2011

Rethinking the Dionysian Legacy in Medieval Architecture: East and West

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CHAPTER SEVEN

RETHINKING THE DIONYSIAN LEGACY IN MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE: EAST AND WEST[*]

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> "No one is able to understand what is written in Saint Dionysius," exclaimed a frustrated anonymous reader of the Old Church Slavonic *Narration on the Book of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite*.[1]

Indeed, everyone who attempted to read the still controversial *Corpus Areopagiticum* either in the original Greek or in any translation, even if supplemented by abundant annotations, would have to acknowledge numerous interpretative questions these texts raise.[2] Namely, the *Corpus* blends seemingly irreconcilable pagan and Christian thoughts. On the one hand, the *Corpus* stems from philosophical Neoplatonic writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite—an Athenian convert under Paul, the "first intellectual" Apostle who himself was concerned mostly with debatable questions about what it means to be Christian (Acts 17:16-34).[3] On the

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[1] Ihor Ševčenko, "Remarks on the Diffusion of Byzantine Scientific and Pseudo-Scientific Literature among the Orthodox Slavs", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 59:3, 1981, 321-345, citation on p. 329.
[2] Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 3-6.
[3] On the controversial figure of Dionysius the Areopagite and his works: Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 3-6; Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 1-22; Perl, *Theophany*, 1-4; Rosemary A. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 1-41.

other hand, the corpus includes numerous sixth-century and later theological Christian collations which tended to streamline the controversies derived from recognition of certain elements in Dionysius' work common to pagan and Jewish understanding of God. Thus, by its definition, this contentious corpus is far from being an easy, straightforward text. At the same time its attractive philosophical tone is extraordinarily open and flexible to various, even contradictory interpretations.

During the Middle Ages, the contents of the Dionysian *Corpus* were translated into numerous languages including Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Latin, and by the fourteenth century Old Church Slavonic as well.[4] Its unusually numerous copies and editions verified its wide distribution and popularity and especially among monastic intellectual circles confirming its important role for the development of Christian thought. Being truly and amusingly "Byzantine," at least in terms of its high complexity, indirectness and confusion, the *Corpus* was debated furiously in medieval times, in both Eastern and Western Christian realms.[5] In the East, its prominence can be remarked in discussions on orthodoxy and heresy, most notably during the sixth century when it was studied and embraced by both Monophysite and Chalcedonian authors,[6] during the Iconoclastic

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[4] Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 5; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 7-22; Andrew Louth, "Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas", in: *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, ed. Sarah Coackley and Charles M. Stang (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 55-71; Boris Milosavljević, "Basic Philosophical Texts in Medieval Serbia", *Balcanica*, 39, 2008, 79-102.

[5] See, for example, Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 237-240.

[6] Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 7-22. Dionysius was accepted in Christian Orthodox thought very early and recognized as a saint. The Athenians even proclaimed Dionysius the patron saint of the city and built a church on the Areopagus hill dedicated to this, believed, first bishop of Athens. The archaeological evidence for this medieval church remains obscure, as it was most likely rebuilt in the sixteenth century: John Travlos and Alison Frantz, "The Church of St Dionysios the Areopagite and the Palace of the Archbishop of Athens in the 16th Century", *Hesperia*, 34:3, 1965, 157-202. Some scholars, however, maintain that an anonymous writer under the pseudonym Dionysius was a Miaphysite Syrian and that his work was informed by Jewish practices: Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 13, 19-21, and Klitenic Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite*. On the opposite view: Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality", in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, 11-24; Perl, *Theophany*, 1-4; Charles M. Stang, "'Being Neither Oneself Nor Someone Else': The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysius the Areopagite" in *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, ed. Charles Boesel and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 59-75, esp. 69-71.

controversy,[7] as well as in the fourteenth century within the context of the hesychastic religious movement, which was especially strong on Mount Athos.[8]

1. Dionysian Thought and Architecture: Scholarship and Methodological Questions

Art historians have recognized the Neoplatonic influences in medieval art.[9] Yet, though certainly pervasive, frequently the Dionysian legacy is

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[7] Andrew Louth, "Cappadocian Fathers and Dionysius in Iconoclasm" in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, ed. Jostein Børtnes and Tomas Hägg (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2006), 271-281; Ivanović, *Symbol and Icon: Dionysius the Areopagite and the Iconoclastic Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

[8] Hesychasm (ἡσυχία), literally meaning "stillness," "tranquility," "peacefulness," "silence," is a meditative state in which monks sought to receive the vision of God in various forms. The access through uncreated divine light was considered the purest and truest access to God, which could have been realized through omnipotent divine grace. Rooted in early Christian monastic contemplative practices, *hesychasm* was revived in the fourteenth century, when it acquired its dogmatic concept under theologian and saint Gregory Palamas (ca. 1296–1359). John Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1959); John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1974). See also: Louth, "Reception of Dionysius"; Alexander Golitzin, "Dionysius the Areopagite in the works of Gregory Palamas: On the question of a 'Christological corrective' and related matters", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 46, 2002, 163–190; Hierodiakon N. Sakharov, "The Uncreated Light in Palamas and in Elder Sophrony" in *Ο Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς στην Ιστορία και το Παρόν*, ed. Georgios I. Mantzaridis (Athos: Vatopaidou Monastery, 2000), 307-318. Georgios Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984). The "Dionysian" variety of thought which led to the concept of *theosis* and *hesychasm* can be observed in the visions of uncreated, divine light experienced by a monk Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022). His works had a long-lasting legacy especially in Slavic world and above all in the Grand-principality of Moscow: Hilarion Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and the Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 169-174; 215-240; 278-281.

[9] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy "Mediaeval Aesthetic: I. Dionysius the Pseudo-Aeropagite, and Ulrich Engelberti of Strasburg", *The Art Bulletin*, 17:1, 1935, 31-47; Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 53-58; Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 18-22, 55-58; Jeffrey F.

addressed without detailed critical inquiry about its influences on specific accomplishments. An especially controversial question is the relation between Dionysius' texts and architecture. Most scholars recognize highly complex theological and iconographical programs of medieval architecture and its monumental decoration.[10] Nonetheless, it remains highly speculative how and to what extent the creators of architecture were informed by Dionysius' works. For example, a Serbian monk Isaiah is credited with the first translation of Dionysius' work into Old Church Slavonic in 1371.[11] Isaiah's numerous translations reached not only Serbia but also Bulgaria and Russia.[12] However, the Dionysian angelic hierarchy was painted in

Hamburger, "'To Make Women Weep' Ugly Art as 'Feminine' and the Origins of Modern Aesthetics," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 31, 1997, 9-33, esp. 22-23, with further references. On the Dionysian legacy in Byzantine art: Louth, "Reception of Dionysius", with references to Gervase Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (London: John Murray, 1963), and John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997). To this list we may add: Viktor V. Bychkov, *Vizantiyskaya estetika* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977); Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2001); Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the limits of representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002); Eric D. Perl, "'…That Man Might Become God': Central Themes in Byzantine Theology," in *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantium*, ed. Linda Safran (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 39-57; Tania Velmans, *La visione dell'invisibile: l'immagine bizantina o la trasfigurazione del reale: lo spazio, il tempo, gli uomini, la morte, le dottrine* (Milano: Jaca book, 2009).

