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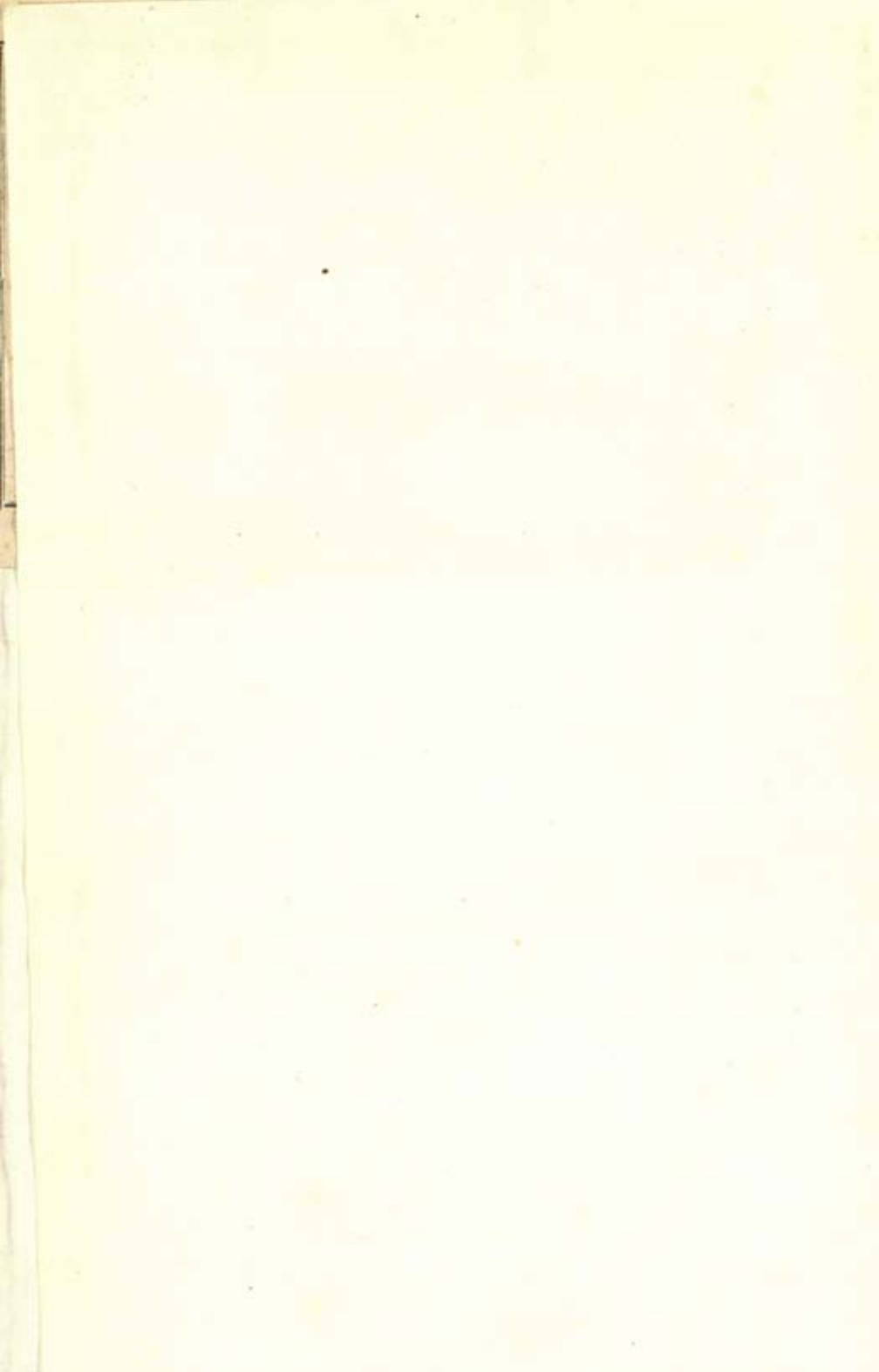
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AN AESTHETIC APPROACH
TO BYZANTINE ART



An
Aesthetic Approach
to
BYZANTINE
ART

428.10
By

P. A. Michelis

With a Foreword by
SIR HERBERT READ
LITT.D., M.A.



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TO
EFFIE,
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FOREWORD

THE reader of this book might be well advised to begin with Part Three, which defines the aesthetic approach to the history of art. Since Hegel first established a philosophy of art, most art historians have realised that it is not sufficient to classify the historical facts into periods, styles and schools: some explanation must be offered for the origin and development of such phases, and they must be related in some convincing manner to the general course of history.

The most considerable attempt to apply such "fundamental concepts" to the history of art has been that of Heinrich Wölfflin whose principal works are now available in English. Professor Michelis, while paying his tribute to this great pioneer, shows the limitations of his historical method, which stopped short at the psychological processes involved in the conception and presentation of the work of art itself. These "categories of perception" are specific to each period, and do not extend beyond the morphology of art. In Professor Michelis's view, we must look beyond the form to the feeling it embodies, and this feeling is a dynamic force which must be identified and related to the basic concepts of the age or civilisation to which it belongs.

Professor Michelis identifies two such basic concepts, whose alternation and dialectical interplay can explain the whole history of art. It is at first with surprise, and then with relief, that we discover that no new phraseology is necessary to describe them—they are designated by the classical terms "sublime" and "beautiful". Beauty we have always had with us, but a scientific age has tended to discard the word to which Longinus first gave currency, and which Burke and Kant (to name no others) found indispensable. Professor Michelis brilliantly and convincingly restores the sublime to its status as an aesthetic category, and he suggests that there is no period or style that cannot be interpreted either as the contemplation of the beautiful or as the experience of the sublime. There are many differences and distinctions to be elaborated in relation to each category, particularly those arising from the opposition between objective and subjective attitudes—differences

that can be expressed as the opposition between form and formlessness, measure and immeasurability, quiescence and dynamism, differentiation and fusion, etc.; "differences that are not external, for they have a deeper meaning which ultimately resolves itself in the contrasts between being and becoming, the complete and the incomplete, cosmos and cosmogony".

Though this book is a very clear and complete survey of the contemporary position in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, its main purpose is to apply the aesthetic categories thus determined to a select period—that of Byzantium. No period in the history of art suffers from so much ignorance, confusion and controversy. It says much for the validity of the aesthetic approach to the history of art that Professor Michelis now for the first time introduces order and clarity into this learned chaos, and there can be no reader who will not emerge from a reading of this book with not only a deeper understanding of the historical development and religious significance of Byzantine art, but also with the same understanding of those periods and civilisations to which the Byzantine is intimately related—the Classical, the Oriental and the Gothic. Byzantium was the meeting-point of East and West, the melting-pot out of which the whole of modern art was to emerge. An understanding of this supremely significant period is therefore fundamental to an understanding of the history of art in general; and here for the first time we have a work that incorporates an exact knowledge of the relevant facts and rises to a comprehensive evaluation of their significance.

HERBERT READ

January, 1955

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

THIS BOOK was first published in Greece in 1946. After so many years its publication in English raised the problem of revision, since—other considerations apart—the book was originally intended for the Greek public. The absence of good Greek translations of the works of certain eminent art-critics had necessitated the inclusion in the Greek edition of some of their basic theories (as, for instance, Wölfflin's on the principles of art, or Panofsky's on perspective as a symbolic form). And it was felt that these need not be treated at quite such length in an English edition. In this translation, therefore, certain alterations have had to be made, and more recent criticisms added. But to have revised the work thoroughly would have entailed not only an arduous task, but also the risk of destroying its original conception, with what qualities and faults it displays.

I am indebted to Mr. Stephen Xydis for the first draft of the translation, to Miss Mary Moschona for giving it its final form, and to Mrs. Jeanne Pacht for reading it through and suggesting certain emendations. It was in part my very sincere gratitude to all three that made me unwilling to proceed to a radical revision, thus entailing their resumption of a task so ably accomplished the first time.

Our combined efforts for its appearance in English sprang from an earnest desire to attract the interest of the English-speaking public to that great religious art of the Eastern Church—the Byzantine Art.

P. A. M.

London, September, 1954

PREFACE

THE ancient Greek spirit triumphed over Rome, and later took on flesh and blood in Byzantium, whose art reflected its splendour.

Byzantium, as an empire, owed its consolidation in some measure to the power of Christianity, which it was the first to embrace. Christianity, in its turn, owed its propagation in the West largely to the Greek spirit, which provided it with its philosophical background. For mediaeval Hellenism directed its philosophical genius wholly towards Christianity; just as it devoted its poetic and musical gifts to hymnody, which formed the basis for the later religious music of the West; Byzantine architecture and painting, again, had their roots in Greek sensibility and nurture and the Early Renaissance was later to draw on them.

Byzantium has therefore been unjustly branded as artistically inferior and sterile. The work it accomplished may shock the worshipper of classical form, but it was none the less great and fundamentally necessary to the subsequent evolution of modern Western civilisation, which had first to assimilate the teachings of Christianity.

If, then, one wishes to follow the true course of Western civilisation, its rhythm and digressions, its recognition and misconception of ancient Greek civilisation (of which, incidentally, it never tires of proclaiming itself the perpetuator), one must discover the deeper significance of Byzantine art.

Finally, the study of Byzantine art is essential if we would grasp contemporary art. In modern architecture, the forms lose their classical articulation in base, shaft and entablature, while matter, space and light are possessed of dynamism. In painting, the abolition of academic perspective and naturalistic chiaroscuro reveals an underlying tendency to let the irrational predominate, or to strive towards the transcendental. These symptoms are not less apparent in modern poetry and music.

The trends of contemporary art have no marked corresponding precedent in European civilisation; we find their definite precursors only in Byzantine art—which as an essentially Greek art preserved the virtues of the classical spirit—so that it affords our contemporaries a significant example.

It was these considerations that led to the present study.

I wish to express my thanks to Prof. George Soteriou, the eminent Greek Byzantine scholar, and Mrs. Maria Soteriou, who showed generous interest in my work and with ready courtesy placed at my disposal both books and photographic material.

Athens, 1946

P. A. M.

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PART ONE

*The Aesthetic Character of
Christian Art*

CHAPTER I

Introduction

UNTIL RECENT TIMES, mediaeval Christian art—Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic—had been ignored, or, still worse, misunderstood. It was looked upon as inferior art, unworthy to be called by the name, in comparison with the art of classical antiquity, of the Italian Renaissance, or of the neo-classic period. The discovery of the prototypes of the Greek ideal—and not the prototypes alone, but even crude Roman copies or superficial imitations of them in neoclassic work—had resulted in the ostracism of Christian art and deprived it of the archaeologist's and the artist's esteem.

This opinion, which had prevailed since the time of the Italian Renaissance, when Vasari characterised Christian art as "barbaric", was frequently voiced as each classical-inspired period brought with it the paradoxical conviction that Christian art should be relegated to limbo—the conviction, it would seem, that as light is to darkness, so classic and Christian art were, inevitably, inimical to each other. Thus, the fanaticism of the humanistic mentality which swayed the West from the Renaissance onwards stigmatised the Middle Ages as a period of darkness and artistic sterility.

That is why Molière, in France of the seventeenth century, called the Gothic monuments "monstres odieux des siècles ignorants", and the German aesthetician Vischer,¹ in the nineteenth century, considered the term "mummies" (adopted in his time) very apt to describe the "ascetic figures with aged features" of Byzantine painting. Finally, Schopenhauer also,² in his aesthetic analysis of architecture, regarded Gothic structures as arbitrary products of personal idiosyncrasy, not objectively composed, since the system of "lintel upon posts" does not predominate and the relation of "burden to support" is not clearly expressed. Gothic cathedrals—through a multitude of flying buttresses transferring

¹ Fr. Vischer, *Aesthetik*, IV, p. 424 (Meyer und Jessen, München, 1922).

² Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, II, ch. 35, pp. 481–88 and 490.

the vault thrusts to the vertical piers, which, with their pyramidal terminations, seem to rise to the infinite—would, in his opinion, have seemed to a Greek the work of barbarians.

No doubt the Greek evoked by Schopenhauer would have expressed just such a criticism since he was, in essence, a fictitious Greek, a projection of the neo-classicist's concepts. The neo-classicists, side by side with their well-justified admiration for classical antiquity, had such stylistic prejudices and so confined an aesthetic judgement that they debarred the appreciation of anything at all different in form from the classical prototypes.

Yet we do not know how the genuine ancient Greek would have judged Christian art. We know, of course, that in the Greece of his day all that was not Greek was barbaric. But this view referred to the spirit rather than the form. The spirit of ancient Greek art was misunderstood first by the Romans, and hence later by the Renaissance and by the neo-classic age. Byzantium, in contrast, was the direct heir of the Greek spirit, while in the West, during the Gothic period, "Atticising" forms appeared (in sculpture at least) which, according to Worringer,¹ indicate a deeper affinity with Greek sensibility than do the works of the Roman *ratio* and *ordo*. For these reasons, the genuine ancient Greek would, in my opinion, regard as barbaric the products, in the first instance, of Roman art, and especially those which sought to imitate outwardly or to exploit Hellenic morphology. Towards Gothic and Byzantine architecture, I venture to say that he would be more favourably inclined, if indeed he did not prove enthusiastic in his appreciation of their sincerity of feeling and their originality of expression. He would attempt, in any case, to understand their meaning, and if he failed to realise the dialectics of their form, he would answer as the Athenians answered St. Paul, when he preached on the Areopagus against idols and of a new God: "We will hear thee concerning this yet again. . . ."

It was mainly thanks to the Romantics that, after many centuries, the "subjective" melody of these "barbaric" works began at last to delight our ears. A Victor Hugo was needed to reveal the beauty of Notre Dame; a Goethe to make us aware of the majestic chords of Strasbourg Cathedral; until in time Christian archaeology indicated the Roman and Oriental elements which Romanesque and Gothic art had borrowed in order to achieve original expression; it showed, moreover, that Byzantine art had imbued

¹ Wilhelm Worringer, *Griechentum und Gotik*.

similar elements with the Hellenic spirit and in transforming them was the first to express the uplift of the Christian mind, as it reached out for the divine—to express, namely, a new ideal.

However, two reasons chiefly impeded the appreciation of Byzantine art. First, the hostility of the Catholic Church towards the Greek Orthodox Church—a hostility which showed itself in attempts to present Byzantine civilisation and its contributions as a mere reflection of Rome's influence; secondly, the comparison on the spot of Byzantine with ancient Greek works of art: a comparison, that is to say, of a world of picturesque beauty, multi-coloured and sensitive, with one of geometric austerity, a marmoreal world of intellect—two worlds at first sight unrelated.

For example, as late as 1908 Louis Bertrand, who had extolled the picturesque environment of classical Greek beauty and who tried not to be influenced by academic stipulations, yet writes about the Church of the Gorgoepekoos in Athens (merely because it is situated at the foot of the Erechtheum and the Parthenon): "This sacred dove-cote has always seemed to me a small, sickly, and unclean monster. Its builders did not even know how to keep the lintels straight; they mutilated the pagan reliefs and wedged them into their masonry and mortar. They cut across the whole splendid scene of a Bacchic dance. . . . In a small town of the Orient I might have condescended to look at such barbaric patch-work (*raccommodage*), but to have met it in Athens!"¹

Christian art, despite the recognition it has recently gained, will continue to baffle even artistically gifted spectators so long as its aesthetic character is not clearly defined. When we look at works of Christian art, our first reaction is that of the conventional lover of antiquity; it is but natural that we should still come under the spell of humanistic education with its unilateral aesthetics. Its art and culture, themselves "anthropocentric", have taught us appreciation only in the light of classical antiquity. Therefore we too, on looking at the mosaics of Byzantine art, seek (secretly where the humanists sought overtly), if not Praxitelean, Phidian, or Michel-angelesque forms, at least their anatomy; and in Byzantine buildings we look, if not for the system of construction and the classic morphology, at least for something of the proportions of the Parthenon, of the *moduli* of Vitruvius, or of the grandiose scope of St. Peter's in Rome. Now, Byzantine painting in presenting unnatural, dematerialised forms, subordinated to a curious

¹ Louis Bertrand, *La Grèce du soleil et du paysage*, p. 86.

perspective, disappoints us. The same may be said of Byzantine architecture. It works with poor materials which it conceals in decorative vestments. It neglects precision in adjustment and geometric regularity in form, and subordinates the proportional articulation of pyramidally graded cubes and domes to pictorial expression. Gothic painting also is unnatural, linear and expressionist. It exhales—as does Gothic architecture with its extreme verticality, that dissolves mass and plays conjuring tricks with the problems of statics—the mystic *maniera gotica*, from which, according to Vasari (who praises God for it), Michelangelo liberated Italy. Little did he realise, as Riegl remarked,¹ that his hero was re-introducing this manner in art under another guise!

For a true perception of the value of Byzantine art and of Christian art in general we need more than the indication of its differences, as compared with classical art, in means of expression, scope and ideals; nor is an account of the historical evolution of the age adequate to prove the inevitability of the transformation which art underwent. All the criteria set up by archaeologists and art historians are necessary but not revealing; as purely logical vehicles, they are inadequate to convey knowledge which, in matters pertaining to art at least, must be felt before it is taught. In this sense, then, archaeologists and art historians put the cart before the horse.

Before we can reveal how Christian art differs from classical, we must first discover that eternal quality about it which can move man today as it did then. And these Christian works must have surely sprung directly from the artistic spirit abroad in their day, since we may sense it vicariously even now on contemplating them. But it is only by revealing their eternal quality to the spectator as “an inherent tendency” in man that we shall divest him of the burden of his humanistic knowledge and enable him, thus freed from any prepossession, to forget himself in a communion with Christian art, in which he will discover and feel its peculiar beauty.

The spectator will then forget, at least transiently, the ancient Greeks and the Renaissance; and by degrees the conviction will grow upon him that the works of Christian art are not necessarily ugly because they are not beautiful in the manner of “classical” works; they express sublimity, not beauty.

Unless we can sense this fundamental difference between the

¹ Alois Riegl, *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*, pp. 79–80 (Vienna, 1923).

aesthetic character of the one and the other art, their dissimilarity must continue to be, as in the past, the main obstacle to a full understanding of the kind of expression peculiar to Byzantine art. While this awareness is absent, our pronouncements on Byzantine art are only descriptive and miss its essence; and in extolling it, where our praise is intellectual but (as so often happens) without emotion, it sounds, if not insincere, at least invalid. Art critics, although they have perceived in this art an appetite for ornament, its pictorial order, its tendency to dematerialise, are yet unable to integrate and justify these characteristics as necessary morphological consequences of an artistic expression: an expression springing from that spontaneous, irrepressible artistic sentiment which belongs to the aesthetic category of the sublime, as distinct from that of the merely beautiful.

This sublime quality is the basic feature of Christian art as a whole: an art which, adapting itself to the prevailing conditions of time and place, to the psychology and the intellectual and spiritual trends of the various peoples who cultivated it, each time hit upon a special and original style, a distinct form suited to its environment.

CHAPTER II

The Beautiful and the Sublime in Art

AN ARTISTIC COMPOSITION may, according to its special character, be called "tragic", "sublime", "graceful", "comic", "beautiful" or "ugly". The beautiful, therefore, is merely one of many aesthetic categories, applicable only to a certain kind of artistic expression. Popular language, however, impatient of fine distinctions, usually terms all artistic works "beautiful" to denote their essential qualities of taste and fitness—*τὸ καλόν*; and, in this wide connotation of the word, it reflects only a traditional aesthetic education devoted almost exclusively to the specific category of the beautiful.

For our aesthetics, we should remember, originated in the humanistic education; and its prototypes—Greek, Roman or Renaissance works of art—were representative mainly of the beautiful. Humanism thus converted aesthetic taste into a merely conventional cult of the beautiful.

Yet a more exact terminology distinguishes a work by Sophocles, for example, as a "tragic" work, and hence calls it a tragedy; a play by Molière as "comic", hence called a comedy; similarly it calls the archaic "maidens" (the *κόραι*) in the Acropolis Museum "graceful" and the Parthenon eminently "beautiful". Under this exact terminology, then, the various works of art fall automatically into their respective categories.

And in a differentiation between art eras, bearing these categories in mind, we may find each marking an epoch for its own. Thus we see the classical period dominated by the category of the beautiful, the Rococo period by the category of the graceful, while the Christian period is dominated, I suggest, by the category of the sublime. This idea bears development.

The distinction between classical and Christian art was first drawn by German philosophers of Idealism, and mainly by Hegel, who was most definite in classifying Christian art as an "art of the Sublime"¹; yet to Byzantine art he attributed little significance,

¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, I, p. 494 (2e Aufl., Frommans, Stuttgart).

considering its architecture merely "pre-Gothic", its painting soulless, and of inferior craftsmanship, and ossified in "mummy-like" forms, from which the Renaissance was the first to free itself. Thus, he failed to perceive in Byzantine art that sublime element which he had discerned in other Christian works, either because he had not studied the former with penetration, or, as seems more likely, because he could apprehend the sublime only in the colossal monuments of the Orient or of the Gothic period, which expressed it with mysticism, fervour and violence.

Art critics of the following generation turned their attention to the study of other—mainly morphological—characteristics of Christian art. Although occasionally recognising the lofty inspiration of the Gothic cathedrals, it yet never occurred to them, in their analyses of Christian art, to place it within the framework of the particular category to which it belonged and to view its morphological traits as consequences mainly of its tendency towards the sublime.

In the particular case of Byzantine art, the words "superb" and "sublime" were uttered at random (along with many another incoherent judgement) only in connection with Haghia Sophia. Even less did later art critics recognise the role of aesthetic categories in showing the fundamental character of each art epoch. Finally, and more confusing still, the aestheticians of idealism and more recent critics continued to view the expression of the beautiful, even in works sublime in scope, as the essential function of art, believing the sublime, the graceful and other aesthetic categories to be mere modifications of the beautiful.

I shall return to this point in the final part of the present study. The point I wish to make now is that the aesthetic categories live in time, and that notwithstanding the preponderance of one or another of them at different periods, the others also are ever present and may intercross it. So it is that, for example, the Byzantine and classical periods can both show such graceful works as the Gorgoepekoos (Fig. 125) or the Erechtheum respectively; that the classical period, again, can produce such prophetic and sublime works as the tragedies of Aeschylus. But always, whether tragic or graceful, comic or sublime, whatever their nature, the works of art of a particular age will obey the dictates of the prevailing category.

The reciprocal influence of the general aesthetic character of an age and the particular aesthetic character of each of its artistic

productions provide an interesting field of observation; as does also the variety, in any one particular age, of the expression of the same aesthetic category—as, for instance, of the sublime in Oriental and Western Christian art, or of the beautiful in the classical Greek period and the Italian Renaissance. With both these points, however, we shall deal later.

At present our problem is to discover the distinctive features of the sublime as an aesthetic category. In the course of this analysis, it is hoped to show why the ideals of the Christian period were compatible with this aesthetic category, in contrast to the preceding classical period, whose ideals found expression in the aesthetic category of the beautiful.

Measure and order determine the beautiful. As Plato said, "Beauty is not without measure",¹ or to quote Aristotle, "Beauty consists in size and order".² A classical work of art, then, is neither too small nor too large, and its order is immediately obvious. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. All movement aims at the preservation of an ideal balance, so that the work conveys a feeling of Olympian serenity to the spectator. Its beauty is static, like the Parthenon or an expanse of calm sea in a bay.

If, now, we look upwards at the sky, wishing to grasp the image of that vast dome, a totally different—a dynamic—feeling assails us; and this feeling is even more intense if in mid-ocean we gaze on that infinity bounded only by the horizon and the silent high vault above. Our mind is uplifted in awe before the limitless silent ocean. So long as the sea is serene, in the contemplation of its vastness we are conscious of fear and admiration. And from these contrasting feelings surges a sense of ecstasy at the grandeur of the spectacle and the dynamism it conceals. But awe of the sublime is transformed into stark terror if the fury of a gale suddenly disturbs the elements. Man then knows himself to be utterly forlorn and impotent. The spectacle offered is beyond his mental reach. He is annihilated. Yet from the safety of the shore he can participate aesthetically in the elements' turmoil, as when listening to the dramatic crescendo of a symphony.

For there is in man such an aesthetic force that it can convert fear of physical violence into appreciation of a superb manifestation of power. It is this elevation from mental annihilation to the

¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 87c: "τὸ δὲ καλὸν οὐκ ἄμετρον".

² Aristotle's *Poetica*: "τὸ γὰρ καλὸν ἐν μεγέθει καὶ τάξει ἐστίν" (1450b, 38).

higher sphere of apperception that brings intense feelings into play, which find their solution in ecstasy—in apprehension of the sublime.

The sublime in nature, in whatever form and degree it is manifested, reveals itself as immeasurable in size and supernatural in order (in contrast to the beautiful, which relies on measure and order). The expanse of ocean and heaven is of inconceivable magnitude: despite the horizon and dome of sky which frame them in, they are to us the infinite. The outbreak of a storm, the swell of the sea, the sudden flashes of lightning appear to us as manifestations without conceivable rhythm: abrupt, incalculable but revelatory projections of supernatural forces.

In nature the sublime is now suggested to us in the static serenity of a vast expanse, now brought home to us by the violence and intensity of conflicting forces. Kant's incisive distinction, nevertheless, between the "mathematically sublime" and the "dynamically sublime"¹ is external. For example, our serenity at the contemplation of a calm ocean is not completely untroubled. Underlying it is our amazed consciousness that beneath this limitless surface, in the unfathomable depths of the ocean, lurks a blind force, a tremendous power, only temporarily dormant. Similarly, in gazing at a mountain we are conscious, along with its immobility, of an irresistible structural energy supporting its every towering peak and preventing its collapse. Conversely, were the earth to begin to quake, the mountain to collapse, and a fierce tempest to be loosed, some instinct would inform us that a new world must emerge from the very chaos around us. We would be instinctively convinced that each cataclysmic power was at the same time regenerative, that the unison of the universe can never be shattered—"σύμπτωια πάντα".

So too in art—through the spiritual tempests it describes, the storms in nature it paints, the resounding vaults it builds, and the silent spaces it illuminates—there is the creation of a new world that fills us with ecstasy.

Longinus rightly called the sublime "an echo of high-mindedness that leads to ecstasy".² He was, it is true, applying this definition to literature, but it may equally well be applied in all art.

In art, also, the sublime may at first sight appear to have found two separate forms of expression—extent and power. The one in

¹ "Mathematisch und dynamisch Erhabene" (Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §24).

² Longinus, *On the Sublime* (Περὶ Ὑψους).



1 *Haghia Sophia, Constantinople*

immense works in which size predominates, such as the Pyramids of Egypt, or Haghia Sophia, arising pyramidally, unadorned (Fig. 1), or the towering Gothic cathedrals (Fig. 2); the other in works which, although not immeasurable, are nevertheless charged with tremendous intensity and power, like the "Moses" of Michelangelo, the Pantocrator of Daphni (Fig. 4), or the sentence in the Old Testament: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."¹ It should not hence be deduced that all works great in size are creations of sublime inspiration. Buildings like St. Peter's in Rome, for example (Fig. 3), despite their great size do not, in my opinion, suggest the sublime. In that church, with its mistakes in scale, immensity is lost; its classical morphological elements are borrowed from works of a beautiful, not a sublime, character. Nor is there about it that intensity, that suggestion of a supernatural power, which would have expressed sublimity. Michelangelo, it is true, with his articulation of the whole plan and especially of the dome, tended in that direction. Nevertheless, the dome itself sits on the remaining structure as if isolated in its lofty intention. In a period lacking in depth of religious feeling, like the Renaissance, extension only remained.

Works of art which are merely vast, then, are not necessarily sublime. They become so only if they possess a power which,

¹ Old Testament, Genesis i, 3, is quoted as an example of the sublime expression by Longinus, and by Hegel.

vanquishing and surmounting their material size (as occurs in the mediaeval churches), emphasises only their spiritual greatness.

On the other hand, works are not sublime by virtue solely of their immeasurable power. Most of the mediaeval fortresses, or, again, the "Slaves" of Michelangelo, are instances in point. They are like the sentence: "And God said, 'Let there be light' . . ." which startles us and creates anxiety, but does not fill us with ecstasy and admiration, unless the conclusion is added: "And there was light." Only then is the sublime purpose of the Divine Will fulfilled; and it is this unexpected and sudden fulfilment of an incredible work which reveals it to us as a miracle. Power, then, must underlie extension in the expression of the sublime.

We may now discriminate two kinds of artistic expression of the sublime—the external and concrete, and the esoteric and spiritual. In the former kind size predominates and power is evident throughout; in the latter depth and potential power are the predominating elements. So that, as they reach out for the sublime, we have one kind of sublime work expressing itself conspicuously and tensely, and another doing so reconditely and serenely.

To return to our comparison with nature, an unclouded sky and an unruffled ocean fill us with a sense of the sublime. So also do a thunder-charged sky, a wave-lashed ocean and volcanic flames. The difference is that in the former a mysterious serenity, in the latter a declamatory violence, bring us ecstasy. The serenity suggests a hidden power at bay which, in its omnipotence, binds together the infinite harmony of the world; while the violence projects a power capable, in its omnipotence, of shaking the cosmic order (even though in this orgiastic symphony the elements function with unity). In sublime serenity form is still preserved; in sublime violence power shatters the bonds of form and, amassing



2 *Ulm Cathedral*

the fragments, attempts to create a new form from formlessness and a new world from chaos.

Similarly in art the Gothic cathedral (Fig. 2) is more external, more materialistic than the Byzantine church in its expression of the sublime. The power that runs through it, making its vertical lines tower towards the infinite, is violent; it astounds; its will, as someone has remarked, is expressed in defiance of the stone and of the laws of gravity. Moreover, the Gothic cathedral, in apparently attaining heaven, not only heightens the edifice, but also lowers



3 *St. Peter's, Rome*

the sky. Haghia Sophia in contrast (Fig. 1) is more esoteric, more spiritual in the expression of the sublime. It is possessed of a power, tremendous yet serene, that lifts matter on its wings, dematerialising it without disturbing the harmony of the surrounding world, without stupefying or filling us with anxiety. Haghia Sophia instils in us that same feeling we experience when we gaze at a tranquil sky or at the ocean in repose. The Gothic cathedral, on the other hand, rouses in us the feeling we experience when watching an angry sky or ocean. The strong predominance alone of verticality over the other dimensions of width and depth—a verticality multiplied by the pinnacles and the spire which probes the clouds—is

enough to produce this feeling. In Haghia Sophia, if we ignore the added Turkish minarets, no dimension is exaggerated: a certain measure reigns throughout, and the towering mass resolves itself tranquilly in the melodious curve of the dome. Some vestige of classical beauty, like a distant memory, seems to run through the superb edifice of Haghia Sophia. The basic difference between Occidental and Oriental Christian art lies in this: the former is more external and material in expression; suggesting the sublime through mass and with fanatical force, it risks becoming formless. The latter is more esoteric and spiritual in expression; suggesting the sublime through the depth of its afflatus, it therefore remains serene. There are no excesses there either of mass or power. Form is preserved. This explains how Byzantine art, through its recondite intensity, is able to suggest the sublime even in diminutive Byzantine chapels like the Gorgoepekoos (Fig. 125), just as it is suggested in nature by the slow murmur of a brook or the mysterious rustle of leaves.

We should not, then, seek in Byzantine art what we can find only in Gothic, both of which thus show in their varying expression of the sublime that one and the same aesthetic category may be variously manifested. A corresponding diversity is to be found in the expression of the concept of beauty, as manifested in classical Greek art and in the art of the Italian Renaissance. While the former is more esoteric and spiritual, the latter turns outwards and is more materialistic.

From the above comparison between the sublime and the beautiful, we may deduce that:

(a) The sublime is dynamic; the beautiful static. This does not imply that beautiful works are soulless, but that the sense of the sublime comes from a conflict, a "strain" of tense¹ emotions seeking rest; whereas the sense of beauty springs from the reposeful balance, the "solution"¹ of rival forces. Beauty delights us; sublimity amazes us.

(b) The dynamism of the sublime demands our fervent spiritual participation in its striving; the equilibrium of the beautiful allows us serene and calm contemplation of its harmony.

Obviously, in every artistic manifestation the spectator remains a contemplator of the work. He watches without suffering; he

¹ *Spannung and Lösung.*

experiences emotions vicariously and therefore remains unimpassioned, taking no part in the action. A spectator in the theatre, for instance, who passes over the "aesthetic distance" that art creates between him and the work, and is led to intervene in the action, loses the aesthetic delight. None the less, the fact remains that experiencing the sublime through a work of art stirs the spectator more profoundly than contemplating beauty in it. Sublime works appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect; beautiful works do the reverse: hence a work of beauty is always "measured" and clear. It follows that:

(c) In a beautiful work, form, and in a sublime work, content, must play the principal role. This distinction does not, of course, alter the fact that form and content are indissolubly bound in any work of art.

(d) The beautiful is turned outwards and is an affirmation of the evident harmony of the world; it invites contemplation chiefly by the beauty of its form. The sublime is turned inwards and is a negation of the finite world's apparent harmony, revealing the divine in the sphere of the infinite; it demands subjective participation primarily by the intensity of its content.

That is why the sublime work does not hesitate even before formlessness. (Indeed, in nature one of its most striking manifestations is in the creation of chaos; and in primitive art in the creation of the colossal and monstrous.) This being so, and the formless and the ugly being very closely allied, we see why the sublime often employs the ugly as an expressive means.

Monstrous and huge works conveying sublimity might lead one to the conclusion that in manifestations of the sublime, form rather than content is of outstanding importance. But this is true only in so far as the content of such works deals with material powers and supernatural forces, and not with transcendental powers or metaphysical concepts, as in Christian works. Any monstrous form naturally ceases to be a source of pleasure (in contradistinction to the form of the beautiful). It repels us rather, as does the ugly; and in employing it as a means of expression, despite its repellent nature, sublime art shows that form is but a secondary, and content its main, concern.

The intervention of the period of the beautiful (through Greek art) between the Oriental and Christian art-eras, and the spiritual texture of sublime Christian works, failed to eliminate the basic tendencies and primordial associations of the sublime. Neverthe-

less, wherever the influence of beauty had more directly penetrated (as in Byzantium), form as such retained its value, and to express ugliness or symbolise blind forces never became, as often in Gothic art, an end in itself.

These distinctions are important in the discussion of the sublime in Byzantine art which follows in the second part of the present study. They are important, too, in giving us a clearer insight into the inspiration of the artist and his period.

The objective, unimpassioned outlook of the classical mind, which viewed man as the measure of all things, inevitably expressed itself through the category of the beautiful. The subjective rapt emotions of the Christian spirit, which participated in the miracle of spiritual resurrection, inevitably found their outlet in the category of the sublime.

CHAPTER III

The Christian Ideal and its Sublime Character

WHY DID THE Christian ideal find its artistic medium in the aesthetic category of the sublime rather than of the beautiful, through which pagan religion expressed its own ideals?

Is not every religion, after all, an approach to the divine? Do they not all build places of worship dedicated to invisible and superhuman powers or beings? And, indeed, the immanent piety of their quest explains why a sublime tendency is to be found underlying every religious artistic expression. This sublime tendency, however, at different periods is now subordinated to and transmuted into another dominant trend; now develops and asserts itself.

In the ancient Oriental religions the sense of the sublime sprang from man's terror before nature's untamed, demoniac forces. Art, therefore, attributed monstrous forms to the gods and built for them colossal temples. In Greece the sense of the sublime was vitiated because man rationalised and lived in harmony with nature. He humanised his gods. As a result, art attempted by means of harmonious proportions to idealise the human into a divine form, and it modelled its temples on man's dwellings. Whatever the degree to which human "measures" were surpassed in the representation of gods or of their habitation, the exaggeration never aimed at quantitative magnitude, but only at qualitative superiority. Hence, thanks to the preservation of the human form in the statues of the Greek gods and of the human habitation in the pagan temples, their qualitative superiority does not induce terror. It calms and delights through beauty. One is not overwhelmed on facing works of this kind. The ecstatic transport induced by the sublime is transposed into a consciousness of joy (*φρόνημα χαρᾶς*), the intellectual tones of which swell to the dominant scale of the beautiful. In the Christian period, however, the feeling of the sublime tends again towards the measureless, but

now it seeks to convey the infinity of the spiritual world, not the colossal and monstrous material forces of nature. In Christian art it is the spirit of Infinite Love which allays fear and terror, not, as in ancient Greek art, the rational mind.

It was in order to show the Omnipotent Spirit that Christian art etherealised the figure of the God-man; it was in order to contain it in the churches it built that it made the space appear infinite. As Schelling has aptly said, while antiquity faced the problem of representing the infinite within the bounds of the finite, Christianity sought to solve the problem of including the finite within the infinite, making of the finite an allegory of the infinite.¹

To sum up, the experience of the sublime varies—gaining or losing intensity, or becoming transformed—as the conception of deity and the faith of the believers differ in each religion. The aesthetic character of works of art being affected by the prevailing conceptions, we find at different periods one particular aesthetic category predominating, which, however, neither excludes the others nor makes them mutually incompatible.

Let us now examine more closely the contrast between the Christian and the pagan religions. St. Paul, trying to explain the spirit of the new religion to the Athenians of the decadence, mentioned how, as he was walking through the city, he had perceived among the mass of idols an altar dedicated to an “unknown god”. This god, whom they revered although they knew him not, they should seek within themselves, St. Paul told the Athenians; for he was in each of them. “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.”² The possibility of *turning to our inner world for the revelation of the divine spark* gives us the key to the difference between the Christian and pagan religious ideals, as well as to the aspirations of the Christian artist.

In ancient Greece the gods were many, and although a certain hierarchical order was, indeed, established, yet even Zeus was subject to *Ananke*—Necessity. He was not omnipotent. Like the other gods, he shared the passions of men and, like men, was subject to the cosmic harmony. Enemy powers opposed him and his sovereignty was not eternally assured, since he was not the creator of the Universe. He had achieved this supremacy once upon a time, fighting the Titans, with the other gods at his side. Thus, he owed a great deal to the other gods, and ruled not as an absolute

¹ Lotze, *Geschichte der Aesthetik in Deutschland*, p. 394 (München, 1868).

² Acts xvii, 28–29.

monarch but dependent to a certain degree on other deities. His fall had been foretold by Prometheus, who strove to bring fire to man, and with it light, the awakening of the mind. As a result, man now was the centre of the Universe and his own mind was his guide.

The morality of the pagan religion, therefore, adopted a positive attitude towards life. It held that a healthy mind resided in a healthy body. The search for truth was the task of Philosophy, a question of knowledge that only free citizens could achieve—and of those only the *élite*, never the slaves. Even the mystic quest for truth through such Mysteries as the Eleusinian was a privilege of the few initiates. Moreover, in unofficial cults and rites, where participation was less restricted and the participants were more average types, it seems that soul and spirit touched upon certain truths symbolically only, in Dionysiac or maniacal experiences. Women as Maenads scourged themselves, danced and shouted throughout the night in the woods, weeping or falling into orgiastic frenzy. As Burckhardt has pointed out, the words of Aristotle are applicable to all Mysteries: "There is no need to learn a thing but only to experience it."¹ The supreme result of this experience was the "light at Eleusis" which, suddenly, blinded the eyes of the initiates at the end of their journey through darkness. If an illumination of the soul or a catharsis occurred, this was due to conceptual symbols and to the suggestion of experiences "from without", not to revelatory experiences "from within" of the free individual conscience residing in the human soul.

The Christian, on the other hand, believed in but one God, the Almighty Creator of the Universe, Triune and Indivisible, immune from human passions. In His infinite love of man He came in the flesh and was crucified for the redemption of mankind, having taught that in universal love lay man's salvation from his sinful material existence.

The attitude therefore of the Christian ethos towards life on earth is negative, promising another eternal life, where good and evil shall be judged. Our sojourn on this earth is only a trial, a strife between good and evil in the free conscience of the individual, which allows him to gain eternal bliss through repentance and prayer. Sin, salvation, repentance are new elements in religious life, suggesting the turning of man's gaze inwards to discover his soul, his inner personality, the transcendental possi-

¹ "Ὅς μαθεῖν τι δεῖν ἀλλὰ παθεῖν"—see Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* I, part 3, p. 451 (Leipzig, 1929).

bility of his participation in the Divine. Truth was now therefore, on principle, not a question of knowledge but one of revelation by Divine Grace of the "unknown god" within us. This Ultimate Truth was now accessible to the most illiterate, to the humblest child of the people, to slave and freeborn alike, without distinction. All could love, believe and hope.

This withdrawal of man into an inner self, wherein resided an eternal and pure gleam of the Ultimate Truth and of Infinite Love, was an experience that filled man with wonder. What aesthetic reaction could this experience evoke other than amazement? How awe-inspiring the contrast between his trivial mundane existence and the majesty of his immortal soul with its divine attributes! How dazzling the joy of salvation from bonds of finite matter through Infinite Love! Thus, man's knowledge of his surpassing gifts, his taste of supreme bliss came from within him, and his soul overflowed with admiration. In discovering an ineffable inner beauty, he renounced his worship of the beauty of outward form. The awareness of this inner beauty was not to be acquired through *Paedeia*, but in *Anachorism*. The ideal now, far from being physical fitness, was asceticism, so that the athlete was superseded by the ascetic. The ugly, the crippled, the deformed, all could enclose within them Infinite Love. In fact, man could more easily find his imperishable soul by denying the flesh and ignoring the charms of external beauty.

In seeking to bring out this imperishable essence in the human form, art now relied no longer on the harmony of the human body, but on the expression of the human face—mainly of the eyes, the lips, the wrinkles on the emaciated face of an ascetic body, levitating rather than standing, as if not of this world.

In the depiction of the God-man these characteristics were, naturally, intensified. The Almighty, the implacable Judge in Heaven, whose eyes flashed lightning, was also the All-Benevolent Martyr of Love. Before Him awe seizes us, but joy also elates our soul; His majesty overwhelms while it elevates us. The aim of Byzantine art is to express this sublime uplifting and to convey the miraculous. Thus the Pantocrator at Daphni (Fig. 4), gigantic and with a terrifying glance, is yet tender in expression. He is the Spirit personified, to be represented only in a disembodied human form. He is the invisible Omnipotence which tends to shatter any form, and which, solely because of His infinite goodness, deigns to reveal Himself to our eyes in this form, which must, therefore, be



4 *The Almighty (mosaic), Daphni*

ception of him¹ as the god "who knit his eyebrows and made Olympus quake". However, this affirmation of physical superiority and strength did not convey the idea of omnipotence and, especially, the spiritual majesty of love. Conversely, it should be noted that some of the attributes of Zeus were to be found in the God of Christianity. He is often praised as "He who makes the earth tremble"; "He who suspended the earth in water"; "He who enveloped the sky in clouds". As we may see, for instance, from the mosaic in the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian in Rome (Fig. 5), these attributes of Zeus lingered on. However, the Christian God was not only the possessor of material power. He was also the representative of Infinite Love, the Martyr whose death upon the Cross was a sacrifice demanding a sublime image to express it. The gods of ancient Greece knew nothing of such superb actions; only men, feeling their need, provided examples of them in the mythical Prometheus, sung by Aeschylus, and, later, in the death of Socrates—the beautiful death of a high-minded man, in which is adumbrated the ideal of sublimity.

In the serene harmony of beauty, exemplified and expressed by the classical Greeks, we may undoubtedly recognise overtones of a conception of the sublime and we do undoubtedly encounter prophetic intimations of the "unknown god" as the only God, both

sublime. It must compel awe and admiration; it cannot be beautiful as Apollo or Hermes were, nor as Zeus himself, the "father of gods and men", who, being the sovereign god, held in his hand the thunderbolt and must have been vested with a certain sublimity in his expression. When Phidias carved him, he made him gigantic, and, according to Proclus, he managed to convey Homer's conception of him

¹ Proclus compares him with the Demiurge of Timaeus; see Schuhl, *Platon et l'art de son temps*, p. 55, footnote 1 (*Alcan*, 1933).

among the poets and the philosophers of ancient Hellas, as even St. Paul recognised when he concluded his sentence, "For in Him we live and move and have our being", with the words, "as certain also of your own poets have said". But these tones of the sublime are engulfed or lie dormant in the aura, in the Olympian serenity of the beautiful. That is why classical art, in its ends and means, was unsuited and inadequate to provide a fitting expression for the one and only God of Christianity, the "unknown god", the All-Benevolent Spirit of Omnipotence. Nor could the artist have found such an expression had not the idols been overthrown, had he not renounced every "beautiful" form and drawn upon the recesses of his soul, upon a new feeling which was in the nature of a miracle and could be expressed only in the sublime.

