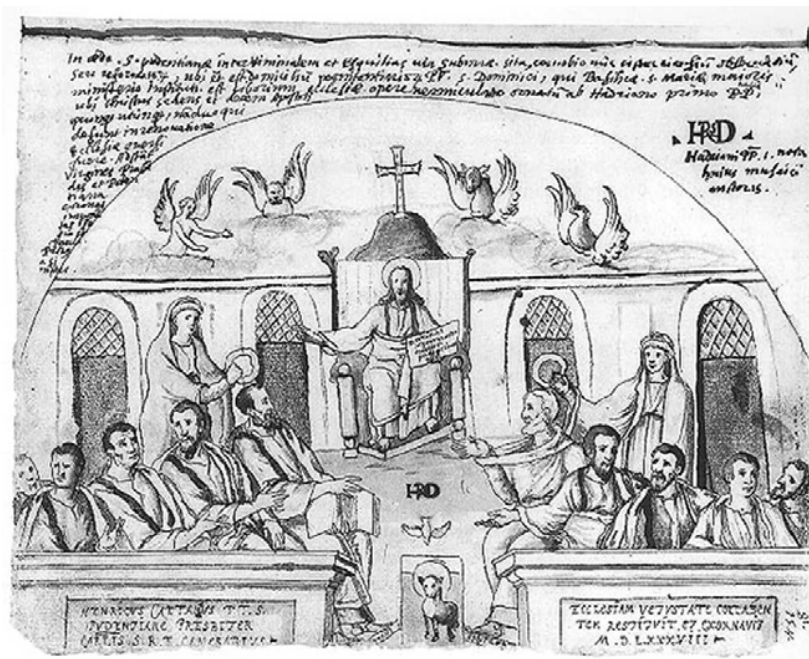


Fig. 83 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, Ciacconius' drawing (after 1588).

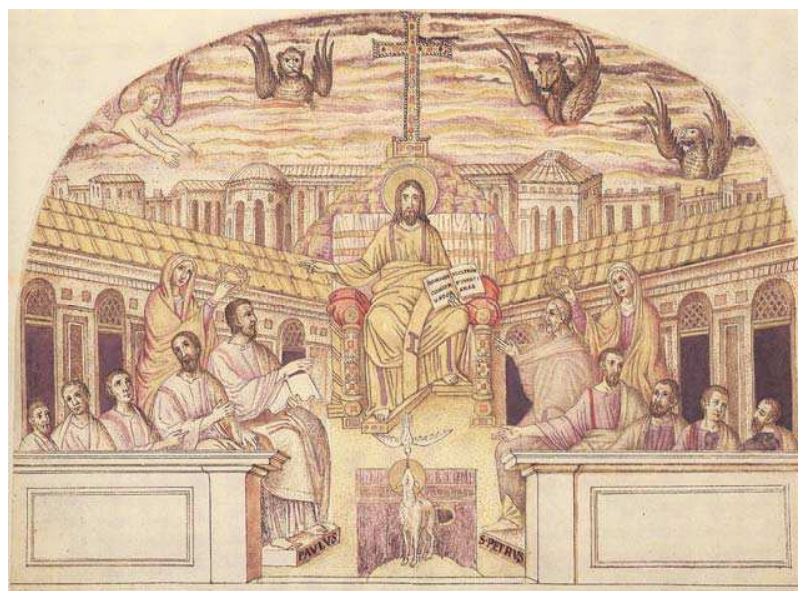


Fig. 84 Rome: Sta. Pudenziana, apse mosaic, Eclissi's drawing (1630c.).





Fig. 85 Madaba: mosaic floor, detail of the Madaba map, city of Jerusalem.