[10] Among scholars interested in interpretation of medieval church architecture in the light of concurrent theological and philosophical questions are: Christos Yannaras, "Teologia apofatica e architettura Bizantina" in *Symposio Cristiano* (Milan, 1971), 104-112; Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 231-264; Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*; Panayotis A. Michelis, *Aisthētikós: Essays in Art, Architecture, and Aesthetics* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977), 123-181; Id., *An Aesthetic Approach to Byzantine Art* (London: Batsford, 1955); Piero Scazzoso, *Ricerche sulla struttura del linguaggio dello Pseudo-Dionigi l'Areopagita* (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1967), esp. the fourth chapter "Il linguaggio del *Corpus*, l'architettura e l'iconografia bizantina", 133-149; Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Latrobe, PA: Archabbey Press, 1951); Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 3-58; 130-135.

[11] Milosavljević, "Basic Philosophical Texts", 79-102, esp. 85.

[12] At least fifty copies of Isaiah's translation have been preserved in Russian libraries alone, while more than seventy copies, including those in Serbia and Bulgaria are attested: Ševčenko, "Remarks", 321-345, esp. 330, note 22; Djordje Trifunović, "Areopagitova simvolika čovečjeg tela u prevodu inoka Isaije [La

Serbian medieval architecture even before Isaiah's translation of 1371.[13] Louth has suggested that religious images served also as a "linguistic filter" (or rather linguistic interface) that linked Greek with Slavic Orthodox Christians, especially after the iconoclastic controversy of the ninth century.[14] Does this mean that the knowledge of Dionysian themes came by employing itinerant building and painting workshops that repeatedly used recognizable and accepted church design and monumental decoration, which ultimately derived from Dionysian thought? If so, did such practices precede a formal exchange of intellectual ideas? Did artisans lack an intimate understanding of Dionysian theology and philosophy? Possibly, in some cases, but not necessarily always. Byzantine artists often confuse cherubim and seraphim by depicting them as visually identical with six, many-eyed wings, and by making a differentiation only through inscriptions. Peers argues that such iconography diverged from Dionysian references to angels and derived not from texts but from the liturgy of John Chrysostom, who mentions "the cherubim, the seraphim, six-winged and many-eyed."[15]

A unique surviving fresco of the *Anastasis* from Dečani monastery (ca. 1340) is an illustrative opposing example that shows a highly sophisticated and direct depiction of a Dionysian theme—angels holding discs, presumably mirrors.[16] According to Gavrilović, the bright and untarnished mirrors, here describe the role of angels in receiving and reflecting the light and beauty of God.[17] In turn, angels, as mediators between God and humans, are mirrors in which the image of God is reflected.[18] Such a maturely developed angelic theme as in Dečani would require a deep understanding of Dionysian thought either by its patrons, in this case

symbolique du corps humain dans la traduction des textes de l'Aéropagite par le moine Isaija]", *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta: Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines*, 45, 2008, 243-251, see also note 2.

[13] Branislav Todić, *Serbian Medieval Painting: The Age of Milutin* (Belgrade: Draganić, 1999), 87-93; Smiljka D. Gabelić, *Ciklus arhandjela u vizantijskoj umetnosti* (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1991), 18-19; Svetozar Radojčić, *Uzori i dela starih srpskih umetnika* (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1975), 262.

[14] Louth, "Cappadocian Fathers and Dionysius", 271-281, esp. 272.

[15] Peers, *Subtle Bodies*, 47-49.

[16] This theme has been studied and convincingly presented by Zaga Gavrilović, "Discs Held by Angels in the Anastasis at Dečani" in: Id., *Studies in Byzantine and Serbian Medieval Art* (London: The Pindar Press, 2001), 181-197.

[17] DN IV.22. See Gavrilović, *Discs Held by Angels*, 181-197, esp. 186, with further references.

[18] CH III.2, EH III.10.

Greek-fluent Serbian kings Stefan Dečanski (r. 1321-1331) and his son
Stefan Dušan (r. 1331-1354), or by the anonymous artists who painted the
fresco, or by both the patrons and artists.[19] Whether this understanding
reflects the values of a cultural milieu or formal education again may
remain unknown.

   One of the major problems in understanding the transmission of the
Dionysian legacy in arts and architecture is our limited knowledge about
medieval artisans and their training in the liberal arts, especially in the
Christian East. In the West, various texts, especially from the late
medieval period, discuss architectural projects, their aesthetics and
symbolism, building accounts, records of hereditary building guilds as
well as the constitution of mason's lodges.[20] In the East, an apparent lack
of surviving textual references about the training and education of
architects resulted in conclusions that by the ninth century the professional
architect was replaced by essentially a savvy technician who lacked any
theoretical training.[21] Yet, the elaborate architecture and complex programs
of the buildings themselves witness that, even if the social status of an
architect often deteriorated in the middle ages, it would be superficial to
dismiss altogether the theory behind architecture.[22] When in 1400, the

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[19] Svetozar Radojčić, *Staro srpsko slikarsvtvo* (Beograd: Nolit, 1966), 136
acknowledged the presence of numerous artists in Dečani. The artists working on
the dome and frescos in the naos were certainly well-informed, but not the best at
the time. They copied older icons and frescoes. More in: Branislav Todić and
Milka Čanak-Medić, *Manastir Dečani* (Beograd: Muzej u Prištini, 2005), 460.

[20] Teresa G. Frisch, "The Architect of the First Centuries of the Gothic Period" in
Gothic Art 1140–c. 1450: Sources and Documents (Torronto-Buffalo-London:
University of Toronto Press and Medieval Academy of America, 1997), 43-61;
Spiro Kostof, "The Architect in the Middle Ages, East and West" in *The Architect:
Chapters in the History of the Profession*, ed. Spiro Kostof (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1977), 59-95; Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 3-20, 219-226;
Milka Čanak-Medić, "Teorijska sprema i stepen obrazovanja srednjovekovnih
graditelja [Connaissances théoriques et degrée d'éducation des contremaîtres du
Moyen Age]", *Zbornik zaštite spomenika culture: Recueil des travaux sur la
protection des monuments historiques*, 18, 1967, 5-26.

[21] See, for example: Robert Ousterhout, *Master Builders of Byzantium* (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1999), 39-58, with further references.

[22] Fil Hearn, *Ideas that Shaped Buildings* (Cambridge, MA-London: The MIT
Press, 2003), 2-3; Miloš R. Perović, *Antologija teorija arhitekture XX veka*
(Belgrade: Gradjevinska knjiga, 2009), iii-iv; Stefaan van Liefferinge, "The
Hemicycle of Notre-Dame of Paris: Gothic Design and Geometrical Knowledge in
the Twelfth Century", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 69:4,
2010, 490-507; Paul Binski, "'Working by Words Alone': The Architect,
Scholasticism and Rhetoric in Thirteenth-Century France" in *Rhetoric Beyond*

architect of the Cathedral of Milan, Jean Mignot, defended the need for geometry in architectural design, he shouted "*Ars sine scientia nihil est*", and thus confirmed that, without theory, architecture is irrelevant.[23] The forms of architectural theory in medieval times, however, remain obscure.[24]

Similarly limited and confusing is our knowledge about the medieval forms of art appreciation and the use of theological and philosophical texts as a guide to understanding art and architecture.[25] Partially because of the Byzantine iconoclasms of the eighth and ninth centuries, which spurred debates on the use of icons, we have a relatively good number of sources that discuss visual arts in relation to their theological-philosophical essence and to church practices from that period. During the iconoclastic controversy, Dionysius' work could have been used not only as a pro-art argument as in the much studied works of John Damascene, Theodore the Studite and other iconophiles,[26] but also as an argument against art. The latter can be exemplified by the account of Ignatius Monachos in his discussion about the fifth-century mosaic of the Thessalonian monastery of Latomou (also known as Hosios David) which shows the tetramorph. Monk Ignatius states that "anyone who wishes to liken these to heavenly

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Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14-51.