Now the history of art teaches us that this change occurred by evolutionary stages. The wall paintings in the catacombs, it points out, in symbolising the Christian's faith show elements of Hellenistic painting and even represent figures from the pagan religion. Catacomb paintings may indeed be said to be "crypto-Christian"

and the Hellenistic elements in them admitted; but the historical linking of the two periods by external elements does not explain their radical, inherent irreconcilability. If we wish to capture the sentiment of the catacomb paintings, we must bring to them our inner vision. The artist, absorbed in his spiritual mission, descended into the tenebrae of the catacombs in order to paint, not the shades of Hades, but the soul of the Christians liberated from the flesh. Only his participation in the new spirit could have compelled the artist to express himself with the sincerity displayed in the



5 *The God-man* (detail from mosaic), Rome, Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian



6 *Praying Woman (Orans), Rome,
St. Priscilla Catacombs*

catacomb paintings, which, even at this early stage, display astonishing originality. Observe, for example, the Praying Woman in Fig. 6. How imposing and profoundly moving is the tall figure with her hands outstretched; the palms with the long extended fingers and thumbs turned upwards; her austere, self-concentrated expression; and the simplicity of the whole scene. Where in ancient art is such a figure to be found? What has the spirit that moves this work in common with any work of the ancient world, to warrant our seeing any affinity in their expression? Unless we are misguided by the external resemblance of forms and by the use of a Hellenistic technique, borrowed by this "crypto-Christian" art, we must, surely, admit that beneath an outwardly peaceful transformation we are witnessing a revolution in art. But the artist could not have revolutionised his art in reproducing the new spirit abroad unless he himself had been stirred by it. The Christian artist must have overthrown the pagan images and statues in himself even before they were overthrown by the State. The One, the Infinite, the Unpredictable must have filled his soul with a dreadful fervour that ultimately found vent in his art, and impelled him to give it a form—no matter whether covert, symbolic or allegorical; no matter if in a borrowed guise at first. His new belief was founded upon faith, hope and charity, whence flowed into his work that quality of purity and of goodness which pervades all "crypto-Christian" wall paintings, that quality of sublime simplicity which puts one in mind of the innocent, wide-open gaze of children's eyes.

An eminent student of pre-mediaeval painting, K  mstedt,¹ ex-

¹ K  mstedt, *Vormittelalterliche Malerei*, pp. 6-9 (Augsburg, 1929).

presses the view that the paintings of the catacombs possess the characteristics of the Baroque, and especially of the Roman Baroque—hence the emphasis on, and intensity in, the expression of the figures, as in the Praying Woman above mentioned. He does not find in these paintings that spiritual mentality which alone can produce the “transcendental style of expression”—the “Transzendenter Ausdrucksstil”, as it developed in Byzantium later—and which, in its turn, is the only suitable medium for the Christian ideal. No doubt this spirituality is yet lacking, and the emphasis in those figures is largely due to the artist’s resort to the Baroque, which is an expressionist style, with a “subjective” note of human weakness, presenting violent movements, passionate poses and theatrical gesticulations. However, as Kōmstedt also admits, catacomb paintings have eliminated the sensual and erotic elements and stressed “soulfulness”. It is not enough merely to accept this tendency in the catacomb paintings as their Christian element: it should be appreciated aesthetically too, as the expression of sublimity so deeply felt that it has the power to communicate itself to the spectator, through all the emphasis of the Baroque.

Another part of this study will attempt to show how, after classical art, each Baroque period is one of transition between the beautiful and its opposite, the sublime; a period which aspires to, without attaining, the sublime, in the pale glimmer of whose future effulgence the torch of the beautiful is extinguished. A period, namely, of decadence on the one hand, because it eclipses the radiance of the beautiful; and a period of creativeness on the other, because it sets alight and kindles the spark of the sublime. These transitional periods, unable to impose either aesthetic category, have recourse to one which has common kinship to both, the category of the graceful; so that close on the heels of the Baroque follows the Rococo, with its idyllic naïveté and charming representations, which appear also in the catacomb paintings (Fig. 7). Yet with this difference: that in the catacombs classical Greek physical grace no longer alone animates the figures, which are endowed here with a certain celestial grace (*οὐρανία χάρις*) also.

Christianity, of course, had its source in the Jewish religion and is, like it, “mystical” in principle. Its art, however, did not grow anti-representational as did Jewish art later. Jewish art, in renouncing images, was not, it would seem, merely obeying the dictates of the Mosaic Law, which forbade them in order to prevent the people from falling into idolatry. Indeed, we have instances of

Jewish Old Testament figural representations in Dura Europos. It is probable, therefore, that Jewish art, in banning images, was also conforming to a natural aversion of the people to human representation and to the imitation of nature, as Strzygowski¹ remarks. This aversion was inherited by Islam, a nomadic people; and the iconoclastic tendencies of Protestantism seem to indicate it as inherent also in the Nordic races, who, being mystically inclined and non-rational, naturally tend toward the transcendental sense of the sublime rather than toward the measured sense of the beautiful.



7 *Roof Ornament, Rome,
St. Lycine Catacombs.*

As Hellenism took up the beliefs of Christianity and transmitted them to the world through its fervour, its language and its philosophy, lending the Christian dogma its gnostic elements, so it embraced Christian art and provided it with its indispensable representational means which enabled it to express, finally in Byzantium, the loftiest conceptions and most exalted experiences, and even to suggest invisible powers and the immortality of the spirit. The new religion, as I have

tried to show, in revealing the God in man established a concept of an impersonal self. The choir of martyrs and saints are living examples of that concept and their commemoration in iconography is its expression. It was this concept which converted the Greek from the dispassionate spectator, the objective judge, the "measure of all things", into a "participant in the Divine", an anchorite, a contemplative and a mystic. He thus became acquainted with another aspect of his being, or, more generally, of the human hypostasis. His conversion need not surprise us; for the mystic-

¹ Strzygowski, *Ursprung der christlichen Kirchenkunst*, pp. 89-90 (Leipzig, 1920); see also Peraté, "L'Art préroman", in A. Michel's *Histoire de l'Art*, I, p. 3.

probing philosophy of Plotinus¹ had already roused in him those intuitive faculties inherent in all men. As Novalis has said: "Whatever is visible depends (*haftet*) on the invisible; whatever is audible, on the inaudible; whatever is sensed, on that which cannot be sensed; perhaps the conceivable on the inconceivable (*Undenkbaren*); nothing is more accessible to the spirit than the infinite."²

As in the case of the catacomb paintings, so too in examining Christian architecture, we should not be misled by its external physiognomy, but try to discover its scope, to discern the spirit that informs it. Let us observe here that the pagan temple of the Hellenes, the harmonious abode wherein the god was propitiated, had to be substituted by a new type of temple, on the pattern of the basilica—the *ecclesia*, the church—a space in which the faithful assembled beneath the roof of One Omnipresent God, in order to approach Him through prayer. The church is "the terrestrial sky, in which God in Heaven lives and walks".³ The dome was, then, the symbol of Heaven. To attribute the originality of Christian architecture to the combination of Roman and Oriental stylistic elements is to offer too simple a theory—superficial and schematic—which is immediately exploded by the obvious fact that elements so inanimate, heterogeneous and incompatible as the Roman and Oriental could not automatically have merged, and emerged in a new form. Only the compelling incentive of a new inspiration could have forced the artist's hand to seize what material it found, and shown him how to integrate it into the form he had visualised. If tradition and technical limitations, to a certain extent, and in every age, restrict the artist who has a new message to deliver, yet his creation will always convey something of it and of its novelty, something of that originality without which art would grow static. So it was with Christian art, which caught the emanation of sublimity from the religion which had given it birth. To impart the sublime was its function, its *raison d'être*. And this it did, through

¹ For details of Plotinus' views see pt. III, ch. 10, and also P. A. Michelis, "Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Byzantine Art", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. XI, No. 1, Sept. 1952, in which the author deals with Grabar's attempt to explain the principles of early Christian art through Plotinus' aesthetic principles; Grabar is, in fact, accommodating Plotinus' thoughts to the technique of Christian art, thus giving them a materialistic sense which they do not actually possess.

² Quoted by Lützel, *Führer zur Kunst*, p. 157 (Freiburg i. Br. 1941).

³ According to Patriarch Germanos, quoted by Soteriou, *Christian and Byzantine Archaeology* (in Greek), I, p. 343 (Athens, 1942).

all the changes of time and climate, with a single-heartedness and fervour and self-sufficiency that disdained imitation, and stamped it with an individual style as original as the aesthetic impression it conveys.

The fundamental and inevitable difference between the Christian and the classic religious ideals having shown us the resultant difference in their aesthetic character, I shall proceed now to draw in broad outline the elements of Byzantine art in an attempt to show how they were subordinated to the sense of the sublime, and how the technique and morphology of both architecture and painting concurred in the expression of the new ideal. Its emergence wrought such changes both in morphology and technique that it would be a mistake, from the aesthetic point of view, to dissect the phenomena and to reconstruct them into their archaeological past. In disintegrating its constituent elements, we should be temporarily robbing Byzantine art of its secret; effacing its expression of the era's new ideal, and divesting it of its attendant artistic sense of sublimity.

PART TWO

The Sublime in Byzantine Art

CHAPTER IV

The Expression of the Sublime in Byzantine Architecture

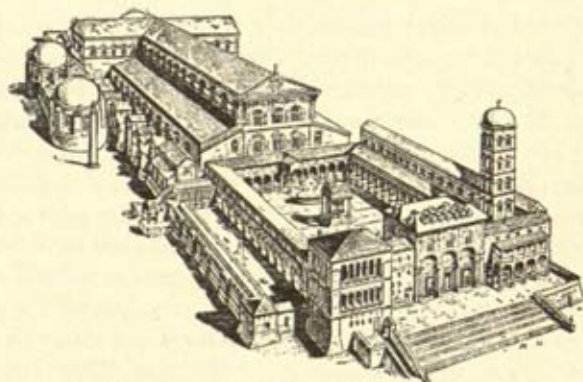
THE CHURCH

The Turn Inwards

It is evident that all architectural works are, in the first instance, intended to serve certain needs, which therefore influence their plan. As already briefly noted, the need which the Christian church served was not the same as that to which the pagan temple answered. The latter, in classical times, sheltered the statue of the god to which it was dedicated, and in some cases also guarded the city's treasure. Into the temple's interior only the priests entered, or those entrusted to present offerings or bloodless sacrifice to the statue of the god. The crowd of worshippers remained outside, where stood the altar for living sacrifice. The people were spectators of the holy rites, vaguely perceiving, through the temple's door on the east side, the gigantic statue of the god. They could take refuge from the burning rays of the midday sun, or from rain or storms, beneath the temple's *pteron*, or, more often, within the porticoes of the *peribolos*.

The church of the Christians, on the other hand, was an *ecclesia*—that is, an "assembly" hall of the faithful who participated in the divine service within the building. The Christian church, therefore, had to be spacious, for it had to house not only the priests in their performance of the liturgy, but also the flock of the faithful, before whose eyes—especially in early times—the whole service was enacted. The early Christian basilica (Fig. 8) is usually preceded by an open court with a peristyle, the atrium, a spacious area capable of sheltering under its colonnades a large number of people. The entrance to the atrium is directly opposite the façade of the main church. At the entrance of the main building is a kind of forehall, the narthex, where the catechumens waited for the invitation to participate in the church service. The sanctuary is at the east end of the building. In short, the church forms a roofed

continuation of the atrium, like the Roman basilica of the forum, as defined by Cicero. Hence its astounding dimensions in comparison with the area of the atrium that precedes it. The pagan temple, on the other hand, takes up only a relatively small space within the *peribolos*. The arrangement of the Christian church is reminiscent of the Greek home, in which life moved around the central court, avoiding any external show. The warm atmosphere of an inner life, enclosed within itself and indifferent to the outside world, was eminently suited to the groupings of the early Christian basilica. The pagan temple, on the other hand, was placed, like a statue, in space and was free on all sides. Indeed, the whole *peribolos* in which it was set obeyed the same principle—namely,



8 *St. Peter's in Mediaeval Rome (restoration)*

single free buildings forming, in the way they were planned, an organic unity in which each co-operated, without losing its independence; the gods of paganism being numerous, each sacred place as a rule contained more than one temple.

Underlying the practical needs which determined the plan of the early Christian church was the spiritual urge which influenced not only the disposition of the buildings, but also the artistic expression of the church and of the whole group. Whereas the Greek temple, seeking to attract attention and impress the crowd outside, turned its attention mainly to external appearance, the Christian church was concerned with retaining the faithful *within* its halls, and concentrated on the artistic arrangement of the interior. Haghia Sophia is an excellent example of this characteristic. Simple and unadorned outwardly, it encloses a wholly unexpected wealth of highly colourful decoration. This contrast is to be met

with throughout, but mainly in the early Christian period. As Vischer aptly remarked,¹ while the pagan temple is "built outwards", the Christian church is "built inwards". In fact, Christian architects attached so much importance to the interior of their churches that, even when designing the exterior, they used for it other forms and motifs of decoration. As a result, the Christian church reveals, in the formation and organisation of interior space and in figural decoration, a world completely unforeseen from outside. In contrast, the interior of the pagan temple presents us on every side merely with a kind of façade beneath a roof. But it was the Christian's desire for spiritual inward dwelling which, even more than the practical considerations entailed, led to the early Christian church's exclusive preoccupation with its interior: external simplicity was intended to stress the significance of the content.

It has sometimes been said that Haghia Sophia, for example, was left externally unadorned because the surrounding structures would have concealed all such ornament. This explanation seems to me inadequate. The church with its atrium formed a unified whole; the atrium allowed only a full-face view of the main building which thus could not be considered as a work in itself, but was subordinated to the whole. The structures surrounding Haghia Sophia, in our view, merely helped to provide the spectator with a "scale" of comparison, allowing him to size up the mass of the church, which thus seen appeared tremendous and gave him his first intimation of the sublime. To recapture that feeling, we have only to remember the view of Haghia Sophia when we enter the Bosphorus and see its dominating mass among the houses of Constantinople. We experience a similar sensation when looking at Gothic cathedrals, wherever the groups of oppressively small mediaeval houses have not been demolished in modern times. Those cathedrals, rising among the lowly dwellings, amaze us by their size and their suggestion of height.

Now Gothic cathedrals, although originally surrounded by a multitude of small houses in the narrow squares of mediaeval towns, were richly decorated with sculpture on the outside. Indeed, after the early Christian period, Byzantine churches, for reasons which we shall later explain, also gradually began to be decorated on the outside. There are various reasons for this later adoption by the Eastern church of external decoration, the chief of them being the abandonment of the atrium—both in Byzantine

¹ *Aussenbau und Innenbau* (Vischer, *Asthetik*, III).

and Gothic churches—which thus left the church free in space. It was now the façade which had to express the depth of the world contained in the building (very much as the face expresses the human soul). The doors, the windows and pediments gave the façade its character.

The new architectural element of the façade was suited to the more passionate temper of the West. It is in the West that it reached its greatest development, where in Gothic art it manifested itself in the great towers, the vast portals and the rose-windows; in Renaissance art, in the superimposed orders and the bell-towers; and in Baroque art, in the giant orders, the curved shapes and the overabundant decoration. The concentration of external ornament on the façade left the other sides of Western churches rather sparsely decorated. Indeed, the sides of a Gothic cathedral, with their piers and flying buttresses supporting the main body of the church in the manner of crutches, repel the eye, making it seek the façade again. The inward-dwelling principle of the Christian church held good in the West also, but here it was anticipated in the façade, with its relative independence, striving with exaggerated emphasis to mirror the recondite spirit within the cathedral, very much as in Western painting depth of feeling is often expressed by a grimace.

This concept of the façade applies mainly to basilicas, since in centrally planned buildings all sides have similar exteriors. In ancient temples of rectangular plan and with sculptural decoration in the pediments, it is almost wholly lacking, especially in the sense in which we use the term now. The pagan building seems to have no face. It is an ideal, not an individual, form. The difference as compared with the Christian basilica corresponds to that between an ancient Greek sculpture of a god and an icon of a saint. In the former the beauty is ideal; in the latter it is characteristic. In other words, in the ancient Greek example it is objective harmony of the ideal form which is of primary importance; in the Byzantine it is the expression of a subjective experience.

Byzantine architecture, even when it decorated its churches externally, at no time attached to the façade the importance which Gothic architecture did. More esoteric, more spiritual and more restrained than the latter, it relied on doors, windows or pediment to give the church its character, and desisted from particular decoration. A certain remnant of classical idealism stylised facial expression, making it impersonal, and idealised characteristic beauty. The idea of the façade, however, was always latent in Byzantine

churches,¹ even in their centrally planned buildings, because Byzantine architecture wished, for liturgical and aesthetic reasons, to combine these buildings with the basilical plan, or at least wished to make them suggest the dominance of a longitudinal axis. Thus, there was a drive towards depth in the Byzantine interior space, and necessarily the building was provided with a façade, even though only an ideal one.

It should be observed, incidentally, that the ancient Greeks, because they did not employ the façade of their buildings to express the interior, did not hence lack a feeling for space, and that Christian art was not the first to be aware of it. This facile distinction, often drawn, implies condemnation of classical architecture, if not, indeed, complete lack of appreciation for it. The turn inwards should not be confused with the feeling for space.² Since space as an artistic conception exists outside a building also, the feeling for it is pre-supposed in the architect's creation. The sagacious plasticity of the Greek temple testifies to this; the formation of the columns and of the prostases, the arrangement of such buildings as theatres and stadia, and finally the grouping of buildings which focuses attention mainly on space dispel any doubt that the interior of the Greek temple was not equal in its interior spatial economy to any architectural work of quality of any period. The interior of the Christian church differed merely in that it sought to rouse, along with a feeling of space, a sense of the sublime. Therein lay the novelty of Christian architecture's contribution to art.

German art critics especially have abused the high-sounding word "space", and have led to the arbitrary and absurd conclusion that in turning inwards, the Christian church was the first to order space aesthetically. The truth is that the Christian church was the first to make of interior space the "carrier of an idea", as Strzygowski³ puts it, so that it was the interior mainly which determined the building's external form. In other words, where the architect of classical times worked at his building inwards from without, as the sculptor does his marble, the Byzantine architect worked outwards from within, as the potter moulds his clay. The first gave content to form; the second gave content a form. For whereas the Christian, possessing greater spiritual wealth, was

¹ In the Byzantine period the inner court of the early Christian building is gradually abandoned in favour of an outer court, as in the houses of Mistra, which therefore acquire façades.

² P. A. Michelis, "Space and City-planned Groups of the Ancient Greeks" (*Annales Techniques*, fasc. 151, Athens, 1938).

³ Strzygowski, *Ursprung der christlichen Kirchenkunst*, p. 186.

almost indifferent to outward show, the ancient Greek, richer in representative images of aesthetic value, knew how to display them; and both enriched art out of the abundance of their genius.

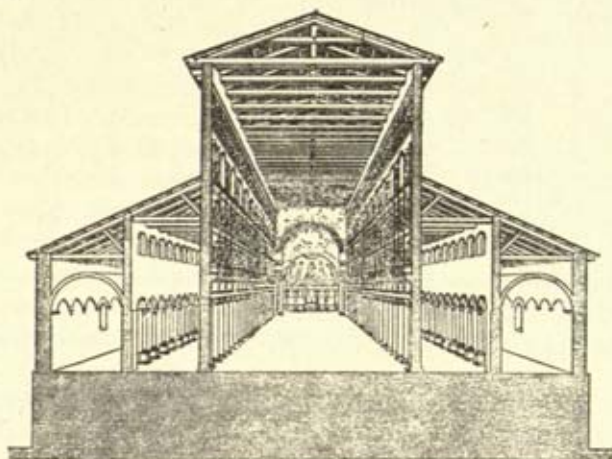
The Romans certainly paid a good deal of attention to the possibilities of internal space. If, indeed, we judge their works solely on their utilitarian merits, we may say that it was they who first introduced in architecture the idea of the organisation, if not of the exploitation, of space in the service of utilitarian needs in a complex group of buildings. Moreover, they progressed in the internal decoration of buildings, and succeeded in more forcibly suggesting the feeling of space, in works such as the Pantheon. The Romans, however, did not conceive of space as the "bearer of an idea", and especially of one of sublime religious import; whereas it was on that very idea that the basic contribution of Byzantine architecture rested. For the first time in history the architects of Byzantium conveyed through the medium of space the feeling of the sublime, suggesting within the confines of the building the infinity of the Universe, where the Omnipresent Creator resided. The expression of this transcendental conception had its origin in and was the fulfilment of an ardent aspiration, in ministering to which the Christian church could no longer remain, like the pagan temple, a god's habitation modelled on the human dwelling, a *megaron* of marble. It had to become a miniature Universe, for therein dwelt the one and only God. Byzantine architects could no longer be satisfied with the type of timber-roofed basilica of the early Christian period, which was mainly a utilitarian form. Of necessity, they had to revert to centrally planned buildings with domed superstructures; they had to combine this plan with that of the basilica; to arrange both in such a way as to make use mainly of the motif of the dome which recalled the heavenly sphere; and, in general, to employ any other artistic elements indispensable to the expression of the sublime majesty of the new religious feeling.

Types of Churches

Christian architecture, before it could achieve the expression of the sublime through the medium of space, had first to reveal and display the latter. It had to advance, therefore, beyond Greek and Roman architecture in this respect, and make space the centre of artistic interest, divesting it of its cumbersome trappings, or, more correctly, framing it within suitable forms which would enable it to unfold as though *ad infinitum*. Space could not be enhanced merely by being stressed, nor through merely colossal works, as

are certain Roman buildings, nor again by mere decoration of interior surfaces. Compositional means had to be used in dealing with the successive spaces and in designing the main body of the church. Let us, then, glance at the various types of churches in Christian architecture.

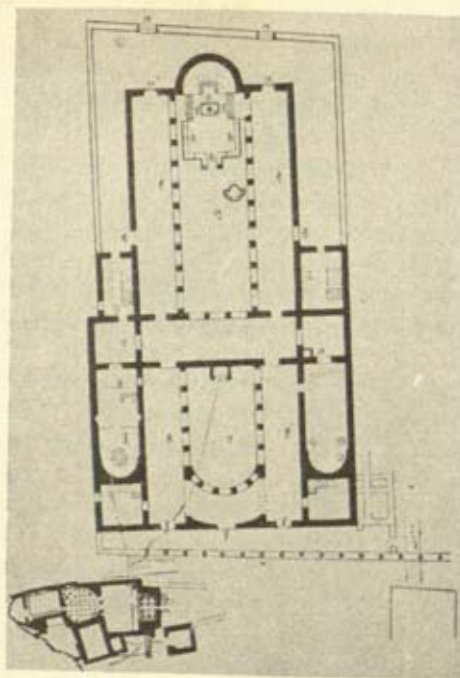
There were, to begin with, two basic architectural types of Christian churches—the basilica and the centrally planned domed structure. The former at first glance appears to have borrowed its organisation wholesale from the homonymous Roman building, which, in order apparently to introduce adequate lighting into the central part of a large hall, was divided into three or more aisles,



9 *St. Peter's (section of original basilica), Rome*

with the nave's wall heightened above the roofs of the aisles and pierced with windows (Fig. 9). As its name denotes, the pagan basilica may have originated in Greece. In Rome, in any case, it served practical needs—as tribunals, agorae, etc.—in halls which required not only abundant light, but also good ventilation.

A more careful examination, however, of the relationship between the pagan and early Christian basilica will show that the latter is more than just an ingenious continuation of the constructional and utilitarian arrangements. The changes in its composition also reveal a definite intention to exhibit space. Passing over the examination of the proportional relation of the various particular spaces—namely, the atrium, the narthex, the nave, the aisles, etc.—since it would reveal little beyond the harmonious relation of the parts to the whole which all good



10 *The Basilica, Thebes, Thessaly*

architecture possesses, we would note that the alternations in axial directions of successive spaces may be slightly more revealing (Fig. 10). The contrast between the narrow narthex placed lengthwise and the main axis of the church, and the relations of width and height in the nave and the aisles, contribute to the creation of spatial impressions. Let us, however, look into the fundamental principles of composition which awakened in the spectator a feeling of space, which classical architecture had attenuated in teaching him to appreciate mainly har-

monious and finite space. In Christian art we may distinguish three fundamental principles: the stress of depth, the display of height, and unification of infinite space (Fig. 11).

Depth, enhanced by the predominance of the longitudinal axis of the basilica, terminates in the sanctuary's apse, whose semi-



11 *Church of St. Demetrius, Thessalonike*



12 *Ulpia Basilica, Rome (restoration)*

circular shape, suggestive of a welcoming embrace, augments, as it invites us towards it, the impression that space is endless. Simultaneously, the rhythm of the colonnades, dividing nave from aisles, the rows of windows over the arches, the rafters of the timber roof—all these break, in their contrary motion, the monotony of the longitudinal axis, while at the same time they rouse and sustain a heightened interest in its direction. It was only later that a change in the divine service caused the *iconostasis* to be introduced, thus concealing the apse which was originally visible (as it is to this day in Catholic churches) and set out to invite the worshipper. In the Roman basilica, on the other hand (Fig. 12), the aisles were set on all four sides of the nave, or at least on three of its sides, and the drive towards depth as a result was checked.

Height in the Christian basilica is stressed by a step-like towering of the roofs of the three or five aisles. In addition, the nave is not only emphasised as an *opaion*—a sky-light—with windows on all sides of the building, but also branches distinctly out towards the aisles, so that space is not broken up into many relatively independent compartments added to the nave (as in the Roman basilica), but appears unified. The aisles as a result emerge, not as an added annexe, but as a natural growth; in their turn they penetrate into the nave, which, seeming to draw them to itself, gives the impression of raising the interior space towards the illumined heights. These upward gradations and the intensity of the light in the nave strike a lofty note, while, untethered, the unified space dominates dynamically over the shell that encloses it.

In contrast to the Christian basilica, the three interior divisions

of the classical temple are of equal height and the roof is flat. There is no gradation upward. In the Roman basilica the aisles on all sides of the building make a skylight of the nave, and the unity of space formal. If in the Christian basilica we imagine the nave lower than the aisles, we immediately realise how indispensable to its expression are the gradation and unity of space. Little as this would affect the spaciousness and lighting, the result of such a change would be oppressive, for space would then be split into three parts. In its present form, however, the space in the Christian basilica appears limitless in depth, and breathes freely in height, because, thanks to the nave's bright illumination and the usually visible rafters, it seems almost roofless and brings a suggestion of infinity. But this space is neither boundless nor uncovered: the basilica's shell, in other words, forms a closed unity, in which space flows as it were infinitely out and, thanks to the dominance of the nave, returns to itself. In this play of infinite and finite we feel alternately subdued and uplifted. It is this very contrast between the finite and the infinite which, in making us conscious of space, gives us our first intimation of sublimity. This is further strengthened by the multitude of scenes glimpsed beneath the colonnades' rhythmic succession of arches, seeming like infinite variations of the nave; while from the nave itself the aisles seem pierced by innumerable arches. A manifold alliance is thus achieved, in which unity is diversified and diversity unified, without the obstruction of classical architectural articulation. The morphology of Christian architecture, characterised by curved lines, smooth surfaces and low-relief decoration, allows the eye to rove uninterruptedly in all directions.

In centrally planned Byzantine churches we observe that space may be amplified in all directions from the centre more easily than in the Christian basilica, and that the unity of space is stressed by the central dome. In diverging towards the perimeter from the dome, the central space makes a centrifugal movement: it is not placed there by the addition of independent spaces around the centre, as in Roman buildings like the Pantheon or the Baths of Caracalla: it is a branching-off, an organic development. Height, moreover, is self-emphasised in a natural ascent towards the light, along with the gradual rise of the vaults supporting the dome. Thus, as reproductions of the Universe, the churches aimed to convey the sublime idea of the Omnipotent Spirit through infinite, but unified, space.

It should be observed, of course, that the longitudinal axis

which predominates in the basilica and leads towards infinite depths did not originally exist in the simple centrally planned buildings. Here there was a kind of centrifugal tendency radiating from the centre with equal force in all directions. From the artistic point of view its absence was an advantage: the centrally planned structure, with its stress on the vertical axis leading to the centre of the dome, acquired an apparent artistic independence—as though it stood there in its own right and not to serve any particular purpose. It was aesthetically isolated as a complete and self-contained world, like the heaven which roofed the earth. In the basilica, on the other hand, the persistent tendency in a certain direction, though intentional, was prosaic. It was advantageous solely from the liturgical point of view, because the sanctuary, where the divine liturgy took place, found its natural position at the end of the longitudinal axis with the apse as a background. In the case of centrally planned buildings, the only natural place for the sanctuary would be the centre of the church. But this position, although useful, in so far as it enabled the congregation to stand round the altar, was inconvenient in that it provided no background for the service; it might be likened to the stage of a theatre placed in the centre of a circular hall. Hence it was that centrally planned buildings were originally used for sacramental rites: the placing of the tomb or of the baptismal font in the centre under the dome was a happy solution of functional and architectural problems (Fig. 13).

Eventually it became necessary for the centrally planned building to shatter its centrifugal unity by a longitudinal axis, and by placing its sanctuary at the end, as in SS. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople (Fig. 14) or in San Vitale at Ravenna (Fig. 41). Hence the perpetual tendency in Byzantine architecture to combine the basilica with the centrally planned building, to which, however, aesthetic reasons also contributed. If the centrally planned building needed a longitudinal axis for liturgical purposes, the basilica equally as much needed a counterbalance to the continual pull toward depth which the main axis of the church gave it. A vertical axis was therefore introduced, which lent an air of calm, especially when a dome crowned the space above. Standing beneath the dome, the spectator could imagine for a moment that he was the centre of the Universe. This combination produced the domed basilica, in which the dome at first was placed in front of the sanctuary (see the Ilissos Basilica in Athens) and was later moved to the centre of the church, both in order to underline its



13 *The Baptistry of the Orthodox,
Ravenna*

importance and to make it visible to the spectator entering the building.

The combination and assimilation of these two types of Byzantine churches, which at the same time exploits the thrusts and counter-thrusts of the vaults, is most happily represented in the domed cross church (Fig. 15) and its variations. From the artistic point of view, however, the most masterly example is Haghia Sophia in Constantinople, with which we shall deal in greater detail in the chapter on space.

The evolution of the domed cross church later

produced the type of the four-column church of the eleventh century (Fig. 16), in which the dome, of relatively small diameter, became a mere symbol. Since it was not visible to the person entering the church until he had approached its centre and made a movement of the head upwards, this dome on its elevated drum stressed the vertical axis of the centre so strongly that it vied with the formerly predominant horizontal axis. With their domes rising like cypresses, a Gothic note is introduced in these little Greek churches, which combine sublimity with grace.

As a reaction to this interior unobtrusiveness of the dome, and appearing as a survival or revival of older aspirations in the Macedonian Renaissance, we have the type of octagonal church to be encountered in Daphni or Hosios Lukas (Figs. 17 and 18). In these buildings the central space is given free play and calls to mind the vast embrace of Haghia Sophia's drumless dome, which allows us to perceive its summit comfortably from the entrance,¹ and transports us with its grandeur and sublimity.

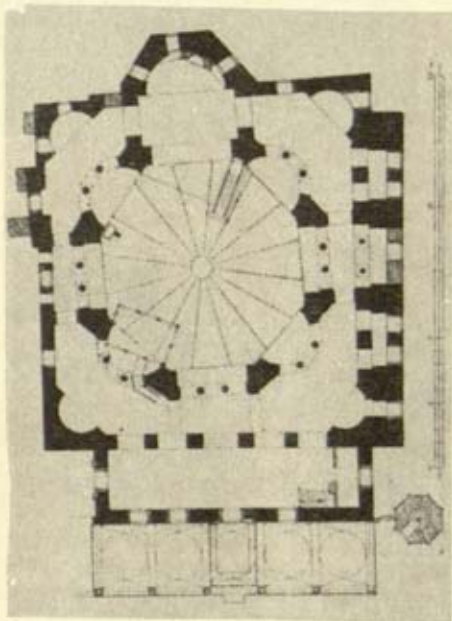
¹ Some believe that the fact that the visual ray of the spectator's eye, when standing at the inner door of the narthex of the Gorgoepekoos, finds the dome's

Between the octagonal and the four-column type of church there is a deep-rooted difference, in which we are not immediately aware that two separate ideals are at work. The octagonal type revives the singleness of space beneath the manifest sovereignty of the dome, so that dynamic unity is achieved. The four-column church breaks up space into a number of more or less independent parts as though of a multipartite organism. In essence, the difference is one of ideals. The octagonal church aims at sublimity by subordination of parts to the whole, represented by the dome which reigns supreme. The four-column church, in allowing the parts to acquire such independence that they become entities harmonising freely in the whole, expresses a classical tendency.

This contrast and conflict are not unjustified, when we consider that the two opposing currents—Oriental and classic, sublime and beautiful—were acting and reacting on the Byzantine style, until they blended into it and into an original form. Although the category of the sublime was ever dominant, the category of the beautiful, intervening as a corrective, stylised, idealised and so Hellenised its tendencies. Indeed, when the urge of the Hellenic spirit became more intense (as in the works of the Greek Provincial School) it turns, in a vain attempt to vanquish the sublime, to the graceful, which is related to both sublime and beautiful.

At this point my previous remarks concerning St. Peter's in Rome may be seen in a clearer light. Michelangelo simplified its plan, in order to give it such unity as would enable the dome to dominate powerfully and so lend the building a sublime tone. A comparison of Bramante's design with Michelangelo's alterations (Figs. 19–20) will reveal in the former's project the conception of the beautiful; for there the parts, seemingly self-contained and freely co-operating among themselves, predominate over the whole; whereas in Michelangelo's plan the whole dominates the parts, absorbing their independence and subordinating them to the

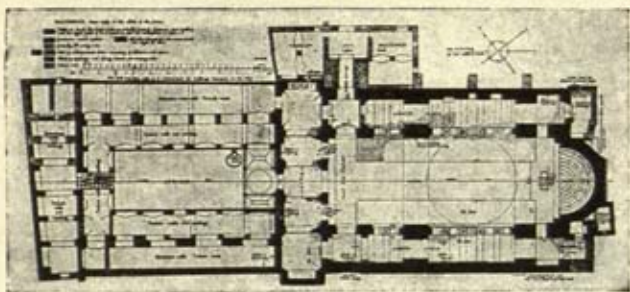
summit, proves that this church follows the arrangement of the Haghia Sophia dome. However, attention was not paid to the difference in the angle formed by the visual ray each time, and it was overlooked that when the angle surpasses a certain limit, and compels the spectator to throw back his head for a view of the dome's summit, it interferes with his pleasurable appreciation of it. The view that only those buildings are artistic of which the dome's summit is immediately visible is also partial and superficial. The artist may create a work of art just as well when not relying on the view of the dome only but on the harmony of the building as a whole: as, for instance, in the case of the inscribed cross type, when the dome's summit is invisible to the entering spectator; or in the case of the octagonal church.



14 *Church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, Constantinople*

imperious prestige of the principal unit—the dome. This dominant influence of one member is a necessary element, for the feeling of the sublime, in time, is based principally on the factor of suddenness (as in the fall of a thunderbolt); in space, suddenness does not exist. Hence in a building it can be expressed only by the abrupt superiority of one member over the others. In architecture this explains the tower overpowering the façade of Gothic cathedrals; the vast dome overwhelming the space of Haghia Sophia; the stress of verticality through a high-drummed dome in Byzantine churches of the eleventh century; and the formation which does away with the plasticity and the autonomy of the co-operating members and unifies them in great lines for the exaltation of the whole. The abolition of the parts' independence, the prevention of their plastic development, and their integration under the main lines of the whole

plan meant, in essence, their transposition to another scale—a supernatural if not a transcendental one, which is beyond human measure. This transposition, however, gave rise to a dangerous architectural problem—namely, how to preserve the “natural”

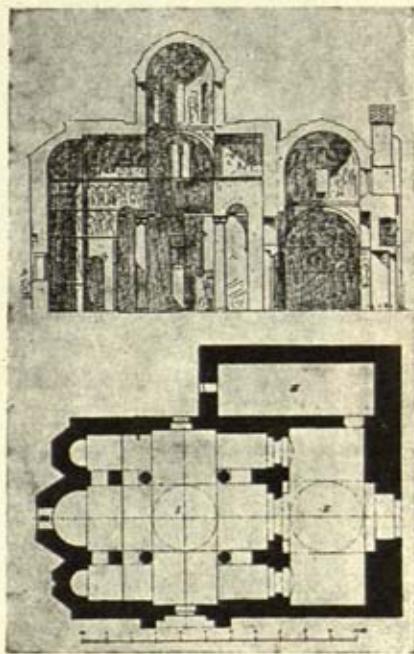


15 *St. Eirene, Constantinople (originally a domed basilica, later domed cross church)*

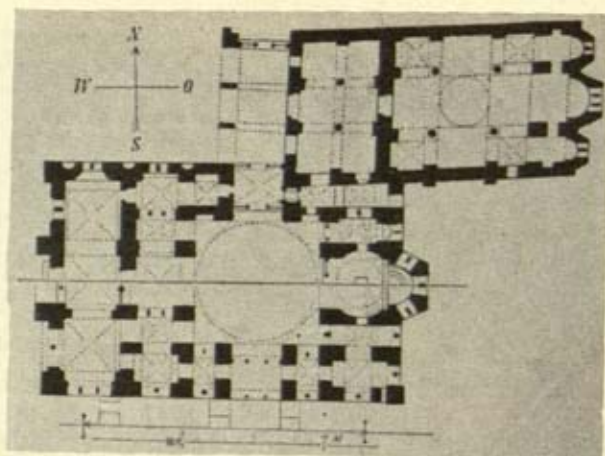
scale of the work so that its dimensions did not disappear into a space made chaotic through an almost clumsy design. This very problem proved a pitfall to Michelangelo in St. Peter's. Let us, however, see how it was solved in Byzantine architecture.

Scale

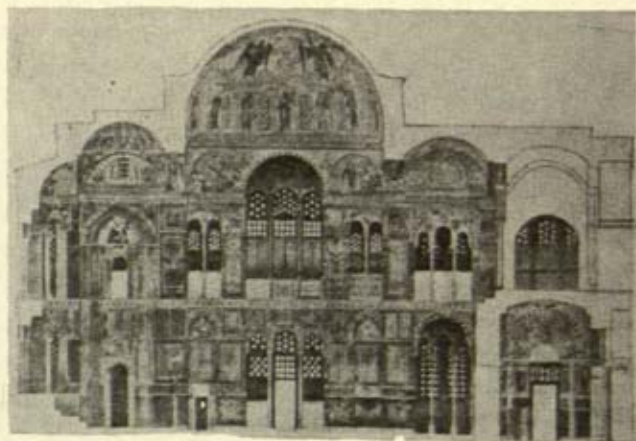
Scale was another prime factor introduced in architecture as a compositional means to stress space and, more generally, the sublime in Christian churches. By "scale" we mean the relation of the architectural to the human dimension: in other words, the adoption of scale by the Christian church meant that all its parts were measured out on the basis of man's dimensions. Aesthetically speaking, the Greek temple is almost completely indifferent to human measurements, and the size of its members is usually determined by a "canon" of proportions. Thus if we would make a schematic distinction, we should say, like Choisy, that when the size of the temple is doubled, so



16 *The Monastery Church, Kaissariani*



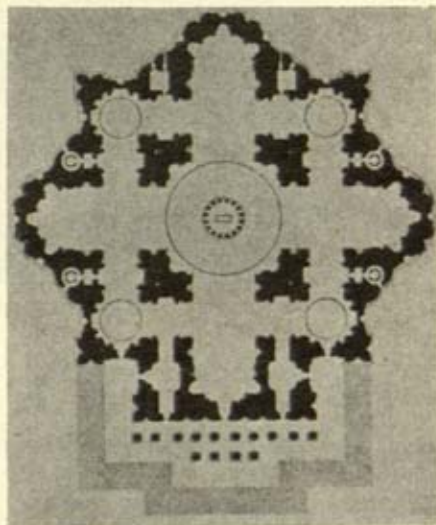
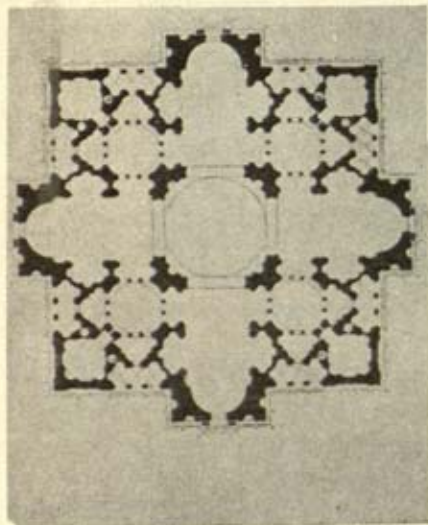
17 *Hosios Lukas Monastery Church, Phocis*



18 *Section of the Hosios Lukas Monastery Church, Phocis*

too is that of all its members, in order to maintain the basic proportions—irrespective of the fact that, for example, the door by being doubled becomes exaggeratedly large (since half that size would have sufficed for men to pass through comfortably); and that, for example, the steps of the *krepi*s can now no longer be ascended by man. The proportions must be preserved, whatever the actual size of the temple; the artist is concerned exclusively with the harmony of proportional relations in the work, for his appeal is to the intellect mainly.

In the Christian church, on the contrary, the size of all the utilitarian members—steps, parapet slabs in the galleries, etc.—is allotted in relation to man, whether in the diminutive church of the Gorgoepekoos or the vast temple of Haghia Sophia. Thus, by applying the dimensions of the human scale to the parts of the church, the spectator is afforded an intelligible means of



19 and 20 *Plan of St. Peter's, Rome* (left: by Bramante; right: by Michelangelo)



21 *Church of St. Demetrius, Thessalonike*
(before the great fire)



22 *Haghia Sophia, Constantinople*

comparison which enables him at once to assess the size of the work, even though at first only as an expression of volume. Moreover, these architectural members act as measures for those others which are necessarily by the canon of proportions larger. We have, then, two scales in the building, as, for example, in the five-aisled basilica of St. Demetrius in Thessalonike (Fig. 21), where the small columns of the aisles make the large ones of the nave appear gigantic, and so themselves gain in height.

A third scale in the work is introduced by the decoration which uniformly and freely passes through the nave and the aisles and unifies them with bands, friezes and borders of marble wall paneling, and also assumes the form of arabesque and mosaic. By means of the mosaic, with its infinite number of minute cubes over the surfaces, and of the drill-carved, lace-like ornament of Byzantine sculpture, decoration introduces into the building the measure of the infinitesimal, which, acting as a foil to space, expands it immensely, making it immeasurable and inconceivable.

The best example of the use of all three scales is to be found in the interior of Haghia Sophia (Fig. 22), where they all contribute in making the immense dimensions of its space measurable. The size of certain of the parapet slabs, doors, windows and columns is determined strictly in relation to man's dimensions, so that even were the building much smaller, their size would still be the same. These members are set next to the larger-scale doors, windows and columns (as we may see in the side barrier of the nave), making

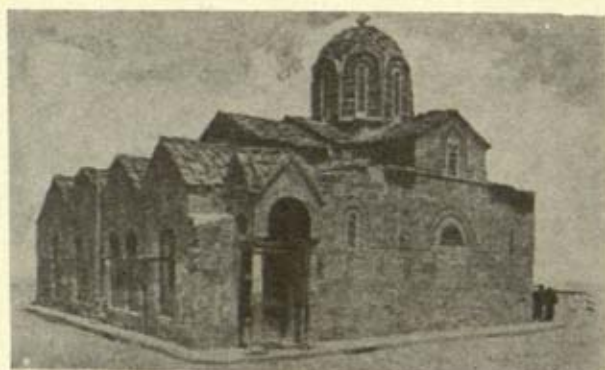
the enlargement of the latter comprehensible by comparison with the former. And again, in an intelligible multiplication, the five openings of the colonnade on the ground floor are set below the seven in the gallery. Similarly, the windows in the *tympana* between the northern and southern major arches are multiplied in superimposed rows, so that the smaller openings measure the larger ones along ever-increasing, ever-widening space, which finally becomes infinite as it merges with the central space, under the forty windows at the base of the dome, spread above it like a cloudless, brilliant sky. So, also, the golden mosaic cubes along the walls' surface augment the latter's size tremendously; while the limits of enclosed space recede from the spectator as does the horizon. The spectator is thus made to feel how small is man, how large the Temple of God; or, more accurately, how infinite the space that contains all. He is conscious, then, of the surroundings sublimity.