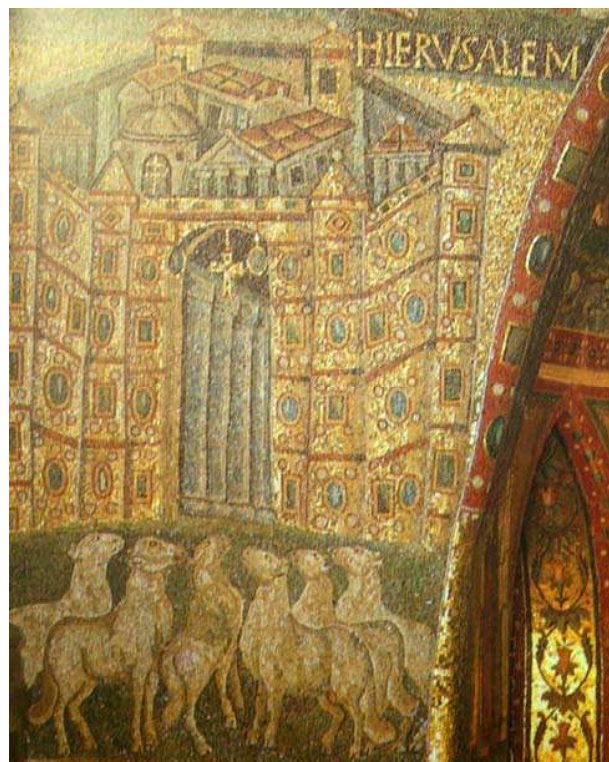


Fig. 86 Rome: Sta. Maria Maggiore, triumphal arch mosaic, Jerusalem.