[23] James S. Ackerman, "*Ars Sine Scientia Nihil Est*: Gothic Theory of Architecture at the Cathedral of Milan", *The Art Bulletin*, 31:2, 1949, 84-111. Perović, *Antologija*, iii-iv.

[24] Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 97, claims that medieval builders did not have any theoretical knowledge.

[25] During medieval times, rhetorical descriptions (ekphraseis) were the basic form of art critique, essentially stemming from ancient philosophy. Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2009); Jaś Elsner, "Introduction: The Genres of Ekphrasis", *Ramus*, 31, 2002, 1-18; Ruth Webb, "The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor and Motion in Ekphraseis of Church Buildings", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 53, 1999, 59-74; Liz James and Ruth Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium", *Art History*, 14, 1991, 1–17; Henry Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 28, 1974, 111-140; G. Downey, "Ekphrasis" in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. T. Klausner, vol. 4 (Stuttgart, 1959), 921-44.

[26] Louth, "Cappadocian Fathers and Dionysius", 271-281; Ivanović, *Symbol and Icon*, 34-49. Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 107-123, suggests that Byzantine understandings of icons fluctuated between Dionysian (Neoplatonic) and Aristotelian thought.

powers will not be in want of examples [art images], as this is clearly explained by the learned theologian Dionysius."[27]

Medieval people seldom wrote about architecture, its theological-philosophical essence, or the sources of inspiration for specific solutions. We are extremely fortunate to learn how Abbot Suger, whose name is closely linked to the infamous first Gothic church of St Denis (1144), was inspired by Dionysius' theology, mostly because Suger erroneously believed that Denis, a legendary apostle of Gaul, and Dionysius the Areopagite were one and the same person.[28] Suger's poetic verses from his treatise *De Administratione* (1144-49) provide a retrospective firsthand account of his intentions and accomplishments in the creation of Gothic style: "For bright is that which is brightly coupled with the bright, And bright is the noble edifice which is pervaded by the new light."[29] Though never explicitly quoting Dionysius, Suger's notion of light and brightness,[30] through which physical light reveals divine light, is closely intertwined with the meaning of the dynamics and physicality of light in the church. Suger initiated the Gothic style in architecture that emphasized height and luminosity, and that is highly reminiscent of the Dionysian concept of anagogical (upward-leading) illumination—both physical and spiritual.[31] Revealing that the design of the church of St Denis is conceptual, Abbot Suger compared it to Mount Zion and by extension to Heavenly

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[27] Ignatius Monachos, *Narr. De imag. Christi in monast. Latomi*, 6ff from Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Torronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press and Medieval Academy of America, 2009), 155-156, citation on 155.

[28] It was art historian Erwin Panofsky who suggested the pervasive influence of Dionysian work on Abbot Suger and the creation of the Gothic Style in his seminal book, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St Denis and Its Art Treasures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), esp. 17-26. Others are suggesting that Abbot Suger's knowledge of Dionysian work and its influence on the creation of Gothic style were non-existent or rather nominal: Christoph Markschies, *Gibt es eine "Theologie der gotischen Kathedrale"?: nochmals, Suger von Saint-Denis und Sankt Dionys vom Areopag* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1995); Peter Kidson, "Panofsky, Suger and St Denis", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 50, 1987, 1-17.

[29] Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 51.

[30] Perhaps more precise definition in Dionysius terminology would be luminosity as a reference to potency of light.

[31] See also: Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 81-83; L. Michael Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 158-164.

Jerusalem.[32] What is even more impressive is that Suger also fervently compared the church of St Denis to the Constantinopolitan cathedral Hagia Sophia and its treasures, which he personally had never seen.[33]

Byzantine authors like court historian Procopius or the poet Paul Silentarius, who wrote firsthand accounts of Hagia Sophia at the time of its design in the sixth century, emphasized the role of light as spiritual content for architecture, yet made no direct references to Dionysius the Areopagite.[34] To acknowledge further how our perspective is severely convoluted, it is enough to mention that presumably the Franks learned about Dionysius the Areopagite for the first time during the iconoclastic controversy.[35] In 827 Iconoclastic Byzantine Emperor Michael II the Stammerer (r. 820-829) —himself a member of the Cappadocian Christian sect that followed Jewish rites—sent a Greek manuscript of Dionysius' works to King Louis the Pious (r. 778-840). From there, the book has been translated and revised in Latin on several occasions by the abbot of St Denis Hilduin (775-840), Neo-Platonist philosopher, poet and theologian John Scotus Eriugena (c. 815-877), theologians Hugh (c. 1096-1141) and his student Richard (c. 1173) of Saint-Victor, and other scholars and

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[32] Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 105, 227, 241.

[33] Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 65. At least during the Second Crusade (1147), the Franks had a firsthand encounter with the Byzantine celebration of St Dionysius in Constantinople and became familiar with Hagia Sophia. Deno John Geanakoplos, *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 362-363. Alexei Lidov, "The Creator of the Sacred Space as a Phenomenon of Byzantine Culture" in *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale*, ed. Michele Bacci (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 2007), 135-176, esp. 141, argues that Abbot Suger considered the Byzantine concept of the creation of space rather than specific architectural elements of Hagia Sophia as a source of inspiration for St Denis.

[34] Procopius, *Buildings*. Transl. H. B. Dewing, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), I.i.15-78; Paulus Silentarius, *Descr. S. Sophiae* from Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 80-91. See also: John Meyendorff, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Byzantine Religious Thought", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 47, 1993, 69-81, esp. p. 77.

[35] Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 18, with reference to Galenus' *Areopagitica*. Gregory the Great (540-604) also refers to Dionysius' discussion on angels. He even may have brought a copy of his works from Constantinople to Rome, though this remains unverifiable. Jean Leclercq, "Influence and Noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages," in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, 25-32, esp. 26.

theologians.[36] These individuals, however, recurrently had only limited command of the Greek language and often used Byzantine commentaries on Dionysius and other Neoplatonic sources to aid their translations. After the fourth crusade (1204), mutual cultural contacts between the Byzantine East and the Medieval West intertwined them further. In 1408, the abbey of St Denis received yet another Greek manuscript of Dionysios the Areopagite, presented as a diplomatic gift by Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologos (r. 1391-1425) via his ambassador Manuel Chrysoloras (c. 1355-1415).[37] Chrysoloras is also known for teaching Greek at the Italian Universities, for his translation of Plato's *Republic* into Latin, and for his influences on the revival of Platonic ideas during the Italian Renaissance, all at the time of the *hesychast* movement in Byzantium. Therefore, although overlapping at critical points of time, art and architectural accomplishments that may have been informed by Dionysian legacy in the Christian East and West could have had independent, though not mutually exclusive, developments.[38]

2. Dionysian Themes in Architecture

The Dionysian legacy can be followed not only through the linear study of the dispersion and reception of Dionysian texts and ideas, but also through its potency within religious, spiritual and creative practices—orthopraxy.[39] Despite all the controversies, it seems plausible that some

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[36] Leclercq, "Influence and Noninfluence", 25-32; René Roques, *L'univers*; Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 16; Eco, *Art and Beauty*, 18-22, 55-58.