If, now, we could imagine the columns taking up two stories in giant orders and the parapets to be unrelated to human dimensions, or if we could visualise vast apertures in the walls without subdivisions to show their magnitude (through their reduction to the common window), we should find that the extensive surface of the walls would then be restricted: their mass would crush us and the whole would become insufferably small.

It was in ignoring the human scale, one feels, that Michelangelo failed in St. Peter's (Fig. 23). In the clear-cut space he created, the natural-scale architectural members proposed by Bramante were lost. Their place was taken by gigantic pilasters, arches and statues beyond any natural scale, which, while they belittle the total size



23 St. Peter's, Rome (interior)



24 *Church of Kapnikarea, Athens*

and so efface the sublime tone both in the interior and exterior of St. Peter's, yet do not achieve the effect of harmonious superiority which pertains to works of classical art.

True, this was not the first time that architecture adopted the human scale. The Romans had made use of it, not so much in temples, which, more or less, imitated Hellenic morphology, but in more utilitarian buildings, such as palaces, *thermae* and amphitheatres. There, however, its purpose was purely practical, and it was not, in consequence, artistically treated in order to promote the impression of sublimity. It was intended merely to offset the colossal dimensions and the mass of the structure, very often to the detriment of proportional harmony; at best it lent its buildings a monumental character, which is not, of course (as the Colosseum in Rome shows (Fig. 36), necessarily the outcome of a sublime tendency.

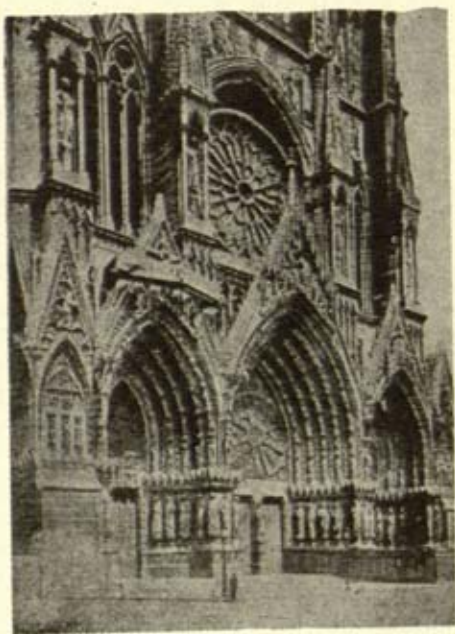
Besides the human scale, Byzantine architecture employed the scale provided by ornament with admirable skill in the exterior as well as the interior of its churches. The natural size of the bricks, stones and ornamental plaques produced, by comparison, astonishing effects of size, despite actual dimensions, in even the smallest Byzantine church (Fig. 24).

In Gothic architecture the scale produces a more sensational, and so less subtle, impression. Not only are the human measurements there to pronounce the awe-inspiring size of the cathedral, not only does the size of the stone contribute to the apparent enlargement of the actual dimensions, but the same plastically detailed treatment of the stone is also preserved throughout, to the most distant pinnacle of the buttresses and as far as the towers'

spires. This detailed workmanship, in introducing the infinitesimal, almost dissolves mass in a play of light and shade and, like the grains of sand on the beach, makes the surface limitless, and the whole boundless in mass, like mountains. As Worringer remarks, each carved pinnacle crowning the buttress is, in itself, a Gothic cathedral in miniature.

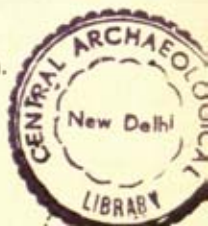
Added to this, there is the intense verticality, endlessly repeated, indeed to the point of satiety, in the parallel flying buttresses and piers, and in the succession of opening and decorative motifs, to explain the astounding illusion of transcendental height produced both in the interior (Fig. 35) and the exterior (Fig. 25) of Gothic cathedrals. As Worringer¹ further says, to attain preternatural size—the immeasurable—is the characteristic aspiration of Gothic morphology: an aspiration springing from a passionate yearning for liberation, which found an outlet in the exhilaration, dizziness and inertia produced by heights. What Worringer does not lay down as a basis for an aesthetic analysis of the Gothic style, although he broaches the point, is that this passionate yearning and striving for liberation is justifiable aesthetically only in so far as it expresses itself in terms of the sublime.

Now the classical Greek temple, being bent neither on asserting itself through its dimensions, nor on conveying sublimity, was, as an expression of the beautiful, always within the bounds of measure. The larger it was, the more necessary it became for it to guard against bulkiness and the danger of departing from the dimensions of its natural surroundings. The regulator of its beauty was, hence, the "canon" of proportions. The nascent



25 Rheims Cathedral

¹ Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, pp. 50 and 113 (München, 1910).



tendency towards the sublime evinced in the archaic Doric temple was gradually eliminated. Whereas, at the outset, the steps of the *krepis*, for instance, were scalable, whereas the width of the *pteron* allowed comfortable shelter to the crowds outside, and both thus provided a certain scale of comparison whereby to emphasise the mass, in the classical period the width of the *pteron* was restricted and the steps were no longer usable. The temple in thus losing its relation to human dimensions lost its massiveness and became an abstract, ideal form, isolated in its beauty. The treatment of the temple, be it added, is not pictorial but plastic. Its mass is not brought out either by low-relief designs extending over the whole surface (as in the Byzantine church) or through the multiple repetition of a basic plastic motif (as in the Gothic cathedral). On the contrary, it conceals even the joints, subordinating details to generalities. It both composes and encloses itself into severe and simple outlines, all of them unified under a basic antecedent pattern. Clearly, then, the traces of sublimity in the dynamic composition and primitive morphology of the archaic Greek temple were finally lost in the perfect harmony of the classical temple, which, indifferent to the human scale, was concerned only with the harmony of proportions: so that the classical work became a self-sufficient unit, ideal and aloof, an aesthetically isolated form of perfection, the archetype of the idea of beauty.

Let it not be supposed that Greek architecture, far as it had moved from the human scale, at any time broke away from it completely. On the contrary, it found a way of recording it in its works.¹ We mention the point only in passing, since to expound it at length would be beyond the scope of this study.

Pictorial Nature of Form

The introduction of the human scale as a means towards the expression of the sublime did not entail disregard by Christian architecture of proportional composition: such disregard would indeed have deprived it of all artistic merit. Systems of proportion played their part in Gothic churches; and Byzantine buildings show harmonious proportions in relating the parts to each other and to the whole. Yet there is a radical difference in the composition of classical and Christian architecture.

We should not overlook the fact that, unlike the classical, Christian works of art have a pictorial, not a tectonic, character. Whereas the classical work evokes the unity of a clear-cut design,

¹ See my book, *Architecture as an Art* (in Greek; 2nd edn., Athens, 1951).

of a plastic volume, simple, geometrically clear, and articulated by differentiated members obeying a type they re-create, the Christian work recalls the unity of a tree, say, in which the proportions are not as important as the character of the tree. Type presupposes a "canon" of proportions (such as Polycleitus' "canon" for the human body), to which every work of that category must conform. On the other hand, character, although concealing in itself a general canon, presupposes mainly an individual expression and originality in each reproduction, so that none should be reminiscent of the other.

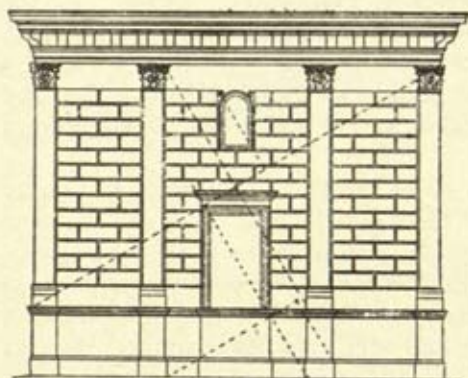
Schematically speaking, given the Doric column of an ancient temple, we can reconstruct the whole temple; or, again, the hand of an ancient statue will enable us to reconstruct the whole body, at least in its proportions. But we cannot reconstitute the shape of a tree by its leaf, nor reconstruct a Byzantine church from one of its columns or its dome: we can only guess its character. We may deduce, thence, that the compositional principle of classical plastic works is the predominance of the parts over the whole which they represent; and of the Christian pictorial expression, the predominance of the whole over the parts which it determines.¹

The co-ordination of the parts into a unity and their subordination to the idea of the whole are, of course, two necessary conditions in any composition; for only the co-operation of these two can create unity in variety. Thus, as we have suggested above, in the classical composition the members are so independent that they can be co-ordinated as entities in the composition, and each so complete as to represent the whole; whereas in pictorial composition, despite the emphasis on the variety of the members, their independence is lost and they are collectively subordinated to the whole. Often a prime unit, ruling autocratically over the composition, may act as the external representative of the dominating whole. In Byzantine churches it is the dome, and in Gothic cathedrals the tower which plays this part. (Let us remember that as the sublime relies for its expression on the element of suddenness in time, so in space it relies on the element of supremacy of a single member over the rest.)

The proportional relations in the façade of the Cancelleria by Bramante (Fig. 26) are an instance of classical composition. The parts preserve their completeness and their independence, yet make it impossible to destroy any one of them, without at the

¹ See also pt. III, ch. 10, for Plotinus' views on beauty and the value of right proportions and pleasing colour in the work of art.

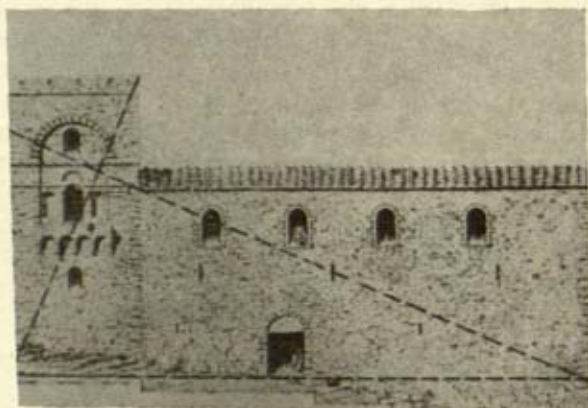
same time impairing the whole. The proportional relations in the Palace at Mistra (Fig. 27), on the other hand, do not by themselves explain the composition of the work. The contrast between the



26 *Part of Cancelleria, Rome, by Bramante (dissective lines by Wölfflin)*

verticality of the tower and the horizontality of the structure at the side is so fundamental that a slight lengthening or shortening of the latter would not perceptibly affect the character of the whole. The tower is like a head, all the rest like a tail. A vertical axis dominates only in the former, while the windows, aligned along the side of the building, draw a horizontal line

across it, which deprives them of their independence. They thus co-operate, rather, in the display of the mass, in which the door, not being subject to any vertical axis, might be moved anywhere else. It is not so much proportional relationship, then, which



27 *The Palace, Mistra*

unifies the members, as the character of the whole, which demands that each of them cede something of its individuality to form it. That is why the whole is preserved, no matter to what degree

the variety of the members is stressed. Indeed, this variety is necessary as a unifying bond running through the work, thus distracting the eye and making it indifferent to austere proportional relations.

In the Gothic cathedral all the piers seem to grow out of the ground like trees of the same species in a forest: the result is that despite the possible differences in the sculptural decoration of the capitals or in the number of ribs, they remain uniform in character. A classical *stoa* would not have suffered such liberties, because although its columns are identical in form, each lays claim to being unique. They do not grow from the ground like trees in a wood, but march freely, falling voluntarily into line, to support the building as representatives of an ideal type of column, each fulfilling its function clearly and simply. In the Byzantine church, on the other hand, while the columns, influenced by the Greek spirit, retain a certain organic independence, they are far enough subjected to pictorial composition to allow of their being crowned each by a different capital (as, for example, in St. Demetrius, in Thessalonike).

In classical architecture the members are plastically formed. They project their volume, that is, and although juxtaposed are kept distinctly separate through mouldings, bands and friezes, so that they do not lose their independence. Thus, each of them separately, and all of them together, testify to a tectonic tendency, in which the independence of the architectural members is in fact so carefully preserved that the joints are concealed and the structural and architectural articulation of each member is unified with colour over the surface. Any impression of diversity is thus weakened. In Byzantine buildings, on the contrary, the architectural members are not articulated plastically as masses, but, so to say, unfold along the surface and join one another without marked distinction. Even in the façades of the Gorgoepekoos, which have a relative plasticity, the narthex is not to be distinguished from the main church, because the walls have no projections; and bands, friezes and taeniae are carried only in flat relief. Therefore the different colours on each stone are emphasised, and the somewhat fortuitous placing of the decorative plaques becomes a principle; the joints are not concealed, but on the contrary are underlined, thus making a pictorial of a monotonous surface—diversifying it, that is, with a vague, expressive and original design, which is anything but a formal prototype. So-called modern Byzantine churches which do not follow these pictorial principles

and distinguish their masses plastically, in contravening the spirit of the Byzantine style, which is by nature atectonic, become unsightly.

The pictorial articulation of Byzantine churches usually presents a contrast between a simple base and a multipartite roofing. So we have the arms of the cross usually drawn across the roof, thus dissolving mass in pictorial tones at that point, and subordinating it to the dominant of the dome, which, when it is set upon a drum (like Kapnikarea, Fig. 24) floats upwards like an alto voice; or when drumless (like Haghia Sophia Fig. 1) swells outwards like a deep bass voice.

Summing up, we may say that simplicity, clarity and the ideal type are the attributes of classical art, while variety, vagueness and individual character are the virtues, not the faults, of Gothic art. Byzantine architecture, for its part, despite its pictorial character, becomes neither complex nor obscure, for it combines idealism with its characteristic beauty, and thus stylises it. A fundamental feature of characteristic, as contrasted to ideal, beauty is that its form, instead of being closed and static, is open and dynamic. In other words, there are forms which one may seize at a glance, because they obey a clear and simple geometric moment of perfection—ideal types. Such are the forms of classical art. There are, on the other hand, open forms which a first glance will grasp only partially, for to each movement of the eye they reveal a new image, seemingly irrelevant to the previous ones, so that until we have seen a number of them we may not enjoy the whole. Their form, at each particular point, as though in an endless process of completion, as though constantly in the making, seems thus to be opening outwards, unfolding. The impression is not of complete, arrested forms, but of forms of a characteristic type, straining after ideal perfection. Such are the forms of Christian art. A classical form requires no more than its frontal view, since, tectonically built, it is by itself enough to enhance its plastic volumes. Pictorial forms, for their part, demand a side view as well, since the frontal view cannot adequately disclose their articulation (Fig. 28). Being atectonic masses, unfolded surfaces, open forms, a frontal view alone might make them appear formless and unplastic, though they are not so in essence: their static and dynamic differences are hidden deeper. So it is that the Erechtheum, although appearing outwardly as an open form, yet, belonging as it does to an architecture of a static nature, preserves simplicity and clarity in its composition. However, this "breach of



28 *Hosios Lukas Monastery Church, Phocis*

faith" is justifiable in that the Erechtheum came under the influence of the "graceful" movement that characterised the spirit of Ionia. And it is natural that an individual tendency should, if it is dynamic, create open forms, and if it is static, closed forms, no matter if the contrary trend prevail at the time.

The Dynamism of Composition

The pictorial arrangement with its inevitably open form is the result of an inner dynamism. It springs from artistic feeling, as opposed to intellect. The one creates, the other constructs: where the mind operates statically, measuring and harmonising, feeling functions dynamically in rhythm and melody; where the mind defines and formulates, ordering variety into a single harmonious pattern, feeling lets its own rhythm transport it to impetuous, "unpremeditated song"; where an act of the mind orders and encloses, a movement of feeling expands in unrestrained freedom. Its artistic nature is absorbed in but one thing—the unison of all the parts, their melody. Necessarily, then, in pictorial composition the parts in themselves are imperfect, confused, somewhat fortuitously arranged, and it is the whole which dominates and, in so doing, justifies their deviations.

It is so in Byzantine architecture, where exactness of adjustment and regularity of design do not play an important part. As Bayer¹ remarked, "The science of asymmetrical waverings is the secret of Byzantine churches", adding that, "from the point of

¹ Bayer, *L'Esthétique de la grâce*, I, pp. 334–45 (Alcan, 1933).

view of our very severe requirements, a Byzantine church is always an error; an accepted error, however, which is successful". The walls of Byzantine buildings are not, it is true, set at precisely right angles (Hosios Lukas, Fig. 17); the roofs often have different slopes (for example, Kapnikarea, Fig. 24); domes are not always absolutely circular at their base (St. Sophia at Thessalonike); the various views are irregular and the bricks are set apparently at random. And if those irregular deviations are acceptable to the eye, it is because the mind discerns a compositional law at work beneath; and if they appeal to the feelings also, it is because those very inaccuracies in drawing and imperfections in the masonic application, those very "poetic licences", so to call them, accentuate the pictorial character of the composition. The whole might be likened to a symphony of which the parts were performed with a feeling and a virtuosity so felicitous and so impulsive that they could not again be repeated exactly.¹

Thus, no work of Byzantine architecture is a pure type, a prototype capable of serving as a model, as is the case with the Doric temple. Each Byzantine church has its own personality. It dis-

¹ It would be well to raise here the point I stressed at the Congress of Byzantine Studies in Thessalonike in 1953 of the deviations from regularity of form which—a picturesque feature common to Byzantine and classical art—yet underlines their difference. For whereas the charm of Byzantine art lies partly in its irregularities of form, the beauty of classical art lies in its stress of regularity and precision of form. Byzantine irregularities arising in the course of construction, far from being due to the masons' lack of skill, testify to their ability to keep the pattern unchanged in its main lines, while allowing such deviations full play (as in the case of certain sketches in which the contour is delineated by several lines). Now classical art also displays deviations of form, in what have come to be regarded as optical corrections. But the deviations here are studied. Goodyear has aptly called the narrowing of the intercolumnia towards the corners of the Doric temple, for instance, "a systematic irregularity"; the term could be equally well applied to the entasis and inclination of the columns, the curves, etc., which do away with geometric accuracy and with the order formal logic would have demanded of the composition. That such systematic irregularities or optical corrections are not intended as counter-illusions only to restore geometrical regularity becomes at once evident in the light of the fact (until recently ignored) that on becoming aware of these curves and deviations, we find them so extraordinarily pleasing that we would not wish them straight.

Such systematic irregularities in classical art testify to a latent picturesqueness there, as they bring to its forms vitality and animation and suggest freedom of design in the composition as a whole. Now Byzantine irregularities by comparison are negative refinements. Let us remember that the aim of classical art is to attain the ideal form of abstract beauty by precision and regularity, and the aim of Byzantine art is to reflect characteristic beauty by irregularity and departure from precision. The classical work presents the realisation of an ideal in its form, while the Byzantine presents a transitional form, guiding as it strives towards the ideal.

This common feature between the two arts shows how important is the study of the one to the understanding of the other.

obeys type and is flauntingly original to a degree unknown in classical art. Byzantine buildings, then, are dynamic expressions of subjective feeling, rather than static compositions of objective contemplation. As a result, reconstructions of Byzantine architectural monuments, attempting to give the structure regular shapes and precise application of masonry, irremediably destroy the pictorial character of the original, as we may see from the present Russian church in Athens, Soteira of Lycodemos, with its deplorable regularity of masonry joints. (In the restoration of classical monuments, such as the Parthenon, on the other hand, the artificial marble filling in broken columns makes patches, and hence lends a pictorial undertone, which classical architecture abhors and strives to subdue aesthetically.) To sum up, it is not polychromy, as Millet¹ has asserted, that enables Byzantine architecture to overlook accuracy of adjustment and regularity of shapes, but its pictorial nature, with its primary insistence on originality, as a necessary factor in each of its creations. One may well feel surprised, then, that Byzantine art was ever accused of rigidity of types or of blind repetition of prototypes, since on the contrary originality, albeit without irreverence to tradition, is its very hall-mark.

Byzantine architecture and painting praise God in chants of free verse, as that of the Testament, and not in classic metres: in chants that obey their own impulsive rhythm and are the expression of individual exaltation, induced by the inner dynamism of a sublime experience. These are no products of objective intellectual pleasure drawn from the serene contemplation of beauty, wherein dynamism (of which, indeed, beauty is not bereft) becomes a disciplined and restrained feeling.

The dynamism of Byzantine art is itself restrained in comparison with Gothic art. This becomes immediately evident on considering both types of buildings in their natural setting. In Gothic architecture the verticality of the cathedral towers is in direct contrast to the plains surrounding them, whereas in classical architecture the buildings fit in with their landscape. That is what Choisy means² in saying that Gothic architecture works in contrasts (*par oppositions*), classical architecture in relations (*par analogies*). The same occurs with Byzantine architecture, which preserves the Greek sense of measure. It does not exaggerate in any direction, whether

¹ C. Millet, "L'Art Byzantin", in Michel's *Histoire de l'Art*, I, p. 162 (Paris, 1905).

² Choisy, *Histoire de l'Architecture*, II, p. 414 (Baranger, 1929).

of depth, width or height. Its towers are numbered, and when they exist, they are set apart from the main building. We must turn to Islamic architecture to find the melodiously strident tones of the minarets or the limitless extension in width, as in the interior of the Mosque at Cordova (Fig. 39). It should be underlined, however, that despite these differences between Byzantine and Gothic architecture, the pictorial character and the dynamism of the composition, in the one as in the other, testify to the fact that it is the aesthetic category of the sublime, and not of the beautiful, which predominates.

TECHNIQUE

Technique and the Artist

In judging the works of a former art-era, the discovery that all technical and morphological elements have concurred in rendering one particular expression may lead to the fallacious assumption that, given those particular elements, art could achieve only that expression.

To assume this is to deny art originality and to attribute its achievements to soulless technical possibilities and to any forms it may have drawn from its environment. Thus, the lively archaeological controversy on the Roman as against the Oriental origins of Byzantine art, interesting as it was historically, completely stripped the art under discussion of its individual originality. The Roman and Oriental elements did not determine the expression of Byzantine art: they were employed in its service. They might equally well have achieved another expression had the spirit of the age been of a different kind, since inert and speechless in themselves, the elements depend on the artist's inspiration to bring them life and move them to eloquence. How malleable they are in the artist's hands we at once realise when we observe how the use of the same morphological elements has produced expressions as different as those of the Italian Renaissance and of classical antiquity; or, again, as different as the archaic Doric temple and the temple of classical times, where, in addition to the same forms, the same technique is also used. If, for instance, in the latter the feeling of the beautiful clearly predominates, there are in the former, as we have mentioned above, undertones of the sublime which remind us of Aeschylus as compared with Sophocles (to take an example from Greek tragedy).

It would, of course, be absurd to pretend that the artist, what-

ever compositional or creative possibilities his genius affords him, is uninfluenced by the prevailing technical and morphological elements. The technical means he must perforce employ, because of their current practical use; others because the conditions and tradition of the region in which he works demand it—as, for example, the flat or slightly sloping roof in the South and the steep-angled roof in the North. But their influence is artistically sterile so long as the artist remains unaware of the essential nature of the traditional forms, of the possibilities of native materials, and the association of both to the spirit of the place and age to which they belong. (Thus, in our own day, the artist, seeing not only the technical but also the peculiar morphological possibilities of reinforced concrete, erects a monolithic construction and roofs over large spaces with thin shells.) Indeed, the artist's work becomes living and up-to-date only when he has discovered and revealed in it the indwelling associations and possibilities of the available techniques and forms. Yet these being only means to an end, the artist cannot blindly and indiscriminately accept any and every material or morphological element offered, but must select as his needs and natural inclinations dictate. He adapts himself to materials and forms only when they, for their part, can be adapted to his intentions. Otherwise he discards them as useless.

So it is that at various times certain traditional forms or techniques have fallen into disuse and died out, others have been resuscitated from oblivion, others have burgeoned in the North and withered in the South. The Renaissance, in abandoning the grandiose technique of Gothic architecture, allowed numerous indigenous, living forms to die out, while it resurrected the classical morphology and corresponding techniques. This retrogression was detrimental to its architecture, for the young sap of an original technique that lends force to imagination and vitality to structure no longer ran through its cells. But the Renaissance, seeking new possibilities in composition and in the expression of the beautiful, could scarcely avoid it.

Let us see now what technical means Byzantine architecture disposed of, and what part they played in the expression of the sublime.

The System and the Materials of Construction

In examining the technical means employed by Byzantine architecture, it would be well to move from the general to the particular and deal first with the system of construction, then with

the degree to which it influenced the form and was concealed or revealed in it, and finally with the relationship between form and function.

Classical Greek architecture employs the system of beam on post, dispensing with vaults; it gives prominence to the horizontal line in the structure; it builds with stone without mortar, so that voids cannot be too large, and the definite measure that prevails throughout precludes bulk; its system is one of combined members without articulation. In other words, the building is formed by a number of independent members that balance, thanks to gravitation, and so, in a "democratic", as it were, co-operation, operate freely while achieving the effect of an organically constructed whole. In the form, this systematic conjuncture of free members into a whole becomes apparent in the chiselling of the original material, the stone, in a way which reveals the various forces that come into play in the work, suggesting them in the fluting, the diminution and entasis of the columns, the curvatures of stylobate and architrave, and in other ways; while in the column's support of its burden, there is a hint of muscular action, as that of a human body carrying a weight. The outcome of an anthropocentric aesthetic attitude, an architecture of masclulation came into being, in which each architectural member performed its task successfully, thus enabling the whole temple to rise without effort.¹ In short, the spirit of classical Greek building is synthetic and the relation between form and function rational.

Roman architecture, on the other hand, when original, was mainly arched. It made use of the arch to bridge over large voids, and of vaults to cover spaces, without the intervention of supports, which would have been obstructive in a utilitarian architecture designed to serve the needs of large masses of people. Except when imitating the costly Greek masonry, Roman architecture used mortar as a cohesive material, pouring fillings into a cuirass of brick or masonry. This system of monolithic construction was applied also to the vaults, which as a result became heavy and required massive supporting walls and buttresses; but it was an easy and rapid method, which largely dispensed with specialised and responsible workers, since it could be carried out by large masses of workers, whom Rome with her world empire could easily find. Not unnaturally, owing to this system of building, Roman edifices became so immense as to be overbearing. In the

¹ P. A. Michelis, *The Aesthetics of Optical Illusions in Architecture* (in Greek; Athens, 1951).

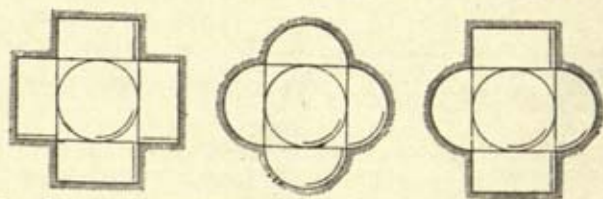
Roman building we have an architecture of mass, in which the subordination of parts shows its "monarchic" spirit. These lose their independence and do not co-operate as free members organically in the whole, but work collectively. In consequence, it is not art that rules but technique, which in its arrogance adopts what pompous ornament it pleases. Columns, pilaster or entablatures often project in Roman buildings, as merely so much additional decoration, in reality supporting no burden in the construction, and therefore dispensable. The system of plastic chiselling of the original stone practised by the Greeks declined, and the Romans adopted a system of veneers on cheap material, of which the decorative value was purely fortuitous. There was no rational relation now between form and function. The Greek spirit of synthesis gave place to a spirit of order (*ordo*) and of formal logic (*ratio*) divested of poetry. *Roma non cantat!* Indeed, she concealed her prosaicism in monumentality, which, itself of doubtful aesthetic value, was her sole contribution to later art.

Byzantine architecture, which also used the arch, the vaults and the system of veneers, yet treated these elements with constructional sagacity, refinement and artistic sensibility. The mass of unskilled workers was replaced by responsible craftsmen, who possessed that constructional ingenuity and artistic initiative indispensable to its pictorial character. The blending of the imperial spirit of Rome with the democratic Greek spirit brought about a corresponding alliance of architectural trends. Accordingly, massiveness was given an organic quality, prosaicism was combined with a synthesising, lyrical spirit, and the overwhelmingly arrogant monumentality was transformed into sublimity. Let us, however, attempt to confirm the above.

Byzantine architects did not pour vaults in concrete, but built them with bricks mainly. They erected them, indeed, without centering, freely in space, with the result that the vaults were light in weight, a kind of monolithic shell; the walls supporting them and the abutments which received their thrusts became less thick. In addition, Byzantine architects attempted to concentrate piers and abutments at certain points, making of the remaining walls mere partitions, carrying no burden as far as this was practicable. And it was not entirely feasible in a structure where there was no possibility of distinguishing between a carrying, independent skeleton and the auxiliary co-operation of walls in the abutment of the diffused thrusts of the roof's vaults. On this score

Seldmayr's remark¹ deserves noting, when he says that the system of Justinian architecture is a "ciborium system", in which a fundamental factor in creating space is the dome, carried on separate piers, and not the supporting walls of any roof. I would say that the composition begins from above flowing downwards, not the reverse. Indeed, if I may so express it, Byzantine architects combined a monolithic system of construction with a system of non-articulated bearers.

The arches and the vaults therefore were directly supported by the columns, not by massive walls or columns which did not, in reality, carry what they appeared to, as in Roman architecture. The architect's rationalism and insight led him so to combine the vaults that, in co-operating, they reciprocally neutralised their thrusts. According to Choisy,² the basic combinations of the dome's



29 *Dome-abutment combinations, according to Choisy*

abutment are three: (a) by four-barrel vaults; (b) by four quarter domes; (c) by a combination of both (Fig. 29). Naturally these combinations affected the centrally planned churches also, and we may legitimately conjecture that certain types of churches emerged in Byzantium without the help of Oriental models. Of course, the morphological principle of distributing supports and abutments within the necessary sub-divisions of the building's interior plan holds good in every constructional combination: the struggle of the antagonistic forces is thus concealed both in the interior and the exterior of Byzantine churches, leaving the spectator's sense of stability undisturbed. The principle of suggesting the skeleton beneath the body is identical with that applied by the ancient Greeks. Where the two architectures vary is in the skeleton itself, of which a characteristic is the beam upon posts in the Hellenic, and the arch upon columns in the Byzantine, with a diversified combination of vaults in the latter; for in Byzantine architecture,

¹ Seldmayr, *Zur Geschichte des Justinianischen Architektursystems*, p. 30. He calls this system a *Baldachinsystem*.

² Choisy, *L'Art de bâtir chez les Byzantins* (Paris, 1883).

this impression being effected not only vertically but also in thrusts, such combinations were inevitable. When the whole composition is statically correct, it achieves an expression of serenity and unity, restful to the spectator. This new architectural manifestation of the Greek world is inalienably related to the classical expression, through the synthetic spirit that informs them both.

The Byzantine architects raised the semicircular arch above its centre so as to reduce the differences in height to the same level in the vaults; they simplified the elliptical curves of Roman cross-vaults into circular ones and so created the "Byzantine cross- or groin-vault". Pioneers in the use of the simple, beautiful form of the pendentive in square, dome-vaulted spaces, they raised the vaults, buttressing them by the counter-thrusts of niches, combining them and piercing them, so that they appear insubstantial and ethereal. The massiveness of the Roman building disappeared, and all that the Byzantine architects retained from the Romans was their system of veneers, even there converting what had been a plastic into a pictorial element, and thus giving it its suitable morphological character. The original material was no longer plastically treated so that its form should proclaim the forces active within it, but was allowed to rove over the form's surface as a revetment, in a play of light and shade and in pictorial polychromy. In the aesthetics of surface that came into being, cohesion and rigidity expressed the monolithic nature and tendency of the construction. This pictorial form was not only rationally related to the function, but was also tectonically expressive. On that account—despite the fact that its composition, like the Roman, showed a "monarchic" tendency, and that the compactness of its monolithic construction was more evident than in Roman architecture, which had retained the Hellenic decoration—Byzantine architecture can boast of a healthier technique and a more genuine structure than the Roman. Artistically, it was thoroughly original, with its form flowing outwards from within and not *vice versa*.

We may better understand Byzantine architecture by comparing it with the Gothic, with its structural originality. While both spring from the same tendency towards the sublime, they grow apart at a certain point, like two branches of the same tree. Gothic architecture made particular use of the pointed arch and the cross-vault, discarding other forms of vault construction which Romanesque art had used before it. It introduced the support of the vaults on ribs—or, rather, so much perfected it as to make of it an

important innovation. These both lightened the construction and, in a total concentration of the thrusts, firmly established the system of the skeleton. All walls became thin screens that carried no weight and could be replaced by glass windows. The supports restricted their mass to the utmost and rose heavenward vertically, gradually becoming transformed from columns into ribbed composite piers, with a number of ribs equal to those supporting the vaults. When, later, these piers shed their capitals, the mouldings appeared to grow from the ground to the roof. The fact that



30 *Flying Buttresses, Gothic Cathedral*

Gothic architecture used in its constructions small carved stones held together by cohesive mortar contributed to this technical achievement. But over and above that, everywhere at work in the building was an analytical spirit which, grasping or, rather, defining structural force in diagrams of statics, petrified them in space, in a feat that seems not only daring but improbable. Thus, in order to neutralise the thrusts of the vaults on the piers, Gothic architecture brought to the exterior of its churches an

audacious system of flying buttresses (Fig. 30) based on stepped piers that restore the precarious equilibrium of forces. Our sense of stability, while it is satisfied, is also amazed, because the architectural members are no longer organically, but almost mechanically, related. As Worringer has said, the Gothic building is a mechanical assembling of members (*mechanischer Gliederbau*).¹

This ribbed construction, finally, in an effort to assume the disguise of a monolithic skeleton, sometimes displays hanging key-stones that look like stalactites. In general, a superb urgency

¹ Worringer, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

seems to possess this stone construction, as though the artist's will, rather than his reason, had shaped it; as though it had indeed been raised "in defiance of matter", as has very aptly been remarked. The analytical spirit that pervades Gothic morphology is evident, not only in the composite piers with their ribs, but also in the architectural parts, with their detailed plastic treatment, which is insistently preserved and identically reiterated from the base to the remotest summit of the work. Here again the relation between form and function is expressive. Gothic architecture thus, although it abandons the system of veneers and returns to the Greek system of plastic treatment of the original material, differs radically from Greek architecture in that it is picturesque. This is indeed common ground to both Byzantine and Gothic art, as, moving along their separate courses, they converge towards their common goal—the sublime.

These two architectures, despite their signal differences, then, share a number of constructional and morphological characteristics. First of all, in the relation of carrying and carried part, the principle of support and burden, although it does not in fact cease to exist, yet ceases to be expressly marked. The burdens do not seem to be directly carried by the supports, but transferred mainly in the form of thrusts, no matter whether—occurring in the interior—this process is invisible (as in Byzantine architecture) or whether—occurring in the exterior—it is visible (as in Gothic).

The character of the support is altered. In classical architecture, burden and support are evenly matched aesthetically (even though in the Ionic and Corinthian Orders, as compared with the Doric Order, there is a gradual lightening of the burden which gives the support a certain superiority). In Byzantine architecture the burden predominates over the support, and although here again a gradual evolution led to the lightening of the weight as the arches' centre was raised higher than the line of the capitals, the burden none the less still continued to prevail aesthetically over the support. The Byzantine capital, in order to enable the columns to withstand the superiority of the burden both structurally and aesthetically, was expanded and enriched by the addition of the *pulvino*, and finally assumed the characteristic form of the reversed truncated pyramid or of the bowl-like capital (Figs. 31 and 54, 55, 56).

In Romanesque architecture, on the other hand, the carrying members began to prevail aesthetically over the supported members (Fig. 32), and in order to maintain this superiority even when



31 *Pair of Columns with
Impost, Hagia Sophia*

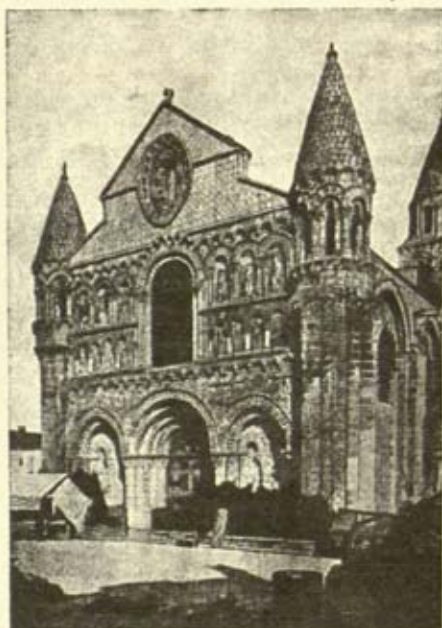
the columns became finer and taller, they were grouped into composite piers, or so much increased in bulk that they were dwarfed. In Gothic architecture, finally, the columns completely lost the independence they had enjoyed in classical times. The piers, although composite and ribbed, became exceedingly slender, because what they lost in bulk they gained many times over in height, and the eye, in following their upward leap, is convinced that their mass prevails over the supported members—especially as, in many cases, the roof remains invisible. The Gothic piers seem to push into and support the clouds.

This intense verticality was especially marked in the Gothic architecture of Germany, for in France it was, to a certain degree, interrupted by horizontal lines, as is to be seen in Notre Dame, Paris (Fig. 33). The flying buttresses being outside the church, the verticality of the columns in the interior of the cathedrals is of particular importance aesthetically, for there their dynamism amazes and makes space vibrate. In any case, in order to explain how this superiority of the supporting over the supported members in Gothic architecture, and the reverse in Byzantine, are aesthetically tolerable, we must examine the methods whereby both architectures succeeded in making matter apparently lose its weight; how, that is, they achieved the dematerialisation of mass—the one (the Byzantine) stamping its achievement with Greek idealism, the other (the Gothic) impressing on it its Western fervour.

The Dematerialisation of Mass

In Byzantine architecture, where, in contrast to Gothic, the solid masses outnumber the voids, the system of veneers is preserved, and as a result mass appears compact, yet without on that

account making the work either heavy or bulky, as might seem probable. For, looking at the curved surfaces of the arches and the interweaving vaults, at their upward movement in support of the dome, the spectator will progressively feel that the material loses its substantiality until it no longer gives an impression of mass. In this particular it is interesting to compare Byzantine with Egyptian architecture, which, with its densely set columns that appeared capable of supporting any weight whatever, produced a strong effect of mass. There weight was countered by decoration, which covered the members with floral forms and the walls with hieroglyphs and figures. In classical times mass rid itself of some of its weight by means of the columns' flutings, diminution and entasis, and of the architrave's curvatures. Then, thanks to the rational expression through the mouldings of the forces at work in each member, mass seems, in this act of balance that surpasses itself, to shed its weight as matter takes wing. In Byzantine buildings almost the same result was achieved through the elasticity of mass, which was here used as a plastic material, spread like a membrane over the space it enveloped, and pierced for purposes of lighting. It displays rigidity and cohesion only in so far as these are necessary to hold together the curved surfaces and so prevent their membrane from bursting, as they stretch and turn. Indeed, Byzantine architecture was compelled to exploit the rigidity and cohesion of the material structurally as well; for the thrusts do not act vertically, but transfer the pressure sideways, occasionally torturing the material with bending, even with tension as the tie-rods testify; moreover, the necessity of diffusing the thrusts within the mass necessitated the domination of mass (which



32 *Notre Dame-la-Grande,
Poitiers*



33 *Notre Dame, Paris*

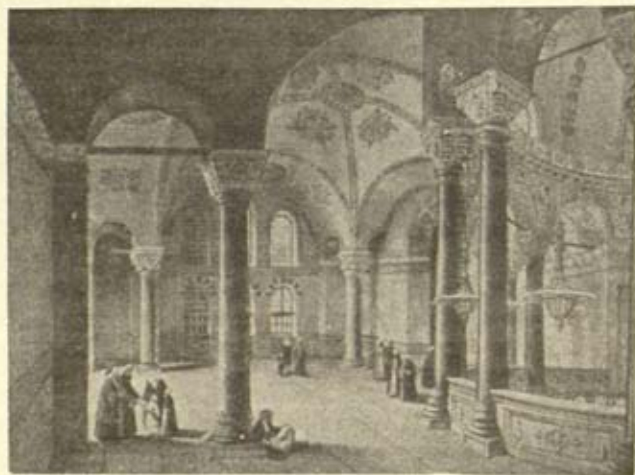
is a carried member) over the supporting members. With the functions of burden and support no longer clearly defined, the impression of weight fades, and the cohesion and rigidity of matter become pronounced. If the work succeeds aesthetically, it is because the members, far from resisting, display co-operation with, the rigidity and cohesion of the composition as a whole. This, as the surface expresses, is in a sense monolithic.

Naturally, the anthropocentric approach is here abandoned. If we can look at the supremacy of the

burdens over the supporting members without feeling that the latter are being crushed, it is because arches and vaults grow out of them, very much like lilies (Fig. 34), while their smooth, dome-like membrane draws the eye from one to the other. A direct display of the weight of matter would have required plastic treatment of forms and surfaces—at least according to the Roman manner (as, for example, in the interior surface of the Pantheon's dome with its coffers (Fig. 37). Here the distinctness of the ribs and of the repeated indentations suggests throughout the surface the full weight and material nature of the mass—indeed, to such a degree that the surface as such ceases to exist, and is represented by a number of volumes clinging together to prevent each other from falling. Even the shadows that throw the indentations into relief seem like an immaterial weight, aesthetically oppressive. In Byzantine buildings, on the other hand, the surfaces, smooth and crisp, are free from plastic decoration; where there is sculptural decoration, it is with linear or pierced arabesques in a light flat-relief. Again, wherever the surfaces intersect there are no pilasters, archivolts or mouldings—no architectural projections—to give the impression that something special is occurring at that point, that extra force and

material weight are needed there to keep the building erect. Incorporeal lines enframe the surfaces wherever they intersect or wherever their curves interpenetrate. Thus lines of edges and elastic stretches of surface, almost all of them curved, induce the eye to glide endlessly on. There is about them a melodious dynamism unknown to the static architecture of ancient Greece, where the efforts of the forces to vanquish weights was suggested rationally in a form that gave wings to matter. The expressive Byzantine architecture, for its part, reveals through form the attempt of matter to become an elastic, rigid and cohesive mass which finally dematerialised envelops the space that whirls within it, and rises heavenward like the smoke of incense.

In Gothic architecture (Fig. 35) the pointed arch does not possess the melody of the Byzantine circular arch, and the ribbed piers have none of the softness of the smoothly rounded, shining Byzantine columns; nor have the scant surfaces of Gothic buildings the elasticity of Byzantine vault construction, with its curved expanse. The Gothic piers and ribs indicate with their plastic formation that in them are concentrated all the actions of the energies and that they forcefully compel matter to rise towards the heights. The clustered piers, spring upward like the trees of a forest, and because they diverge optically from the vertical as they rise, they appear to vacillate, so that their balance seems precarious. Consequently matter, in Gothic architecture also, loses its weight; principally, however, because the ribs appear to have no



34 *Cross-vaults of Side Aisle, Haghia Sophia*

burden to support, and not, as in Byzantine architecture, because of the apparent elasticity of matter. Gothic piers and ribs seem, in this manner, to support the clouds, as previously pointed out. At the roof, which is sometimes invisible, the piers, as Hegel said, branch out, forming a canopy as trees do in a forest. The ribs, like the booming chords of an organ in a church, seem to vibrate through the voids which dominate the solid masses, divested as these are of matter and lacking in melodious curves. Those very sparse masses suggest ossified music, so to speak, a chord in stone that pulsates and vibrates. Alone the persistent rigidity and striving cohesion hold the building together, with the result that the sinewy mass of Gothic architecture makes up in power what it lacks in grace.



35 *Cologne Cathedral (interior)*

Two more important factors co-operate in the effort towards achieving dematerialisation of mass: light, and the treatment of the material's surface. However, before examining these two factors I shall take up the problem of space, inasmuch as for dematerialised mass to breathe freely space is needed—faintly shadowed, mysterious space, in which light and decoration work in unison.