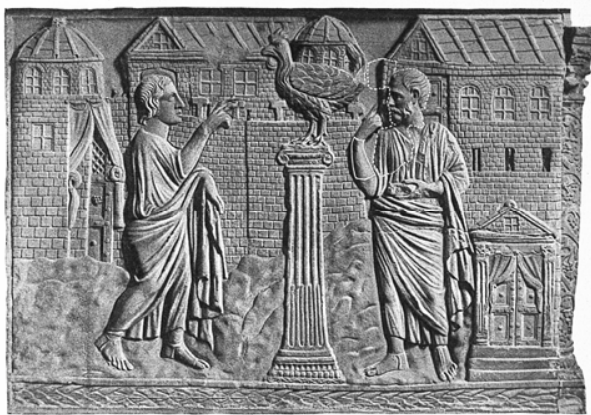




**Fig. 87 Rome: Sta. Maria Maggiore,  
triumphal arch mosaic, Bethlem.**

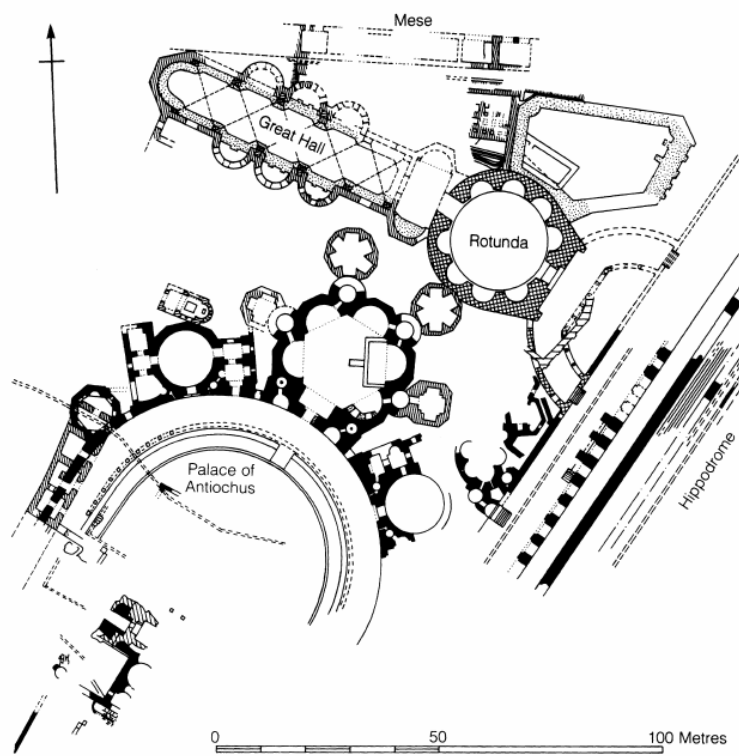


**Fig. 88** Rome: Arc of Constantine, *largitio*.

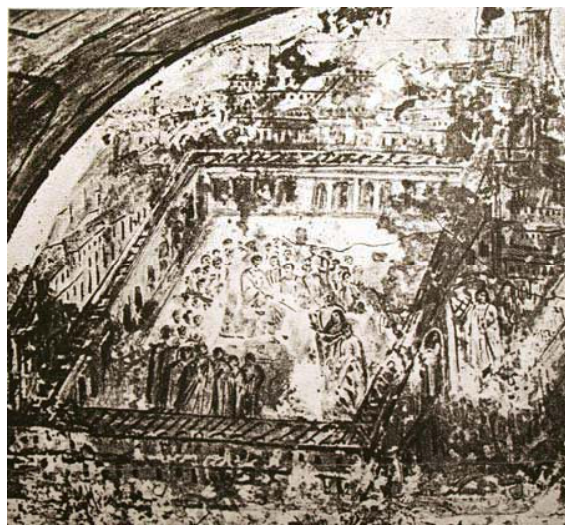


**Fig. 89** Rome: Museo Pio Cristiano, sarcophagus with urban scenes





**Fig. 90 Constantinople (Istanbul): palaces of Antiochos and Lausus, plan of the remains.**



**Fig. 91 Rome: hypogeum of the Aurelii, wall painting.**



**Fig. 92 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior.**



**Fig. 93 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior,  
central nave, southern wall, *palatium*.**



Fig. 94 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, central structure.



Fig. 95 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, lateral portico towards the centre of the nave.





Fig. 96 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, lateral portico towards the *civitas Ravenna*.

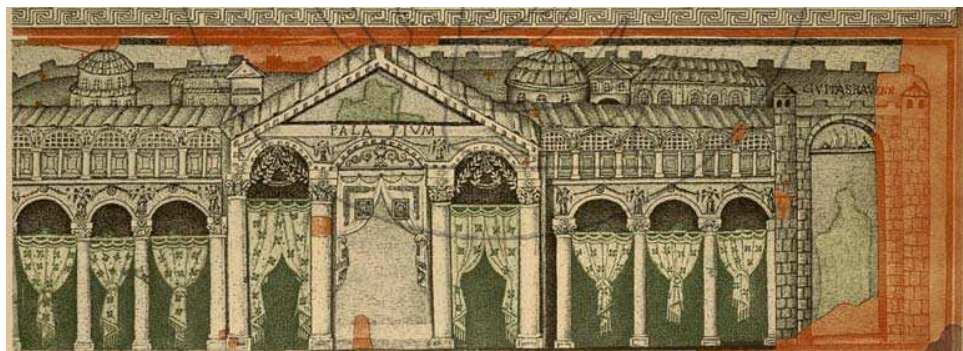


Fig. 97 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*: Ricci's sketch with the eighteenth-century restorations.



Fig. 98 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior,  
central nave, southern wall, *civitas Ravenna*.



Fig. 99 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior,  
central nave, northern wall, *civitas Classis*.





Fig. 100 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, hand on the first column on the right.



Fig. 101 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, hand on the third column on the right.



Fig. 102 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, hands on the building's columns.



Fig. 103 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, colonnade on the right.





Fig. 104 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, central opening.



Fig. 105 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *palatium*, central pediment.