[37] Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 192-195, with references; Robert S. Nelson, "The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts, ca. 1200-1450", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 49, 1995, 209-235.

[38] Deno J. Geanakoplos, "Some Aspects of the Influence of the Byzantine Maximos the Confessor on the Theology of East and West", *Church History*, 38:2, 1969, 150-163. Architectural historian Richard Krautheimer provides a very critical view on the Dionysian legacy on architectural design in the West starting from Hilduin in "The Carolingian Revival of Early Christian Architecture", *The Art Bulletin*, 24:1, 1942, 1-38. Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 150-151, reflects on Dionysian theology on the architectural design of Gothic churches, occasionally calling upon Byzantine artistic influences. See also: Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 81-83.

[39] Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Mediation, Rhetoric, and Making of Images 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-3 acknowledges the co-existence of orthodoxy which relies on canonical texts it

specifically Dionysian themes were used in medieval architecture and monumental decoration. The Dionysian theme of light plays a major role, which arguably can counterpart the theme of a flying buttress in Viollet-le-Duc's theory of Gothic architecture.[40] However, because the theme of light in medieval architecture is so pervasive, as it also overlaps with concepts of light stemming from sources other than the Dionysian *Corpus*, it deserves a book-length discussion in its own right. Here, by pointing to a number of selected medieval churches (12th to 14th centuries), we briefly outline other important Dionysian themes which are seldom mentioned in relation to medieval architecture—hierarchy, symbolism, and apophaticism.[41]

Hierarchy

Dionysius first introduced the theme and concept of hierarchy (ἱεραρχία).[42] The concept, at the time a neologism, roughly defined the sacred rank, which tended to explain the angelic (CH) and ecclesiastical ranks (EH), in particular. *The Celestial Hierarchy* presents detailed, though not fully systematized, explanations of three threefold groups of angels circling around God and organized from up downwards: seraphim, cherubim, thrones; dominions, powers, authorities; and principalities,

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explains and orthopraxy as a set of experiences and techniques, which can never be completely articulated in texts but are based on practicing orthodoxy as a way of life. Orthopraxis as a concept applies to any craft, which "can only be learned by repetitive practice and complete familiarization of exemplary master's techniques and experiences." Citation on p. 1.

[40] Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens sur l'architecture*, 2 vols. (1863; repr. Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg Press, 1965); Stephen Murray, "Notre-Dame of Paris and the Anticipation of Gothic", *The Art Bulletin*, 80:2, 1998, 229-253; Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 50-58.

[41] Ivanović, *Symbol and Icon*, 22 and note 32 explains how *apophatic* theology is often equated with negative theology, which denies any possibility of knowing God. Within Orthodox thought, however, *apophatic* theology is not exactly the same as agnosticism, because of the belief that through the Holy Spirit humankind may achieve knowledge of God, otherwise unknown, via human logic. John Meyendorf, *Byzantine Theology*, 15ff further shows that the Greek philosophical notion of the apophasis differs from the Christian notion which allows for positive meeting with the Unknown. Perl, *Theophany*, 5-16 provides an excellent discussion about the philosophical *apophaticism* that reasons about God beyond being and intelligibility. In this paper, I opt to use the term *apophaticim* instead of negative theology.

[42] Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 16, 73; Perl, *Theophany*, 65-81.

archangels, angels.[43] This theme of hierarchy introduced two crucial topics in the Christian tradition—the hierarchical organization and method for interpretation of visual symbols and their roles.[44] As mediators, literally messengers, between God and humankind, angels are often represented in humanoid and material forms; yet never incarnate they are truly immaterial.[45]

Angels as pure intellects[46] stand for a symbol in a generic way— something essentially unknowable that reveals information. As a methodological tool for understanding reality, Dionysian hierarchy and its related terminology such as order, supra/superordinated-coordinated-subordinated, higher-lower, open to understanding the various forms of realities—celestial, ecclesiastical, ontological[47]—including the microcosmic reality of a church building. The theme of angelic hierarchy is probably the most developed and most explicit of all Dionysian themes, potentially because the angelic themes have a long-developed tradition in pagan and Abrahamic religions in the Mediterranean.[48] Of all Dionysian themes, the angelic hierarchy also seems distorted the least by Christological interpretations.[49]

Art historians have already noticed the inclusion of angelic hierarchy that stems from Dionysian legacy in medieval churches.[50] Developing the idea of the celestial world in artistic form, at the apex of the dome with its connotations of cosmos or the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Byzantines frequently represented, surrounded by angelic figures, Christ Pantokrator (literally "the Ruler of All") ruling the universe He had created and redeemed. Hovering over the interior, such imagery emphasized the overarching potency and importance of the angelic hierarchy. Illustrative and developed examples are in the Late Byzantine churches of the Virgin

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[43] CH VI.1-IX.4, 200C-261D.

[44] Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 16, 73; Perl, *Theophany*, 101-110.

[45] Peers, *Subtle Bodies*, 1-60, esp. 17.

[46] CH I.3, 121C-124A. Perl, *Theophany*, 101.

[47] Perl, *Theophany*, 65-81, esp. 65.

[48] Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 43-69; Peers, *Subtle Bodies*, 1-60, with references.

[49] Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 74-77.

[50] Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 155; Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1976); Suzy Dufrenne, "Les programmes iconographiques des coupoles dans les églises du monde byzantin et postbyzantin", *L'Information d'Histoire de l'Art*, 5, 1965, 185-199; Todić, *Serbian Medieval*, 87-96; Efthalia C. Constantinides, *The Wall Paintings of the Panagia Olympiotissa at Elasson in Northern Thessaly* (Athens: Canadian Archaeological Institute at Athens, 1992), 91-98.

Parigoritissa in Arta (ca. 1290) and the Virgin Olympiotissa at Ellason, Thessaly (1295-1296), where the bust of Christ Panokrator is surrounded by different orders of angels. In Olympiotissa, the central medallion of Christ Pantokrator surrounded by two concentric zones with angels is even reminiscent of the triplets from Dionysian hierarchy.

Some of the most impressive monumental images of the heavenly hierarchy are preserved in Serbian churches such as Bogorodica Ljeviša in Prizren (1309-1313), the church of the Dormition at Gračanica (ca. 1311-1321), Staro Nagoričino (ca. 1313-1318), Kraljeva crkva at Studenica monastery (ca. 1314), and the *katholikon* of the Hilandar monastery on Mount Athos (ca. 1321). Thrones, cherubim, seraphim, and angels are usually represented as celebrants of heavenly liturgy encircling God, "leader of all understanding and action",[51] underlining the concordance of earthly and celestial liturgy in words, images and rites.[52] Archangels are occasionally identified by their names—Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael. Dressed in regal, clerical, or military garments angels often hold various attributes (orbs, candles, scrolls, censors, spoons, chalices, fans and other liturgical instruments). Thus, they all emphasize various sensitive ways in which they proclaim intelligible reality to the people—via contemplation-internal senses, sight, temperature, speech, hearing, smell, taste, touch, or movement. The liturgical interpolations of the *Trisagion* hymn ("holy, holy, holy"), Old Testament references, and prophetic visions of God (Ezekiel 1, 4-11, Isaiah 6, 2-3; 6-7) certainly informed this angelic imagery.[53] However, the Dionysian exegesis about angelic role and sensitive ways of communication with humankind should not be underestimated.