SPACE

The Feeling of Space

When, on entering a hall, our impression is one of being received in an embrace in which we may nestle, we experience a pleasant sensation. This is one of the most characteristic experiences to be derived from an architectural work—the awakening, that is, of

that feeling of space¹ which is an immanent quality and an elementary prerequisite in any good building, particularly in its interior. It has hence been asserted that what distinguishes architecture from other arts is its very ability to create space, and its attendant capacity for making us aware of it; that whereas sculpture deals with the convex, architecture deals with the concave, in whose embrace a feeling of space is more easily induced. We should not lose sight of the fact, however, that the feeling of space, although a quality never absent from architecture, is not in itself enough to distinguish this art from the others, since the same feeling is shared by sculpture, and even painting, whose forms also presuppose it; moreover, architecture, like sculpture and painting, necessarily also expresses itself through forms (which indeed are not always convex; are, in fact, sometimes—as in roomless monuments—concave). In other words, the distinction between architecture and the other arts is not to be sought in the presence or absence of this feeling, but rather in the manner in which architecture expresses and imparts it, as compared with the other arts. And it may be said that, by virtue of its different nature, architecture can rouse the feeling directly and positively where the other arts do so only indirectly and, as it were, negatively. Architecture presents us with, and focuses our attention on, a container of space: sculpture or painting presents us with its content, and in shifting our interest from the container to the content, transfers it from space to object.

Preoccupation with the object, of course, detracts interest from the void which contains it, and overshadows the feeling of space that went into the making and placing of the object. In order to arouse this interest and feeling, the object would have to be given a suitable environment (such as, say, a closed square like a hall, or, better, a concave setting). For example, a statue, looked at as an object in space, suggests the idea of impenetrability. Yet, negatively and indirectly, the object itself, by virtue of its very impenetrability, awakens a feeling for space through our knowledge that we cannot stand where it stands. If it is a piece of sculpture, it becomes an obstacle; whereas a piece of architecture allowing of

¹ We would distinguish between the physiological perception of space, the philosophical conception of space, and the artistic feeling of space. Smell and hearing partly, but the sense of touch and sight chiefly, make us physiologically aware of space. This awareness contributes to the philosophical conception and artistic feeling of space, but cannot take its place. The philosophical conception is a matter of scientific knowledge, the artistic feeling of space an aesthetic experience.

entry, looked at as an object containing space, becomes a source of heightened appreciation of space (unless, indeed, the halls are ugly or untidily set out, when it repels us).

The idea of impenetrability, then, denies a subconscious, instinctive assumption (derived from the open landscape) that space is expansive, vast, boundless and that there is room for all things in its embrace, and through this very denial leads to space-awareness.

The subconscious assumption of boundlessness is instinctively drawn from open spaces; the conscious recognition of limits is derived from closed spaces, which, beyond doubt, satisfy man's physical and mental desire for protection, security and calm, as open spaces minister to his spiritual yearning for freedom. These two diametrically opposed desires are not only compatible but must in fact co-exist, as becomes evident on considering how, when closed space makes us conscious of restriction to our freedom of movement, we regard it as a prison; and, conversely, how, in becoming conscious of the endlessness of open space, we become at the same time confused and regard it as chaos. It follows, then, that closed space is agreeable only so long as we feel, despite its limits, infinitely free to move in it; and that open space is agreeable only so long as, despite its limitlessness, we are convinced of its limits. From this contradictory, dual sense of the limited and the limitless springs the feeling of space.

Now, how does the architect reconcile the opposed concepts of infinite and finite in the closed space? How in an open space?

In a closed space we generally feel, thanks to the doors and windows, physically free to surpass its bounds; we know that as we came in, so we can go out. Aesthetically, however, these technical exits afford us no escape; this only art can provide, either by creating the impression that there is no shell there (the mirrors of the Rococo and modern means of lighting are an attempt to achieve this) or by so far engrossing us in its harmonious design that we grasp in imagination, and so potentially achieve, the movement in all directions which we cannot physically perform.

Just as, then, in a well-planned closed space, in any architectural hall which has good proportions and a pleasant decoration,¹ we

¹ We include in the "decoration" the arrangement of the furniture, which, when so disposed as to facilitate the "function" of our movements in a room, also creates the feeling of space.

are not conscious of being imprisoned, so in an open space we do not generally feel lost or confused, but rather as though sheltered in an embrace; for despite lack of boundaries, we can see a limit in the encompassing sky. In addition, our eye is arrested by the nearer objects—the mountains, the trees, the rivers, in one word the landscape—which close in the limits of open space. Architecture, imitating nature, in its city-planned groups draws its boundaries with buildings, sometimes placing them in continuous alignment, sometimes in a chequered pattern; creating “closed” groups with continuous buildings—squares resembling roofless halls, like the Piazza di San Marco in Venice, or the Piazza in front of St. Peter’s in Rome; and creating, with non-continuous buildings placed at intervals between gaps, “open”, complex groupings, like the Acropolis. The buildings are there held together by directive lines, which, in leading from one to the other, converging and deviating, create axes or circles that link the masses, and so demarcate boundaries in space. In both cases architecture brings to the environment a unity which appeals to us through its order and harmony.

Naturally the heavenly sphere, in limiting the open space, is the simplest and most majestic form of boundary. Here our eye takes delight in unimpeded, ceaseless roaming, resting at will, since a single circular movement gives it the whole picture of a unified world in infinite space.

Our inborn knowledge that the Universe is one and infinite, our instinctive conviction that in it there is room for all things, since harmony and order prevail, demand no more of art for the inducement in us of an aesthetic appreciation of space than that it too should order its environment harmoniously, and so reconcile finite and infinite.

Architecture in this aim has manifested varying tendencies at different periods, stressing the finiteness of its limits at times (as in the architecture of the beautiful) and emphasising the infinite within its bounds at others (as in the architecture of the sublime). Yet apparently contradictory tendencies have often manifested themselves simultaneously—as, for instance, when the classical period creates “open” groups of city-planning, while the Hellenistic and early Christian art produced “closed” groups such as the atrium of the church, etc. But at no time is this paradox more marked than in Christian architecture, which, in aiming to suggest infinity, attempted to eliminate the material confines of its churches, and at the same time provided the cramping cell for the

liberation of the anchorite's soul. This underlining of the relation of the infinitesimal to the infinite is another way of suggesting sublimity.

The Feeling of Space in the Architecture of the Beautiful

In classical architecture we may distinguish three fundamental types of building, which induce in us the feeling of space:

(a) The stoa, open at the sides, with its rhythmically arranged columns and its background of sky. Standing between the solid masses set in rhythmic order in the voids, we feel we may move freely in all directions, provided we avoid the columns. Depth is limitless because of the background of infinite blue sky which closes the picture. The importance of the columns' rhythmic order is better understood if we imagine a forest where the trees grow densely and irregularly. There, instead of the pleasant feeling of space, we feel constricted by the obstacles in our path, and the resultant uncomfortable sense of the impenetrable grows upon us as the lack of rhythm and the denseness of the trees turn the forest into a jungle. It follows, then, that order is an indispensable condition for rousing in us a feeling of space, since from order we derive a sense of freedom.

(b) The closed hall, which suggests the shelter of an embrace—another indispensable condition of space-consciousness—which suggests, that is, that another world encloses us within it, and so more easily rouses in us a feeling of space than does the stoa. When a good architect arranges a room with feeling of space, we feel in it both unconfined and sheltered at the same time; staying in that room gives us pleasure. Our enjoyment is twofold, because the hall is enclosed by solid, well-built surfaces of which the finiteness gives us a feeling of security, while simultaneously the space enclosed seems boundless. The architect creates in us the illusion that the hall's space is infinite, not only by opening windows and so connecting it with the space outside, but also by achieving—through a felicitous ordering of the room's proportions, through the determination of the relationship between planes and voids, and, finally, through the arrangement and decoration of the surfaces—unity within variety, and so making the room aesthetically delightful. In other words, he has enabled the inmate of the room to transmute the constancy of an aesthetic pleasure (provided by the surrounding forms) into a continuously expanding sense of free movement (suggested by the proportional relations).

So that the walls, although protectively around us, are in no sense obstructive. The contemplation of the heavenly sphere will produce precisely the same effect.

The dome of heaven, of course, gives us the feeling of space in its purest and most impressive form. Not being merely a closed hall, but possessing as it does that welcoming embrace with its curved, concave surface, it suggests this feeling immediately. We thus come to the third type of building under discussion, namely:

(c) The building of which the shape is that of a welcoming embrace—as, for instance, the ancient theatre, the sphendone of the stadium, the apse of the sanctuary; or the circular space beneath a spherical dome, as in the Pantheon in Rome. In all these we experience more directly the feeling of space. Conversely, convex forms, such as the exterior of the Pantheon or of the Colosseum in Rome (Fig. 36) or of the Opera House at Dresden, instead of inviting, seem to repel us,



36 *The Colosseum, Rome*

and recall the embrace within only negatively, by making us conscious of being excluded from them. Hence, seen in open space, a building with a purely flat façade, no matter how harmonious its formation, weakens our feeling of space, which gains strength again before a façade which is not flat but is in the shape of an angle or of the letter U, and becomes still more intense when this façade is curved, especially if it is concave. Then the radius from the centre of the eye is equal in all directions and the glance roves serenely and is comfortably drawn towards the depth.

The Pantheon (Fig. 37) gives us an example of the great importance of the arrangement of the surrounding surfaces. Its dome is a formal imitation of the heavenly sphere, but the heavy and

unnatural formation of its surfaces with the coffering—which, as has been observed, makes it like a flat roof that has been curved—does not allow us to forget ourselves in a temporarily endless enjoyment of their harmony that will delude us into thinking the enclosed space boundless in extent. That is why, whereas on entering, the spherical dome has a welcoming effect, we feel, almost immediately afterwards, shut in by finite space. This feeling is only intensified when the sight of the real sky through the *opaion* (lantern) recalls the vast expanse of the open air. Our abhorrence of space is somewhat mitigated by the light which flows in from above and whose radiance draws us upwards.



37 *The Pantheon, Rome (interior view)*

Classical Roman architecture was not capable of expressing the infinity of space to any higher degree, for it lacked a necessary prerequisite—namely, the dynamism of the sublime ideal, which in giving the Pantheon's dome, for instance, a symbolic significance would have justified it aesthetically. Moreover, it utilised in its interior, forms of exterior architecture with a plastic character. The sides of its halls are composed, more or less, of façades of buildings turned inwards, which, being specially designed for the open air, could not summon the peculiar quality necessary in their new interior function. In classical architecture, had not light somewhat favoured the display of space, its closed halls would have given the impression of open places merely roofed over.

We may, then, conclude that the architecture of the classical period, by ordering its spaces into fine rhythms and introducing harmonious surfaces, brought into its feeling of space that restraint and serenity which distinguish all manifestations of the

beautiful. In the architecture of the sublime these tendencies and methods undergo a radical change.

The Feeling of Space in the Architecture of the Sublime

In examining and comparing the Christian church with the classical temple, we perceived that the architect turned the spectator's interest from the receptacle to the content, from external to internal form, thus making of space "the bearer of the Idea". In order to eradicate a customary apathy in the appreciation of space, the Byzantine architect enhanced depth, height and unified space—justifiably so, indeed, for the architecture of the beautiful conveyed a static feeling of it, which could certainly not compel a sublime experience of any intensity. Before our feeling of space can become dynamic, our interest must be turned from the vessel of space to its content—to invisible atmosphere, space itself. Thus contemplated, space is no longer subdivided and contained between the forms of the Universe, but is the infinite itself which contains all forms. It was in this conception of space as the matrix of the Universe that Christian art differed from classical; and working in this spirit, its treatment of space achieves a sublime rather than a beautiful quality.

Certain classical buildings, bringing depth and height into play (as in the theatre of Epidaurus), with the light of the lantern also contributing sometimes (as in the Pantheon), achieve a rudimentary sublimity; the Telesterion at Eleusis must indeed have come very near to its expression. However, spaciousness alone is not enough to fill us with a sense of the sublime: it needs the agency of the forms of the environment to convey to us the three main characteristics of its infinity—namely, its immeasurability, formlessness and limitlessness.

The impression of the immeasurable is created in nature by the thousands upon thousands of stars in the heavens at night; or in daytime by the innumerable colours of the flowers in the fields, or the fine-grained layers of sand in the desert, or the monochrome snow in winter, covering nature like a vast carpet; or, finally, by the numberless, ever-present ripples on the surface of the sea, that a never-silent wind, even in times of calm, brings into play. These almost microscopic units by comparison cause the surfaces to expand and grow immeasurably, so that the circle of the horizon recedes *ad infinitum*, and the dome of heaven that crowns it becomes boundlessly voluminous in proportion. The limitless distance that divides us from the horizon inspires in us a certain degree

of fear and the feeling that the space in and around the sky is infinite. In the diminutive dome of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (Fig. 38), with its decoration of stars, art achieves the same sort of effect.

The impression of the formless in nature is brought home to man by the invisibility of space in contrast to the concreteness of the forms it contains. Man, who abhors and cannot conceive even of the invisible as a vacuum, is filled with fear when any of the shapes

with which he fills space appear to him in a formless state. (He is afraid, for instance, of the moving clouds, or the rolling avalanches, before they settle into and assume form: exactly as he might be afraid of the rushing wind or an unintelligible thought, before he has perceived their purpose and defined them as concepts—that is, as forms.) The formless creates an impression of chaos in man, in which he no longer feels a free agent. Yet his conviction that space is the matrix of the universe will not let him regard it as chaos, so that he is attracted by the mystery of its invisible depth, as he is by the unknown depth of the visible, just as he is fascinated by



38 *The Dome of Galla Placidia, Ravenna*

dense darkness or brilliant light. Conscious of the possibility of extension in all directions, he moves forward fascinated, as though plunging into the deepest darkness or gazing directly at the dazzling light of the sun. The stress of depth and height in space correspond to the suggestive power of darkness and light, and the architect never fails to make use of them in attempting to convey the infinity of space. Yet face to face with the immeasurable, the formless, the boundless which allow movement in all directions *ad infinitum*, the spectator stands transfixed.

Depth and height are two extreme contrasts which the Christian

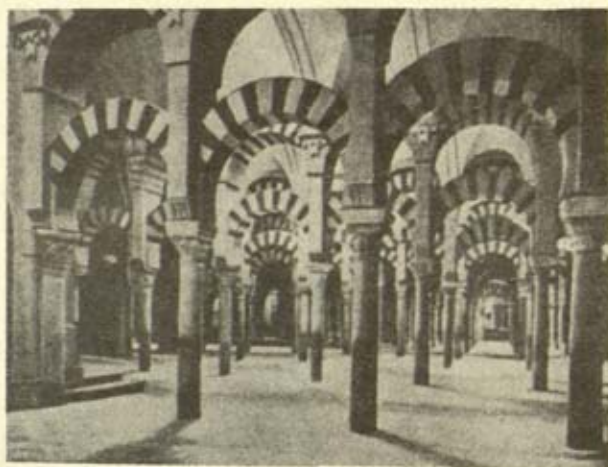
church, in its constant aim to suggest infinity, emphasised with both its architectural articulation and its lighting. Already, by stressing depth, the Egyptian temple had suggested penetration towards darkness, while the Gothic church, by stressing height, suggested flight towards it. And the Byzantine church combined, harmoniously and without exaggeration, flight towards depth and elevation towards height. In addition, it had revealed light in the heights of the church.

It now remains for us to show how the architect conveyed the third attribute of infinity—boundlessness. To this end the visible limits of closed space had, if not to be eliminated, in any case to be aesthetically dematerialised.

When we look at the heavenly sphere, despite our pleasurable acceptance of the fact that it encloses the limits of the world, we yet do not want to accept that it is a material cover and that behind it space comes to an end: we push back as far as possible the limits of space. This displacement or recession of boundaries is aesthetically more successfully achieved with a starry heaven at night, not only because the stars make the surface of the sphere immeasurable in extension, but also because their different dimensions, their various colours and myriad scintillations create many planes in depth, so that not only is the eye able to penetrate into the pierced arabesque of the sky, but it can also pass from plane to plane, on its way to the invisible depth. Of course, the unity of a closed sphere is not lost, even within the scintillating veil of night, for the eye is able to return again from plane to plane and to rest, once it has seized at a single circular glance the unified whole of the magic picture.

The architecture of the sublime employed corresponding means, not only in its enveloping structure, but also in its arrangement of space. It pierced the shell of the domes with crowns of windows and made of mass a luminous and weightless peplum, an ectoplasm—in other words, it dematerialised it. It created, moreover, many planes in space, visible through successive openings. Islamic architecture, with its spaces filled with innumerable columns, produced a somewhat similar effect (Fig. 39), as did also Persian architecture, or even Greek architecture in the Telesterion at Eleusis, and, finally, Gothic architecture. Here the impression conveyed is not one of dematerialised or “spiritualised” space, due to the elegance of the columns (as has been maintained¹), but

¹ G. A. Andreades, *Die Sophienkathedrale von Konstantinopel*, p. 80. (Reprint from the 1st volume of *Kunstwissenschaftlichen Forschungen*, Frankfurt Verlagsanstalt A. G., Berlin, 1931.)



39 *Mosque Interior, Cordova*

rather one of unlimited space, which can contain an apparent multitude of columns. One feels bewildered as in a dense forest, yet with no accompanying sense of chaos, for the columns' rhythmic order precludes this, while it allows the impression of limitlessness to prevail. The means used by Byzantine architecture are nobler, more spiritual. In the centrally planned buildings they reached a degree of perfection which only Haghia Sophia surpassed.

The Expression of the Sublime in Byzantine Centrally Planned Buildings

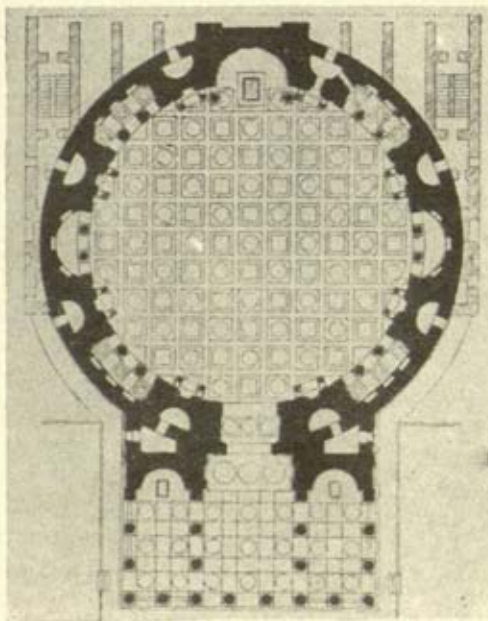
Let us now see how Byzantine architecture succeeded, not so much in the basilica as in centrally planned buildings, to convey a sense of the sublime through space consciousness.

As in every architectural work of merit, it naturally creates a unity in the variety of its forms, conducive to a serene enjoyment of space. However, as has already been stressed, Byzantine works of art were composed pictorially, not plastically. The whole, not the parts, dominated the work—a fact which contributed to the display of the enclosed space as an uninterrupted, uniform whole, despite the apparently ever-expanding surfaces (made to seem so by the introduction of the minuscule element, in the form of mosaic, lace-like decoration and delicate ornament generally).

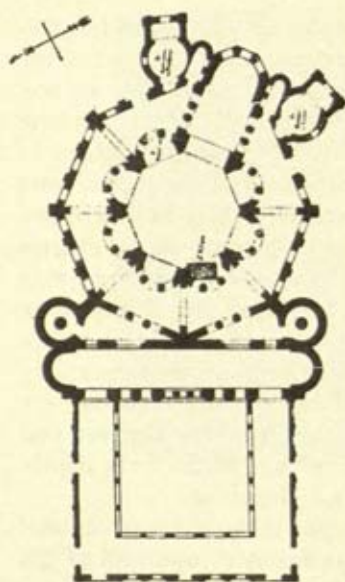
The question now arises, how did Byzantine architecture indicate depth and height in these buildings, and how did it reduce the concreteness of its physical confines?

As we know, even in centrally planned buildings the longitudinal axis is fairly perceptible and terminates at the apse of the sanctuary, which, with its semicircular shape suggesting an embrace, attracts us towards the depth. However, the attraction here is weak, because of the inevitable prevalence in such buildings of the central vertical axis. The whole composition is designed around it in a centrifugal symmetrical radiation, with a master dome above crowning the whole space. The embracing shape centres mainly around this axis, so that centrally planned buildings create an illusion of depth in all directions. As for height, it is immediately conveyed by the pyramidal gradation of the vaults, which attain their summit in the dome. Indeed, light also plays its part, by progressively increasing in its upward ascent, and reversing the process down below in its inward penetration, where, diffused and strong in the centre, it lights up only certain parts of the depth, leaving the walls between the windows in darkness.

Light in itself, however, is not enough, without compositional means to assist it. What are these means? A comparison of the plan of the Pantheon in Rome (Fig. 40) with that of San Vitale in Ravenna (Fig. 41) reveals a notable difference. The plan of the former building is a simple circle surrounded by an exceptionally thick wall, from which the statically superfluous material has been subtracted, leaving a number of niches. Each of these recesses, however, is almost completely closed by two columns, with the result that the recesses appear to have been added to the hall. On the other hand, in the plan of San Vitale, within the ambulatory encircling the whole central body, the circular crown of the dome is supported by an octagon, pierced



40 *Plan of Pantheon*



41 *Plan of San Vitale*



42 *San Vitale (interior)*

with semicircular niches, which are, in turn, pierced by colonnades. Thus, in San Vitale the niches have not been subtracted from the wall: on the contrary, they have pierced and finally dissolved the walls, making of the ground plan, from the single octagon it was, an octagon with folds. The niches are both counterthrusts and connecting link between the octagonal hall and the peripheral aisle. Here we have three partitions, each leading to the other, and all together forming a uniform space. We see the octagon in the first plane; this, through its openings, leads to the second plane created by the niches; which pierced again leads to the third and more distant plane. Owing to its remoteness the limits here are not sharply defined—especially as the light in the depth which leaves the walls in shadow dazzles the eye, whereas beneath the central dome it lies concentrated and diffused. The background thus becomes hazy and dematerialised. In the twilight that constantly prevails there its outlines are only just discernible, suggesting in its vagueness the formlessness of space and invisible depth. The pierced niches, however, while leading the gaze inwards, at the same time, thanks to the semicircular shape, guide it back in an effortless transition to the first plane while the third is still in

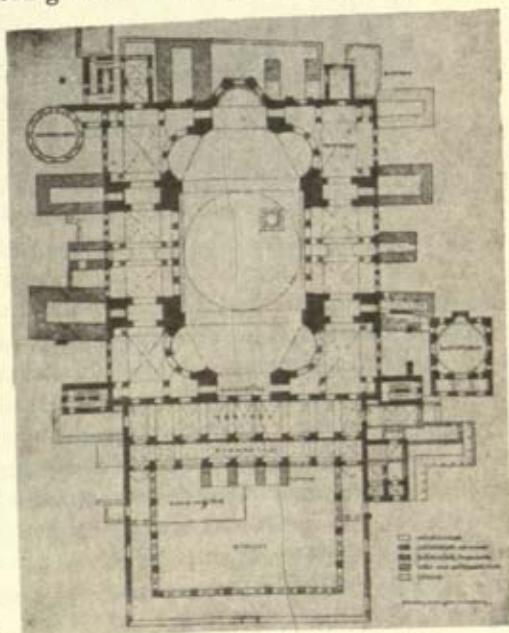
sight. These journeys of the eye from and into depth bring in their wake a series of space impressions which all merge into a predominant sense of a unified and infinite space which can contain them all.

The Pantheon, on the other hand, conveys no such impression to the spectator. The niches within its circumference, placed as though added around the building like separate rooms, are dull and do not lead to a third plane. The impression in the interior of the Pantheon is one of a closed and limited, rather than (as in San Vitale) of limitless and uniform space. In the Pantheon space is unbroken; in San Vitale it is unified (Fig. 42). In addition, the heavy plastic articulation of the Pantheon's dome (on which we have previously commented) gives the impression of its having been originally hewn into a rock, and produces the effect of a closed and grotto-shaped space. This was but natural in an architecture which adhered to classical aims and had not yet assimilated the Oriental influences which assailed it.

The Expression of the Sublime in Haghia Sophia

The same principles hold good in the display of space and the expression of sublimity in the case of Haghia Sophia (Figs. 43 and 44-45), where, however, they were employed with greater intensity and sagacity. In any case, a work so tremendous in size is better suited to suggest the sublime, and suggest it directly in its interior as well as its exterior, as it emerges from among the surrounding buildings.

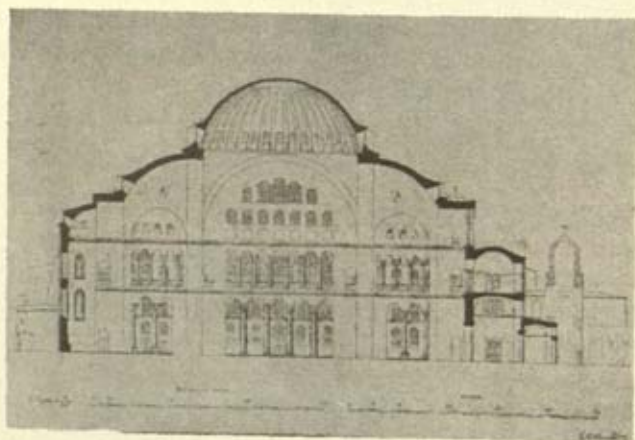
Although a domed basilica, the brilliant originality of this masterpiece by Isidorus and Anthemius defies classification. Even in



43 *Plan of Haghia Sophia*

the briefest analyses¹ it must be considered as a combination of the basilical form with that of the centrally planned building. Four arches support the dome, which is counter-supported by two large semi-domes and two strips of barrel vaults (Fig. 29c).

Let us now follow the course of the spectator's eye as he enters Haghia Sophia. The atrium is a large open space of rectangular form with a proportion of approximately 3:2. It is set in width in front of the façade. This movement in width is accentuated by the narrow and long exonarthex. The esonarthex, likewise, has a proportion of approximately 1:6.5. As a result, when we pass the Royal Door (leading from the esonarthex to the nave) we are immediately struck by the main axis of the space driving towards the



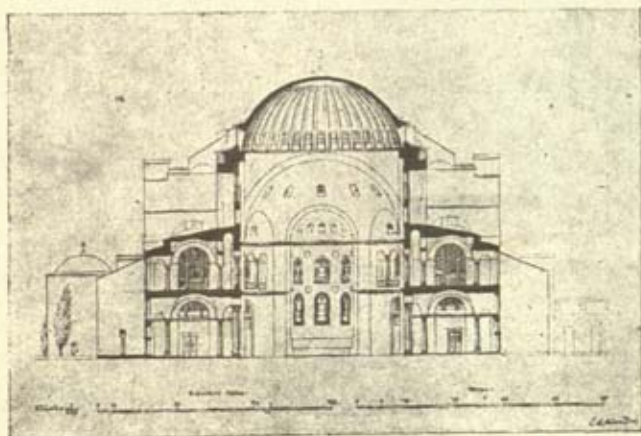
44 *Hagia Sophia (longitudinal section)*

depth. Here we breathe freely because the space of the main church appears, not only long in depth, vast in size and toweringly high, but also because it is more strongly illuminated than the narrower and darker esonarthex, which, in turn, because of the preceding even narrower exonarthex, appears to be of comfortable size; this is a quality indispensable in a forehall worthy of the breath-taking space of the main church (Figs. 46 and 47).

The central space makes a movement primarily towards depth which sets the course to be followed by the spectator's eye. One single axis is clearly defined in the church; as in the basilica, it is

¹ For a detailed analysis of Hagia Sophia before it was remodelled by Isidorus the younger, see my report to the Athens Christian Archaeological Society in April 1946, published in Greek: *Hagia Sophia* (Athens, 1946).

longitudinal, for of the four arches supporting the dome only two are open, with the northern and southern ones closed by screen-walls. Thus, on entering one is drawn along the axis towards the depth, to be received ultimately in the embrace of the large semi-circular niche in which the axis terminates. At the same time, the niche at the other end (the western) opens to the right and left of the entrance, giving the spectator the impression that the walls leave him unconfined in space. This space appears uniform and infinite, because first of all the large niches are pierced and counter-supported by three smaller niches, also pierced, so that planes are



45 *Hagia Sophia (cross-section)*

created one behind the other, showing the space to be endless in depth and uniformly spread out. Another reason for this uniformity and infinity of space is that the lateral screen-walls are so pierced that the spectator standing between them obtains a deep view into the aisles, and thus perceives another axis, which, set at right angles to the primary longitudinal one, stimulates his imagination into reconstructing the symmetrical arms of a cross. Without the screen-walls, Hagia Sophia would have possessed the central symmetry, possibly, of a tetraconch church or of a cruciform arrangement, but the effect would have been weak. The very fact that the cross is hypothetical, and its transverse arms therefore invisible, enhances the central symmetry to the degree to which the imagination is capable of enhancing it, while detracting nothing from the supremacy of the main axis, which, with none of the basilica's monotony, affords us aesthetic pleasure. The



46 *The Esonarthex,
Hagia Sophia*

direction towards which it speeds us, indeed, is beyond this world; for in the middle of the nave and above the ideal centre of the cross, the dome, everywhere visible and brilliantly illuminated, is suspended like the sky itself, emanating light.

This dome, compelling, wherever we may be standing, our upward gaze towards the light, seems to raise us on wings, while the eye in its ascending journey, noting the human scale measurements, becomes aware of the tremendous dimensions of the building. In the screen-walls the arches in the superposed colonnade increase in number, as compared with those in the one below; the windows, of course, dwindle in size, but also seem multiplied, and the wall sur-

faces, which, below, are panelled with marble and are covered with arabesques, break out farther up into a deluge of innumerable minute mosaic cubes. In this way everything contributes through scale to create the effect of immeasurable space. The building now appears so immense that we believe that, no matter how much we may advance, we shall never reach the end; and we stand there alone in immensity, beneath the soaring dome, overwhelmed by boundlessness, encircled by infinite space, dazzled by light streaming from above.

What surrounds us seems an illusion—airy and unreal and as disembodied as the colours, of which, indeed, it seems to be composed. For piers and walls, like unfolded surfaces, displaying no attempt to support statically dangerous points, efface any impression of plastic mass; pierced and dappled matter is dematerialised; only incorporeal lines bind the small niches with the larger ones, and these with the great arches, the arches with the pendentives; and the pendentives barely touch each other with the tips of their fingers, as they support the dome, which, emerging from a crown of forty windows, criss-crossed by the gold rays of the sun (Fig. 48), seems at times not upheld, but suspended, floating in

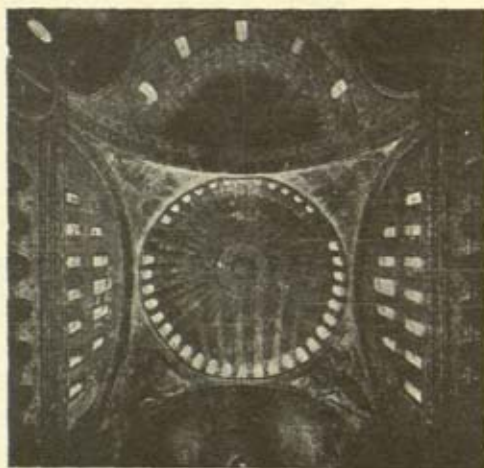
mid-air.¹ The eye glides, escapes, returns, roves away again and again, ceaselessly among the soft curves of arches, vaults, window openings and pendentives, resting finally in the dome that reigns supreme, and within which *space* moves, infinite and uniform. Light, the higher we look up, increases; becomes more intense, scintillates in golden tones and almost dazzles us, as when we gaze at the sun high in the sky.

Gothic architecture employed much the same means to convey a sublime experience through awareness of space. There also we have innumerable joints in the small stones with which the gigantic work is erected, as well as detailed decoration, producing the effect of infinite space, wherein man sinks to insignificance. With the longitudinal axis strongly pronounced, depth draws us towards it irresistibly. Our impression on entering is that we have come to a forest of immense dark pines scaling the heights, and, as Hegel remarked, branching out, intercrossing and covering the space (Fig. 49). However, we do not anywhere in the Gothic forest come across a clearing showing the sky above, as in Haghia Sophia. We stand there, insignificant, impotent and forlorn in the humid air of the glades, filled not so much with ecstasy as with fear. In Haghia Sophia the miracle has been fulfilled, and before it we stand ecstatic. In the Gothic cathedral the miracle is ever on the verge of being fulfilled. As infinite space presses down on us, swirls around us from between the tall trunks of the piers, we are seized with awe. In many of them there is no concentrated light high in the nave to make us palpitate with joy; instead, residing in the aisles, where the



47 *Haghia Sophia (interior)*

¹ Various repairs have resulted in the screen-walls now appearing like supporting ones.

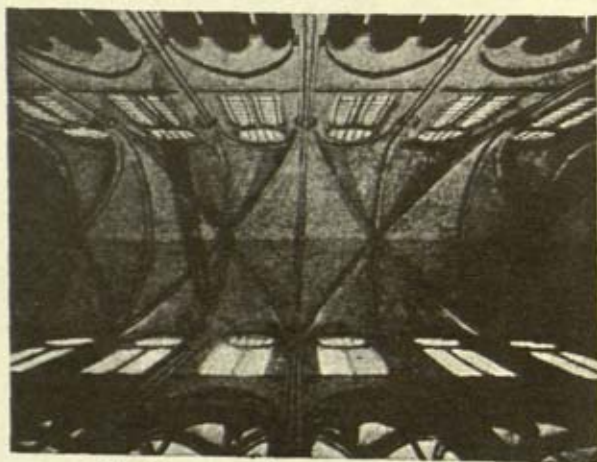


48 *Dome (seen from below), Hagia Sophia*

large windows make it more intense, it conjures up visions of a cloud-charged sky, with a lighter horizon around it. This reversed illumination, far from appearing strange in a Northern climate, in fact makes the violent elevation of the church towards the heights more dramatic.

The invisible depth of space, with an exaggerated dimension of depth, is displayed in terrifying manner by

Egyptian architecture, which allowed the glance to lose itself gradually in the deserted darkness of an artificial night. Gothic architecture, for its part, in its straining, mystic, passionate



49 *Cross-vaults (seen from below), Notre Dame, Paris*

emphasis of height, exaggerates the dimension of verticality and lets the eye lose itself in formless clouds. Byzantine architecture, on the contrary, with an eye ever on balance and form, does not

stress any dimension too intensely. With more spiritual means than Gothic architecture, it emphasises mainly the unity of infinite space. Gothic architecture introduces us, through the forests of the North, into Purgatory; while Byzantine architecture leads us from the multicoloured sphere of the Earth into the illuminated dome of Heaven inhabited by God.

LIGHT

It is through dazzling light and darkness that art reveals the mysterious depths of space. Light, with its play of shadows as it sinks into, or emerges from, gloom, lends space its atmosphere. We are most conscious of this when beams of light illumining motes of dust, mist, clouds of smoke or incense at once enrich and animate the surrounding space. But even without these aids, light in itself, seeming to scatter its own immaterial dust, these winged particles everywhere diffused, makes us conscious of space as almost palpable. So it is that even with light extinguished, or in a sudden blaze, blotting out the surrounding scene, we still refuse to regard even invisible depth or unattainable height as vacuums, and our instinctive abhorrence of chaos which a vacuum implies is thus assuaged. Space, in other words, does not exist aesthetically without light to give it atmosphere; to reveal the ceaseless, teeming activity within it, making of it the matrix wherein all moves and lives.

The Byzantine church employed shining surfaces (of marble wall panelling and mosaic) to catch the myriad reflections of light, with their ceaseless scintillations that made the whole place vibrant and living; and, in a wise distribution of light that progressed from unlit distant vault, through half-lit main church, to the sunbathed centre under the dome (Figs. 50 and 51), it displayed light's gradations from obscurity, through half-lights to gold-glittering sunrays.

Light and gloom alone, however, are not enough to create atmosphere: colour is also necessary. The Byzantine church, therefore, used polychrome surfaces and translucent windows, that lent light magic tones, with which to enrich and animate the interior space. (That is why in those churches where translucent materials were superseded by common glass, which makes the light glaring and colourless, the interior space has lost its mysterious atmosphere—as indeed most Byzantine churches in their present state testify.)

This chromatic phantasy, which brought to the atmosphere a visual warmth that was physically lacking, intensified the spectator's sense of separateness in a space whose warmth he could see

without feeling—perceive, yet not experience directly. Schopenhauer¹ has correctly remarked that rays of light in nature which



50 *Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna*

do not emit warmth, as in a winter sunset, bring with them an icy breath that estranges us and disturbs the harmony of a beautiful spectacle with overtones of the sublime. (Indeed, this icy breath is



51 *Santa Costanza, Rome*

as forcibly conveyed by warmth-emitting but colourless light—as in a summer early dawn or late nightfall, where the severity of contending black and white, without another colour to soften or

¹ Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, I, p. 274 (III, 35).

relieve them, have about them an unearthly remoteness and austerity.) But equally impressive is the contrast of warm and cold colours—orange-yellow, green and violet-red, as we find them in dawns and sunsets. Was it, one wonders, mere coincidence that in the marble revetments of Haghia Sophia and in later Byzantine polychromy, the same harmonic triad (as Wulff has remarked¹) prevails?

However this may be, the Byzantine church, ever striving to express sublimity, succeeded in conveying this impression of austere chilliness in all the warmth of its colourful atmosphere, thanks to its stone walls and the vaults, which even from a distance we hesitate to approach or touch, so cold they seem despite their polychrome brilliance. The pavement itself, made of hard stone, adds to the general austerity (and we have only to imagine a wooden floor in the Byzantine church, to realise how much this would detract from the severity of the interior: In contrast, a thick carpet spread over the stone floor, hushing the noise of footsteps and deploying silence in space, would have created an awe-inspiring atmosphere). So that not only our vision, but also our sense of touch, hearing and even smell, through the burning incense, are all brought into play, and contribute to the general aesthetic impression derived from this architecture.

However, irrespective of the subsidiary aids used to convey sublimity, the basic factor was always light, concentrated high above, from where it poured as a very cataract into the mysterious darkness engulfing certain distant parts of the aisles, and so filling the worshipper with wonder and making him ponder on the words, "In the Lord's light we shall see light."

Despite its brilliant centre, the Byzantine church gives a general impression of subdued light in which the mind finds rest.² With the brilliance of the Greek sky it was essential to gradate, to tone down the light in the interior, before the church could produce that atmosphere of recondite mystery which compels inward-dwelling in the worshipper. The half-light offered by the main church, besides making the luminous points—like the dome—even more vivid and

¹ Wulff, *Altchristliche und byzantinische Kunst*, II, p. 378 (Potsdam, 1914).

² Light in Haghia Sophia was more abundant before the large windows in the side screen-walls were replaced by the present numerous small windows. Several small ones in the large niches have also been blocked. (See P. A. Michelis, *Haghia Sophia*, Athens, 1946; and E. Swift, *Haghia Sophia*, New York, 1940.)

In the early Christian churches, generally, light was always profuse, but as time went on it was subdued more and more until, in the post-Byzantine church, space sinks into a permanent twilight.



52 *Saint-Front, Périgueux (interior)*

welcome by contrast, could alone make the chandeliers and the numerous candles lit by devout hands shine by day like heavenly stars.

In the Gothic cathedral, on the contrary, the first impression is one of predominating gloom, yet the effort to introduce light is there. The Gothic architect, conscious of the sullen light of his native skies, expanded his windows at the expense of his walls, in an effort to let light flow in; this necessarily brought the sacred paintings over the translucent windows, where they were lit up from behind—made of them

stained-glass windows, in fact. The inflowing light, thus naturally subdued, increased the need for voids. As Faure has most aptly remarked, "Gothic architecture died of love of light."¹

Of course, the stained-glass windows, charging the light with their colours, seem to bring warmth to the icy damp that emanates from the high-ceilinged cathedral; but this illusory warmth, that can be contemplated only without being felt, enhances the sublime sullenness of the cathedral. There are no gradations of light here, as in the Byzantine church: only a contrast of light and shadows, thanks to the plastic depths of the thin-ribbed piers, into which mass has dissolved, and which rise collectively rigid, like a stone chord.

In the Romanesque cathedral, be it noted, where the sultry northern light of its native sky is not strong enough to show the sacred paintings on its walls, the masses outnumber the voids, as in the Byzantine church. For the Romanesque architect had not discovered the art of dematerialising his masses. He kept his surface comparatively smooth, especially where, as at Périgueux

¹ Elie Faure, *L'Art médiéval*, p. 128 (Paris, 1911).

(Fig. 52), he was under Byzantine influence, but did not succeed in making them seemingly weightless and insubstantial. The reverse would indeed have been surprising in an architecture which still had static problems to contend with, and whose analytical Western mentality had to assimilate Eastern influences. In the West it was left to the Gothic style to achieve the dematerialisation of mass.

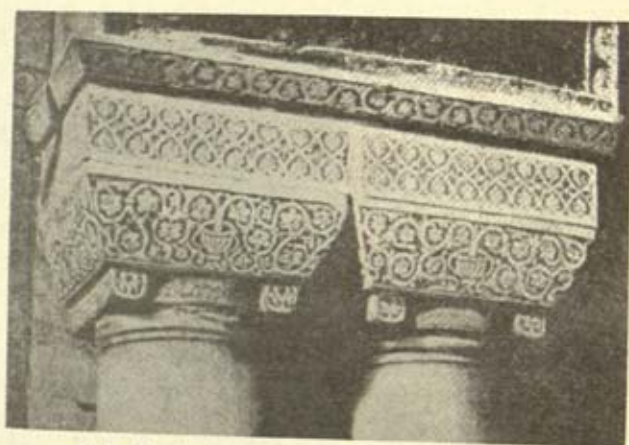
DECORATION

The Sculptural Decoration of the Interior

The inferior material of Byzantine structures necessitated a system of veneers. This, in keeping with Byzantine architecture, was free of three-dimensional modelling; for Byzantine architecture so moulded mass as to create extensive surfaces, free of architectural projections and of plastic articulations stressing the action of the forces at certain points, as was the case with Roman architecture. In other words, in order to suggest that mass was dematerialised, the Byzantine artist made smooth or pierced surfaces (interrupted only by decorative bands or, at most, slanting cornices); the veneers therefore were effected not by added plastic masses, but with flat slabs of marble and plastered surfaces suitable for mosaics or frescoes — especially wherever the surfaces became curved. A new conception in decoration thus came into being, the aesthetic expression of surface, the simplest example of which is Byzantine wall paneling. The polychrome marble slabs are so combined that their veins produce fantastic patterns (Fig. 53), debarring the idea of their being man's handiwork; they were



53 *Marble Veneers, Hagia Sophia*



54 Capitals, Venice, St. Mark's Church

"ἀχειροποίητα"; and when light glides on their shining surface, the phantasmagoric illusion it creates contributes to the dematerialisation of mass and its apparent loss of weight.

Sculptural decoration, in conforming to this aesthetic expression



55 Capital, Hagia Sophia

of surface, extended in flat, two-dimensional design and was therefore either in flat relief (*au champlévé*) or pierced (*à jour*). While the pierced technique separated the decorative motifs from the background by piercing through the material, carving out the background, and so producing a kind of stone lace-work (Fig. 55), flat-relief technique but very slightly raised these motifs from the background (Fig. 54), which it filled

in with a black mastic-like material that gave all its sculptures a web-like appearance; there were no gradations of light and shade here, as in classical sculpture, but only alternating black and white. In this web-like (or lace-like) work the Byzantine architect dressed,

not only the surfaces of the walls, but also usually the capital of the columns.

The aesthetic expression of surface persevered, even in treating the occasional classical acanthus or calamus leaves on the Byzantine capital. In such cases, although the leaves grow out almost in full relief from the capital's necking, they are usually drill-carved. Series of drill-holes outline the folds and veins of the leaves, here again in an alternation of white and black, instead of the gradations of light and shadow produced by the ordinarily carved organic leaf (Fig. 56). The aim of both these Byzantine techniques, then, is virtually identical: namely, to make white vie with black, and show up the ornament on a dark background (as in the chancel slabs of Fig. 57). This passion for piercing was repeated on a greater scale along the large surfaces, linking the nave to the aisles, the inner to the outer space, and, in general, allowing the eye to penetrate and return through the material, which as a result seems transparent to the point of being dematerialised. We may well see in this technique yet another example of the Byzantine architect's tendency towards spiritualisation, his constant endeavour to escape from substance to essence.