**Fig. 106 Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, diptych of Anastasius.**



**Fig. 107 Ravenna: San Vitale, interior, sanctuary, imperial panel, detail of the second lady on Theodora's right.**





**Fig. 108** Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *civitas Ravenna*, detail of the lunette.



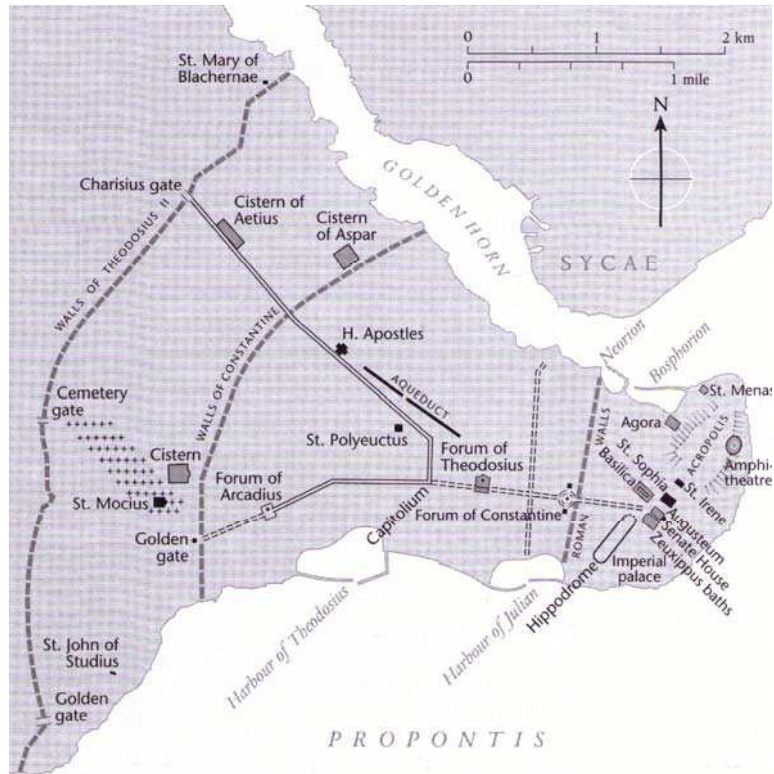
**Fig. 109** Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *civitas Ravenna*, details of the buildings behind the *palatium*.



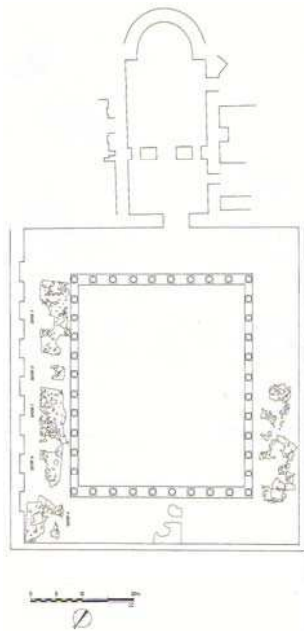
Fig. 110 Ravenna: St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave, southern wall, *civitas Ravenna*, details of the buildings behind the *palatium*.



Fig. 111 Ravenna, St. Apollinare nuovo, interior, central nave. Southern wall, *civitas Ravenna*, details of the buildings behind the *palatium*.



**Fig. 112 Constantinople in Late Antiquity.**



**Fig. 113 Istanbul: Büyük Sarayı Müzesi, plan of the remains with the indication of the mosaic floor.**





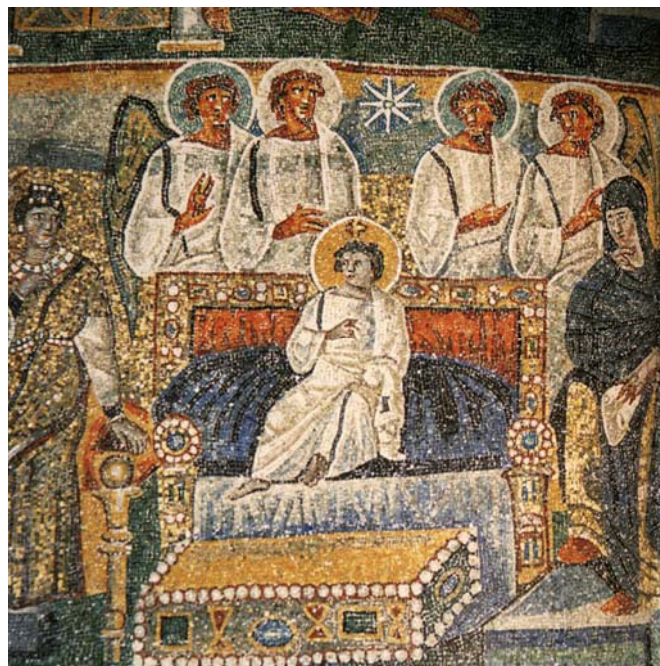
**Fig. 114 Istanbul: remains of the Boukoleon palace.**



**Fig. 115 Istanbul: view of the substructures of the imperial palace (area under the parking of Küçük Ayasofya Caddesi).**







**Fig. 118 Rome: Sta. Maria Maggiore,  
triumphal arch, mosaic, detail.**

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