Developed angelic imagery, inspired by Byzantine solutions, has been revealed in Norman churches in Sicily.[54] Cefalù cathedral (1131-48) and the palatial chapel of King Roger II (1095-1154) in Palermo (1142/3) both display Christ Panotkrator surrounded by an angelic hierarchy. The dome of the Cappella Palatina shows a monumental medallion of Christ Pantokrator at the apex of the dome, encircled by eight angels differentiated by their distinctive inscriptions and attributes. Because Cefalù cathedral does not have a dome, the monumental image of Christ is in the apse, surrounded by angelic figures in the register below and in the groined vault of the apse. Thus, angels visually and spatially frame the image of Christ Pantokrator. A similar solution is observable in Monreale

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[51] CH III.2, 165A.

[52] Todić, *Serbian Medieval*, 92, with references to seminal works on the topic.

[53] Todić, *Serbian Medieval*, 87-96; Constantinides, *Panagia Olympiotissa*, 91-98.

[54] Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, 64-66.

Cathedral (begun in 1174, built by 1183/84) founded by a cousin of Roger II, William II, the last Norman king of Sicily (r. 1166 to 1189). Here, the monumental image of Christ Pantokrator in the apse is again surrounded by angels in the register below Christ and throne, cherubim, seraphim and angels in the soffit of the framing triumphal arch.

Within Gothic design, the Dionysian triplets were over time enriched by other Neoplatonic and scholastic themes and may have resulted in the use of tripartite elevation and triple entrances, as in the churches of St Denis (1140) and Chartres (1193-1250).[55] At Chartres, an integrated angelic hierarchy showing cherubim, seraphim, and angels surround Christ in Majesty over the main portal of the western façade and the Last Judgment over the main portal of the southern façade. Moreover, the Chartres cathedral has nine portals and was initially conceived as a nine-towered structure.[56] The very disposition of nine chapels around choir in St Denis responds to the Dionysian angelic choir.[57] Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no medieval church has all nine distinctive types of the angelic hierarchy literally shown in threefold arrangement. This may be partially due to the lack of detailed visual descriptions of each angelic type in Dionysius' writing, but also to architects' need to reconcile visual, spatial and temporal realities of the church design in order to convey the "celestial" hierarchy in architecture.

The concept of hierarchy and its derivative theme of triplets can be re-examined not only in terms of hierarchical depictions of angels in monumental church programs, but also in terms of hierarchical organization of the entire monumental program within one church. Only limited evidence about the interior organization and decoration of Byzantine churches is available because most of them were deprived of their original decoration by the depredations of iconoclastic disputations, transformation of churches into mosques, wars and natural disasters. Nevertheless, Demus reveals an indisputable hierarchical organization of the mosaic program of middle Byzantine churches (mid-9th-12th c).[58] The three best preserved examples—those of Hosios Loukas at Phokis (1011

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[55] Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 154-156, 201, 203.

[56] John James, *The Master Masons of Chartres* (Sydney-New York: West Grinstead, 1990), 75.

[57] Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 139-140 further connects the consecration ceremony of St Denis which included two hemicycles of bishops—nine surrounding the archbishop in the choir and nice officiating in the crypt—with the Dionysian angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

[58] Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, 16-30. See also Scazzoso, *Ricerche*, 133-149.

or 1022?), Nea Moni of Chios (1042-1056), and the Church of the Dormition at Daphni Monastery (ca. 1080–1100)—confirm a codified interior decoration divided into three major zones, with the most sacred at the top. In fact, the entire concept of the architectural design follows the Dionysian hierarchy starting from above and moving downwards.[59] The upper zones of the church edifice, consisting of the cupolas, high vaults, and the semi-dome of the apse represented the heavenly realm, and were consequently adorned with images of Christ, the Mother of God, angels, prophets, and apostles. The middle zone, consisting of vaults, and wall areas of the cross-arms, was usually reserved for narrative scenes of the life and ministry of Christ. The third, and lowest zone was filled with images of apostles, martyrs, saints, prophets, and patriarchs in busts, half-length portraits, or full-size standing figures, often unframed, providing the illusion that they occupy the same space as the congregation in the church. These images together within the Divine Liturgy coalesced into a complex entity, which within the sacred space of the church revealed the mysteries of God's overarching saving Love.[60] Better preserved Norman appropriations of this Byzantine scheme in churches in Sicily suggest that the Byzantines set the standards for the creation of sacred space in the Mediterranean. The sacred space was arranged following a hierarchical-cosmic ordering of the Christian universe; a topographical system in which church became an image of the earthly life of Christ (God-incarnate); and a liturgical-chronological scheme in which religious images were arranged on the wall surfaces in the sequence of church festivals.[61] No two medieval churches have exactly the same program, but such intertwining of several threads of architectural design indeed requires a highly conceptual approach.

The theme of hierarchy is also observable in the hierarchical structural design of the church buildings themselves. The soaring system of the typical cross-in-square Byzantine church is the expression of the hierarchical system of Christian Orthodox belief. By the Late Byzantine period, some five-domed churches, with pyramidal composition and an attenuating vertical design, emphasized the coinciding of the hierarchical monumental decoration with architectural design. An impressive example is a five-domed church at Gračanica where the angelic hierarchy is

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[59] Michelis, *Aisthētikós*, 123-140, esp. 133-134; Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, 231-264.

[60] Dionysian theme of Love is yet another constituent element of his philosophy which is not discussed here.

[61] Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, 14-30. See also Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 3-20 for the discussion of a Gothic church as heavenly image.

distributed on the central dome and on four smaller domes with the images of thrones, seraphim and angels.[62] Compactly proportioned, so that four smaller and lower domes are more-or-less an equal distance from the central dome and vertical focus of the church, simultaneously the church maintains the developed tri-partite horizontal hierarchical organization: narthex—nave—triple sanctuary.[63] Gračanica and similar churches such as the Hagioi Apostoloi in Thessaloniki (1310-14), therefore, point to an increasing level of sophistication of church builders and patrons in understanding the questions of spatial hierarchy. The Dionysian concept of hierarchy understood as the graded order eventually resulted in an interest in height and a progressive vertical design and is perhaps more evident in Gothic architecture. Byzantine churches with centralized, compact shapes and domical forms of their constituent elements, seemingly responded better to the Dionysian concept of "all-inclusive" hierarchy as "a radiant display that reaches out from God throughout the whole of the created order and draws it back into union with him."[64]

Symbolism

The Dionysian theme of symbols ($\sigma\acute{\nu}\mu\beta o\lambda a$) refers to sensible representations of God and divine, resonating with various Biblical and liturgical references.[65] This "iconic" theme is especially appealing for the creation and reception of religious architecture. Thus, William Durandus (ca. 1230-1296), a theorist of canon law, provides one of the rare medieval architectural treatises on *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments* (1286) and connects architectural symbolism directly to Dionysius' work.[66] In contrast to Abbot Suger, who made allusions to the Dionysian concept of light, Durandus examines particularly the symbolism

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[62] Branislav Todić, *Gračanica: Slikarstvo* (Beograd-Priština: Prosveta-Jedinstvo, 1988), 80-98.