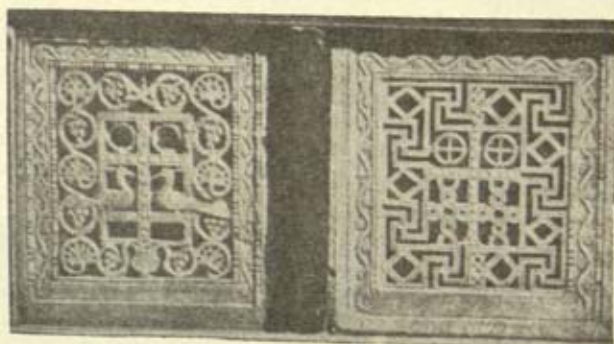
The tendency to expand along the surface, in influencing the technique of sculptural decoration, naturally affected the composition of its motifs. The eye had to travel along them without hindrance, without being halted at the raised points of emphasis. Byzantine decoration therefore began to disintegrate the acanthus leaf into many small leaves, thus depriving it of its tectonic character. It presents a series of endless (*ohne Ende*) motifs along the



56 Capital with Wind-blown Leaves, Thessalonike, Church of St. Demetrius

surface. As Riegl¹ remarked, the wavy scroll (*Wellenranke*) also is no longer confined within bands, but spread along whole surfaces. In fact, its leaves no longer possess their respective independent stalks: they are reproduced, now, on the principle of the arabesque.

Byzantine decoration, then, follows the principle of Byzantine architecture in subduing the parts to the whole, and is, like it, not tectonic but pictorial. A certain classical influence, nevertheless, still at work in Byzantine art caused the scroll (as Riegl remarks) to retain, as in the classical prototypes, its distinction from the flower. Islamic arabesque, where this distinction completely vanishes, is hence rightly called Oriental.



57 *Perforated Plaques, Ravenna, San Vitale*

These finely wrought embroideries, extending along the surfaces of Byzantine churches, produced two definite aesthetic results: firstly, by introducing the diminutive element, they help to magnify aesthetically the interior space; secondly, with their delicately spun but rigid lace or network, that lures the eye to continuous movement, they help to dematerialise mass; in concealing its volume they efface the visible weight of matter. If further proof were needed of their dematerialising quality, it is afforded in the fact that they seem most fitting beside the polychrome marble wall facing, with its fantastic decorative motifs. The degree to which Byzantine sculptural technique achieved this latter effect is as much evident in the Byzantine capital as anywhere else.

The Byzantine column was never fluted, since it was never intended to show that it actively supported the weight it actually bears, particularly since the burden appears to exceed the support-

¹ A. Riegl, *Stilfragen*, pp. 277, 281, 306 (Berlin, 1893).

ing capacity of the column. Of course, this seeming contradiction is obviated, because matter is so moulded as to appear to have lost its weight, to be dematerialised. None the less, the carried members demand a resting-point on the column, and for the creation of a technically and artistically proportionate resting-point the Byzantine capital was provided with a pulvinus and its expanding calathus which assumed the curved shape of a bowl-like or of a similar capital. However, with its delicate lace-work decoration, the capital also appears incapable of supporting weights, and able only to transfer them for a moment from one arch to the next. The capital, that is, acts as the arches' turning-point, rather than as the burden's resting-point. An excellent example of the non-static conception of the Byzantine capital is provided by the type with the wind-blown acanthus (Fig. 56). Its leaves, as though blown and in motion at the arches' turning-point, not only discourage the eye from resting on them and so assessing their burden, but make us sense an invisible wind, which elates us. Wind-blown leaves, it is true, had already appeared in Roman art, as also had work with the drill. But whereas with the Romans the drill technique on marble was but the easy device of a decadent art, the Byzantines turned it into a significant medium to serve the transcendental scope of their art. The Christian architecture of Syria, on the other hand, employing this technique in an effort to express its spiritual aspirations, did not succeed in so fully conveying sublimity as did Byzantine architecture, to which indeed its relation was very much as that of Romanesque to Gothic. Now, from the technical point of view, Syrian, Romanesque and Gothic art (in contrast to Byzantine) have this in common: that their sculptural decoration was cut into the original construction.

Indeed, the question arises how Gothic architecture—which, judged from its externals, is diametrically opposed to Byzantine—succeeded, like it, in singing the praises of the Christian ideal. This problem is not a new one, but it deserves examination in relation to sculptural decoration also, since the comparison aids us to a better understanding of both arts.

The skeleton of the Gothic construction is a sort of net-work, within which the forces are analysed. Aesthetically, that is, it tends to appear as a "non-articulated", dynamic whole, not, like the classical work, as a sum of static and related elements. Thus, in its final manifestation, Gothic art did away with columns and capitals, exhibited continuous ribs that appeared to grow from the ground, and created an apparently monolithic system. It



58 Relief Ornaments (from Rheims Cathedral, and from Notre Dame, Dijon)

skeleton; while, simultaneously, they are the only surfaces that express the exact concentration of the matter. For the ribbed nature of the construction to be revealed in the weak light of the North, the mouldings had to be cut deep and so be clearly defined and displayed. Otherwise the vertical tendency of the cathedral might have appeared weak and devoid of grace. Despite the fact that Gothic sculptural decoration turned from extension to volume, its composition remains, as in Byzantine decoration, pictorial, not tectonic. And because, as in the skeleton, so too in the ornament, the principle prevails of the predominance of the whole over the parts, the ornamental motifs are therefore made, in their interdependence, to interweave in a continuous pattern, which indeed sometimes becomes vague and complex (Fig. 58), and in this, according to Worringer,¹ they reflect an innate psychological trait of the Nordic people. On the other hand, the weak light of the North that does not allow sensitive gradations from light to shadow produces, even in the fully carved members, contrasts of almost solely black and white, and therefore an effect similar to that of the flat relief of Byzantine sculp-

proclaims also the principle that the whole predominates, and not the parts. Nevertheless, it has this one similarity with the classical work: that the sculptural decoration is not added, but, as we have already mentioned, cut into the original stone. The Gothic decorative treatment rejects the system of wall veneers and its ornament is not in flat relief (like the Byzantine carving) but almost in the round. This may be but a natural consequence of the fact that Gothic architecture builds with stone and does not offer extensive surfaces for panelling. The mass has been eliminated and concentrated in the piers and the ribs of the cross-vaults, that form a kind of carrying

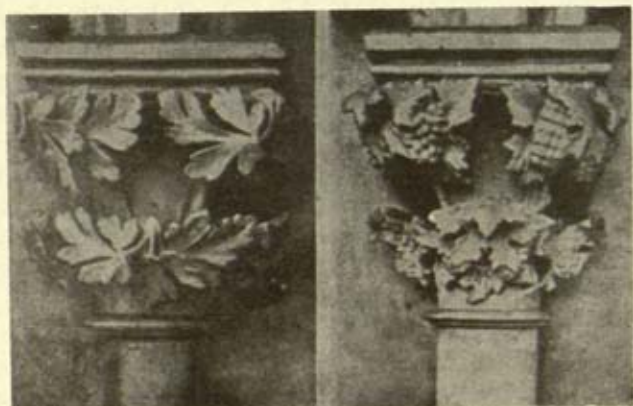
¹ Worringer, *op. cit.*

ture. Accordingly, the foliage around a Gothic capital, although carved in the round, seems—raised as it is from the background—like applied decoration (Fig. 59).

Gothic architecture, finally, builds with small stones and cohesive mortar. It does not carve the ribs, therefore, after placing the stones (as in the fluted Greek column, built without mortar) but each stone before being set in place. This technical condition necessitates the carving of a complete motif on the surface of each stone in Gothic ornamental strips. Each stone thus acts as a measure, as it introduces the element of the minute into the gigantic whole—an element distinctly pronounced on the outside of the Gothic building where the network of architectural joints (not obliterated as in classical Greek architecture, nor concealed with colour as sometimes in the Gothic interior) is conspicuous. Woven between the stones it makes them stand out prominently and introduces a pictorial note.

The Sculptural Decoration of the Exterior

After the early Christian period, the decorative tendency of Byzantine architecture manifested itself also on the external walls of the churches. Marble slabs in relief were inserted, as in the Church of Gorgoepekoos (Fig. 60), or slabs in flat relief, as in the dome of the Hosios Lukas chapel (Fig. 61). However, in the main, it was the inferior material of the walls themselves which was decoratively arranged, now into brick-surrounded masonry, now in interesting combinations of bricks with sometimes ceramic ornaments, friezes of Kufic lettering, and, finally, enamelled plaques



59 *Gothic Capitals*



60 *Marble Decorations*
(early Christian), Athens,
Church of Gorgoepekoos

added. In this way not only was a new minute measure of comparison provided which displayed the size of the church, but the church was also given a pictorial character and natural polychromy. The factors they introduced were not merely harmonious complements to the exterior view of the church: they were artistically indispensable in an architecture which unfolds surfaces, has the minimum number of projections, and does not distinguish volumes from the building's base, as in classical architecture; they became indispensable the moment the church was set free in space.

We meet a similar decorative tendency again in the external walls of Romanesque architecture, where, however, it begins to be combined with sculptural decoration in the round (Fig. 32) as this finally prevailed in the Gothic church (Fig. 25)—yet never bereft of the pictorial character.

We shall have occasion to speak again of Byzantine sculpture and the sculptural representations of Gothic churches when dealing with Byzantine painting. Let us note here that the polychromy of the two-dimensional decoration of the church's façades, both in Byzantine and Romanesque style, was natural, not painted. Unlike the Greek temple, in which the material of which it was built was painted, the Byzantine church preserved the natural colours of its material. On the whole, the same principle was applied in the interior decoration of marble veneer and mosaic, employed to achieve polychromy. Frescoes were not introduced till later.

The Polychromy of the Decoration

The interior decoration in Byzantine churches would no doubt have been imperfect were polychromy lacking. For polychromy adds warmth to light, contributes to the creation of atmosphere in space, and introduces a fantastic element into the cold majesty of

the church. It is there again in painting, mosaic or fresco, whose animated representations recall the life and motion in space. And as in the silence of the church the human voice of the priest uttering the words of the prophets softens their almost terrible magnificence, so does chromatic harmony soften the awe-inspiring glance of the Almighty, the most chaste beauty of the Virgin Mary, the dematerialised faces of the Saints and Martyrs. In lending them that spark of earthly warmth that contrasts so dramatically with their spirituality, it at once enhances them and transmutes them from what might well have been abstract symbols into moving divinities.

The decoration of the Byzantine church attains supreme heights in the paintings of the sacred scenes that introduce both a human and superhuman scale in the architectural work. Thanks to them, space becomes not larger merely, but more majestic, seeming to encompass a world that is suspended from the glance of the Almighty, and across which the angels' wings flutter and the saints' feet tread. The reproduction of this heavenly hierarchy, with so true a sense of proportion as made of it a harmonious unit in a uniform architectural space, involved problems of scale, composition and style in Byzantine iconography inalienably bound up with its architecture. No aesthetic analysis intended to reveal the sublime character of Byzantine art can therefore afford to ignore its iconography.



61 *The Dome of the Chapel of Hosios Lukas Monastery*

CHAPTER V

The Expression of the Sublime in Byzantine Church Painting

HAGIOGRAPHY

The Advantages of Painting

We shall not deal here with the portable icon or the miniature: they had broken away from the architectural frame and were, of course, not conditioned by the architectural demands, but largely subject to the artist's individual concepts. We shall examine only mosaics and wall paintings, which, as an inalienable part of the Byzantine church, share the eminence they helped to promote, and are therefore of far more general interest.

The painting of any great architectural style cannot, of course, be judged independently of its architectural setting, and in the Byzantine church to overlook the painted decorations and sacred paintings in themselves would be to miss much not only of the aim of the great architectural style but also of the spirit of the age.

For the church paintings, in narrating the Lord's Passion and depicting the Donors, Martyrs, Saints and God Himself, in reproducing the terror of the sinner, the beatitude of the angelic soul, were the dumb interpreters of the Christian dogma. As St. Basil¹ puts it, "What the verbal account presents to the ear, the silent picture presents by imitation." Being thus didactic as they were descriptive, they were able more directly to impart the moral as well as the aesthetic nature of the church's sublime scope, of which architecture, wholly dependent on intellectual and abstract forms relying exclusively on dimensions and relations of volumes and on the plasticity of mass, could exhibit only the aesthetic expression. Furthermore, the icon, from the theological point of view, was regarded (in accordance with the theory of emanation introduced by the Neoplatonists and adopted by the Christian Church) as a product of illumination. It partakes of the sanctity of the prototype,

¹ Basil the Great, *Praise to the Great Martyrs*.

because it is identical with it according to its essence (*κατ' οὐσίαν*), although it differs from it according to its hypostasis (*καθ' ὑπόστασιν*). Its relation to the prototype is the same as the relation of Christ the Son to God the Father, and the image is as sacred a representation as is that of the Passion during Holy Liturgy.¹

In this sense the paintings completed and complemented the architectural edifice; but before this could be achieved, the question of their disposition on the architectural surfaces—which in turn gave rise to problems of their size and treatment—had to be solved.

The Position of the Paintings

The position of the paintings in the church depended as much on the hierarchical order established by the dogma as on the inner architecture of the church: each painting demanded a surface as eminent as its subject. If the sacred scenes, figures and emblems in the building had to be painted to the size and allotted the space and position befitting their hierarchical importance, the size and importance of the surfaces, as established by the architectural composition, had obviously also to be considered. A simultaneous grading of surfaces and pictures was needed, then, to enable architecture and painting to promote each other's scope and functions.

In the church the dome, the apse and the floor symbolised heaven, the intermediate space and the earth. Iconography, on the other hand, following the dogma, defined three zones in the church, representing heaven, the life of Christ (and its counterpart, the Holy Land) and the earth with the Choir of Saints.²

Such theological views on the symbols and their disposition in the church agreed perfectly with the aesthetic conception which embraced them. We find, thus, the Cherubim placed high up in the building and in what would seem to be the most fitting place, the four pendentives; although later the Evangelists were placed there as a frame to the Almighty. In Hagia Sophia the Cherubim, placed in the pendentives (Fig. 47), are not only themselves displayed to advantage, but their symbolic attributes also contribute to the illusory elevation of the dome, seeming as they do to carry it on their wings. The representation of the Almighty belonged to the

¹ O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, p. 6 (London, 1947).

² G. Soteriou, *The Iconographic Circles* (in Greek; Athens, 1927).



62 *Dome (seen from below),
Mt. Athos, Dochiariou Monastery*

dome,¹ which, being the symbol of heaven, and therefore the most superb and most brilliantly lighted spot, was eminently suited to receive in its spacious embrace the reproduction of the Highest Form and Hypostasis (Fig. 62). The representation of the Virgin Mary is usually placed in the other significant place in the building: namely, the apse of the sanctuary—the intermediary between earth

and heaven. In some cases, when the form of the church was basilical, the apse received the picture of the Almighty (Fig. 63). However, eminent architectural positions were not considered enough to emphasise the superlative significance of the hierarchically primary figures. They had also to predominate in size among the remaining pictures and to be given a fitting background to set them off. The question of the pictures' size then arose.

The Size of the Pictures

The size of the pictures is of particular importance to the architect, since painting introduces another—its own—scale in the interior space.

The studio painter has lost touch with the problems of relative scale involved in wall painting: his problems concern only the proportions of individual paintings to one another, without reference to a building's scale. But in the case of the church painter, it is not enough to know that the apportioning of a certain size to the figure of his Saint, for instance, entails for his Archangel a proportionately larger-sized figure, and again for the Almighty a figure proportionately surpassing both the former in size. The architect, rather than the painter in him, must perceive how the paintings' figures as a whole affect the scale of the church; for it is

¹ The dome was also considered as an aperture through which the Lord looked on the faithful on earth.

the architect who perceives when the dimensions of the church paintings apparently diminish or magnify its actual size, or when, in perfect proportion to its architectural scale, they serve to enhance the whole edifice, which then in turn acts as their natural and effective background.

Now the church painter had not only to introduce a whole hierarchy, but his portrayal of this host of figures had also to be in keeping with the sublime style of the building. And to this end, it was not enough to combine in his portrait the vivid and ideal form which his subject demanded. Pictures good or even excellent merely in themselves might still have fallen short of the building's requirements, without the fitting proportions which would enable them, while displaying space, to be displayed by it. The church painter had, then, if he was to give his works their appropriate proportions with reference to the building which housed them, to look upon the church as the frame, so to speak, to his picture; and on his picture as a detail of a general work provided by the other paintings in the church. This alone could give him the key to the most advantageous display both of the surfaces at his disposal and of his subjects. For being able then to equate aesthetically surface and picture, he knew that—unless he drew on the scale determined by his frame and his allotted part in the whole canvas, as it were—the drawing of life-size figures, for instance, would not necessarily enable him to preserve the “human” scale of the architecture; nor would the drawing of figures above life-size necessarily enable him to suggest their superhuman nature; nor again would the drawing of diminutive figures necessarily enable him to accommodate artistically a multitude of them within a given space.



63 *Apse, Sicily, Monreale Church*

It was only by establishing the proportions of his detail to the general work, his particular picture to the aggregate, that he could achieve all three objects, while not ignoring the value of vacant surfaces in enhancing both painting and architecture. That is why he sometimes changes the usual arrangement of his composition, or even moves his picture to another part of the church.

To explain how the artist succeeded in establishing these proportions is the task of a more comprehensive study than this claims to be. Suffice it to note here an important point in grasping the disposition, as a whole, of the sacred paintings in the Byzantine church: the Almighty, as a Transcendental Being, is always depicted on a scale vaster than any of the other figures, surpassing even the scale of the church: not only because, being—by virtue of His Nature—placed higher than any of the other paintings, the size of the picture had to be increased, but because it was intended to indicate His divinity by the surpassing size of His image.

In ancient Greek temples, also, the statues of the gods were on a scale disproportionately large to their surroundings. It has been said that Zeus, for instance, whom Phidias had represented seated on his throne in the temple of Olympia, would have carried off the roof of the temple had he stood up—so far did his size exceed the temple's dimensions. Some have concluded, thence, that the statue, being disproportionately large to its environment, was a failure quantitatively and that the ancient Greeks therefore had little aesthetic appreciation of space. How erroneous a judgment this is becomes immediately evident on considering the size of the representation of the Almighty in the apse of the Sicilian church of Monreale (Fig. 63) or in the dome of Daphni (Fig. 66), in both of which He fills out the space, which would obviously not have sufficed to accommodate His whole body. Why, then, were not the Byzantines accused of the same aesthetic deficiency? Choisy sees in the superhuman size of the Almighty in the Byzantine churches the influence and the repetition of ancient Greek practice.¹ But may we not equally reasonably see in both two identical, coinciding concepts of the superlative dimensions befitting the Divine Being? It is, at any rate, true that the artist both in ancient Greece and in Byzantium deliberately employs huge proportions to suggest the sublimity of the deity.

If in the Greek temple this exaggerated emphasis on the statue of the god surprises us and we fail to understand it, it is because the sublime note struck by the god's vast size is unexpected in an

¹ Choisy, *Histoire de l'Architecture*, II, p. 69.

edifice of which the scope is not sublime, and which is judged wholly by standards of beauty. But in an architectural work of which the scope is purely sublime, the superlative size of the Pantocrator is immediately accepted as the fitting scale for Him.

Thus depicted on a vast scale, He comes nearer to the worshipper's range of vision; and in making His symbolic heaven and image prevail over the church and all its images, they are eloquent of His sovereignty over saints and Universe. In the Byzantine church, then, we have painting and architecture co-operating in surrendering the church to God, who deigns to appear in their man-made heaven.



64 *The Draught of Fishes, painting by Raphael*

Great artists like Raphael, Dürer and others used the transcendental scale to indicate the divine. If we look at Raphael's *Draught of Fishes* (Fig. 64) we are struck by the discrepancy in the size of the fishing boats and of the Apostles, and, especially, of Christ. Again, in Van Eyck's *Madonna* (Fig. 65) it is at once evident that the side arches of the Gothic cathedral wherein she stands will not admit her. Yet we find it more difficult to accept the discrepancy of scale in Raphael's naturalistic fishing scene, in which we expect a more accurate imitation of nature than in Van Eyck's *Madonna*, with its hallowed cathedral background. In Byzantine painting, with the forms completely sublimated and spiritualised, we accept such discrepancies even more unquestioningly, as we do the *Madonna* always depicted on a transcendental scale in the apse (Fig. 72).

The Treatment of the Paintings

The image of the Almighty placed in the dome affords us an outstanding example of the two-dimensional, essentially non-plastic technique of Byzantine church painting. Placed in the dome the image attracts and holds the attention, not only because its position is conspicuous and well-illuminated, but also because its surface is concave.

The depiction of a figure on a concave surface, with all the optical distortions the concavity produces, causes the painter many difficulties. In the Byzantine church, however, thanks to its ingenious artistic treatment, it contributed both to the impressiveness and spirituality of the representation of the Omnipresent Being. For looking at the dome (Fig. 66) the spectator is ever conscious of its concave surface, and the effect of the two-dimensional figure in the receding architectural shape is

that of a form whose mass vanishes even while it remains a body, so that it becomes dematerialised and ectoplasmic. How well suited this device was to Byzantine art we may at once perceive if we pause to consider what appalling results the reverse would have produced—namely, had the painter, by the use of optical devices, succeeded in eliminating the concavity of the dome, and revealed to us the figure of God as a sculpturally round body floating in space, as in the Baroque example (Fig. 67). As it is, however, the two-dimensional figure depicted within the immense embrace of the dome suggests a being so ethereal and spiritual that it can but be God.

In the effect thus produced, we at once see how necessary to the sublime nature of Byzantine painting it was, not to be plastic but to be kept upon, and extend along, the surface. Even the painting of the Renaissance, at heart conscious of the same necessity, remains "despite its plastic urge (*Wucht*) a clearly planimetric decoration", as Wöfflin says about Michelangelo's Sistine ceil-

65 *Madonna, painting
by Van Eyck*



ing.¹ It does not seek to pierce the surface it covers. Of course, in the mural painting of the Baroque period the conquest of perspective enchanted the artist to such a degree that it led him to exaggeration. The clouds in the sky appear to breathe as they float in the church's space, and the figures are suspended in the air, with the result that the surface of the wall seems pierced and absorbed by space. The wall recedes to the depths, and the architecture generally is disintegrated.

The change to be observed in the architecture of that time corresponds with and was a natural reaction to the damaging effects on it of the new style of painting. From the pictorial art it was in the Byzantine period and the plastic art it was during the Renaissance, it was reduced in the Baroque period to a pictorial technique of volumes, resembling three-dimensional petrified pictures in space.

We have in these



66 *The Dome, Daphni*



67 *Frescoes, Rome, St. Andrea della Valle*

¹ Wolfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, p. 129, also pp. 101-2 (München, 1915).

changes, indeed, a very clear illustration of the assertion made in this aesthetic approach to the history of art—namely, that in the Byzantine era the sublime predominated in its style; in the Renaissance the plastic conception of the Beautiful; and in the Baroque a passionate religious sentimentality, seeking to uplift itself from the serenity of the beautiful through sublime undertones, yet without attaining the spiritual elevation it strove after, and which it could therefore express only with exaggerated naturalism.

To sum up: in order to blend with its architecture of two-dimensional surfaces, an architecture of dematerialised masses, bereft of plastic projections, with space and light all concurring to produce the lofty note that ran through the church—in order, then, to blend with its architecture, Byzantine painting had to be two-dimensional, avoiding plasticity; it had to etherealise its figures, and lend space majestic colours with which to bathe it in sublime beauty.

Any but the pictorial technique in the Byzantine church seems repellent, as indeed the monstrous modern paintings hung in many Byzantine churches by later churchwardens testify. True, they too, like the Byzantine paintings, depict saints; yet, unadapted to their environment, they seem not to have caught its sanctity.¹

The Picturesque Character of Byzantine Hagiography

Obviously it was the picturesque character of Byzantine hagiography, as of all Byzantine art generally, which caused it to adopt

¹ The technique which, in etherealising the forms, allowed the larger pictures to be placed higher in the Byzantine church served hierarchical purposes. The opposite "organic principle" (to quote Demus) of making the decoration lighter the higher it rose was the Western artist's natural response to an architecture which achieved dematerialisation by making burden lighter than support (whereas in Byzantine architecture the reverse was, of course, the case). And surely the placing of minutely elaborated members in the Gothic cathedrals, on heights where the eye can no longer follow them, was due to no "organic principle", but to a mentality partly mystic, partly realistic which pursued meticulous treatment of material *ad infinitum* in space. This mentality it was which bequeathed to the Baroque period its urge to set in motion realistically painted bodies in illusory space—an achievement which the Byzantine artist could at no time have tolerated, despite Demus' assertion that the latter visualised his forms moving in the actual space of the church. In the Byzantine church, on the contrary, each surface, transferring us as it does to a fictitious space, removes us from reality to the degree to which the forms depicted on it are ethereal. In regard to "antiperspective optic", which Demus says was employed by the Byzantine artist, I have only to say that if this were so, it was not done with a view to displaying the figures' regular proportions, as careful observation will show. Were it not so, in fact, the spectator's view would have depended on one particular point. See also my article, "Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Byzantine Art", in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. XI, No. 1, September 1952.

a pictorial technique. The terms "pictorial" or "plastic" may be applied to the character of an art, of course, apart from its technique. That the same word is employed to describe both a quality and a technique is not unnatural, since the spirit of an art influences its expression. But in borrowing the words "pictorial" or "plastic" from the arts of painting and sculpture which they designate, in order to describe the character of a work, we at once admit that one or the other quality can best be expressed in the particular medium to which it specifically applies.

In the concrete case of Byzantine hagiography, then, was painting the medium best suited to express the nature of its lofty subjects? If so, how did it succeed, and why did sculpture inevitably decline in Byzantium, so that the character of Byzantine hagiography may be said to be essentially pictorial, indeed picturesque? (The examination of these questions is the more interesting since the terms "pictorial" and "plastic" have in recent years been used by art critics in so superficial a sense that the first of them, at least, has almost come to mean mere realistic imitation of the complexities, multiformity or discrepancies an object presents, without reference to the artist's attitude to his subject. No art critic should forget that the artist is always a creator—an architect, let us say—even when he is expressing himself pictorially.)

Painting is an art of imitation, in so far as it depicts natural and not abstract forms. As an art, however, its aim cannot, of course, remain so pointless: the natural model is idealised and painting is no longer merely the faithful reflection of outward form. And indeed painting, in composing such fantastic beings as demons and monsters of Hell, the Cherubim and Seraphim, and souls in Paradise, succeeds in presenting the invisible, the unworldly, the supernatural. The gods of Olympus, themselves unworldly and supernatural, are so in another sense. Differently conceived, their form had perforce to be differently presented.

Let us see which of the two different arts, painting or sculpture, was the better suited to interpret each of these concepts of a celestial world.

The distinction between the two concepts of the deity which follows is somewhat schematic, yet is necessary for posing the problem clearly and for elucidating subtle differences. The gods of the ancient Greeks were mythical, impersonal beings that had never lived on earth and had never been seen; each was the personification of an idea, and the artist who wished to represent them had to sculpture an ideal body and face; he had to derive from his

human models those general characteristics best suited to his gods, for he would have sought in vain for a single human model that could combine the anatomical proportions and features required for an Ares, the god of War, or an Aphrodite, the goddess of Beauty. The sculptor gave his gods the human form, but in producing ideal types he surpassed their natural prototype, which seemed deformed and imperfect by comparison. These statues were the expression of abstract archetypes of the beautiful. Sculpture, setting the nude body in space, subtracting the sensual quality from the flesh, was better able to render lucidly the cold majesty of an impersonal idea.

In contrast to the pagan gods, the martyrs, saints, Apostles and the God-man were not impersonal mythical beings, but figures of reality, and the artist, therefore, had to depict now not ideal types but real forms each naturally differing from the other, each with its own individual characteristics. And individuality being expressed most vividly in the face, the body was ignored and these pictures became portraits—of Peter, or Paul, or Justinian, or Christ, as they were seen when they lived on this earth. Yet these were no portraits in the sense of mere perfect likenesses: they had to indicate the status, the type, of the personality portrayed. Justinian, for example (Fig. 68a), must be shown as the Emperor he was, and not as Justinian the man only; St. Demetrius as the saint he was; Christ as the Supreme Being He was.

With the passage of time, the portraits became formalised, although some of them, such as those of the angels, had been from the beginning impersonal; but invariably, whether wholly idealised or slightly more realistic, as in the case of martyrs or donors, they were portraits of ascetic beings, denying the flesh, concealing it from the eyes, striving to become incorporeal. The spiritual quality in a face was the only "beauty" which the Byzantine artist recognised, and in recognising this for the first time he brought to Byzantine hagiography its original combination of realism and spirituality, in an unprecedented aim: not to produce ideal, impersonal types, representative of abstract beauty, but to express the beauty which saintliness and moral elevation bring to the individual countenance. Indeed, Byzantine hagiography portrays characteristic beauty, or rather stylises characteristic expression, in its effort to stress moral uplift, even when the form is not beautiful. It does not hesitate to portray even the ugly, though never as an end in itself, as often occurred in Gothic art, but only where it serves to reflect certain qualities of the soul and

to suggest sanctity, the sublime and hieratic. In saying that the Byzantine portrait on the whole ignored physical beauty, we should make an exception of the Virgin and the angels, who usually partook of it.

(a)



(b)



68 *The Emperor Justinian and the Empress Theodora (details from mosaics, see Figs. 74 and 75)*

The purpose of Byzantine hagiography, then, is diametrically opposed to that of ancient Greek sculpture. Its object is not to represent the perfect nude body and that beauty of feature that shall bring down to our world the archetypes of ideal beauty, but to reproduce the spirituality of individual expression that shall uplift us and turn our thoughts heavenward. Gestures, features, vivacity

and animation of the glance—all these, contributing to individual expression, played their part in Byzantine painting, which therefore showed a predilection for full-face portraits and frontal representations, bringing the likeness into full view.

Byzantine hagiography, as Wulff has correctly remarked,¹ does not represent so much as “express”, and to this end painting, so much better able to vest and redeem even the ugliest features with a radiant look or a lofty expression, is a more suitable medium than sculpture. Already, in Hellenistic times, the increasing importance of the individual had promoted portraiture (Fig. 69) and



69 *Portraits (fourth-century),
Museum of Brescia*

had led to the carving of portrait busts—a practice continued in the early Christian period (Fig. 76). The sculptural work, however, even if placed on a pedestal, always gives the impression of a tangible body—of a presence that can circulate among men. It must, therefore, avoid facial realism and be an ideal figure, creating an aesthetic distance between itself and the spectator.

Painting, on the other hand, which does not set its works in real but in fictitious space, along a two-dimensional surface, is far more apt to give the impression of its representations as visions, shades, imaginary beings, out of the world of reality; for, no matter how vivid the painted likeness to the real individual (who may, in fact, still be moving in our midst), the picture propels it into an imaginary sphere.

In Byzantium, painting, which superseded sculpture, turning from the tactile to the visual, refused to imitate sculpture's plastic treatment. Indeed, the spiritual space behind heaven's canopy, where the angels, the souls and God dwelt, presupposed immaterial ectoplasmic bodies, which had therefore to be represented in painterly style—namely, in two-dimensional and disembodied forms, which lent themselves far more naturally to painting than

¹ Wulff, *Altchristliche und byzantinische Kunst*, I, pp. 79–89 and elsewhere.

to sculpture, where such effects would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to produce.

In order to give the impression of the third dimension, at least to the degree of verisimilitude necessary to the work, it combines the frontal with the side view, as did in a sense Egyptian painting. There the head in profile, alternating with the chest in full view, or the side view of the feet, alternating with the full view of the torso, gives the impression that the body is turning, and along with this motion the painting suggests plastic depth; and, indirectly—since experience tells us that objects have volume and move in space—it suggests space also. Moreover, objects seen as surface projections are inevitably seen against a background and this juxtaposition of projection and background, conveying a sense of proximity and remoteness, again evokes a sense of space, especially when the figure shows movement.

It is in the nature of painting to represent disembodied shades or contours of immaterial objects. Painting is able to animate even lifeless, motionless objects by the combination of projections of plan and elevation, as in Egyptian decorative designs or as in the drawing of children. Later it also employed elementary visual means of overlapping forms, intercrossing lines and chiaroscuro. The intention of representing objects in perspective, and so creating the illusion that they are tangible bodies moving in real space, was adopted and accomplished by painting in other ages. In Byzantine painting the face shown in three-quarter profile is intended to avoid a strictly profile view, which, according to Demus, was reserved "only for figures which represent evil forces . . . like Judas".¹ The combination of a frontal with a side view, however, does not, as Demus contends, result in the movements of the figures meeting in the real space outside the picture; nor is the fictitious background² lacking in the Byzantine painting. Did the figures in fact give the impression of moving outside their frame, they would do away with the aesthetic distance always necessary to the enjoyment of art, and the church would then seem like a cage imprisoning them.

We have, further, in Byzantine painting the juxtaposition of various colours on a single plane, which again creates the impression of varying distance—with red, say, appearing nearer than blue—and which therefore again gives an illusion of plastic depth; indeed, if we bear this chromatic effect in mind, we see in the

¹ O. Demus, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

wealth of colour displayed by Byzantine hagiography (which sometimes appears to move in the realm of pure decoration) additional evidence of its picturesque tendency, and not of a passion for decoration as such. The decorative nature of Byzantine painting is the outcome of a genuine pictorial sense, which knows how to create an image by purely linear and chromatic means—unlike pretentious plastic chiaroscuro and monochromy, which, in attempting to represent volume realistically in imitation of sculpture, destroy the nature of painting. Byzantine painting does not confine itself to a single source of light and uses local colours.

With its turn from the "tactile" to the "visual", then, Byzantine hagiography, far from being, as might at first sight appear, only remotely aware of the functions of painting, on the contrary kept them well in sight. With the dark blue background in the mosaics creating an invisible depth, and the golden backgrounds inundating space with abundant light, it produced the transcendental atmosphere required for its holy icons. Indeed, the lofty conceptions Byzantine hagiography sets out to represent divorce it completely from either primitive or childish painting, which are quite devoid of any such aim or significance; it shares with them only this trait—that it does not represent objects only as we see them to be, but also as we know them to be. Children often draw thus, not putting down what they see, but enlarging whatever impresses them and omitting whatever they consider unnecessary or of which they do not know the use. In this respect the Byzantine painter works not unlike a child, drawing cities from above (in bird's-eye view) and distorting the proportions of the body so as to emphasise a certain sentiment or to symbolise a transcendental idea. Yet even at this stage his work retains throughout just that degree of plasticity which keeps it within the precincts of the realistic, so that we have direct access to it and, through it, to its loftier symbolism.

The didactic motives which impelled Byzantine iconography to adopt painting as its medium went hand in hand with a kindred narrative tendency. The narrative tendency of Byzantine hagiography is not superficial: it derives from a profounder source—a religious conception of history with a past, a present and a future. The Christian no longer viewed the world statically, but saw it in process of development. Nevertheless, in the disposition of the scenes of the Passion and the like in the church, Byzantine, unlike Western, art never followed the historic sequence of the events, but described them in various symbolic scenes. The artist thus remained

faithful to the Greek conception of abstracting the important fact and not compelling the spectator to follow a filmed sequence. This agrees with the fact that painting is an art of space and not of time, as music is, so that it must perforce capture the "fertile" moment—that is, the moment in which an attitude conveys the whole action, with all its antecedent and future implications. If symbolic movements thus significantly arrested seem sometimes unnatural, they are still the most suitable and desirable, in that far from bringing the action to a halt they suggest its continuity.

This fertile moment absorbs our attention, so that the physically unnatural passes almost unnoticed. So it is that the figures in these paintings, beneath their seemingly eternal immobility, yet pulsate with life.

The fertile moment, however, in Byzantine paintings does not concern the body's attitude so much as the spiritual attitude. As we shall see in the following chapter on sculpture, the body's attitude becomes somewhat prosaic, because the centre of gravity is shifted to the content and this inevitably detracts from the importance of the body as such. Bodies ethereal, as though levitating, and which moreover lack correct proportions owing to the expressionist emphasis, are presented at a fertile moment and satisfy us not through their bodily action but by the suggestion of their spiritual status.

Let us take, for example, the Saint in Fig. 70. Drawn as he is frontally, almost at attention, there is a fixed immobility about him that at first sight makes him lifeless; but only until we perceive that his immobility is of the very fabric of holy meditation, is eloquent, as nothing else could be, of complete self-withdrawal. The whole attitude then compels our attention; everything about the figure—the two large eyes, the closed mouth, the right hand holding us at a distance—testifies to spiritual action, which grows



70 *Mosaic, Thessalonike.
Church of St. Demetrius*

upon us as we look upon the Saint, until the protection he casts over the two little children standing beside him seems to become all-embracing; his great tallness, shown up by the children reaching up to his waist, is the only marked physical trait about him, for all anatomical lines are lost beneath the hieratic robe, as he rises two-dimensional, almost disembodied, and solitary in his height. Such are the austere effects which in Byzantine hagiography uplift us, as Italian art, with its gestures and theatrical tricks, cannot.

Painting, moreover, with extensive surfaces at its disposal, may, by arraying the various instantaneous movements or scenes, reproduce a whole act spread over a considerable space of time, and



71 *Entry into Jerusalem (mosaic), Capella Palatina*

so narrate a drama or a festive occasion—such as the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (Fig. 71). But even when the external narrative element is lacking, the unity of a scene is kept up by an inner power which entails animation and so implies a series of images (as in Fig. 70).

Byzantine painting, in a way, creates “open” forms suggesting the dynamic, and therefore with the parts, as in its architecture, subordinated to the whole. Differentiation between the parts is consequently subdued: they lose their independence and submit collectively to the whole, which may be represented by a principal unit. The compositional subordination appears more clearly in the figure of the Virgin (Fig. 72); it is, however, even more impressive in the triumphant presence of Christ (Figs. 73 and 5), where the

sublime is made manifest in the spectacle of the God-man, gigantic in size and terrible as Zeus. Even in the mosaics of San Vitale (Figs. 74 and 75), despite the isocephaly of the figures, there is again a principal unit, to which everything in the picture points:



72 *Apse Mosaic of the Virgin in the Church of Torcello*



73 *Apse Mosaic, Rome, Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian*

a spirit of submission, in homage to the Emperor's flashing brilliance, pervades all the figures and is transmitted from one to the other, either by a movement of the hand, a turn of the glance or through chromatic concord, all moving from, and returning to, the

painting's centre of gravity—the Imperial figure in the nimbus and purple.

In the Christian scheme of things, time, which began when the world was created, yet held promise of eternity. A world-theory (*Weltanschauung*) so radically different from the classical necessarily brought in its wake an aesthetic approach correspondingly



74 *The Emperor Justinian (mosaic), Ravenna, San Vitale (see detail Fig. 68a)*



75 *The Empress Theodora (mosaic), Ravenna, San Vitale (see detail Fig. 68b)*

dissimilar to the classical. Space seen through time grew infinite; the Christian's thoughts turned to infinity and eternity; it mattered little that things temporal and the body perished, since the soul could dwell in heaven awaiting the Day of Judgement. We pass thus from the static approach to the beautiful, to the dynamic experience of the sublime; as the Christian artist passed from the depiction of ideal forms to the expression of spiritual states and the representation of transcendental visions.

Byzantine Sculpture

Plastically sculptured saints and angels, tall and nude like classical statues, would scarcely look true to type. They would seem as strange to us as those of the Italian Renaissance with their beauty-seeking realism, or as those of the Baroque with their melodramatic fervour. Byzantine sculpture, in order to rise to the new spiritual demands on art, had itself to adopt the inward-dwelling spirit.

In sculpture this spirit first becomes apparent in the Hellenistic period, but does not assert itself until early Christian times. Portrait busts attempt to show, not the lineaments of an ideal face, but the expression of individual characteristics (Fig. 76). The statues are no longer nude but draped. As a result, the harmony of ideal proportions disappears, and is replaced by the decorative pictorial effect of garments. In addition, the statues' pose loses its tectonic grace, which was produced mainly by the contrast between the weight-supporting leg and the one used as a counterbalance.¹ The bodies now stand solidly on both legs (Fig. 77), making of the sculptured figures no longer a poetic composition, but a prosaic² presentation of a transitory moment in their lives. But, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the "fertile" moment is now transferred from the physical to the spiritual movement. Both the bodies and their attitude seem strange, because these now act only as vehicles of a spiritual state.



76 *Bust of an Empress
(probably Theodora),
Milan*

¹ *Standbein and Spielbein.*

² *Wulff, op. cit.*, I, pp. 133-68.



77 *The Four Moors, Venice*

The mutation from the "tactile" to the "visual" is well illustrated in Fig. 79, where the superposition of more distinctly pronounced figures above those in the forefront creates many planes leading to the background and shows space. The element of time is suggested by the turn of the bodies towards Caesar and, in some cases, by movements in the opposite direction, and by the crowd of heads and eyes turned upwards to look at him, as—judging by the expressive gestures and poses—they listen to his oration.

The unity in the work, though immediately sensed, yet urges the eye to follow the sequence of the description throughout:

no one part is self-sufficient enough to be, as a perfect form, independent of the context it helps to compose. The scene, developing in a succession of images, compels the eye to follow its evolution in order to seize the unity—to film, so to speak, the spectacle. A striking instance of this is to be found in the spirally unfolding representations on the commemorative columns of Roman art (Fig. 78). The spectator here, instead of being suddenly transported beyond space and time, in the contemplation of an eternal and ideal scene, is made to take a part in the unfolding scene.

Classical works, of course, also showed in relief descriptions of an action developing in time—for example, the Panathenaic procession on the Parthenon's frieze. But the theme here develops in "stages" of the procession, each allowing us to grasp the whole scene and its poetic theme instantaneously—in "stills" although we are, in fact, "filming" its actions. Each of the frieze's fragments is sufficient in itself to give the rhythm of the procession as a whole, whereas in the Christian relief until we have seen the whole description we are uncertain of its ultimate point. We may not inaptly compare the first to a poem, the second to a prose tale.

The pictorial tendency is naturally a negation of sculpture's basic possibilities, and technically cannot be displayed otherwise than in low-relief decoration or in carving or engraving—on ivory, for instance, or silver, or enamel or golden objects. These materials in themselves demand pictorial treatment, which can dispense with fully rounded masses, divided by gradations of light and shadow, and requires only relief projections or indentations, defined by slight curves or by lines creating simple contrasts of black and white; or, again, only decorative pierced surfaces. And, indeed, the reliefs in the Byzantine minor arts give at first glance the impression of line drawings, as we may at once see from Figs. 80 and 81. In both these objects the style vacillates, as in all Byzantine art, between the pictorial and the plastic, the sublime and the beautiful. (For another sculptural line drawing see also the arched lintel—Fig. 82—in the Chora Monastery of Constantinople.)

The turning away from the great classical sculpture in Byzantium should be regarded as a sign of artistic vitality and keen aesthetic consciousness, and not of decadence; and incidentally, its preoccupation with the goldsmith's art, enamel and ivory carving should not be regarded as merely an Orient-influenced love of luxury and ornament. It is not in imitation merely of Oriental textiles that we must seek the origin of the flat



78. *Parade of Army before Caesar, Rome (relief on Column of Marcus)*



79 *Caesar's Oration to the People, Rome (relief on the Arch of Constantine)*



80 *An Empress (ivory relief)*



81 *The Holy Virgin (ivory relief)*



82 *Ciborium Arch (now over a door of the Chora Monastery)*

reliefs of Byzantine art; nor in any church regulation against depiction of the human form must we seek the reason for its sculpture's hesitation to carve human figures in the round. Indeed, no such regulation has yet been discovered (as Bréhier has re-

marked¹); as for the Oriental reluctance to represent the figure, if we must take it into account, this could not long have enforced its dictates on the art of a country where Hellenism prevailed and gave it its means of expression.