[63] Slobodan Ćurčić, *Gračanica: Arhitektura* (Beograd-Priština: Prosveta-Jedinstvo, 1988; English version 1979), 100-129.

[64] Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 30 with reference to Dionysius (CH III.1-2, 164D-165A).

[65] Perl, *Theophany*, 101.

[66] William Durandus, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments: A translation of the first book of the Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), chapter VI. Inductive argument, lxiv-lxvi. On the importance of Durandus' treatise on architecture: "William Durandus from *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments* (1286)" in *Architectural Theory*, vol. 1. *An Anthology from Vitruvius to 1870*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Malden, MA-Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 24-25.

and design of the church sanctuary in reference to the Holy of Holies of the Jewish Temple and the need for the sanctuary screens that distinguished this holiest place of a church, "even if we do not know what sorts of screens really existed."[67] Durandus understands that "ancient authors" including Dionysius provide only incidental references for the church symbolism, but he acknowledges the pervasive and constant use of this symbolism. Durandus' brief discussion on the Dionysian legacy in the symbolism of churches is, nevertheless, extremely informative because he rightly recognizes at least two elements critical for the theory of architecture: 1) the type (τύπος) and its derivative archetype and antitype; and 2) the use of veils and screens (παραπέτασμα, προβάλλειν, προβεβλημένον). Both are crucial philosophical terms from the Dionysian *Corpus*,[68] here linked with an architectural "taxonomy" that includes its physical aspects.

Within the Dionysian thought which may be applied to architectural theory as well, the archetype presents the original type (pattern), from which copies are made.[69] Lidov has also pointed to the comparative Hebrew term *tavnit* (image, model, project, also pattern) which was used for the entire design and creation of the Tabernacle as a prototype of sacred space created by God himself (cf. Exodus 25-40).[70] Thus, in both philosophical Neoplatonic and religious Judeo-Christian terms, the archetype stands equally for idea (εἶδος, ἰδέα) and form (icon, image, figure) (εἰκών, σχῆμα, μόρφωσις) of the divine mind prior to creation.[71] Within Orthodox thought, the archetype can be apprehended by human intellect when aided by divine grace, yet it remains independent, often different and even contradictory, though not mutually exclusive, of the antitype foreshadowed and identified by the type. In this context, not only

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[67] Durandus, *The Symbolism*, chapter VI. Inductive argument, lxvi.

[68] CH II; Ep. VIII.

[69] The discussion of type and typology in architecture, which is still wrapped in its own inconsistent terminology, here mostly derives from Paul-Alan Johnson, *The Theory of Architecture: Concepts, Themes & Practices* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994), 288-295.

[70] Lidov, *The Creator*, 135-176, 366-371, esp. 144.

[71] "The foundational principle of Neoplatonic thought is the doctrine that to be is to be intelligible. The identification of being, τὸ ὄν, that which is, as that which can be apprehended by νόησις, intellection, is the basis not only for the Platonic and Neoplatonic identification of being as form or idea (εἶδος, ἰδέα), and the associated view that the sensible is less than completely real, but also for the Neoplatonic insistence that the One or Good, the source of reality, is itself 'beyond being.'" Perl, *Theophany*, 5.

do Old Testament concepts and forms prefigure New Testament "revelations," but also the tabernacle and the Holy of Holiest of the Jewish Temple become the type of the Christian sanctuary.[72] This hypothesis has crucial consequences because it defines the Christian church not as antitype of a synagogue or pagan basilica but in continuity with the Jewish Temple, as Durandus suggested in his treatise.

Byzantine theologians influenced by Dionysian work often refocus their discussions about church to Christ.[73] Thus, Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580-662) in his *Mystagogia* and Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 733), in his *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation* likened the specific parts of the church with the human (Christ's) body or with places that mark the events associated with Christ's life and ministry.[74] Similarly, in the twelfth-century West, Hugh of Saint-Victor in his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* centers on the crucified Christ and his humanity.[75] By introducing the Incarnational argument (or "God-made-manifest"),[76] these theologians not only enriched the Dionysian legacy of archetype as simultaneously God and image of God and church as its derivative "type" but also emphasized the importance of the human body in the creation of sacred architecture. In his *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dyonisius remarks that the "form of God raises itself to the imitation of Him in its own measure".[77] He compared images of angels, the active

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[72] See also: Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Theology* (London-New York: T&T Clark-Continuum, 2003).

[73] Pascal Mueller-Jourdan, *Typologie spatio-temporelle de l'ecclesia byzantine: la Mystagogie de Maxime le Confesseur dans la culture philosophique de l'antiquité tardive* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 99-108. The idea that a human being is a micro-cosmos derives essentially from Plato's *Timaeus* and was widely accepted by medieval Christian thinkers and especially enriched with the Incarnational argument. Also, Louth, *Maximus*, 29-31.

[74] *St Germanus of Constantinople on the Divine Liturgy*, ed. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); Maxime le Confesseur, *La mystagogie*, ed. Marie-Lucie Charpin-Ploix (Paris: Migne, 2005).

[75] Hugh De S. Victore, *Commentariorum In Hierarchiam Coelestem S. Dionysii Areopagitae*, PL 175, 930D. See also, Grover A. Zinn, Jr., "Suger, Theology, and the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition" in *Abbot Suger and Saint-Denis*, ed. Paula Lieber Gerson (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 33-40. Moreover, since the ninth century, *Mystagogia* by Maximus the Confessor, in both original Greek and translations, circulated among the Franks. Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 126-127.

[76] Perl, *Theophany*, 101-109, eps. 109.

[77] CH III.1, 164D. Andrew Louth, *The Origins*, 164.

mediators between God and humankind, with human likeness,[78] which was further developed in medieval typological treatises. Within this context, the human scale and haptic measurements are consistently employed in the conceptual and actual design of architectural elements and of the church as a whole.[79] The question of divine measure was, however, differently understood in the West and East.[80]

In Gothic cathedrals, the Neoplatonic proportioning was based primarily on sacred, pure, and "perfect" geometry, which resulted in the overwhelming towering constructions in which human body is literally dwarfed. Even for the largest Byzantine churches, such as Hagia Sophia, all measurements were stable, based on human dimensions (Byzantine imperial feet), which were multiplied but not progressively enlarged. Human intellect and senses crucial for understanding God as the ultimate intellect and creator, as formulated in the Dionysian *Corpus*, thus are further defined within the creation and reception of a Byzantine church. Simultaneously, architecture where both place and time—defined by liturgical rites and human actions—play an important role can be fully considered as a spatial and temporal creation.

The concept of architectural typology as closely intertwined with Dionysian theme can be observed on the level of models and copies in architecture within specific stylistic developments. St Denis is considered the prototype of Gothic style of the Île-de-France, closely tied to the Capetian monarchy.[81] Following general trends in European culture, in the period between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, Serbian rulers built a number of royal *mausolea*. *Joupan* Stefan Nemanja (r. 1169-1196), the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty, built his mausoleum church of the Mother of God at Studenica monastery (begun 1183) in the region of Raška. Recognized as an early example of the unique, so-called "Raška style" in medieval architecture, the church blends Romanesque corbel tables and architectural sculpture with Byzantine spatial concepts and domes. Nemanja's heirs built their subsequent *mausolea* "na obraz Studenice" ["in the image of Studenica"], as Serbian medieval textual sources and architectural accomplishments confirm.[82] Most impressive is

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[78] CH XV.2-9, 329C-340B.

[79] Here, discussion derives mostly from Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, 231-264.

[80] Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 21-60; 209-211; Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, 231-264, with references to Michelis' work.

[81] Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 61-91.

[82] See, for example, reference to "Raška style" church in Banjska in Danilo Drugi, *Životi kraljeva i arhiepiskopa srpskih: Službe*, ed. Gordon M. Daniel and Damjan Petrović, (Beograd: Prosveta, 1988), 142.

that monk Isaiah used the Old Church Slavonic term *obraz* (ѡбразъ) in his translations of the Dionysian *Corpus* as a term for both type and form,[83] thus suggesting its potency within the theoretical discussions of architecture. Although no absolutely exact copy of the Studenica church has been ever built, a steady programmatic set including recognizable architectural elements would become symbolic-semantic elements that define the style. In the medieval concept of typology, comparable to St Denis for Gothic churches,[84] Studenica becomes the (proto)type and subsequent *mausolea* become antitypes.

All individual structures emanated from the ideal, archetypal church which unites both physical and spiritual contents revealed through human activities and liturgical practices performed within the church space. By extension, this concept again confirms the ontological connection between the archetype and its derivatives, here applied in architecture. Following Dionysius' symbolism, there is never an exact resemblance between the archetype and type. The archetypal church, by its definition, however, is defined by its concept of an ideal church, the Heavenly Jerusalem in continuity with the Temple,[85] and revealed through its symbols even if we do not know what sort of architecture it really was, to paraphrase Durandus.[86]

Within the same context, the Dionysian concept of various veils and screens can be understood as "architectonic" symbols, both similar and dissimilar, simultaneously revealing and hiding that which they represent.[87] The rood screens in Gothic churches can be arguably connected with the late medieval phenomenon of using veils and screens in churches, as suggested by Durandus.[88] Architectural "hermeneutics" in the work of the Late Byzantine theologian and major proponent of *hesychasm* Symeon of

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[83] Trifunović, "Areopagitova simvolika", 243-251, esp. 249.

[84] Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 3-20, 6-91, 96.

[85] See also: Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 96 with references to Suger's *De Consecratione* II. 218.

[86] See note 64.

[87] Perl, *Theophany*, 104, with reference to CH I.2, 121B: "For it is not possible that the thearchic ray illumine us otherwise than anagogically cloaked in the variety of the sacred veils."

[88] See, above note 64. Jacqueline Jung, "Seeing through Screens: The Gothic Choir Enclosure as Frame", in: *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon Gerstel (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006), 185-213, does not take into account the Dionysian legacy in the rood screens of Gothic churches. Yet her subtle analysis implies spiritual concepts of light and elevation (anagogical movement) common in Dionysian work.

Thessalonike (d. 1429) was directly inspired by Dionysian work.[89] Symeon of Thessalonike connects Dionysian veils with the architecture of church buildings and the icon screen that separated the sanctuary from the other parts of the church. The iconostasis screen and miniscule design of late Byzantine churches fit into the Dionysian concept that the visible reveals the invisible, intelligible liturgical rites, the sensible realities[90] of the divine here seemingly seamlessly incorporated with the theology of John and the Byzantine liturgy.[91] After the Iconoclasms, the liturgy was reduced to a series of "appearances" of clergy to the faithful, who essentially remained concealed behind the iconostasis most of the time during the liturgy. The liturgical rites and their setting emphasized that the heavenly is to be contemplated from "darkness" until light, the content of all vision, conceals darkness, making it invisible in the realm beyond.[92] As Perl remarked, such paradoxes "capture the very essence of symbolism: to hide what it reveals by revealing it and to reveal what it hides by hiding it."[93] Within the Incarnational context of the church, this typological overarching approach emphasizes that the signifier becomes the signified, as Christ, God-incarnate, "out of the hidden the beyond-being has come forth into manifestation according to us."[94] Moreover, within orthodoxy and orthopraxy, the very essence of the Dionysian idea of the symbolism is taken, as the Church and liturgical life within it are therefore not pure symbols that lead towards non-symbolical union with God, but rather are theophanic symbols imbued with God-incarnate, and thus reality made sensible.[95]

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[89] The literature is increasingly abundant in recent scholarship. See, for example: Nicholas P. Constas, "Symeon of Thessalonike and the Theology of the Icon Screen", in *Thresholds of the Sacred*, 164-183, with references to seminal works on iconostasis.

[90] EH II.3.2.

[91] Meyendorff, *Continuities and Discontinuities*, 69-81, esp. 80; Perl, *Theophany*, 104.

[92] The concept of darkness, which is in close relation to the concept of light, is yet another Dionysian theme, not discussed here.

[93] Perl, *Theophany*, 107.

[94] Ep. III, 1069B. Perl, *Theophany*, 101-109, citation on 109.

[95] Indeed, Orthodox Christians do not consider the Eucharist as a symbol of Christ, but Christ. On the philosophical treatment of the theme: Perl, *Theophany*, 101-109.

Apophaticism

Dionysius distinguishes three types of theology—*kataphatic*, *apophatic*, and symbolic.[96] While the *kataphatic* deals with affirmative thinking about what God is, the *apophatic* is concerned with questions of what God is not in order to reach the inexpressible knowledge of God beyond being. Symbolic theology overlaps with each and links the two. According to Dionysius, the angels, pure intellect, by their seemingly paradoxical, metaphorical extension, are symbols themselves.[97] They take various forms (εἰκών, σχῆμα, μόρφωσις) and meanings. Their "geometric and architectural equipment has to do with their activity in founding, building, and bringing to completion, in fact they have to do with everything connected with the providence which uplifts and returns their subordinates".[98]

In this context, geometry and architectural equipment provide a framework for the Dionysian legacy in medieval "architectural theory." Architectural accomplishments and their sensible qualities serve as a departure point for intelligible contemplation of God, regardless of how "dissimilar" these symbols may be to God. This potency of architecture for uplifting, anagogical contemplation is crucial for understanding its place within the *apophatic* thought.[99]

In his *apophatic* method, Dionysius is concerned with questions of what God is not by using sequences of negations, starting with lowly images most obviously unlike God and ascending towards the negation of the highest attempted affirmations of what God is.[100] Middle and Late Byzantine churches, similarly to concurrent Romanesque and Gothic examples, are remarkable for their monumental decoration, including the growing inclusion of reliefs and architectural sculpture and an overwhelming display of a full range of the cosmos as discussed by Dionysius—from angelic figures via humans to the lowliest creatures such

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[96] Louth, *The Origins*, 154-172, esp. 159-160 with references to MT III, 1032D-1033C.

[97] Perl, *Theophany*, 101-109.

[98] CH XV.5, 333B.