The negative attitude of Byzantium toward sculpture and that medium's gradual degeneration were due to two reasons chiefly: first, to the religious conception that the human body must be concealed because the flesh is evil, a perishable receptacle of the immortal soul and spirit, which being incorporeal cannot therefore be reproduced by sculpture; second, to that mysterious change in man's aesthetic attitude—first evidenced in the Hellenistic decadence in Alexandria—towards world phenomena. Man now was no longer moved by beautiful spectacles only, but also by sublime themes which could appeal to his moral nature. The sculptor gradually ceased to mould beautiful volumes and began to draw on surfaces, until finally he was superseded by the painter, who could much more successfully express the celestial visions of morally resplendent worlds and transmit the ecstasy of the sublime in the music of colours, the rhythmic of expression, the features and the immaterial images on two-dimensional surfaces.

While it cannot be asserted that architecture and sculpture, which had reached supreme heights in ancient Greece, surrendered their place to painting and music—arts that can more easily express man's profoundest emotions and spiritual yearnings—it may yet be said that they were certainly influenced by them in their expression.

Gothic Sculpture

Byzantine hagiography did not for a moment imagine its representations moving in the real space of the church, as Demus thinks²; for then it would have preferred sculpture, as more adequate to this purpose. It was the more realistically disposed West which pursued this object, and did not exclude the possibility that a certain kind of sculpture could be evolved which in unnatural, ectoplasmic bodies would represent the incorporeal and transcendental. It was the achievement of Romanesque and Gothic sculpture that they did in fact attain this object; for it was an object which, both for climatic and psychological reasons, could have been achieved only in the North. A sunless climate which did not tolerate the nude body made the spectator accept the draped

¹ Bréhier, *L'Art byzantin*, p. 114 (Paris, 1924).

² O. Demus, *op. cit.*, pp. 9 and 13.

sculptured figures, in clothes of many folds, beneath which harmonious and anatomical proportions were, of course, not to be divined. In addition the climate of the North, with its feeble light, illuminates the folds of draperies only when they are deeply carved—in one word, when the whole piece of sculpture is treated pictorially, leading to contrasts between blacks and whites (unlike classical sculpture, where the transition from light to shade and to cast shadow is gradual).

The Gothic sculptured figures, then, became unnatural and strange, stimulating an imagination naturally inclined to the



83 *St. Peter (relief), Moissac,
St. Peter's Cathedral*

supernatural. For the Northerner's mind did not move within the luminous orbit of ideas, but in the misty light of an irrational sphere, in which he saw supernatural visions and spirits as material creatures moving in dark forests and coming out of clouds. Hence he had no difficulty in momentarily imagining these beings standing there beside him in stone (since, as we have mentioned previously, any sculptured piece set as a tactile mass in the space in which we move gives us the impression of a presence circulating in our midst until we let aesthetic distance prevail).

The statues in Gothic churches, be it noted however, are not

placed free in space, but grow out of the mass of the edifice, as though they had been moulded with it, so that they usually project from a background which restores to them the two indispensable qualities of which their pictorial treatment deprives them—namely, a fictitious space and a contour. Whereas sculptural works, when free volumes in space, treated according to the classical conception gain in effect by being looked at from many sides and not only frontally, anatomically unnatural works, such as those of the Gothic or of the Baroque period, lose in effect when viewed in this manner. The Gothic artist, therefore, created a suitable background for them and, thanks to this artistic device, saved

Northern sculpture from its illegitimate pictorial and narrative character. This explains why those of the Romanesque sculptures which were of a narrative or intensely transcendental nature are carved in full relief and not in the round (Fig. 83).

Finally, the Western conception of the sublime is, as we have repeatedly had occasion to ascertain, less idealistic, more matter-of-fact than the Eastern. The Westerner's mysticism is a sensuous approach to the transcendental; the Easterner's, a contemplative approach. Hence it is that while Byzantium was content to represent theological symbols in its churches, the West, with its mystic realism, wished to hold the mirror up to the Universe (*speculum universale*). May we not indeed—without taking into account the political reasons which inspired them—attribute the crusades, those invasions of the Holy Land by the West, to the same mystic realism? And if, as Demus maintains, it was the iconographic scheme of the Byzantine church which, in affording a symbolic pilgrimage in the church itself, did away with the need of crusades,¹ this but proves the contemplative capacity in the Byzantine, as opposed to the realism in the Western, make-up. So, too, the Western predilection for the basilica, with its beginning and its end, is indicative of the march towards a goal; the contemplative mind of the Byzantine, on the other hand, was at home in the Byzantine centrally planned building, in which motion led to the dominant, immovable centre.

However this may be, in converting tactile into visual sculpture as his fellow artist had done in Byzantium, the Western artist suggests violent emotion rather than spiritual or intellectual force. His sculpture refused to imitate nature with the rationalism of classical art, and its apparent naturalistic tendency (incidentally wholly absent from Byzantine sculpture) is superficial and, in fact, expressionist in aim. Strzygowski maintains that the Gothic sculptor transformed it from a decorative to a representational² art; in fact the Gothic sculptor did not intend it to reproduce its natural models accurately, but through them to express transcendental feelings and experiences. His was an expressionist art. Taking motifs from the plant world, it wove fantastic combinations, if not arabesques; borrowing motifs from the animal kingdom, it composed imaginary monsters; human figures it clothed in draperies of numerous folds, making them unnaturally tall and

¹ O. Demus, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

² J. Strzygowski, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Kirchenkunst*, p. 83, distinguishes between *schmücken* and *darstellen*.



84 *Two Statues compared by Worringer*
(left: *The Madonna in the Paris Notre*
Dame; right: *Isis*)

lean, and this, in addition to their dramatic physiognomy or their occasional mysterious smile, gives them an intensity eloquent of the mortification of the flesh or of some mystic experience. This irrational sculpture disfigures, tortures and occasionally ossifies the forms, in order to dematerialise them. Passionate fervour, overshadowing intellectual and spiritual force, marks the Gothic effort to transform the tactile into the visual and matter into an expressive spirit form.

As the pictorial art of Byzantium retained a certain amount of plasticity and a sense of Hellenic measure, so in Gothic sculpture we discover occasionally hints of plasticity and of classical beauty which amaze us. Worringer suggests that with the spreading of the Greeks¹ in the Middle Ages, the Hellenic artistic sensibility influenced, in Southern France mainly, both Romanesque and

¹ *Gräzismus* according to Worringer (*Griechentum und Gotik*).

Gothic sculpture, if not architecture. Thence the famous "Atticist" sculptures in French cathedrals—sculptures in which the pose of the body, the profile and the whole arrangement suggest a beauty of Hellenic inspiration, as may be seen from Worringer's comparison in Fig. 84. This hypothesis, however (well-grounded as it is in the indubitable historical truth of the expansion and influence of Greek colonists in the mediaeval civilisation of the West), seems plausible enough, yet not wholly convincing, in that it does not explain how an art so vital as the Gothic could have assimilated an alien spirit in that sporadic manner, unless indeed it had itself felt the need of turning to related values. If we examine the matter more closely we see that, though these statues are to a certain extent reminiscent of classical models, the grace they possess is not exactly Hellenic.

If we examine the statue in Fig. 84 we shall see that its extremely slender and tall figure and the somewhat aesthetic charm it radiates are anti-classical. Its classical appearance is due merely to the crossing of the aesthetic category of the graceful with the aesthetic category of the sublime—a combination which predominated at the time and manifested itself in an expressionist style. Indeed, such combinations are likely to occur anywhere and at any time. In this instance, sculpture itself, naturally inclined to plasticity and to the serene expression of the beautiful, would seem to have automatically embraced the opportunities offered it by the aesthetic conception of the graceful. This particular exception in Gothic sculpture may be used to prove the rule we proposed originally—namely, that the sublime, transcendental tone of Christian hagiography and its innate picturesque character could find full expression only in painting, as occurred in Byzantium.

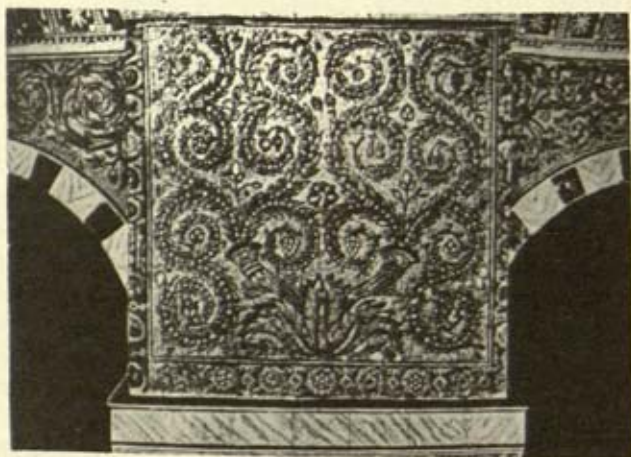
The comparison made by Worringer between Romanesque sculptured pieces and Byzantine mosaics only serves to show the degree of effort required by sculpture to achieve the expression of the sublime, and to indicate that the "mysticism of space" (which in his opinion is their common characteristic) vibrates more splendidly in the mosaic than in the sculptured work.

TECHNIQUE

Byzantine monumental painting employed two techniques mainly with which to stress its sublime character: mosaic and fresco.

Mosaic is constructed with small cubes of glass or stone, which

are either applied directly or placed in reverse upon a piece of material on which the design has first been drawn, and then embedded in the plaster base, the material then being removed. The glass cubes were given their colour by various metallic oxides, and those used for the shining background, when this was not dark blue (as in the earlier mosaics), were covered with fine silver- or gold-leaf. The great advantage of mosaic is that it provides an eternally indelible painting for both flat and curved wall surfaces. It provides, moreover, a fitting continuation for the polychrome shining marble panelling of the Byzantine church, not only on its



85 *Mosaic, Jerusalem, Omar's Mosque*

vertical interior walls, but also on the curved arches, vaults and domes; for mosaic, in addition to being polychrome, also reflects the rays of light, so that it casts a resplendent hue over the whole space. On some of the surfaces the mosaic cubes, placed at a certain angle, are more sparingly used, and at the same time catch better the reflection of the light.

In addition the innumerable small cubes, with the fine joints between, introduce a diminutive measure that broadens the surface of the picture remarkably (Figs. 85 and 68) and endlessly enlarges the space of the church. Mosaic, displaying to the ecstatic spectator the radiance of its myriad gems in a space which it helps to make apparently infinite, contributes to his experience of the sublime.

Mosaic, radically different from painting, was able to lend Byzantine hagiography a monumental character. Mosaic cannot

tolerate plastic chiaroscuro, nor a great variety of chromatic gradations. Its figures project like silhouettes, with clear outlines of shadow on a monochrome background of either blue or gold. Thus, the figures are not only distinct when seen from afar, but also gain in that monumentality and austerity which is indispensable to their sublime scope.¹ The Roman mosaic, which sought to imitate the multicoloured gradations and plastic shading of painting, cannot be taken as a good example of mosaic technique, and compared to the Byzantine may be considered a failure. For, as the Byzantine artist well knew, the innate function of mosaic is two-dimensional representation; what plasticity mosaic lent its forms in the Byzantine church was achieved mainly through juxtaposition and contrast of colour. Again, without that pronounced plasticity which would have been alien to its nature and out of place, and notwithstanding its monochrome background and the complete absence in it of pictorial atmosphere, Byzantine mosaic yet provided for its figures precisely that amount of fictitious space indispensable to give them life.

If, as Demus maintains,² the gold ground precluded any idea of space behind the figures, suggesting it only in front of them (since, according to his theory, the Byzantines saw their representations moving in the real space of the church), then the figures would in fact seem to be living in a prison of which the walls are impenetrable. As it is, the gold ground unmistakably creates fictitious space. First of all, because the granular surface of the material abounds in a subtle and delicate play of light, shadow and reflections; secondly, because the figures, despite their stylisation, have movement, and we know instinctively that where there is movement there is also space. Indeed, the two-dimensional nature of the figures—that is, the lack of volume in forms apparently alive, if not actually moving in space—endows them with the immaterial and ectoplasmic quality of unearthly visions. The light and shade, moreover, of mosaic is not in imitation of nature; it is artificial, and always the result of “studio” lighting,³ as Millet has remarked.

¹ Of course, two methods are to be distinguished—the one working in sharp contrasts, the other in gradations of colours. These methods were attributed to Oriental or Hellenistic influences, or to different ages. Demus accepts that they are conditioned by the size of the mosaic, for the artist could not spend the whole series of gradations in the outlines of a figure, when it was of great size. But these techniques are often both combined in the same work, and depend also on the height, the position, the figure and, finally, on the artist's imagination.

² O. Demus, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³ Millet, *L'Art byzantin*, p. 290.

Until the eleventh century, dark brown was used to depict shadows, and later, according to Bréhier,¹ fine gradations from green to grey-blue. In some cases, as in the mosaics in St. George at Salonica, the image looks like a negative photographic plate with the shadows in white, and as though lit up from below, as Millet observes (who, incidentally, sees in these mosaics a revival of the plastic effects of Alexandrian illusionism). It is in any case a complete reversal of the natural order; if it convinces, it is because it acts, as in logic, as the denial of a negation. For to admit that light and the shadows it produces come only from outside is to deny the human being's inner light; this negation can be denied by art. Demus asserts that the Byzantine painter used this technique to introduce real light for the icons set in dark corners of the church. Yet we find the same technique in icons placed on well-lighted walls; the very fact, too, that the technique was employed by the Palaeologian art proves that this was an artistic device independent of real light.

The glitter of the mosaic cubes contributes greatly to the visionary quality of the images; for as the light slides over their cubes, it is as though fleeting visions of saints were being reflected in space. It is easy enough to imagine how disturbing its *chiaroscuro* would have been had it imitated nature. The brilliance and reflection of the images on the mosaic surfaces do not resemble the icy reflection and the graceless downpour of light on mirrors, as in the Rococo architectural spaces. These mirrors, of course, also create an illusory effect, but their inescapable realism reveals them to the spectator as the optical illusions they are, and not as sublime visions. In contrast to the mirror, the mosaic has not an absolutely smooth surface, but one of minute projections and indentations (especially when curved), throwing up innumerable lights, shadows and reflections, enlivening with its sparkling glitter both figures and background, until they seem to pulsate in the deep celestial space provided by its dark blue, or to pulsate in a resplendent sun-bathed space when the background is of gold.

As far as fresco is concerned, its technique consists of impregnating the wet stucco with colours that become indelible when the ground on which they have been applied dries with them. It was not, like mosaic, destined for all time; but though more ephemeral it was more economical, while at the same time, possessing certain qualities in common with mosaic, it was equally suited to hagiography. The detailed gradations of colour and the complicated

¹ Bréhier, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

chiaroscuro of oil painting are out of the question in fresco painting, since the artist must work swiftly on large surfaces, before the stucco dries and makes correction impossible. Fresco, then, also stylised its figures, making of them, as in the mosaics, two-dimensional silhouettes; with this difference, however—that both the figures and the background here may take on various chromatic tones that give them a painterly touch. (Hence, incidentally, the preference for fresco in the Byzantine decadence.) This painterly touch helped to make good the inability of fresco to increase aesthetically surface and space, as mosaic, with its minute cubes, could do. Fresco, finally, while of course not possessing the brilliance and attractive glamour of mosaic, nevertheless fills the spectator with wonder, thanks to its powdery and suffused light which, shining at various points among the darker colours of its immaterial images, permeates space with silent mystery.

PERSPECTIVE

Orthodox Perspective

From the present academic point of view, the perspective of Byzantine painting is distorted; Wulff, in order to justify it, described it as "reversed",¹ while others have found it imperfect or wholly absent from Byzantine painting.

However this may be, we must, before judging it, and if we are to judge it correctly, review our own conception of perspective and trace it to its source, in an attempt to discover how far it is justified, and whether ours is the only correct point of view. This as it were unwinding process may, like Ariadne's thread, lead us to an unexpected and new view of perspective; for we may, in the course of our revision, discover certain shortcomings in our own point of view that will more or less justify the existence of another. The examination of this question is necessary for the study not only of Byzantine painting, with which we are here concerned, but also of modern painting, which seems to ignore the conventional conditions and rules of academic perspective.

Orthodox perspective is a product of the Renaissance; it is the scientific system arrived at by the artistic research of the period. I shall first describe the system briefly; afterwards examine why

¹ Wulff, *Die umgekehrte Perspektive und die Niedersicht* dedicated to A. Schmarsow in *Kunstwiss. Beiträge*; first supplement of *Kunstw. Monographien*, 1907, Leipzig; Wulff, *Altchr. und Byz. Kunst*, I, p. 168; Strzygowski, *Ursprung der christl. Kirchenkunst*, p. 187; and Panofsky, *Die Perspektive als symbolische Form*, footnote 30 to pp. 310-13 (Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, 1921-25).

the artistic research of the Renaissance led to it, and how far this system corresponds with the early studies in perspective of Hellenistic painting; and finally, discuss whether Christian hagiography, which inherited these Hellenistic concepts, was content merely to assimilate, or whether it did not in fact also propel them towards the new directions disclosed in the Renaissance.

To make my task easier, I shall confine myself to the description of the "central perspective" system, that accepts the spectator's eye as the centre to which the visual rays of the optical cone converge as they come from objects observed frontally in space. The section of this visual cone by a vertical plane gives us the picture panel. On it are projected in perspective all the objects that the spectator sees, and this, to put it simply, according to the following geometric system of construction:

(a) Horizontal lines parallel to the plan of section remain horizontal; similarly, vertical lines remain vertical.

(b) All lines vertical to the plan of section meet at the vanishing point, which is on the line of horizon at eye level.

(c) Objects that are farther from us appear smaller than those that are nearer, in proportion to the distance. An impression of depth is thus created in the picture.

The perspective view of objects from the side creates two vanishing points, and it was for this reason that its laws were not discovered until later. However, it took the Renaissance long years of research to arrive, step by step, even at this simple system of central perspective. Ambrogio Lorenzetti¹ first dared, "with full mathematical conscience", to concentrate the lines of a tiled pavement at one point (Fig. 86), and Alberti gave the mathematical definition that the "image is a plane section of the optical pyramid".² In any case, thenceforward the panel was, according to Alberti, an "open window" (*fenestra aperta*) or, in the words of Leonardo da Vinci,³ a "glass diaphragm" (*pariete di vetro*), through which the objects could be seen and represented as they appeared in it. This discovery created a tremendous sensation at the time; first,

¹ According to E. Panofsky, *op. cit.*, p. 279, and according to Wedepohl, *Die Aesthetik der Perspektive*, p. 21.

² *Intercisione della piramida visiva*. Perhaps the discoverer of the legitimate construction (*costruzione legittima*) was Brunelleschi. However, Giotto and Duccio are considered the true pioneers, for they re-introduced in their works the conception of box-space (*Raumkasten*), as Panofsky points out (*op. cit.*, pp. 277, 283-84).

³ According to Panofsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-92.

because a "scientific" system (not to call it "mechanical") had been established for the representation of objects in space, and to an age as scientifically curious as the Renaissance the attraction of such a system was powerful indeed; secondly, because thanks to this system the painter's view became objective; and thirdly, because one was able to place the view point wherever one wished, and in order to calculate the diminution of an object in space, it was sufficient to know its position, inasmuch as all objects (according to this theory) diminished steadily and progressively in proportion to their distance from the spectator. Conversely, the distance of objects could be calculated on the basis of the optical diminution, and, even, when the size of one of the objects was known, the measurements of all the others could be worked out.

The fact that the Renaissance rejoiced in these discoveries seems to indicate that it regarded the painting of the Middle Ages as bereft of any system of perspective, or at most as possessing only an imperfect one. It would also seem to indicate that, if a system did exist in the Middle Ages, it was based upon subjective criteria, thus leaving undefined the relations of the sizes and distance of



86 *The Annunciation, painting by Lorenzetti, 1354 (dissective lines by Panofsky)*

objects among themselves and from the spectator. The painter's panel in the Middle Ages was not an open window for the view of objects placed in space according to a perspective order, but a two-dimensional plane upon which the artist aligned his objects here and there according to his subjective sense of order. It sufficed for the painting as a whole to create an aesthetically pleasant impression. In fact, judging the works of mediaeval painting coldly and scientifically we see that the complaints of the Renaissance were well founded. In these pictures the perspective, or, more precisely, the faint traces of perspective, are not systematised. Sometimes a part of the pavement exhibits an attempt to make lines



87 Mosaic (twelfth-century), Monreale Cathedral (dissective lines by Panofsky)

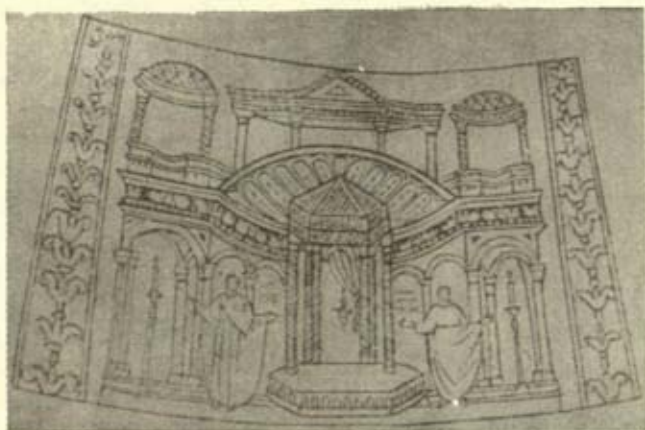
converge towards one vanishing point, while another part of the same pavement tends towards another vanishing point (Fig. 87). In the mosaic in St. George at Thessalonike, the pavement, the roof of the ciborium and the vaulted lateral annexes of the building's roof are drawn as if seen from above, whereas in the centre of the same edifice the frieze of the niche and the balustrade above are drawn in reverse (Fig. 88). There is, then, no system of perspective. Some art historians like Wulff have sought to define Byzantine perspective as "reversed", as the contrary of

ordinary perspective; its view point would be, in consequence, behind the picture, and therefore the direction of the lines would be inverted (as, for example, in the couch depicted in Fig. 99). This inversion, however, is not applied systematically to explain every composition.¹ Moreover, it is reversed perspective only to one thinking in terms of orthodox perspective as a scientifically established fact. To the Byzantine artist, however, who had no intention of imitating appearances, our orthodox perspective might have seemed unjustifiable, and therefore not desirable as a system. Again, there would be some point in the insistence of certain authors that the Byzantine artist in presenting his objects showed no system of perspective, were the works in question artistically unsuccessful, or had they failed in their purpose of

¹ Grabar, in *Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale* (Cahiers archéologiques, fasc. No. 1, Vanocst, Paris, 1945), tries to explain reversed and ray-like perspective through Plotinus' tractate on Vision, according to which the impression of vision is not created in the soul, as by the seal on wax, but where the object stands. From this, Grabar concludes that the artist saw the picture as though from where its reproduced object stood. He is thus making a Physics out of Plotinus' Metaphysics. In order to understand the mediaeval artist's optical devices, it is not enough to reverse perspective.

representing objects. The curious thing, is, however, that they do succeed in representing all they intended, in fact sometimes better than orthodox perspective or even photography could have done, because they usually drew as from above and often dared to bring into the foreground objects which would normally be hidden from view. They drew, that is to say, in the manner of primitives or children, relying on their memory and previous knowledge of a scene in order to show, not only what they saw at the actual time of drawing from one fixed point, and seeing the objects with their eyes alone, but also what they knew of objects or had observed of them at various times. Many contemporary artists—"moderns", as they are called—paint in a similar manner, without a system of perspective, despite the fact that they are acquainted with the rules of orthodox perspective. They draw as though moving from place to place as they work, revealing whatever they consider important.

The Byzantine artist, then, although he followed no rational system of perspective, had nevertheless a "knack" of seeing and representing things. Depth seemed to him not of the same value, optically, as width and height. The first plane was predominant. The figures in the first row of a crowd are set next to each other and are of equal height (isocephaly), and in order to denote depth the heads are placed one above another. Space is, none the less, revealed indirectly, thanks to the many planes suggested by the comparison of dimensions, as also by the movement of the figures on the two-dimensional surface. Thus, while detracting nothing



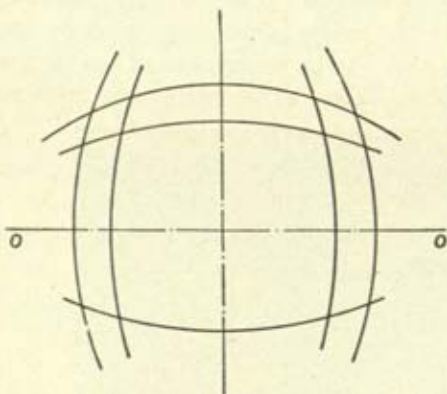
88 *Mosaic (early fifth-century), Thessalonike,
Church of St. George*

from the representations, as far as perspective was concerned, they brought to painting this important advantage—that the picture throughout gives the impression of a single surface. Thus, it is not the objective photographic observation of reality and the uniform perspective order of the object's lines in space that establish unity in a Byzantine painting, but the painter's subjective impression: the significance of the action which, in his judgement, binds together persons and things in the picture. The painter, that is to say, reproduces these with such devices and artistic mastery as to make us disregard true likeness and consider them as truthful appearances, mainly because they speak to us symbolically.

The question arises now whether the Middle Ages, and before that the Hellenistic period, made any attempt to systematise perspective, and, if not, was it for some particular reason? However, before answering these questions we must examine first the perspective system of the Renaissance and ascertain to what degree the views and the principles on which it is based are scientifically and artistically unshakable.

Perspective with Vanishing Axis

The Renaissance, in its system of central perspective, accepts that the section of the optical pyramid through a vertical plane renders faithfully the image the eye sees in nature. Our eye, however, is not flat but spherical, and the surface of the retina is concave. In addition, the eye when immobile has but a small visual angle, and in order to increase its visual field it moves about. Geometry, therefore, to imitate it must substitute the plane of section by a spherical surface, in which the central perspective image of the outer world is formed in a manner somewhat different to visual perspective. The horizontal lines of objects are no longer horizontal, unless they coincide with the line of the horizon. Of the other lines, those above the horizon curve down-

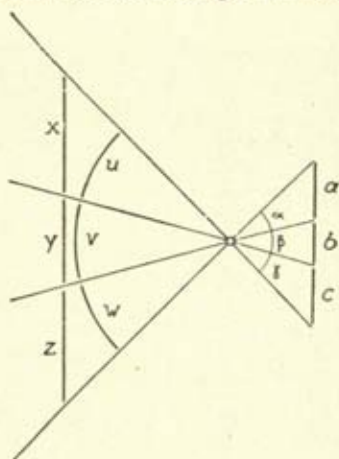


89 *Theoretical Representation of Straight Lines on a Spherical Plane of Perspective*

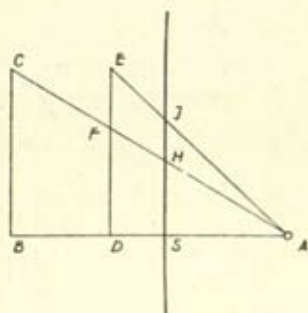
what different to visual perspective. The horizontal lines of objects are no longer horizontal, unless they coincide with the line of the horizon. Of the other lines, those above the horizon curve down-

wards at their ends, while those beneath the horizon curve in a reverse direction. In addition, the vertical lines curve with their ends converging in the direction of the central vertical axis of vision, which, with the horizon, is the only line that remains straight (Fig. 89). Besides, upon the flat plane of section of the visual rays the proportions of real dimensions do not change, namely $a:b:c=x:y:z$ (Fig. 90). On the contrary, upon the spherical plane of projection the dimensions change and the unequal parts x, y, z are projected as if they are equal, when the angles α, β, γ under which the eye looks at them are also equal. This, at any rate, explains the distortions we get in photographs, especially when objects are taken at short range. Because the photographic plate is flat, objects appear deformed at the edges, since they do not decrease in size, as they would on a spherical surface of projection, and they seem to us in a photograph unnatural, exaggerated and larger than they should be.

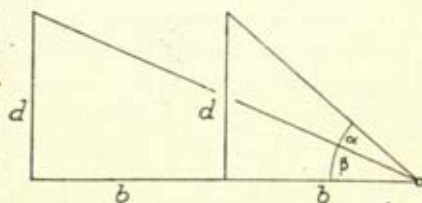
If, then, we accept for a moment that the ancients had a certain system of perspective and that, judging more correctly, they had the sphere (instead of the vertical plane) as the surface of section of the visual rays, the images in that case would be nearer the truth than the constructions of the Renaissance. In fact, this is not to be excluded according to Panofsky, if one bases oneself upon a passage in Vitruvius, in which, speaking about "scene-painting" (*σκηνογραφία*) for the theatre, he refers to the centre



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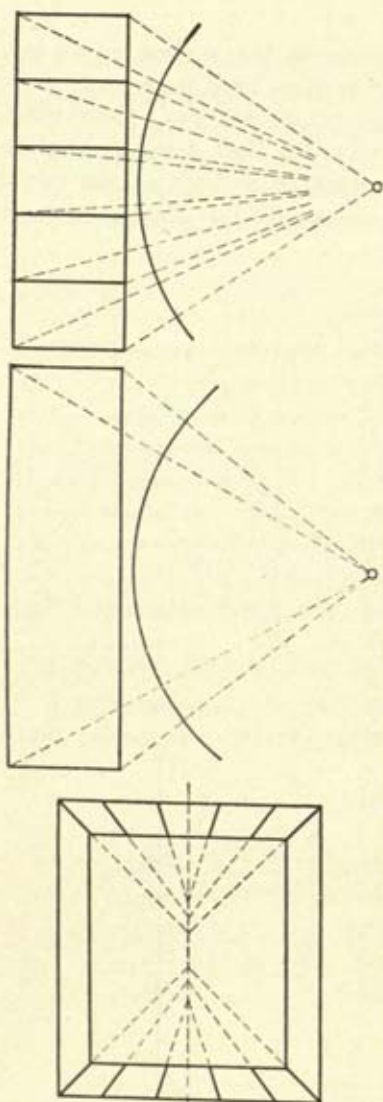


91



92

Diagrams by Panofsky



of a circle as a meeting point of lines.¹ Vitruvius, of course, does not say clearly whether this centre was to be found on the picture or whether it was the centre of the spherical plane of projection. For this reason it was considered originally as corresponding to the vanishing point of today's perspective. One may nevertheless take it also as the centre of the visual circle of projection and accept that the ancients, in accordance with an optical theorem of Euclid, defined visible dimensions, not in relation to distance, but in relation to the angles of vision that include them.² In that case the apparent dimensions (*Sehgrößen*) are directly proportionate to the distances, namely $\beta : a + \beta$ is related as $2b : b$ (Fig. 92), and not in reverse proportion to the distances, as occurs in the flat planear projection, where $HS : JS = AD : AB$ (Fig. 91).

It was on the basis of these views, and substituting the arcs of the circle of projection by their chords, so that the dimensions of the images approach the dimensions of the angles, that Panofsky explained axial per-

93 *Angular Perspective, according to Panofsky* (above: perspective as an "angle perspective" or "perspective with ground-plan"; middle: side-vanishing axis"³ (Fig. 93) This method does not suffice to give

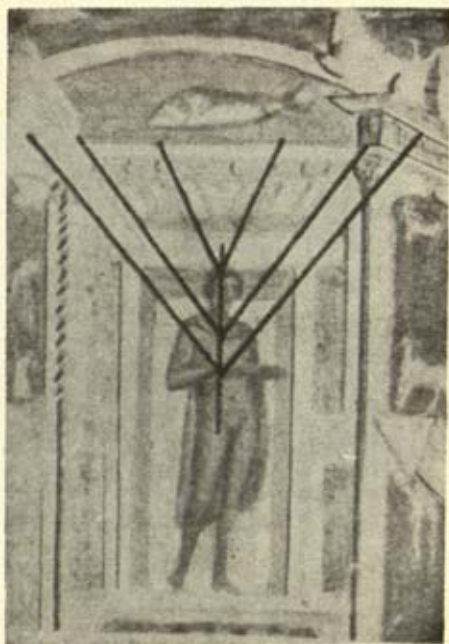
¹ "Omnium linearum ad circini centrum responsus," says Vitruvius, as quoted by Panofsky, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

² Euclid, *Optike*, terms 4 (ed. Heiberg, 1895, vol. VII of *œuvres complètes*). See also P. M. Schuhl, *Platon et l'art de son temps*, pp. 22-3.

³ *Winkelperspektive* or *Fluchtachsenperspektive*, according to Panofsky (*op. cit.*,

us a regular perspectival diminution of a chessboard, for example, because the lines towards depth do not meet at one vanishing point, but in couples to several points all of which are upon a vanishing axis, and, in consequence, all the dimensions of height, width and depth do not diminish according to a fixed proportion. This theory, then, while it does not exhaust the subject of the perspective of the

ancients, explains at least to a certain degree the flight of lines in depth, wherever they occur in works of Hellenistic or mediaeval painting (Figs. 94 and 95). It is a hypothesis without pretension of proof, and is unstable and inconsistent, as even its author agrees. Its characteristic advantage, however, is that it is more objective than orthodox perspective, since our eye must move about in order to see objects. If, indeed, we consider that we have two eyes, not one, then the perspective method devised by Hauck,¹ with its spherical surface of projection for the purpose of explaining the optical corrections of



94 Wall Painting (first-century),
Boscoreale (dissective lines by
Panofsky)

the Parthenon, is more objective, despite the fact that the author himself calls it "subjective perspective", implying thereby that he takes into account the physiological conditions of vision. When studying the optical corrections of the Parthenon in another work,²

pp. 265-67). Wedepohl (*op. cit.*, p. 21) calls it *Teilungskonstruktion*, according to Kern. It has also been called "vertical perspective".

¹ Hauck, *Die subjektive Perspektive und die horizontalen Curvaturen des dorischen Stils* (Stuttgart, 1879).

² P. A. Michelis, *Architecture as an Art* (in Greek). See mainly the chapter on Optical Corrections. The inadequacy of this type of perspective to explain the curves of the Doric temple at once becomes obvious when we consider that the curves of the stylobate are convex. According to this theory, they should have

I made a critique of such a perspective, proving it insufficient to explain corrections that are in fact due to the deeper cause of our *Einfühlung* towards the forces acting within the work.

Anyhow, if we take Euclid's theorem into account, we realise another fault of Renaissance perspective: the dependence of apparent dimensions on the spectator's distance, to such a degree that his impression of reality is perverted. My personal opinion is that Euclid's theorem concerns scientific optics, not perspective construction, inasmuch as Plato clearly mentions that objects at a



95 *Moses Handing the Decalogue, miniature of the ninth century (dissective lines by Panofsky)*

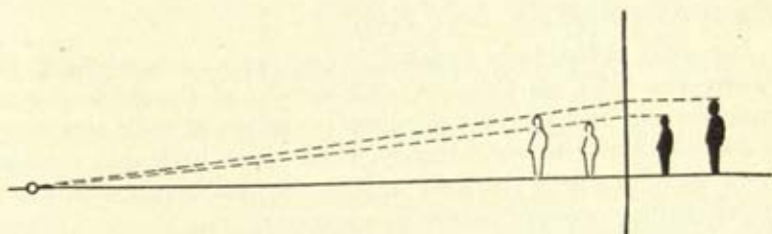
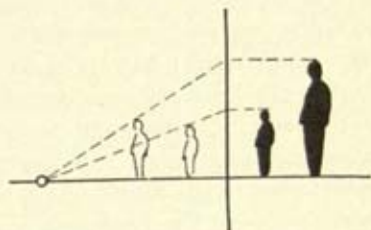
distance appear smaller than those that are nearer,¹ a phenomenon that does not occur when we observe with angles of vision. This theorem, however, urges us to reconsider the question of the dependence of dimensions of objects on the observer's distance and to remember, first, the perspective fact that the more we move away from two objects of equal size and lying at an unequal distance, the more these objects appear to us equal in size.² The same applies to objects of unequal size (Fig. 96). Secondly, the psychological fact that man who knows objects from experience will not accept that their size decreases as they become more remote, and,

been concave. Moreover, curves which, according to Hauck, could have been exhibited only by the Doric temple, were later discovered in Ionic temples too.

¹ Plato, *Republic*, X, 602, ed.

² Wedepohl (*op. cit.*, p. 57) proves that apparent dimensions of two unequally distant objects from a spectator are related among themselves in inverse proportion to their distance from the spectator.

n seeing them diminish, automatically adds to their apparent dimensions, which then are not absolutely in proportion to the distance. Moreover, our impression of depth is influenced by the comparisons of dimensions that we make instantaneously and involuntarily. For this reason, for example, the moon seen between trees will appear to us larger and nearer than when high up in the sky. Indeed, the smaller of two equidistant objects seems farther than the larger one. If we add to this the physiological remark that man not only has two eyes, but also that they are in continuous movement, we may draw the most important conclusions that he never forms a single image of the external world as the immobile photographic lens, but that in a mental combination and synchronisation of many images he composes one



96 *Diminishing difference in height by increasing distance*

that has assimilated all the others. The eyes, then, are only the means, the optical organ of vision, while the image is the result of vision—and of vision not only in the sense of a physiological mechanical function, but also in the sense of mental inner vision.¹ The visual order of objects in space, then, is not independent of the spectator's critical look and is more subjective than the perspective system of the Renaissance allowed for. The task of the artist cannot lie in the blind mechanical imitation of the external world, as it is seen from a "window", but in the arrangement of objects in his picture, according to his individual sense of fitness, as his inward eye perceives those features in space.

It may well be asked at this stage: "Was Renaissance art, then,

¹ See also E. Brunswik, *Experimentelle Psychologie* (J. Springer, 1935): *Sehraum und Sehgrösse*, p. 83.

content to rest on an inanimate system of perspective that was not concerned with a critical observation of nature, and little heeded the part played by the artist's subjective approach to the perspective arrangement of objects in space?" Far from this being so, the Renaissance in fact transgressed the rigid severity of its own perspective system, and subordinated it to the artist's vision, as innumerable examples will show. Had it been otherwise, indeed, the Renaissance would not have produced works of art. It is an open secret that there is, in painting, a great difference between perspective construction and perspective composition. In fact, according to Kern, perspective composition is the mother of perspective projection.¹ We shall have occasion in the following chapter to remark on the clashes between perspective construction and composition in painting. At this stage, we must examine how and why the Renaissance arrived at this perspective system and discover what intervened in the Middle Ages to leave unpromoted the Hellenistic perspective of the vanishing axes.

Perspective as a Symbolic Form

Panofsky in his study entitled *Perspective as a Symbolic Form*, basing his work on Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,² analyses how and why the perspective system of each period is a symbolic form of its world theory. There seems little reason to disagree with Cassirer's principle, or with the idea that the growth of the scientific system of perspective was part of an historical evolution; what seems untenable is the theory that the development of this system was progressive and continuous, and that the discovery of the rational system of perspective marks a stage of progress in art. Perspective is a technical means, not an artistic end, and was arrived at after periodical attempts, now welcomed, now rejected, by art.

For an age, for instance, in which man turns towards the transcendental will discard any previous means employed for the naturalistic imitation of nature. Such repudiations are indeed recurrent in the history of art, and we have the "geometrical" period, the Hellenic Middle Ages, as it is called, in which the artists turned their back on all the previous achievements of Greco-Mycenean painting and reverted to primitivism, just as the painters of today, in their disregard of the conquests of academic painting, appear primitive. Were the historian of the future to

¹ Quoted by Wedepohl, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

² E. Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (Berlin, B. Cassirer, 1923-31).

attribute the attitude of present-day art to certain external reasons—to the destruction, say, of the preceding civilisation, or the official banning of orthodox perspective—his fallacy would be no less grave, surely, than that of art historians who maintain that similar external reasons compelled the geometric period to reject the devices of the naturalistic era that preceded it.

In the turn from the beautiful to the sublime, the objective approach is weakened, naturalism becomes atrophied, imitation of nature declines, and the rationalism that regulates the technical means of painting and reduces them to the science of perspective becomes defective. In reaching out for the transcendental, the painter draws emotionally, consulting only his inward eye. The means of representation become non-rational, though not necessarily devoid of reason, with a visual order dominating the perspective order; whereas in an objective approach to the beautiful, visual order makes great concessions to perspective order. In the next chapter it will be shown that in painting, certain overlappings, diverging or converging lines, a few lights and suitable colours can do duty for perspective, which in effect does no more than indicate the depth of space and represent objects plastically. Perspective, in fact, may fail even in these its essential functions, in the absence of visual order, which is by itself capable of trans-fusing artistic emotions.

The indication of space in art was always felt to be necessary and it would be erroneous to assert that the aesthetic revelation of infinite space was a privilege of the Renaissance, and that the conception of the infinite emerged from that of the finite thanks to the gradual advance of philosophy.¹ Finite and infinite may have become intellectual concepts only with the passage of time; as artistic percepts they existed always, for the artist's innate feeling for space kept him ever informed—no matter whether only sub-consciously—of their co-existence (as we attempted to show in a previous chapter). Nevertheless (as indeed the prevalence of the aesthetic category, now of the beautiful, now of the sublime, clearly indicates), it is true to say that now the sense of the finite, now the sense of the infinite dominated art. We have at any rate seen it to be true of architecture. If it is as true of painting (as we shall attempt to show in the following chapter) it would be a contradiction in terms to attribute the revelation of infinite space (as achieved by the Renaissance system of perspective) to anything

¹ See also P. A. Michelis, "Space-time and Contemporary Architecture", in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. VIII, No. 4, Dec. 1949.

out the ruling conception of the three co-ordinates in an isotropic and homogeneous space. It was certainly not a deliberate aim of the Renaissance, straining after the "beautiful" to reveal infinite space; its painters, indeed, strove to subordinate depth to its other two dimensions (as Wölfflin remarks). The Baroque artist, on the other hand, in an age that strained after the sublime, made of depth a vital dimension equally as dominant as, if not more so than, the other two.

We should not, therefore, in our examination of Renaissance painting, assume it to have been so influenced by the progress of philosophical space theories that it represented them with their own scientific fervour. Moreover, isotropy and homogeneity of space are qualities which may pertain equally well to a finite as to an infinite translation of space.

Let us, however, first glance at Panofsky's views on the progressive development of the conception of space, the conquest of its problems in art, with the gradual emergence of the laws of perspective.

Perspective represents (each time in accordance with a certain system) the objects in space. Space, as we understand it today, is the inanimate Euclidean "metric" space, defined by the three co-ordinates of width, height and depth. Unless space is thus viewed, Renaissance perspective is deprived of meaning. The artist of that period could, on opening a window and looking at objects before him from within its frame, draw them in objective order, solely because he assumed that the space containing them was homogeneous and continuous in all directions, like the metric space of Euclidean geometry. This conception of space, however, had not always prevailed. As Panofsky points out, "No ancient philosophic theory agreed to define space as a system of simple relations of height, width and depth—namely, as three-dimensional. The world was ever 'discontinuous' (*diskontinuierliche*)."¹

The philosophical concept of "theoretical" space in ancient times coincided with the artistic idea of a "perceptible" space. "Contrary to the metric space of Euclidean geometry, visual space (*Gesichtsraum*) or tactile space (*Tastraum*) are non-isotropic and non-homogeneous. In both spaces, which are physiologically perceived, the main directions, forward-backward, upward-downward, and right-left, are of unequal value", Cassirer tells us.² This

¹ Panofsky, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

² Cassirer, *op. cit.*, II, as Panofsky mentions, *op. cit.*, pp. 260-61. See also Wundt, *Grundriss der Psychologie*, p. 122, and W. James, *Précis de Psychologie*.

concurrence of philosophic and artistic conceptions of space Panofsky regards as the influence of the artistic sense on philosophy, maintaining that the artist's view of "perceptible" space is to be traced in Democritus, Plato and Aristotle: in Plato's theory of "*ὑποδοχή*" and Aristotle's denial of a *quantum continuum* and of an "*ἐνεργεία ἀπειρον*".

This coincidence of philosophical and artistic conceptions of space (which he finds in the classical era) continues—according to him—into the Hellenistic age, and in turn explains Hellenistic perspective composition and construction, which rested on subjective criteria. The painter at that time, I would say, set down his objects, considering as space what remained between them.