[99] Yannaras, "Teologia apofatica", 104-112. I outline this theme roughly in "Apofatični videz mavzolejev kraljevske dinastije Nemanjićev," *Apokalipsa*, 55-56, 2002, 95-105 [in Slovenian] and "The Apophatic Appearance of Royal Mausolea of the Nemanjić Dynasty", *Annales d'Esthétique*, 41A, 2001-2002, 127-139 [in English].

[100] Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 201.

as worms, from personifications of natural phenomena (winds, clouds) to attempts to record miracles.

Gothic cathedrals are often labeled the "speculum mundi," mirror of the world, reflecting the compendium of human knowledge, transience of the material world and search for the immortal, ultimate, and divine truth. Arguably, this phenomenon and the "encyclopedic" approach in design of religious architecture can be discussed in terms of the revival of Greco-Roman and Late Antique vocabulary in architecture.[101] It also may be tied to a disclosing continuity with the philosophical notion of *apophaticism*, in which the material is not disparaged for its lowliness, as the material realm partakes in immaterial truths of the heavenly.[102] However, in the *apophatic* system even the loftiest qualities of buildings, because of their relative similarity to some aspect of the divine, must be negated because of their ultimate dissimilarity. For example, the Byzantine-Romanesque "hybrid" church of Studenica, praised for its beauty, is literally built of fine marble, which under ideal conditions would grant it longevity, aiming to eternity.[103] The white polished marble of the church glitters and shines in the sunlight, thus confirming the sophisticated use of light without a clearly defined light source, as the supreme beauty that gives light and through light calls to itself.[104] Within this context, the church itself functions as a potent symbol that propels anagogical, uplifting movement, a step in the overall ascent toward the spiritual knowledge and union with God, often expressed through the metaphor of light.[105]

This process, however, was not identified with some spatial three-step movement up, but with the ascending process *into*.[106] The Dionysian threefold "orthopraxy" process of purification, illumination and perfection[107]—or "founding, building and bringing to completion"[108]—

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[101] See, for example, Jean Bony, "What Possible Sources for the Chevet of Saint-Denis?" in *Abbot Suger and Saint-Denis*, 131-143; Jelena Trkulja, *Aesthetics and symbolism of Late Byzantine church façades, 1204-1453.* (PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2004) 101-115, 213-215, with references.

[102] Yannaras, "Teologia apofatica", 104-112; Bogdanović, "Apofatični videz", 95-105 and Bogdanović, "Apophatic Appearance", 127-139; Jean Favier, *The World of Chartres* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1988), 168-173, including references to the role of artists and masons from Dionysius' EH IV.3.

[103] Bogdanović, "Apofatični videz", 95-105, and Bogdanović, "Apophatic Appearance", 127-139.

[104] Bogdanović, "Apophatic Appearance", 127-139, with references to Bičkov, *Vizantiyskaya estetika*.

[105] DN III.1, 680C; CH XII.3, 293B; EH V.3, 504C; MT I.2, 1000A.

[106] Louth, *The Origins*, 154-172; Perl, *Theophany*, 108.

[107] EH V.3, 504B, VI.1-3, 532BC, VI.2.6, 537AC; CH III.3, 165D.

may explain how medieval people reconciled the co-existence of symbolism, *kataphaticism*, and *apophaticism* in architecture. As in the orthodox acceptance of visual images as a meditative aid towards God beyond visible, within orthodoxy the perceptible and material qualities of architecture are not entirely denied. Materiality of architecture is valued for its uplifting role since "it is quite impossible that we humans should, in any immaterial way, rise up to imitate and to contemplate the heavenly hierarchies without the aid of those material means capable of guiding us as our nature requires".[109] This approach is in contrast to the heretic approaches of the dualists such as Paulicians, Bogomils, and Cathars, who eventually denied the need for places of worship in their religious practices.[110]

The builders of medieval churches in particular emphasized their material glory and beauty as inseparable from their *apophatic* aesthetics propelled by their *kataphatic*, material and sensible, and thus also symbolic, values.[111] Such a participatory approach underlines the use of architecture to complement the material with the immaterial world as was done within the liturgy. The material body of architecture acquires significance beyond its nature and allows the beholder to "bring to completion" union with God in the space beyond.[112]

Conclusion

Rethinking the Dionysian legacy in architecture can be summarized in a famous question, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" or the academy with church, as posed by Tertullian (ca. 160-220), an early Christian thinker and polemicist against heresy.[113] The way and mode of

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[108] CH XV.4, 333B.

[109] CH I.3, 121CD.

[110] Yuri Stojanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2000), 148-150, 161-166, 181-190, 222-259.

[111] Louth, *The Origins*, 154-172, esp. 163-165.

[112] Harrington, *Sacred Place*, 201-205; Mircea Eliade, "The World, the City, the House" in *Experience of the Sacred: Reading in the Phenomenology of Religion*, ed. Summer B. Twiss, Walter H. Conser, Jr. (Hanover-London: UPNE, 1992), 188-199.

[113] Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* VII.9 (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1968). In his seminal book Jaroslav Pelikan, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?: Timaeus and Genesis in Counterpoint* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) magisterially discusses the counterpoint of Platonic and Judeo-Christian traditions in European culture.

thinking based on Greek philosophical thought, of which Dionysius texts partake, were very strong in European civilization. The Dionysius *Corpus* tends to reconcile the long-lived pagan and Jewish traditions with Christianity, and this theophanic philosophy lends itself to a better understanding of medieval culture. Even if we are unable to isolate direct influences of Dionysius work on specific architectural accomplishments, the sophisticated solutions throughout the medieval realm reveal an intertwining of classical with Judeo-Christian vocabulary and idioms in architecture. Most importantly, Dionysian texts provide a sound framework for the discussion of elements of medieval "architectural theory." Various interpretative options, based not only on different theological supplements to Dionysian texts and the importance of other textual and liturgical sources, but also on different building and artistic practices may reveal how much churches of Hagia Sophia and St Denis are at the same time dissimilar and similar.

Following Dionysius' explanation that "the sensible sacred things are the represenations of the intelligible things" and that "they lead there and show the way to them,"[114] the reality of medieval architecture is spiritual and conceptual.[115] The material architectural symbols, often stemming from within the particular cultural milieu, are the means by which they are communicated. The Dionysian *Corpus* is not concerned with creative practices and accomplishments, yet artistic and architectural metaphors are present.[116] By making strong and numerous allusions to Biblical passages, the undisputable power of the Dionysian legacy lies in spurring religious thought and practices both in the West and East, evident in various aspects of medieval material culture.

It seems plausible to recognize the pervasive and evocative presence of Dionysian concepts—including those of order, symbolism and *apophaticism*—in architecture and monumental decoration, even though direct influence of Dionysian thought on specific accomplishments most often remains unconfirmable and inconclusive. "The paradox of Dionysian legacy" is that it stems from highly complex philosophical-theological texts open to various and wide interpretations, and thus by their definition, truly on the very threshold between orthodoxy and heresy. It seems that only within orthopraxy, which goes beyond literal adherence to texts and includes religious, liturgical and creative practices (patterns of ritualized behavior and familiarity with design processes, building techniques and

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[114] EH II.3.2, 397C (my translation).

[115] On the spiritual reality see also *St Germanus of Constantinople on the Divine Liturgy*, 26.

[116] Cf. Scazzoso, *Ricerche*, 133-149.

experiences) the Dionysian legacy in medieval architecture can be more fully understood.