Panofsky, in seeking the progressive evolution, finds now that it was only in the Middle Ages that a momentous change of outlook revealed space as uniform and infinite, the matrix of all things; since it was not so much a gradually evolved philosophical as a theological concept, necessary to the existence of the one and only God of the Universe. At first, indeed, this uniform infinity was confined to the heavenly sphere alone; and accordingly, in the painting of the Middle Ages, the uniform background suggests, even on the two-dimensional surface, uniform, infinite and all-embracing space. In fact, the gold background of Byzantine hagiography conveys the impression of the "*λεπτότατον φῶς*" by which the neo-Platonists defined space. From the Renaissance onwards this conception of space as uniform and infinite took firm root both in the artist and the philosopher. This coincidence, that is to say, of "theoretical" and "perceptible" space occurs (according to Panofsky) in every period; perspective is, therefore, a "symbolic form of an epoch's world theory", as Cassirer describes it.

Yet, one may fairly ask, if the artist thinks mainly in terms of "perceptible" space, which is neither homogeneous nor isotropic, how, in the Renaissance, did his view agree with the philosopher's conception of a uniform and infinite space? For whereas physiological perception of space cannot vary, space theories may and do.

Panofsky, indeed, does not even raise the question, probably considering it a self-evident axiom that any shifting in the position of a space theory must automatically also change the angle from which "sensible" space is viewed and so bring to light a new prospect—an artistically conceived space. But our view of "sensible" space as non-continuous and non-uniform is the result of a physiological function, so that, no matter how much we may intellectually outgrow the impression of our sense organs, we can

never wholly eradicate it. The artist's conception of space at different periods, then, does not depend on the relation of "theoretical" space to "perceptible" space, but on the relation between "theoretical" space and the artist's feeling of space.

For perceptible space is one thing, the feeling of space another. The former is basically immutable and a physiological experience; the latter is an aesthetic experience and therefore variable. (We observed in the chapter on Space that this aesthetic experience and its expression may vary according to the prevailing aesthetic category of the beautiful or of the sublime. Hence, a change in the conception of "theoretical space" in an art-era might affect the artist's feeling of space, but cannot affect his sense of "perceptible space". The feeling of space may accentuate now the finite in the infinite, now the reverse, according as the artist feels the need to be embraced in space or to experience utter freedom in all directions. The natural outcome will be an aesthetic category corresponding to the current world theory of the age.)

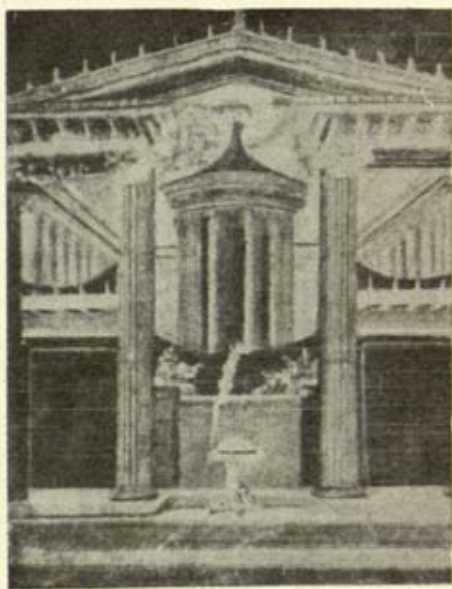
Thus, when the aesthetic category of the beautiful predominates, as in the classical period, the feeling of space is static. The architect emphasises the outlines of the building that is to contain us, and the painter represents space as what remains between the objects, as he sees them plastically differentiated in nature. When, however, the aesthetic category of the sublime prevails, as during the Christian period, the feeling of space is dynamic. The architect then stresses the infinite that contains his edifice, ourselves and all else; and the painter paints, so to say, first the space and then places within it the objects, all of them subordinated to its infinity.

A world theory, *Weltanschauung*, then, in as far as it affects the theoretical conception of space, influences the artist's feeling of space, because it changes the aesthetic category under which is gathered every artistic manifestation of an age; his sense of perceptible space it cannot alter, for this, as a function mainly of the sense organs, is immutable and instinctive. To my mind, space to the artist always remains non-isotropic and non-homogeneous, as we may observe in both Byzantine and Renaissance painting.

The mutual influence on one another of philosophical conception and of artistic feeling of space, via aesthetic categories, explains not only the relation between the world theory and the art of each epoch, but also why we in our age can feel the beauty of the Byzantine or Renaissance painting, despite their different presentation of space, systems of perspective, or methods

for the subordination or insubordination of objects in space. We can, moreover, feel why there is a correspondence and what the differences are between the Renaissance and the Hellenistic painting, or between the Byzantine and the modern work.

Let us now examine the evolution of orthodox perspective. When we look at a Pompeian painting (Fig. 97) our first impression is that the artist, like his Renaissance brother, opened a window and drew in perspective what he saw before him in space. However, careful inspection will reveal a difference; for certain incongruities convince one that such a system did not exist. This happens, according to Panofsky, because space was not yet conceived as uniform and continuous. I think that in art, space is always conceived as sensed, that is to say, as non-uniform and discontinuous, though the idea of continuity inevitably underlies it in conformity with the artist's innate conception of a unified Universe. In Hellenistic and Pompeian paintings the impression of discontinuous space is accentuated when we look at it in the way we are in the habit of looking at



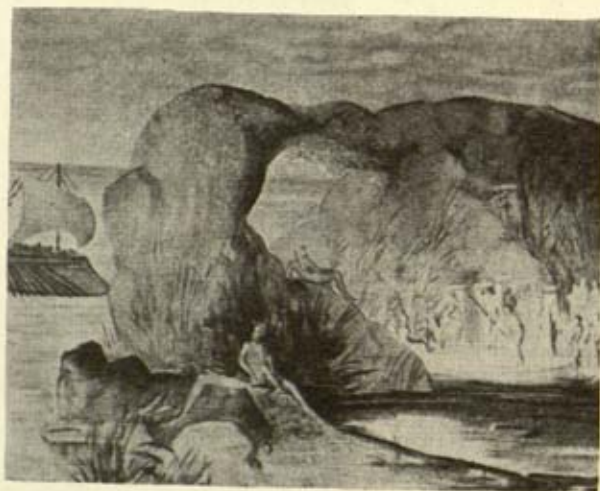
97 *Fresco (first-century) from a Villa near Boscoreale*

Renaissance works, with their correct system of perspective. There the impression of perspective order moving towards depth makes us forget the non-homogeneity and discontinuity of space presented by differences in lighting, clouds, scale and so forth.

In Hellenistic works also space is unified, though now between plastically differentiated forms, according to its classical spirit. Nevertheless, the works lose nothing of their persuasiveness—on the contrary, in their freedom from the rigid rationalism of a perspective system, they gain aesthetically. Yet, in Hellenistic painting the conception of the sublime had already begun to emerge, demanding a forceful representation of infinity by external means

(Fig. 98); hence the perspective *tour de force*, which soon had to be abandoned, for early Christian art found other means to express infinity, creating a fictitious space with its monochrome background.

Byzantine and Christian art, generally, no longer sought an objective system of perspective for the representation of space: it was basically anti-rational and was sometimes content to borrow a perspective with a vanishing axis (Figs. 99 and 95), as it had received it from Hellenistic painting. The painters of the best period of Byzantine art felt that certain overlappings, a few lights and, especially, the indication of movement, of life, sufficed to



98 *Ulysses in the Underworld (fresco),
Vatican Library*

communicate to the spectator an effect of depth. "Reversed perspective", as it has been called, in which the size of the figures depends, not on their distance from the spectator, but on their hierarchical importance thus asserts their value directly, as it ignores the external effect of perspective. When the decline set in, the sense of the sublime weakened, and naturalism in art gained ground. The Byzantine frescoes at Mistra or the mosaics at the Monastery in Chora (Fig. 100) show this clearly. Panofsky admits that the conception of metric space was exhibited in art by Giotto and Duccio, who re-introduced the "box of space".¹ Thus the "super-heavenly space" has been transferred to nature,² since it

¹ *Raumkasten*.

² Panofsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-6.

so happened that at that time the philosophers ceased to consider the earth as the centre of the world, and now viewed it as merely a particle of the Universe. I would say, rather, that the Renaissance,



99 *Mosaic in Baptistry, Florence*



100 *Mosaic, Chora Monastery*

as a product of Roman formal logic and order¹ bequeathed by the Italians, aspired to a rational anatomy of space, and was in its naturalism not content to represent depth indirectly with devices that were subject to individual treatment. Choosing any point in

¹ *Ratio and ordo.*

space, it wanted to represent the objects it saw in their external perspective order. It therefore sought to define systematically the relation of dimension and distance, and the directions of the lines of objects as they are set in space. Its efforts, which were concerned chiefly with quantitative, not qualitative, relations, and not with the inner unity between objects projected in space, led to the discovery of the "vanishing" point.



101 *The Last Judgement, painting by Michelangelo*

Nevertheless, when Renaissance painters realised that the vanishing point led to the infinite, the measureless depth that ran counter to their aesthetic views—to their static conception of the beautiful—intimidated them. As a result, they always attempted to give a two-dimensional "planometric" picture, despite the fact that they represented objects plastically. And they succeeded in holding the eye on the first plane, so that, even in such works as Michelangelo's Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel (Fig. 101), the closed form prevailed

in the action and the figures (as Wölfflin has analysed). That is why the Renaissance never took the dangerous step of depicting space in front of the first plane, between the objects and the spectator, thus including him in the infinite space containing all. It held him—as was indeed proper to a static art ruled by the canons of "beauty"—at a distance from the picture panel. But it was natural that the Baroque, with its "sublime"—aspiring tendency, should have taken the step before which the Renaissance had retreated. It pierced the first plane, and placed space between the spectator and the work. It gave "aerial" perspective, which constituted the achievement of seventeenth and eighteenth-century painting. Plump bodies, sometimes floating in space with strong contrasts of light and shade, monochrome effects with gradations

from the deepest to the lightest tones, in one word, "open" forms moving in immeasurable depth, are all naturalistic means to produce an effect of infinite space (Fig. 102). It is interesting to remark at this point that space, although systematically represented, lacks uniformity and continuity owing to the clouds, the lights and other compositional means. If the results of Baroque are not aesthetically felicitous, it is because the religious fervour that swept the world at the time temporarily revived the sublime aims of an art now more versatile than spiritual.

Thus art, from the presentation of the idea of Being, idealistically presented in classical times, turned in Christian times to the depiction of the idea of Becoming; then, in the Renaissance, back to the idea of Being, but this time naturalistically presented, so that when the Baroque again reverted to the idea of Becoming, a sort of intense reaction drove it to emphasise appearance. This conception of art as "appearance" persisted until the recent revolution of modern art, abolishing perspective, began to rely chiefly on visual order.



102 *St. Ignatio, painting by Pozzo*

Painters, however, at no time disregarded the fact that a good perspective construction did not suffice for the picture to achieve space and painterly atmosphere. Excellent perspective constructions exist, from which, however, space is lacking among the objects. Let us therefore now examine the composition of a picture.

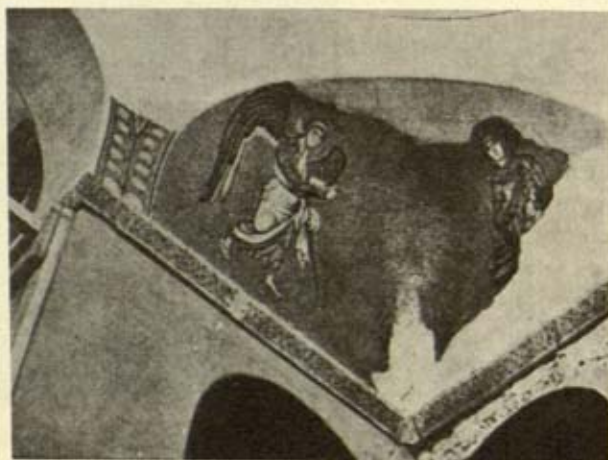
COMPOSITION

The Visual Order of the Composition

Every painting of merit must, as a composition, have order and "style". Order in the general arrangement of the composition stands for that co-ordination and subordination of its detail which will bring unity in variety.

Visual order, firstly, which depends on the synthesis of contrasts in weight, colour, scale and symbolism—in view of its purely imaginative nature, which in essence determines the spirit and general arrangement of the composition. Perspective order, secondly, which, if the work possess it, depends on the frontal or the profile view of the presentations, the position of the horizon and the distance. Its part in the work is more mechanical than that of visual order. These always co-operate in giving a composition its “order”, even when the perspective devices are not systematic or orthodox.

An examination of the general arrangement in a painting will show us that the figures are disposed in one of two ways: either



103 *The Annunciation (mosaic), Daphni*

symmetrically around a main axis, as in the Crucifixion at Daphni (Fig. 104), or asymmetrically around a centre of gravity, as in the Birth of the Virgin at Daphni again, or the Birth of Christ at Palermo (Figs. 105 and 106). In both cases the axis or centre of gravity is directly emphasised, either by placing at those points a figure larger or much smaller than the others, or by leaving the space empty and placing the figures around it. (Any figure stressing these points will naturally be the most significant one in the composition.) We have examples of direct emphasis on the axis or centre of gravity in the Crucifixion, the Birth of the Virgin and the Birth of Christ (Figs. 104, 105, 106). An example of indirect emphasis on the axis is provided in the picture of the Annunciation,

in one of the squinches supporting the dome of the church at Daphni (Fig. 103).

At this stage an analysis of the works here reproduced will serve to explain the spirit of their composition. Beginning with the simplest example, the Annunciation (Fig. 103), we see there two figures placed on each side of an unoccupied axis. They are remote from one another and what links them together is the Angel's movement towards the Virgin, and the Virgin's tendency to welcome the Angel, as though expecting him; the artist has obviously avoided stressing the Virgin's expectancy, by giving her a strictly frontal position, which, in contrast with the Angel's lateral representation, lends the Angel's movement more life and makes their meeting inevitable. The Angel's movement on the other hand, not only links the figures into a unit, but also creates space in the picture. The concave surface of the squinch itself contributes



104 *The Crucifixion (mosaic), Daphni*

to this effect, since it apparently diminishes the distance between the two figures, allowing us for a moment to imagine that the Angel is actually flying through the niche's space. The impression would have been weaker were the picture's axis occupied by another figure, instead of being, as it is here, empty. In any case, these two-dimensional figures floating in space¹ suggest nothing so forcibly as visions, yet are powerfully endued with a spiritual life. Note how eagerly the Angel seems to deliver his message; how the Virgin has placed her hand on her bosom, as though to calm her fluttering heart at the announcement she expects yet dare not believe.

¹ To my mind this space is created by the spectator's imagination, without which art cannot create an illusion. In Demus' opinion, it is the real space of the church, owing to the absence of fictitious space in the picture's plane.

The Crucifixion (Fig. 104), for its part, presents three figures in alignment. The salient position and size and the importance of the Crucified Christ easily subordinate the two other figures standing symmetrically on each side, and placed there to stress and enhance the central figure. All three together form a unit, despite their difference from one another in weight, colour and rank. Now consider the visual order of this composition, which harmonises the figures with each other, not only because the figure of the Lord at the axis of symmetry in its own right subordinates all others, but because each, in its pose, movement, distance, and finally colour and symbolism, co-operates with the others in reproducing a unified whole.

Let us now see how this co-operation is achieved—by means of what balancing of effects, and by what contrasts.

The Body of the Crucified Christ, drawn on a larger scale than the other figures, advances to the first plane, while its colourlessness, as though reacting against such prominence, draws it back again, only to mark more boldly the black Cross of Martyrdom. The heavy Cross, in its turn, firmly planted in the earth, carries the Crucified Body, whose noble curve around its axis subtracts from its weight and dematerialises it. In this pose the Body of Christ seems to approach towards the Virgin, who drawn almost in profile view, appears to desire to move towards her Child. Although she actually does not move, her right hand nevertheless advances in that direction, and is in danger of being sprinkled with the blood that spurts from the wound in Christ's right side. Her left hand, by its very immobility, stresses the movement of the right hand. It lies there holding the handkerchief, and with two fingers clutching at her throat, as if, in her ineffable grief, trying to control its working and to regain her speech. Thus the Virgin's tragic silence is transferred from one hand to the other, and with it her tense, interrupted breathing, the arrested beating of her mother's heart, which prevents her from moving. The danger of lowering the composition to the level of realism by the Virgin's approach to the Body of Christ is combated through colour. The Virgin, by being dressed in dark colours, is aesthetically isolated from the pale immaterial Body. St. John the Evangelist, on the other hand, has a greater chromatic connection with the Crucified Christ, because he stands at a greater distance. His right hand, in a parallel line with his slightly inclined head, leads his thoughts towards Christ, as he gazes, not, like the Virgin, at Christ, but straight before him, with all his thought centred on the Holy Martyrdom. With the Virgin

it is all her feelings which come into play, impelling her to move towards Him; the Evangelist exhibits no such tendency, and only shows an intended movement to turn and look up at the Crucified Figure. This turn is aesthetically possible only because the Crucified Figure has inclined His head towards him; had He turned it in the other direction, the turn of the Evangelist would have been meaningless. As it is, we are permitted to imagine that their eyes may meet. Of course, Christ's eyes are half-closed and it is not improbable that He is looking in the direction of His Mother, whose eyes are fixed upon Him.

We cannot accept that His glance is lifeless, or that He can no longer see, since blood still flows from His Body and He has not yet expired; we can only surmise whether, through His half-closed lids, He is looking at His Mother, at the Evangelist, down upon us who see Him from below, or whether He is living through the Sacred Drama in imagination. We have, then, weight, scale, colour and symbolism of the figures, all co-operating to translate feeling into meaning, uplifting in its sacred revelation.



105 *Birth of the Virgin Mary*
(mosaic), *Daphni*

In the mosaic of the Birth of the Virgin (Fig. 105) we have many figures. However, one of them, through scale and size, weight, colour and symbolism, dominates and subjugates the others: it is the figure of St. Anne. It predominates not merely because it is larger, heavier, chromatically richer, symbolically stressed by the nimbus, but also by virtue of the position it holds. This position, which is also the centre of gravity of the whole composition, is created by the other figures, so co-ordinated around this centre as to display it. The elimination of the figure of St. Anne from the composition, on the other hand, would leave the remaining figures unrelated, forming a kind of circle from the centre of which some dominant,

unifying factor would be lacking. With St. Anne in that space, everything moves towards her, and from her everything flows, even the relatively independent group of women washing the newborn child. Indeed, in the way she is seated, St. Anne throws her weight above the piscina (in which the child is being bathed) in order to stress the action taking place at that point. A vertical axis is thus created, which would have ended at St. Anne's halo, were it not continued to the end of the flabellum, where the exaltation of St. Anne reached its optical zenith. Contrasting with this vertical axis is the horizontal dominant line which gives the picture its serenity and the figure of St. Anne the majesty that befits her. Moreover, it separates the events occurring on either side of the bed, which, indeed, is sufficiently high to provide a background for the font and raise the centre of the composition, namely, St Anne's bosom, to approximately the middle height of the picture. However, since this centre is not in the middle of the picture's width, the two girls bearing the gifts act as a counter-balance; therefore the one at the far-right is dressed in dark draperies and is represented almost in profile view, in order to appear heavier, and the one in the middle is dressed in light colours and placed slightly higher, appearing more remote. Thus, the impression is created that the circle of figures around St. Anne is drawn in space. The scale of figures in the group around the infant, relatively much smaller, although on the first plane, achieves the twofold purpose of displaying the figure of St. Anne to better effect, making it greater in size by comparison with its own scale, while simultaneously its position in the first plane suggests that the little detail described here is very important.

Let us now take the mosaic of the Nativity of Christ at Palermo (Fig. 106). The composition in this picture follows the same principle as in the previous one. The figures, that is, are arranged asymmetrically round a centre of gravity, with the difference, however, that here the groups of figures around the centre describe historical occurrences at different times; as, for example, the arrival of the Magi on horseback, the bathing of the new-born Child, etc. The painter does not reproduce a scene: he narrates episodes, connected symbolically certainly, but apparently disjointed, relying on the initiated beholder to link them into a single significant theme, and on visual order to give them aesthetic unity in the picture. The horizontal line that would have provided a certain serenity to the work is lacking, and only the vertical axis passing through the composition's centre of gravity is stressed, by an in-

elegant ray of light coming from the star that guided the Magi. The conventional underlining of this axis and the lack of a broader poetic inspiration show how far a picture's general arrangement can in itself lower the artistic standard of a work; or, indeed, raise it,



106 *The Nativity (mosaic), Palermo, Capella Palatina*

as in the incomparable example of the same subject at Daphni. These works and numerous others like them are eloquent instances of how much more visual order can suggest than mere correct perspective—a fact which the Renaissance certainly did not ignore.

Perspective Order

The perspective order of a picture depends, as we have mentioned previously, on the position of the horizon and on the distance. Perspective order is to be looked for mainly in Renaissance and modern painting—that is, only from the time it came into existence as a system. Nevertheless, its discussion will help us to a better appreciation of Byzantine painting.

The presence or absence of a perspective system in a picture is of fundamental importance, in that when present, at least one vanishing point exists. This point takes control of the spectator's eye and may lead it far from where it would naturally linger in contemplating the picture—namely, the middle or, at least, the centre of gravity of the whole composition. Deviation of the glance from its natural position to the vanishing point would be



107 *The Last Supper, painting by Leonardo da Vinci*

detrimental to the painting. The vanishing point is a necessary auxiliary of the mechanism of perspective, while the natural focal point, or point of contemplation, is a necessary position for the understanding of the composition. The mechanism, therefore, must serve and not interfere with the contemplation of the composition.



108 *The Fisherman's Ring, painting by Paris Bordone, Venice*

That is why the Renaissance artist usually makes both these points coincide in the centre of gravity of the composition. His vanishing point thus becomes the "bearer of an idea", to use Wedepohl's words in connection with Da Vinci's Last Supper,¹ where both points coincide approximately in the person of Christ (Fig. 107).

Byzantine painting, for its part, lacking a vanishing point, yet has the advantage of allowing the eye to concentrate on the natural position, the middle of the picture, which

¹ Wedepohl, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

usually approximates with the composition's centre of gravity (as we have seen in the case of the Birth of the Virgin at Daphni—Fig. 105).

The frontal view in perspective has the peculiar advantage of offering the picture horizontal lines, which therefore lend it serenity and monumentality, as may be seen from the Last Supper (Fig. 107).

The Byzantine work of the Birth of the Virgin (Fig. 105), devoid of orthodox perspective, and without conflicting with it, achieves the same result, be it noted. In the case of the Last Supper, Da Vinci made the length of the table face the spectator in order not to lessen the eminence of Christ in perspective, and was thus forced to present all the figures on one side of it.

The profile view in perspective, on the contrary, creates a certain disturbance in the picture, because the horizontal lines disappear and the vanishing point can rarely coincide with the natural focal point and the centre of gravity of the composition. The painting by Paris Bordone (Fig. 108) is an example, although it does not, in fact, show an absolutely lateral perspective; its vanishing point is merely placed to one side, so that the horizontal lines remain. The picture is therefore not excessively disturbing, despite the divergence between vanishing point and natural focal point. It is both an asymmetrical frontal and an imperfect side view, incorrect in perspective. Yet it was a view often used in the Renaissance—either because the technique of lateral perspective had not been fully mastered, or because of the serenity its horizontal lines lent a composition; but the fact that it was so often adopted despite its incorrect perspective seems a fairly conclusive indication that "perspective composition" preceded "perspective



109 *Crucifixion, drawing by Huber*



110 *Espousal of the Virgin Mary, painting by Raphael*

construction",¹ and that artistic considerations sanctioned mistakes in the latter.

If that is indeed so, Byzantine painting, in which artistic unity and serenity were ever the criteria, is not to be dismissed for its lack of an integrated system of perspective, or because it naïvely combined frontal with side view. A comparison of Wolf Huber's drawing of the Crucifixion (Fig. 109) with the mosaic of the same subject at Daphni (previously analysed—Fig. 104) will corroborate the superior achievement of the Byzantine work. Huber's picture, as far as perspective is concerned, is correctly drawn. Yet the

lateral representation of Christ detracts not only from the serenity of the work, but also from the compelling majesty that such a spectacle presupposes. Neither the blowing wind, nor the eloquent hands of the Evangelist, nor the Virgin, crushed by grief, succeed in conveying sublimity. It is a far cry from Huber's prolix pathos to the lofty tone of the Crucifixion at Daphni.

In perspective the horizon's position affects the figures very considerably. Any object upon the horizon's line is emphasised serenely and stands out persuasively; exaggeratedly raised above the horizon, it risks losing its importance; placed much below the horizon, it is brought to the first plane, and so boldly shown up (see Raphael's *Sposalizio*, Fig. 110). Now, when the horizon is placed low in the picture, the figure raised above it is exalted in our eyes; it becomes huge and predominates, like the Crucified Figure in Huber's drawing (Fig. 109). When, on the other hand,

¹ Mathematicians, apparently, had prematurely discovered the construction of lateral perspective, but the Renaissance painters put it aside, and it was the Dutch who used it mainly during the seventeenth century. Later, art was influenced by the progress of dark camera and the growth of realism. (See Wedepohl, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-7.)

the horizon is placed high in the picture, the representation is lowered in our eyes, like the crowd to the left in Bordone's painting (Fig. 108). Again, the placing of the horizon high up, in a picture which has numerous small figures, gives a popular character to the work. The field of vision widens, the surroundings gain greatly in importance, and the figures are lowered to the level of a crowd, as in the engraving by Dürer (Fig. 111). That is why in popular art the horizon is usually placed high.

Comparing Renaissance with Byzantine art again at this point, we find that the latter also often placed its horizon high, although since it did not work on a clear system of perspective, the device here is purely conventional, and the habit (which, to be more precise, is one of drawing as if objects were viewed from high above) grew from the need of superposing figures, to indicate depth and an over-all view of a scene around a centre. Thus, in the *Birth of the Virgin at Daphni* (Fig. 105) the line of the bed that takes the place of the horizon achieves the same result as a Renaissance painting. It elevates the figure of St. Anne and brings the scene of the bathing of the infant to the first plane. In the miniature of the *Judgement of Christ before Pilate* (Fig. 112) the horizontal line which separates the judge from the Judged, while it elevates the former, brings the latter to the first plane. The bird's-eye view in the fresco from Mistra (Fig. 113), where the crowd moves in spacious surroundings, gives the work the character of a popular painting.

Now, when the picture is set in an elevated position in a building, with the horizon's line placed high, it will give us the impression of ascending towards the picture as we examine its contents; its representations, instead of being demeaned, are elevated in our eyes, as in the case of certain



111 *Birth of the Virgin Mary,*
drawing by Dürer



112 *Christ's Judgement (miniature)*

dimensions at unequal distances from us, the more their apparent size tends to become equal (Fig. 96). It follows that in a picture in which the figures are drawn from a great distance, they may all participate with equal force in the composition, since those at the back will differ little in height from those on the first plane. And, conversely, in the picture in which they are drawn at close quarters, the figures at the back must diminish abruptly in size, in comparison with those on the first plane, so that if they are to participate in their action, they must be enlarged. Many a famous painter has resorted to this artifice. For instance, in Dürer's *Birth of the Virgin* (Fig. 111), while the architecture of the room diminishes with perspective regularity, the figures at the back do not diminish proportionately. They are, indeed, so large that they could not, if they wanted to, pass easily through the door that corresponds to the point at which they are placed. The artist, in other words, viewed the perspective lay-out of the surroundings from one point and that of the figures from another. Through this difference in scale, the artist succeeds not only in making all the persons participate in the action, but also in stressing the important persons at the back of the room. Had he placed them on the first plane, space would have been but an insignificant environment for them, a background merely, whereas now it co-operates in the composition by making it possible both for the new-born child

hagiographies in Byzantine churches. Conversely, when the horizon's line is placed low and the picture is set high, it gives us the disagreeable impression of not being allowed to see beyond the picture's first plane, and of being estranged from whatever is drawn in the depth at the back.

In perspective order, the distance of the eye from the objects before it also plays an important role. The more we retreat from objects of equal

on the first plane and the mother at the back to enjoy equal prominence. Thus the importance of the event—the birth—is indicated by placing the infant on the first plane, and the quiet majesty of the mother, by her transcendental scale, in the mysterious depth of the picture.

Here again a comparison with the representation of the same theme at Daphni (Fig. 105) will show how the Byzantine mosaic achieved, with different means, the same exaltation of the infant and of St. Anne. The two main persons are placed the one above the other in height, whereas in Dürer's composition the one is placed behind the other in depth. In both cases the large bed dominates the space. Yet how different the spirit that prevails. In the Byzantine composition the bed where the infant was born is a bed of joy; in Dürer's conception it is a bed of labour. In both works the difference in scale contributed to the reciprocal display of the figures, yet with a serenity, unworldliness and spirituality in the Daphni composition wholly lacking in the agitated and self-tortured realism of Dürer's design. The figure of the Angel alone retrieves this picture from prosaicism.

Finally, the indirect suggestion of space in Byzantine paintings, which show all figures almost on the first plane, has the additional advantage for frescoes of not breaking up the unity of the wall, of not piercing it. Renaissance wall painting, in this effort, usually freed the space behind the first plane, which is used only as a background. In the Baroque, on the other hand, painting abolished the idea of walls surrounding a hall, and carried the spectator into



113 *Healing of the Paralytic and the Unclean (fresco), Mistra, Church of the Metropolis*

infinite depth; by such naturalistic means, however, as soon disillusion him.

The Architecture of the Composition

We have seen that in Renaissance painting the vanishing point often interfered with the natural focal point. Byzantine painting, in lacking a vanishing point, allowed the gaze to rest undisturbed on the centre of gravity and grasp the work's visual order—namely, its integration of varying scales, weights, colours and symbolic values.

Yet in Byzantine painting one or even more vanishing points occasionally appear. In other words, many directions of lines in depth appear, seeming to converge towards various vanishing points, even though these do not, in fact, exist. Take, for example,



114 *Handing the Purple Garment (mosaic),
Chora Monastery*

the mosaic from the monastery in Chora (Fig. 114), where the curvilinear building to the left seems to have one vanishing point and the rectangular building to the right another. Far from disturbing the composition, this contrast contributes to its unity, because each building belongs visually to one of the two main groups of figures in the picture, while both of them contribute to the display of the centre of gravity of the composition. The elevated building to the right, with its converging lines towards depth, unifies the group of women. Indeed, its vertical lines stop the crowd, and thus allow the Virgin to take a step forward and form

the centre of gravity in the whole composition. The curvilinear building to the left holds the group of priests in its embrace and accentuates their importance. If both buildings had a common vanishing point, they would lead the eye in that direction and detract from the enjoyment of the picture as a whole. As it is, the eye, uninfluenced by any vanishing point, devotes itself to the visual order, which is mainly synthetic and (as in the examples of Daphni previously analysed) gives the work its architecture through representational means.

STYLE

Style in Classical and Christian Art

The two sources of style are the personality of the artist and the spirit of the age: thus, we designate works of art by the artist's name, calling it a Phidias, for instance, or a Panselinos, or a Rubens; and, again, by the name of a period, calling it "archaic", "classical" or "romantic". In each case, the work exhibits both the individual style of the artist and the flavour of the period.

For before an artist can become a pioneer, he must first assimilate the aspirations of his age, and merge his ego into a wider, a universal consciousness that will transform his work into an achievement almost impersonal. The spirit of an age, on the other hand, diffused amongst the multitude, remains an inarticulate and vague quest until it finds an exponent in a vital personality who can incarnate it in a concrete work.

This fusion of the artist's and the age's genius is effected in the work of art. Indeed, the potential work of art also, in as far as it might serve certain practical needs under certain conditions, has an independent force of its own.

It is obvious that the work makes different demands according to its religious or secular nature, if the medium is architecture; or of a dramatic, poetic or prosaic nature, if the medium is writing. On the other hand, the artist's inclinations may (in architecture, for instance) impel him towards the monumental or the merely practical; or in poetry, towards the epic or lyrical. Finally, the spirit of the age may be turned towards mystical experience or prosaic finality.

The combinations between these varying demands and tendencies of age, artist and work are numerous; they produce valuable results only when they coincide; and it is only by their perfect coincidence that a style is established.

Before analysing the style of Byzantine art, the distinction should be drawn between the styles of Christian and classical art. In the ancient Greek period the artist's attitude to his work was basically objective. He relied far more on the subject itself than on his personality to give his work its character, while he remained the serene contemplator. He gave his figures the eloquence peculiar to their character, as did the epic poet, avoiding unrestrained lyricism or personal display. As a result, the personal contribution of the artist was restricted mainly to the perfection of his work's form, in accordance with an ideal of harmony and beauty. This exclusion in the classical period of the artist's personality from his work led architecture, always the most objective among the arts, to adopt Orders, mainly the Doric and Ionic: certain rhythms proclaiming the formation, the articulation and proportional relation of the architectural members among themselves. If in the classical piece of architecture the façade, as we have seen, had not yet been fully conceived, it was also because the composition of a façade entails the projection of the artist's individual architectural mentality and a pictorial rather than a tectonic conception. In classical sculpture and painting, again, the representations are ideal, impersonal figures. The spirit of classical art, as a whole, is epic rather than lyrical.

In Christian art, conversely, the artist's attitude to his work is subjective: not because he prefers not to let the subject speak for itself, but because, treating of spiritual conditions as he does, his subject depends, in the last analysis, on an immediate personal experience of the transcendental, and is therefore capable only of subjective translation in art.

That is why in Christian architecture there are no Orders, but only types of buildings. Naturally, the arrangement of certain buildings presents us with an Order, but in Christian architecture the Order applies to the interior plan (and elevation) and it is applied for the benefit of the inhabitant, not the spectator; so that the concept of Order has here undergone a change, and refers now to the utilitarian, not the artistic composition—or, at least, to content instead of to form. Yet not wholly so until the Renaissance; for early Christian architecture, with its esoteric spirit, little concerned as it was with functional needs generally, concentrated only on content. But the subjectivity which, as we have seen, originally derived from the almost mystic nature of the early Christian work took root and made the artistic form prone to personal influences. (So it is that each of any two basilicas belong-

ing to the same type of building might have been—far more easily than would have been possible in classical architecture—individually formed; and each might display an independent originality all its own, which would have been impossible in classical architecture. The idea of the façade was therefore now apparent.)

It was only in the Renaissance, when art began to serve the individual patron and secular architecture to prevail, that Order ceded its artistic to its utilitarian merits.

In early Christian sculpture and painting, again, the individual character of the work rests, not on the objective proportions of the nude body and the outlines of the impersonal, ideal face, but on the expression of the spiritual qualities which dominate the form. For instance, the Virgin, in the Byzantine work, has the expression of a chaste mother; Christ, of the All-benevolent Judge; certain saints have an ascetic expression; and all the works together vibrate with religious lyricism.

Briefly, then, in Christian art, as the objective contemplation of the beautiful mattered less than the subjective experience of the sublime, style stood less for perfection of form than for loftiness of expression: its rhythmic urgency was transferred from form to content.¹

The Greek word for an architectural Order, be it remembered, is *ῥυθμός*—rhythm. *Rhythmos* is a wider concept than Order, *Ordo*, adopted by the Romans, who saw in the Greek styles only the external arrangement of the architectural members, measuring their relations while they remained unaware of their musical rhythm. The Greek conception of *Rhythmos* lived on into Byzantine times, although it now referred, as we have seen, chiefly to content. The Renaissance, under the influence of the Roman rationalistic tradition, of an external approach to and revival of the Greek styles, and of the functional concepts of secular architecture, finally reverted to the Roman idea of Order.

Style, then, reflects the temper of an age, and as the concepts of the beautiful and of the sublime respectively and alternately stressed the importance of form and content, so style alternately gave prominence now to rhythm or Order, now to expression. And if Byzantine art can display no Orders like those of classical architecture, yet its expressions are charged with rhythm.

¹ As I have already stressed elsewhere, content and form are indivisible in the work of art. The discrimination, however, is temporarily useful for purposes of analysis, in the attempt to verify certain conclusions.

Byzantine Style

Christian art is essentially esoteric; its spirituality, of course, it shares with the art of many another era, since every great art has usually been, or aspired to be, religious. Esotericism, however, is peculiar to Christian art. In the Hellenic period a pronounced human and rational element underlay the pagan religion; its character, more mundane than that of the Christian religion, allowed personality to expand, so that the works of art of that period, despite their objective epic character, yet strike an individual note. The transcendental religion of the Christians, however, demanded in an art remote from the mundane the submergence of the individual in anonymity. That is why in the art of the Middle Ages, despite its subjective nature, the number of known celebrities is negligible. Indeed, its very subjectivity explains its anonymousness; for in expressing his transcendental experience, the artist, even as he produced a purely subjective work, viewed himself merely as a medium or vessel.

The art of each period thus presents a dramatic contrast in itself: classical art, the personal note in an epic style; Byzantine art, the impersonal tone in a lyrical style. It may be that from such contrasts, indeed, original composition emerges. It is certain, in any case, that in every religious art, no matter how intensely subjective its expression, the impersonal tradition which demands rigidity of types is more carefully preserved than in secular art. And this was true of Byzantine art in contrast to Renaissance, in which, as secular architecture began to thrive independently of and to predominate over the religious, the impersonal tradition became atrophied and acquired only external significance, with each artist drawing directly and as he pleased from Roman prototypes. The cult of classical form gained currency. (The unbridled individualism which henceforward developed in the West trampled down the spirit of austerity and sublimity in art, which only a new religious fervour—in which the artist would forget his ego—could now revive).

The style of Byzantine painting was therefore characterised as "hieratic"; the term was intended at first to disparage, then to explain chiefly the unbending severity of the Byzantine painted figures, the distortion of anatomical proportions, and the schematic uniformity which they were alleged to possess. Of the moderns Demus,¹ because he postulates that the picture has a magical identity with its prototype and that, consequently, it is a symbolic

¹ Demus, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

representation (as is, for instance, the Holy Liturgy of the Passion), expresses the opinion that the artist exercises the function of the priest. On the same principle, we might say that the priest performs the part of an actor when he officiates. The truth is that the painter remains primarily an artist, as the priest is essentially the servitor of God. True, theology provided the artist with his symbols, but it was his own artistic grasp and imagination that represented their content and form. The artistic merit of the work is independent of its religious import, and merely helps to uplift all who can appreciate it, pious and non-devout alike, to a higher visionary sphere. The establishment of a magic identity, if it occurs, is the work purely of the devout spectator.

The term "hieratic" is indeed an apt enough description of Byzantine painting, so long as it refers to its solemnising influence on the beholder, through which he is uplifted.

The hieratic style of Byzantine painting shows three outstanding external characteristics, viz.:

- (a) the draped anatomically deformed figure;
- (b) stiffness of figures;
- (c) indifference to ugliness of feature;

all three external characteristics being overshadowed by, or rather employed as mere instruments to bring out, three marked inner tendencies, viz.:

- (a) expressionism of form;
- (b) rhythmic dynamism in pose and movement;
- (c) dematerialisation.

Let us now examine in pairs the corresponding items in the two groups.

The Draped, Anatomically Deformed Figure and Expressionism of Form

In the classical period the prevailing principle of *mens sana in corpore sano* was not incompatible with the period's religious views. In Christian religion, on the contrary, the body is regarded as an impediment to the soul, flesh is evil, and matter in general is a negation. Thus, body and soul are dissociated. This has an immediate bearing on art, for it led, firstly, to a loss of interest in the proportions of the human body (so it is that, as Strzygowski remarks,¹ "no anatomist would ever think of making a study of the

¹ J. Strzygowski, *Ursprung der christlichen Kirchenkunst*, p. 180.

human form from early Christian representations"); and led, secondly, to the covering of the body by multifold drapery. These draperies acquired a decorative character, as the craftsman, now far from seeking to reveal (as in the classical period) the proportions of the human form beneath the folds, on the contrary covered them in an endeavour to represent them non-naturally. He elongated certain members, diminished others, and in general did not hesitate to distort the body's proportions because he felt that he thus expressed the innate spiritual force that was in these beings. The intention of this expressionist art, in other words, was



115 *The Crucifixion (fresco),
Rome, Santa Maria Antiqua*

to stress, with the help of external means, the inner life of these beings, and to suggest, by the concentration of the spiritual expression in their face, that they had forgotten their body. It is there, in the look of their faces mainly, that the bliss of spiritual uplift overflows and is analysed.

The Crucifixion in Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome (Fig. 115) is an excellent example of expressionist painting. Christ's unnatural body, tall and slender, unnatural and, therefore, clad in a colobium, is nailed on the

Cross as if it had no material weight, since it has no volume or even enough width. In consequence, He is not, in fact, hanging upon the Cross, but is merely outlined upon it, like a thing incorporeal; the two vertical lines of the colobium elongate His body even more, making it immaterial. The aureoled head is serene, almost independent of the body, and is framed only by two naked arms, which, open as they are, and exaggeratedly long, seem to proclaim that naught but the spirit remains. The divine face has an expression of intense and concentrated spirituality. In contrast to the expressionist representation of Christ, the forms of Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist are anatomically more

correctly depicted. They are, therefore, more material, heavier—in a word, more true to life. The whole painting gains in sublime expression because of this contrast between Christ and His satellites. This contrast, incidentally, shows us the fallacy of assuming as a general principle that Byzantine artists did not imitate nature, and that they ignored the correct proportions of the human form. The fact is that Byzantine artists were not interested in external form, for their point of view was wholly introspective. They looked inwardly, and it is the inner man in the main that they wish to represent. Nevertheless, where external form was not out of place (as in the case of Angels, who were intended to be beautiful), and when, more generally, the Greek conception of harmony overrode the Oriental influence (as in the mosaics at Daphni), form acquired importance and was imitated more faithfully,¹ albeit never at the expense of the spiritual content of the work. In this respect, the expressionism of Byzantine art differs from the expressionism of Gothic painting. More spiritual than the latter, it accepts more naturally the suggestions of the beautiful, which control and lend its expressions—no matter how celestial—their humanity.

The Stiffness of Forms and the Rhythmic Dynamism of Pose and Movement

Expressionistic figures—figures, that is, anatomically deformed, so as to express their dematerialising tendency and spiritual quality—would appear ridiculous if they showed natural movement. Those who alleged that Byzantine hagiography was too rigid did not take this into account, nor did they observe that the apparently unnatural poses and movements were in keeping with their expressionistic form; for these also are the result of an inner

¹ According to Millet (pp. 288–89), there are works which adhere to the *canon carré*, although—in the second period chiefly—the members are exaggeratedly elongated or kept very short. The tendency to free the neck, to drop the shoulders, to give the body height, in search of grace, is an ascetic ideal. In any case, the Byzantines did not lose sight of the anatomical principles of the ancients. Essays on the subject testify to their constant preoccupation with it. But because the representation of the nude body was not the result of direct knowledge of nature, their models passing into the current hagiography were distorted. (A superficial explanation, to my mind.)

Finally, according to Demus (*op. cit.*, pp. 32–33), the distortions of anatomical proportions are mere corrections determined by the height on which the pictures are placed, so that the forms must appear to the spectator standing below as having correct proportions. Hence the “negative” (as he calls it) Byzantine perspective.

But art has always made such corrections, even in ancient Greece and the Renaissance. The question still remains why the Byzantine hagiographies, seen from below, continue to show distorted yet expressive proportions.

dynamism. It is indeed this inner quality that integrates the representations, inasmuch as, in a pictorial art, in which the whole dominates over the parts, the figures are not differentiated among themselves as in classical art. Examining, for example, Fig. 116, one sees that a rhythmically undulating wave runs through the picture, uniting the figures each to each in its undulations. Thus, despite their superficial differentiation, among the palms that separate them, they submit *en masse*, to the movement that controls them. Thanks to this movement, we tolerate the unnatural proportions of the bodies, the **strange** position of the feet, the artificial folds of the draperies.



116 *Litanies of Saints (mosaic),
Ravenna, Sant' Apollinare Nuovo*

The dominance of the rhythmical movement is itself aided by the relative uniformity of the vestments and of the row of trees, which in their immobility, and despite their unnatural uniformity, do not distract us with their form: when we have seen one, we have seen them all. The trees, moreover, are drawn on such a small scale that the figures, in contrast, appear huge. Of course, if we look carefully at each figure separately, we shall discover that despite their apparent uniformity, in

each figure the pose, the dress, the movement, the ornament, and finally the features are different—as, in each tree, the branches, the trunks, the fronds.

A note of studied variety is thus introduced, which imitates schematically the natural variety of the tree, or of the landscape, or of the draperies' folds, as the case may be. It is artificial and purely decorative, because only thus can it draw attention to a transcendental, non-natural reality. Imitation of nature would have produced a factual prosaicism, and Byzantine painting is essentially lyrical—its counterpart in poetry being free verse with a pulsating rhythm. It is that very rhythm in Byzantine painting which effaces its alleged rigidity to anyone artistically unbiased by

the Renaissance ideal, which was later to be transformed to an anti-poetic naturalism.

Ugliness of Feature and Dematerialisation

With the advent of Christianity, man ceased to be the "measure of all things". He was important now only in so far as his nature partook of the divine; his personality was now assessed mainly by certain inner spiritual qualities, like goodness, humility, the capacity for repentance—in contrast to classical times, when it was intellectual gifts, like judiciousness, balance, statesmanship, that ranked higher. Feelings now mattered far more than ideas, and sentiment more than intellect: it was the need to give sentiment expression which introduced portraiture into Byzantine hagiography, and caused its preference for the frontal representation of figures. We have seen how, thanks to the expressionistic representation, the spectator's interest was drawn from the body to the face and, more particularly, to the eyes. St. Luke's saying, "The lamp of thy body is thine eye", is illustrated with particular force, however, in the faces of angels, saints and God Himself.

The analysis in a portrait of an individual's feelings demands the realistic reproduction of physiognomy, of that person's characteristic features; or, as we have seen, the stylisation of the model's characteristic expression—not, in any case, the expression of an ideal, abstract beauty. In these portraits, therefore, facial ugliness was not always to be avoided, and was often, indeed, valuable to the artist in emphasising the supremacy of spiritual beauty, which, shining through the contrasting physical ugliness, seemed if anything more attractive. Ugliness plays, then, the role of a *repoussoir* in these pictures: it repels us for a moment, only to compel us by virtue of its very repulsiveness to turn our attention to the inner beauty, which then draws us by its splendour. From these dissonances emerges the sublime tone of these pictures. For even in such figures as the Virgin's, usually depicted as beautiful, there is an unobtrusive dissonance in the blending of the mother's tender warmth and the eternal Virgin's austere chastity. Again, in the figure of Christ, who is simultaneously God and Man, there is the dissonance of the severe glance of the Judge along with the all-benevolent look of Love.

However, the Byzantine artist, wishing to detain his spectator until he had conveyed his sublime message, had to counteract those disturbing, because dissonant, chords. He therefore resorted to decorative polychromy. All the colours are unnatural, but

harmonised in a transcendental music, and give the work a unity which in itself charms the eye. The colours' magic and their decorative pattern engage the eye until the mind has grasped the sublime spirit of the work. That is why colour and the decorative pattern it weaves play a most important part in Byzantine paintings. These works, were they uncoloured line drawings, would not appeal to our religious sense with anything like equal force.

Of course, the "music", so to speak, of Byzantine painting does not derive only from its colour, but is also supplied partly by the dynamism of every movement, and mainly by the rhythm of its expressionism—that is to say, its style. It is a style born of a religious lyricism, which, in its strife against the realistic portrayal of physiognomy and emotions by means of external traits, produces a transcendental realism, in which celestial apparitions and divine visions are brought to life through figures and objects of "this world".

The lyricism which found such powerful expression in these works is to be explained by the fact that the Byzantines, both collectively and individually, kept their gaze turned heavenward, believing in divine persons, in the Holy Scriptures and in miracles, as if these were the only reality. Thus the figures of Christian history, though once living persons, were not represented by the artist in their earthly life, until he had first elevated them to the heavenly sphere and made of them celestial beings. The mythical personages of the ancient Greeks underwent a corresponding metamorphosis, for the ancient Greek believed in the reality of the myth; indeed, had it been otherwise, he would have fallen into a most prosaic realism. As Muratoff has aptly said, "Byzantine and Christian art, in general, was not essentially different from the art of Hellas, which always made the reality of the myth its theme, in contrast with the other arts—including that of our times—which vainly pursue the myth of reality."¹

The style of Byzantine painting would be completely lost, of course, in a composition with plastic forms differentiated in space; with figures anatomically correct, yet lacking spirituality in expression; with a landscape in the background; and with the devices of perspective predominating. Such a picture might, indeed, treat of a religious theme, or narrate the passion of Christ, but it would lack religious style. The God-man would impress us as a human being rather than as God. He would fall short even of the gods of Hellas, in that they would have the advantage of being extra-

¹ Muratoff, *La Peinture byzantine*, p. 27 (Paris, 1928).

ordinarily beautiful forms, thanks to the idealism that ennobled Hellenic realism.

Two conflicting factors, then, underlie and seek expression in both arts, since in each reality strives with idealism. It was the artist's imagination alone which knew how to reconcile these contending elements in synthesis and symbolism. As was inevitable, the aesthetic category prevailing in his age dictated to the artist the style of his creative expression; for indeed no art, unless it derives from an aesthetic category, can possess style, and—lacking rhythm as it must then do, whether in its composition or its expression—no art then is worthy of the name.

CHAPTER VI

The Mutations of the Sublime in the Development of Byzantine Art

The Three Stages

The development of an aesthetic category naturally follows that of the era's *Weltanschauung* to which it corresponds; and its fluctuations, evident in its works of art, thus reflect the fluctuations of the epoch's ideals.

We are not, however, concerned here with tracing any transformation art may have undergone through these influences, but rather with an examination of the transformations themselves in the art of the period under discussion. We are concerned with ascertaining whether the aesthetic category of the sublime reigned supreme in the Byzantine era, or whether it went through the inevitable stages of birth, acme and decline; if so, how its works were transformed in the course of that evolution; and with ascertaining also if and when, in the course of that era, it was superseded by another aesthetic category.

In order to determine the above, it is first necessary to examine the morphological development of Byzantine art, and see how the sublime was expressed each time in its three characteristic stages: (a) the Justinian period; (b) the Macedonian and Comnenian Renaissance; (c) the Palaeologian Renaissance.

Each of these three stages of Byzantine art marks a significant development and transformation in its character, and could best be characterised as a phase of "extension", of "intensity" and of "emphasis", respectively.

Let us now take examples chiefly from the architecture of these three stages:

The First Period : Extension

The first thing that strikes us about the buildings of the Justinian period is their size. The difference in size between them and those of the other two periods is especially conspicuous in Haghia Sophia. Haghia Sophia, of course, is the only work in Byzantine

architecture that attained such tremendous proportions (diameter of the dome 32.5 m.), because Justinian policy intended it to serve not only as a church, but also as the temple of the Empire's splendour. However, even less pretentious edifices, like the Church



117 *Church of St. Eirene, Constantinople*



118 *Church of St. Eirene, Constantinople (interior)*

of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople and that of St. John of Ephesus, were very large in comparison with the later buildings, and, in any case, "extension" is not displayed in the building's actual dimensions only, but also in a tendency towards the heavy and massive that in the basilicas and the domed churches,

prevailed throughout the early Christian period. St. Eirene in Constantinople (Figs. 117 and 118), the Acheiropoietos in Thessalonike (Figs. 142 and 143) or the basilica of the Studion are cogent examples. Indeed, smaller works such as the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (Fig. 144) are perhaps even more eloquent of this tendency, because, despite their small size, they achieve a massive effect. This tendency is manifest in all the works of the Justinian period, although in time it became more restrained, more subdued, as it gradually began to weaken. Mainly in the domed churches of the first period the articulation of the volumes appears clearly. It is "cubic". The pyramid within which the elevation of the building is inscribed has a broad base and a relatively small height. The dome usually is without a drum. The exterior views are bare, almost unworked. The interior space increases towards infinity and, to put it briefly, the monumental character of the works testifies to a tendency to suggest the sublime through the immeasurable and the majestic. Thus, "extension" stood for the expression of sublime ecstasy.

In seeking to convey the sublime, through extension, a prime factor was *augmentation*. Haghia Sophia is an excellent instance of this and affects one not unlike the roar of an ever more tumultuously approaching wind, that dies down as the gale recedes, until at last one hears only its awe-inspiring moan in the distance. The building itself starts serenely at first on a massive pedestal with plane surfaces, but afterwards the articulation of the volumes augments upwards and the curved upswing attains its summit in the drumless dome, nonchalantly lying at the highest point—a turning-point whence the roar begins to subside gradually in the serenity that pervades the whole work, despite its tremendous fluctuation of line.

Such serenity is not found in the Gothic cathedral, because here *exaltation* of power is the guiding principle in suggesting the sublime. Here, too, the members of the work are multiplied and increase, but they call to mind a driven wave, that suddenly breaks against a rock with unbridled power, as the tower of the cathedral speedily ascends to meet the sky. The sudden cessation of the wave presupposes an uncontrollable collision, and its unbridled flow a quick and premature outbreak of the power that moves it.

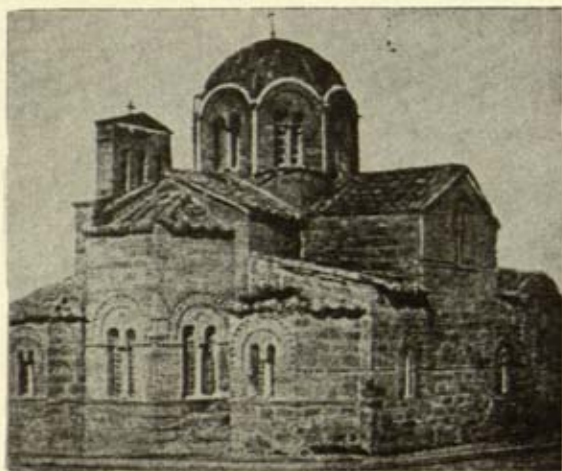
In the suggestion of the sublime, in addition to augmentation and exaltation, we have also *syncopation*; rather like the syncopated rhythms of drums in funeral marches, that fill one with a sense of frustration. In architecture the continuous interruptions

of curved arches or of masses that alternate, intercross and interweave, creating a pictorial unity, are best described as syncopations, especially as they appear on the roofs of Byzantine churches.

We find, then, that the three factors of augmentation, exaltation and syncopation everywhere co-operate in the expression of the sublime, yet with one or other dominating in the various works. In works of the first period it was augmentation which predominated, yet not without exaltation also playing its indispensable role in giving the whole and the parts the monumental character of extension.

The Second Period: Intensity

In the second stage of Byzantine art, "extension" is replaced by "intensity": monumental works are succeeded by works which



119 *Church of SS. Theodoros, Athens*

are more adapted to the human scale, and which, instead of amazing, stir our imagination by their pictorial quality. In these works the immeasurable and the grandiose were replaced by the measurable and the vigorous. The Church of the Saints Theodoros in Athens, of the Provincial School (Fig. 119), and the Theotokes of the Chalkaion in Thessalonike, from the School of the Capital (Fig. 120), are good examples of this architecture. In these works the ideal pyramid within which the elevation of the volumes is inscribed becomes more acute and, in general, the vertical is stressed. The columns become more slender, the arches are heightened, the

domes acquire a drum and thus seem no longer to lie on the building, but to rise from it, stretching high up in a slenderness that seems sometimes strident. This raising of the dome is, in any case, necessary to counter-balance the classically inspired multipartition in the plan and elevation. The columns are distinct in space, the compartments increase in number, as do also the domes. The whole spreads itself out, as though to fall into right proportions, until the dome rises abruptly slender, like a cypress-tree. There is an intensity about that sheer, sudden rise that transmits itself to the spectator. This internal articulation is expressed also extern-



120 *Church of Our Lady of the Copper Smiths*
(Chalkaion), *Thessalonike*

ally, mainly at the level of the roof, where the arms of the cross intersect and the pediments and curves appear to move in pictorial combinations. The base, indeed, preserves the plane surfaces of the cubic podium, but with this difference—that these surfaces, here richly decorated, introduce a polyphony as an accompaniment to the sudden projections, to the syncopations of the pediments, the fluctuations of the curves, and to the general pictorial termination of the work. To this decorative trend a certain more plastic articulation of the exterior seems to react, as is manifest in the Church of the Myrelaion in Constantinople (Budrum Djami) and elsewhere. But these churches, with their taut, suddenly rising body, bring us an experience as intense as it is brief—not unlike

the sensation we derive from the mysterious rustle of leaves suddenly disturbed by a rush of wind, followed by the quick stir of frightened birds, then silence. A sort of concentrated and sudden intensity, then, superseded, in the second period the serene, majestic sublimity suggested by Haghia Sophia in its arrangement of volumes and its upward gradations.

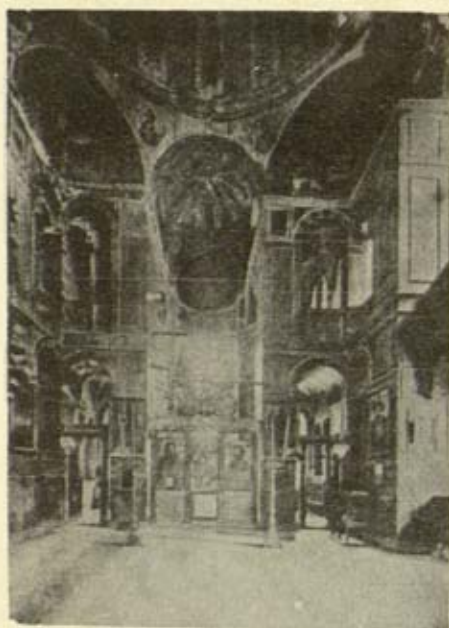
The change was, of course, gradual, for there are transitional works, such as St. Sophia in Thessalonike (Fig. 121), where the massive articulation is preserved externally, while in the interior there is a marked effort to suggest the measureless and infinite in uniform space. Obviously in the small chapels the suggestion



121 *Haghia Sophia, Thessalonike (interior)*

of infinity survives only thanks to the classical multipartition, which, by differentiating the members, creates manifold views and numerous planes in space.

Finally, the sublime majesty with which the works of the first period of Byzantine art are charged is revived in the second period in churches of the octagonal type, such as Daphni, or that masterpiece, Hosios Lukas (Fig. 122). This revival of "extension" is to a certain extent perceptible in the exterior of these buildings, with their heavy, one might almost say solemn, domes; it is, however, chiefly evident in their interior, where classical multipartition is almost eliminated in its subordination to the supremacy of the spacious dome, which restores to space its uniform continuity. Nevertheless, the serene majesty and the rich solemnity of Haghia Sophia or St. Eirene are not recaptured here. With the chapels surrounding the central space and reminding us of monastic cells,



122 *Church of Hosios Lukas*
(interior) (see also Figs. 17 and 18)

multipartition pierces through the ground plan of these churches; it seems to linger in their exterior also, where, despite the building's cubic formation, a certain movement in the volumes at the roof level and the pictorial decoration deprive it of quiet simplicity.

In the second period of Byzantine art, the shifting from measurelessness to measure, from the unit to the multipartite, from serenity to movement, from augmentation to instantaneous growth—briefly, from extension to intensity—naturally, at times, brought the graceful into play in the sublime work.

For movement, abrupt cessation, sudden alternations and, primarily, measure are equally characteristics of the graceful. Grace, it has been said, is beauty in motion. If, indeed, in the graceful, measure restricts extension and leads ultimately to the minute; if it curbs exaggeration and achieves cadence, yet the graceful shares both movement and dynamism with the sublime. These properties, kindred to both categories, relate them more closely than ever when syncopation is introduced. Then, the achievement of one or other effect, graceful or sublime, is a question merely of accelerating or retarding the rhythm; as, in a funeral march, the more rapid reiteration of the syncopated theme on a drum will change the suggestion of tragic beats to one of dancing steps and leaps of joy.

A characteristic example of the combination of the graceful with the sublime is the Gorgoepekoos in Athens (Fig. 125). Of course, in many diminutive Byzantine churches the frolics of grace are evident, as for example in the Kapnikarea (Fig. 24) and the Church of the Transfiguration (Fig. 126), both in Athens, or in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessalonike (Fig. 127); although

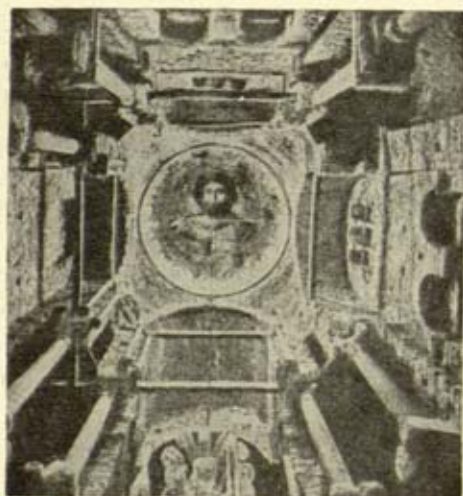
the last two examples are later than the first. In the Gorgoepekoos, however, a certain classical sense of measure lends the church, if not beauty, at least intense grace. Indeed, so marked is this quality in the Gorgoepekoos, that we automatically think of it as a "charming" church rather than a sublime work. And not unnaturally so, for inevitably we associate the sublime with the vast, while on the contrary we associate the graceful with the dainty and the minute.

The swift motion of the graceful could not have found free play in the monumentality which large dimensions in themselves give a work. Weight of volume, simplicity of surface and continuity of line, which architecturally make up the monumental, retreat before grace. Volumes are dissolved, become lighter, diminutive; surfaces are interrupted with projections, ascents and descents; and indispensable pictorial decoration with repeated syncopations is everywhere introduced. That is why Bayer¹ remarks: "The plasticity of grace results in an aesthetic of disintegration; an aesthetic which prevailed in the Byzantine churches."

However, this "disintegration" may very well be looked upon as the dispersion of the graceful before the sovereign

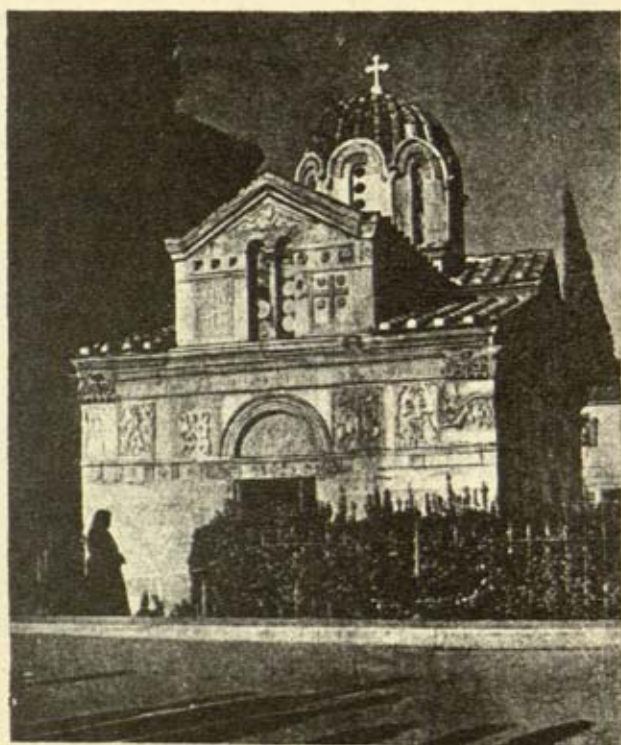


123 *Church of the Virgin Mary the Comfort-Giver (Paregoritissa), Arta*



124 *Church of the Virgin Mary the Comfort-Giver, Arta (interior)*

¹ Bayer, *L'Esthétique de la grâce*, I, p. 350.



125 *The Church of Gorgoepekoos, Athens (The Little Metropolis)*

category of the sublime in this Byzantine chapel. True, this chapel does not possess the aristocratic and precise grace of the Erechtheum, or of the smile of the Korae of the Acropolis, nor any of that wild, playful grace of the Rococo. But careful examination will show that the movement which stirs the diminutive masses, which distributes the decorative motifs picturesquely, continuously interrupts the pediments in sudden alternations, breaks the cylindrical into an octagonal drum, syncopates the curved arches on the small slender columns, until, at a certain point, it allows the curved roof of the dome to express itself melodiously—that this movement is not haphazardly at play, but strives seriously to compose a hymn to the deity. So it is that these lighthearted, graceful movements have about them a sweet solemnity and an earnest reverence that are not far remote from the sublime.

Not only monumental buildings and turbulent peals of thunder

are capable of stirring in us a sense of the sublime: diminutive buildings and the music of silence can do the same, when beneath the smallness and the hush we discern immeasurable and mysterious depth. The murmur of a rivulet, the sighing of a forest, the innocent gaze of a child will sometimes fill us with a sense of the sublime. And, indeed, those Byzantine chapels have something of the ineffable sweetness that lights up the face of a child in solemn prayer; something of that sweet innocence. For these are no temples, but unpretentious chapels, the work of devout men, who in the utter self-effacement of the mystic found bliss in building only for the glory of God.

The Third Period: Emphasis

Some later works of the "sublime-cum-graceful" in the second period (like the Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour in Athens, Fig. 126, and that of the Holy Apostles in Thessalonike, Fig. 127, mentioned above) in their expression of the graceful herald the third period of "emphasis".

Look at the Church of the Transfiguration. The tall slenderness of its dome's drum vibrates with grace. It leaps upward like a cry, whirls like a trill, and mere effects as these may seem, they may not be dispensed with. At any rate, it is not bereft of a certain emphasis, which is even more pronounced in the Holy Apostles in Thessalonike (Fig. 127) and other churches, where the exaggeration of the vertical is evident to a greater degree. While the Church of the Transfiguration, which belongs to the School of the Greek Province, where the influence of the classical spirit is more direct, preserves a certain simplicity of surface and possesses serenity, the Church of the Holy Apostles, which belongs to the School of the Capital, is agitated by complex and repeated



126 *Church of the Transfiguration,
Athens*

projections, rich decoration, elegant blind arches and exaggerated syncopations in its pictorial articulation. It is a more abandoned and, as it were, passionately gesticulating, occasionally shrill grace



127 *Church of the Holy Apostles, Thessalonike*



128 *Church of the Pammakaristos, Constantinople*

that runs through this work. Inevitably, the suggestion of sublimity is weakened, as we feel the architectural hymn of praise being succeeded by a cry of supplication.

These works make free with their effects and technical virtuosity—evident, indeed, in even older works of the School of the Capital, like the Church of the Theotokos of Chalkaion, with such inconsistencies as false pediments.

In larger works, again, such as the Pammakaristos in Constantinople (Fig. 128), which is uninfluenced by the category of the graceful, the three factors of augmentation, exaltation and syncopation, employed in the earlier works to suggest the sublime, still survive, but are now equivalent, with none predominating over the others. Syncopations now give the impression rather of accidental interruptions. We have, as a result, an overburdened building, the basis of which is not organically connected with the pictorial arrangement of the domes on its roof. In the Church of the Paregoritissa, in Arta (Figs. 123 and 124), something similar occurs in the façade, which recalls a building with superposed stories. In this particular example of a work of the decadence, the internal arrangement of the dome suggests a legerdemain technique, that shows the bold ventures to which the graceful led. We clearly see the decline of the earlier extension and intensity into emphasis—an emphasis outwardly displayed by the repetition of a single feature, on a human scale throughout. But to return to the Church of the Pammakaristos (Fig. 128). Here curves, organically unjustified, at certain points crown the views; a plastic cornice dominates, and, generally, variegated motifs only superficially related to one another testify to the turn towards emphasis. Thus a kind of "Byzantine Baroque" came into being. These works, that seek to appeal to the eye rather than the soul, are the legacy of a conventional faith which has lost its inner meaning and can be served with external means and overwrought expressions; the forceful sense of the divine has surrendered to weak human emotions. Longinus has justly remarked¹ that periphrasis, while it lends force to the expression of the sublime, yet lowers it when exaggerated.

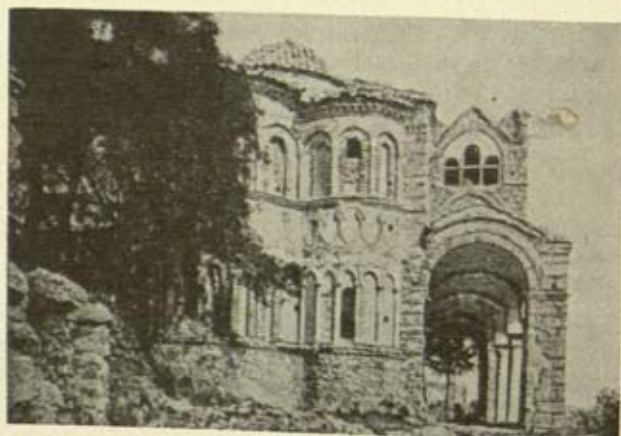
It may be wondered at this stage whether the general principle of emphasis, undeniably proclaimed in many works of Byzantine decadence, is conspicuous in those works eminently representative of the third period—the works of Mistra. In other words, was the last resurgence of Byzantine art under the Palaeologi merely a period of decadence that brought nothing new?

If we examine the Pantanassa at Mistra (Fig. 129) we perceive blind arcades, Frankish and Saracen arches, and extremely complicated projections which, being in essence rhythmic interruptions, create a superficial unity. The schematic mixture of types is repeated in the plan also, for while on the ground we have a basilica, the arrangement on the floor above is reminiscent of the

¹ Longinus, *On the Sublime*.

cruciform five-dome type. In addition, a turn from the pictorial to the plastic, though only superficial, is evident. The mass, in any case, acquires weight. All these morphological symptoms are indubitable indications of decadence and none of the three laws for the suggestion of the sublime can therefore be predominant: these buildings show neither the extension nor the intensity that might have conveyed sublimity. At Mistra the bell-towers are almost the only part evocative of the lofty. None the less, this Byzantine Baroque, like any other Baroque, is itself a reaction against decadence—a fanatical, dramatic reaction, no doubt, but still one that offers new ideas.

For, indeed, in these works of the third period three new characteristics are evident. First, a slight departure from the



129 *Church of Pantanassa, Mistra*

pictorial to the plastic—a differentiation, that is, of the tectonic elements, that lends mass volume and weight. In consequence, the dematerialising tendency is no longer expressed in elasticity of surface, but in mobility of mass. A second feature is what might be described as the “humanisation” of dimensions—that is, the reduction of each member to a human scale, so that the work brings no sense of exaltation. The elevations of the churches appear as merely superposed stories, resembling the façades of houses with rows of windows above one another, as in the Paregoritissa at Arta or the Brontochion at Mistra. This humanisation of dimensions explains the style of the monastic architecture of Mount Athos also (Fig. 130) and of the modest but, as it were, intense and sublime-aspiring churches of the post-Byzantine period scattered

throughout Greece (Fig. 131). Finally, a third trait of the decadent period is the mystery lent to the interior of the buildings by subdued illumination.

In general, the straining after ethereal grace was not without its effect, for it achieved a note of melancholy loftiness that gave a



130 *Church of Chilandari Monastery, Mt. Athos*



131 *A Church in Mykonos*

fugitive suggestion of the sublime—often with external means and individual virtuosity.

The third period, then, has given us an emphatic “exaltation”, which, if it misses sublimity, yet moves within the realm of religious fervour; testifies, perhaps, to a mystic passion which dramatises and humanises the divine. The more direct reason for this change, of course, was the resurgence of the classical Greek

spirit. It had, as a matter of fact, always lurked in Byzantine art, but whereas in the earlier period its idealism was mainly borrowed, now it was its humanism which was adopted—the first to spiritualise, the second to humanise art. Hence the reconciliation of official and popular art in Mistra, on which Bréhier remarks. Humanism, however, was not the result of Western influence. Humanism as a movement began in Thessalonike mainly, and in the fourteenth century¹ was also afoot in Constantinople. The most eloquent proof of the introduction of the human element —of human passions—in artistic expression is provided by the painting of the Palaeologue period. It was natural enough that the Byzantine, beginning after incessant contemplation of the divine to lose the ground from under his feet, should have turned his attention to man again. It was not, then, the West which influenced the art of Mistra but rather the reverse.

Painting

How far, in the three great periods, the expression of the sublime in Byzantine painting followed the same evolution as architecture, in a progress from extension to intensity and, finally to emphasis, will emerge in the course of this chapter.

Interesting examples of the first period are the Ravenna mosaics or those in Rome, earlier dealt with in another connection. The size and impressive gesture of Christ in the apse of the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian in Rome (Fig. 5) should be noted. However, since most of these mosaics have undergone repairs at various periods, it is most fortunate that the sixth-century mosaics in the Monastery at Mt. Sinai are unimpaired, for from the point of view of art and style they are indeed a revelation.

The composition of the Transfiguration of Christ (Fig. 132) is in the apse of the church, and the presence of Christ there, in the midst of the Apostles, has an overwhelming effect on the beholder. The figure of Christ is larger than the others, and, surrounded as it is by the phantasmagoria of the aureole, seems to increase still further in size, while the splendour of the colours provides the figures with intensity and warmth. The figures around Christ, although only five in number, are scattered in space, as if stepping aside to make room for Him, and the space, as a result, seems to increase tremendously. The figures of the Apostles, some of them fallen, others kneeling, express astonishment in gesture and pose, as though thunderstruck. In contrast to Christ's erect, practical

¹ Diehl, *L'Art byzantin*, p. 701 (Paris, 1910).

immobility as He stands forth among them, their poses become extraordinarily vivid. With one hand Christ blesses them, while His other is hidden beneath His *chlamys*, perhaps so as not to weaken the effect of the blessing hand. The two prophets are standing on either side of Him, at the two ends of the apse's semi-dome. The composition is thus framed in, enclosing within it God's tremendous presence, which diffuses awe all around. The figures, few and on a large scale, acquire such apparently large proportions in a space capable of containing many times that number of ordinary human figures that the spectator is made to feel that he is transferred beyond space and time—an effect enhanced by the fact that no figure stands firmly or leans steadily anywhere, but all seem to levitate in an other-worldly, heavenly sphere.

However, the overwhelming impressions thrust at the beholder do not end here. Over the apse, to right and left, in each spandrel, there is a gigantic angel—or is it a winged monster? At any rate, it is a creature of divine beauty and power, that stirs the ether with its wings and so keeps its immense body suspended in space. The body is large, the torso and head comparatively small; the hands are large, and the long limbs are accentuated by the exceedingly small feet. While the feet and limbs beneath the chiton, drawn two-dimensionally, are almost ethereal, the nearer we come to the torso the more plastic does the linear figure become. Thus, torso, head and extended hand appear to emerge from a supra-worldly, invisible space into perceptible space, as though to suggest the projection into the church of some heavenly, personified power with an apocalyptic mission.

The change from extension to intensity is clearly visible in the mosaic of the Crucifixion at Hosios Lukas (Fig. 133)—an interesting example to compare with the representation of the same subject in Daphni, already analysed (Fig. 104). The classical severity in the balance of pose and controlled movement, the harmony of the figures' anatomy, and the fine lines of the draperies, in the Daphni work, give place in the Hosios Lukas mosaic to expressionism. The difference in the composition is due partly to the difference in the proportions of the general framework within which each of these Crucifixion scenes is drawn. It can, of course, be conversely maintained that the Daphni painter, with his classical tendency, would never have chosen a wide and low framework in which to paint a Crucifixion, as did the Hosios Lukas painter. While the three figures in the Daphni work are vertically balanced and their faces are the summit of an almost equilateral triangle, in



132 *The Transfiguration (mosaic),
Sinai Monastery*

the Hosios Lukas work the altitude of the triangle is lowered, with the Crucified Figure somewhat compressed, and the two bodies converging towards it as if making a movement in its direction. Had they stood vertically they would have appeared exaggeratedly remote from the Crucified Figure and awkwardly placed in the circular frame. However this may be, those figures, by the inclination of their bodies, have lost their solid footing on the ground and hence their material nature. Thus, the whole picture gains in expression. The expressionism becomes more marked as we

realise that the Crucified Figure does not possess the harmonious proportions of the Daphni Christ, and describes a curve now more intense, but not as noble. The face expresses suffering; the head leans heavily and directly on the shoulder, almost without a neck to support it; the hands are extraordinarily long, because the Cross is heavy and almost massive; the blood that flows from His side spouts diagonally, and not in the soft curved line of the Daphni mosaic. Moreover, the movements of the Virgin Mary here are less restrained, and St. John, who rests his cheek in his right hand, seems profoundly affected as he turns towards Christ, instead of merely standing lost in contemplation as he faces the spectator, as at Daphni. The draperies have unnatural folds, though their chromatic combinations are realistic, just as the pose of the bodies is unnatural, although the faces are more realistic than at Daphni. In the Daphni picture there is almost no difference between the size of Christ's figure and that of the two others. Christ, nevertheless, owing to His position in the composition and the proportions of His body, seems to gain in height. In Hosios Lukas, where He is placed lower, Christ, in order to dominate the composition, is

drawn larger and more massive than the other two figures, and so made to gain in height. "Exaltation" is generally stressed and proportions are cleverly distorted to display intensity. Intensity is displayed in the Daphni work also, in comparison with the works of the first period, but everywhere, here, with measure and serenity; whereas in Hosios Lukas it is stamped with an exalted expression, not to say a disturbingly passionate one. In Daphni the spectator remains a contemplator of a tragic scene idealised; at Hosios Lukas, on the contrary, he is moved to a greater degree, and directly participates in the scene, realistically presented, despite the unnaturalness of pose and movement and the two-dimensional figures.

The transition to emphasis is well illustrated in the fresco of the Lament at the Tomb, in the Monastery of Chrysostom in Cyprus. The two details (Figs. 134 and 135) in their expression of human passions, exhibited not so much in the movements as in the features—the lips, the eyes, the eyebrows, the foreheads and the contracted faces—show an intensity so extreme that it becomes emphasis.

Finally, in the painting of Mistra, Salonica, and other artistic centres, the introduction of the element of human passions, designed to enliven the toneless forms of sacred art, is to be seen at its most intense. Here the painter transforms the scenes of the Holy Scriptures into a passionate human drama. The early two-dimensional representations, restrained and austere, now become



133 *The Crucifixion (mosaic), Phocis, Monastery of Hosios Lukas*



134 *Head of Christ and Virgin Mary (detail from fresco of Holy Sepulchre), Cyprus, Coutsoventi Monastery*



135 *Detail from Fresco of Holy Sepulchre, Cyprus, Coutsoventi Monastery*

almost plastic figures with expressive poses and dramatic gestures that express impassioned feelings, as though the artist aimed at capturing fugitive impressions of life. The figures, moreover, are placed not only against a monochrome background, but also within a natural frame. Hence there is an attempt now to create environment, to bring in the landscape; and despite the fact that the perspective aids (later so indispensable) are lacking here, the painting succeeds. Already, however, the figures, set farther back, sometimes diminish in size and the lines tend towards the discovery of a perspective *fuite* (Fig. 136). How-

ever, there is fortunately no anatomy of space yet, as late in the Italian Renaissance; and the pictures therefore often impress one as Hellenistic works—provided the figures' unnatural proportions



136 *Meeting of Joachim and St. Anne before the Golden Gate (fresco), Mistra*



137 *The Raising of Lazarus (fresco), Mistra*

reminiscent of El Greco are overlooked. The curved architecture (shown in Fig. 136) and elsewhere the curved throne of the Virgin, which Demus¹ regards as the transference of the niche motif to the

¹ O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, p. 80.

flat picture—because, as he maintains, the Byzantines preferred to place their sacred pictures on the curved surface of the church, so as to give the illusion that the figures faced one another and moved in actual space—are, in my opinion, merely the Baroque curves which appear in every decadent style.

Various rationalists have remarked that these works show a certain confusion and present disturbing sights, like the rocks that seem ready to collapse in Fig. 137. The explanation for this is that in a still expressionist art with a tradition of the transcendental, nature and man are brought to the foreground, and in its pursuit of sublime effects it imitates nature unnaturally. This art has not yet become naturalistic, as that of the Italian Renaissance, but achieves an illusionistic naturalism.

This inevitable turn to Baroque is to be observed eventually in the style of every period. What, in effect, are the sculptures of Pergamon in ancient Greek art if not exaggeratedly passionate pieces, realistic expressions of man, whom they bring to the fore? Similarly, Italian Baroque, although apparently a movement of ecclesiastical fanaticism for the reinstatement of the Catholic Church after the Reformation, is, in effect, the most passionate human cry ever heard in art. Italian Baroque revived (though in the trappings of the Renaissance) the Gothic tendency towards the sublime. It is rich in sap and abounds in vigour, that both enriches and perverts its forms. Byzantine Baroque differs from the Italian in that, with its classically Greek inheritance of plastic elements, it turned from the pictorial to the plastic: whereas Italian Baroque, with its rich mediaeval legacy of pictorial elements, made of a plastic almost a pictorial art. In both cases, however, the expression of the sublime entails the introduction of the element of human passion—in Italy in naturalistic realism, and in Byzantium with mystic-aspiring idealism. Thus, although in the course of its evolution, stress on sublimity progressively weakened as Byzantine art approached its decline, yet, strictly speaking, this art never came under any other aesthetic category than that of the sublime. In its mutation from extension to intensity, it gained an esoteric quality, which soon, however, degenerated into emphasis. The conflict of Oriental and Hellenic elements, of which the former denotes the transcendental mysticism, the latter the "idiocratic" spirituality of Byzantine art, resolves itself into concord at the end of the third period. These two elements mutually influenced each other throughout Byzantine art, although on its inception the Oriental and in its decadence the Hellenic element predominated. It was natural for

this to occur, for with the gradual decline of theocracy, God was also brought down from heaven to earth, where intellect, rather than fervent piety, was at work, and the thinker rather than the mystic ruled. In order to express his victory over theocracy, man abandoned now the intense aesthetic category of the sublime and resorted to the serenity of the objective approach—the category of the beautiful, which, after the fall of Byzantium, he sought in the Italian Renaissance. Yet Byzantium had revealed to the curious, inquisitive mind of ancient Greece seeking the “unknown god” the sublime meaning of the one and only God, and ancient Hellas for her part, through the beautiful gods of Olympus, had delivered mankind from the theocracy of the Orient.

It now remains to be stressed that the emergence of the passionate element in the third period of Byzantine art is not the result of a premature crossing of the category of the beautiful with that of the sublime. The concept of beauty had always lain hidden beneath Byzantine art; in its period of decadence that concept tended to make itself manifest, and the element of passion it introduced in its expression is a sign of degeneracy and a lapse from beauty itself, as it was in decadent ancient Greek and Italian Renaissance art. That third Byzantine period can show, in addition, instances of the sublime-cum-graceful (as in the mosaics of the Monastery of Chora, in Constantinople, Figs. 100 and 114). In any case, the influence of the Hellenic spirit that led to these inter-crossings did not make of Byzantine a “beautiful” art, but the spiritual expression of serene sublimity, in contrast to Gothic art, which is a realistic and violent expression of the sublime. The morphological qualities of this Hellenic influence are that certain simplicity, sense of measure and rhythmic expression which marked every period of Hellenic art. When the decline set in, Byzantine art was not extinguished but the primordial expression¹ of the sublime was lost, and replaced by a mystic-aspiring idealism, expressed in subjective virtuosity and with what power still survived. Otherwise the art of the decadence continued as a dead form in post-Byzantine tradition.

¹ The terms “impressionism” and “expressionism” have been used in their literal sense and should not be confused with the schools of modern painting so named.

CHAPTER VII

Historical Factors in Byzantine Art and its Originality

Historical Factors

In their attempt to explain the origins of Byzantine art and its peculiar character, earlier art historians have posed the question "Rome or the Orient?"¹—a question still being discussed—and they forget a significant, if not the only significant factor, Byzantium (see also Guyer²). For it was Byzantium that combined those influences, and art historians would have been better employed if, instead of tracing the origins of its foreign elements, they had studied how these were assimilated and transformed in Byzantium to form the original composition known as "Byzantine Art". Indeed, we cannot begin to understand that art until we have recognised the peculiar aesthetic originality which is its very essence, and which explains every transformation its borrowed elements underwent.

If this method of proceeding to the examination of Byzantine art seems unusual, this is due to the fact that its study began at a time when historical and archaeological research had been firmly established, had broadened their scope, and acquired primary importance overshadowing the aesthetic approach, which was considered of little consequence; where the latter was still applied, it was invariably in the light of antique beauty. It was only natural, in such circumstances, that Byzantine art should be regarded primarily as decadent. The study of ancient Greek art, on the other hand, had followed another course. For there, aesthetic appreciation had preceded archaeological and historical treatment, and when research discovered the borrowing of Oriental elements in classical art, it did not esteem it any the less for this, but, on the contrary, praised it for having assimilated and transformed them in order to express itself with originality. Byzantine art had done

¹ J. Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom* (Leipzig, 1901).

² Guyer, "Vom Wesen der byzantinischen Kunst" (*Münchener Jahrb. d. Kunstwiss.*, 1931).

no less, but in its case historical research adopted a different attitude. Ignoring Byzantium, the very source of its inspiration, historical research here endeavoured to explain it by resorting to the technical and morphological elements of past or even then extant civilisations, which Byzantium had itself introduced. This was due to a hypertrophied historical research on art which failed to recognise at first sight the aesthetic value of that particular art's original expression, to recognise the value of Byzantine art as such, irrespective of the factors that had concurred in its creation. It was due, also, to an atrophied aesthetic fed chiefly—as it is largely still—on ideals of classical beauty.

The style of an art-era is, of course, also partly the product of certain historical factors, which, however, combined in a different spirit might have produced quite other results—a wholly different style. The spirit of an age is unpredictable, it is not predetermined by historical data, and can be defined only *a posteriori*. So too with a style. It is therefore only after we have recognised its originality that the examination of historical factors which went into its making becomes interesting: just as it is interesting to learn from history who, for example, were Plato's and Goethe's parents and how they lived, but only after we have assessed the merits of the great men themselves. Nor is the parallel between a style and a personality far-fetched, since its individual spirit is a reflection of individual and collective genius.

Every people, quite apart from the degree to which it is affected by the legacy of the past or by the influences of the present, invariably possesses its own exclusively innate artistic talents.

If the previous part of this study has, as I hope, shown the originality of Byzantine art, and sufficiently stressed the sublime tone that was its special attribute, we may now, without fear of losing our way, take the reverse course and arrive at Byzantine art through its three historical highways, the Orient, Rome and Greece; examining what each offered, or rather, where the value of their contribution lay, from the technical, artistic and cultural points of view.

The Orient

The Orient offered, in the architectural province, the systems of vault construction without centering and the principle of transferring the thrusts to buttresses which, organically distributed in the arrangement of the building, remained invisible. In the field of painting, in addition to its decorative polychromy, the Orient

contributed the principle of the two-dimensional representation of motifs as practised in their textile and enamel techniques.

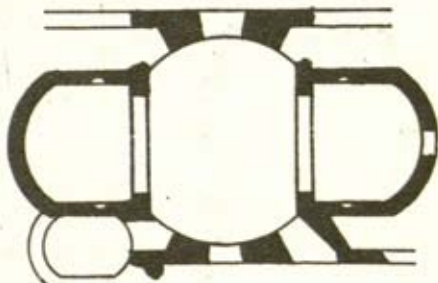
The Orient displayed in its art models of pictorial technique in which the visual, not the tactile, dominated. In consequence, it paved the way for an aesthetic of surface which, in architecture, adopted the facing of mass, and, in decoration, the expansion and development of motifs in endless continuity. Finally, with its anti-representational tradition, the Orient also brought its realism to art, whenever it had recourse to imitation—in other words, led to the tendency of seeing and depicting individual expression. It provided the elements for an art of characteristic beauty, as Byzantine art became, not of abstract beauty, as was classical art.

To the general culture of the age, the Orient contributed something of its mysticism and that transcendental outlook with which it had already impregnated the Roman Empire in its decadence, and so prepared the ground for a universal, in contrast to the Greek and Roman national, religion. It was in this mystic-seeking religious spirit that the sense of the sublime lay: the Orient—and this is its most important contribution to Byzantium—roused that sense of the sublime.

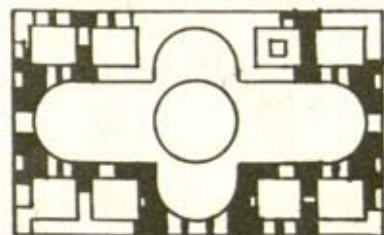
Rome

Rome's contribution in the architectural province, as in all art generally, was "barbaric". The examples of Roman arched and vault constructions lack that sagacity esteemed by Western civilisation, which can achieve the best results with the minimum amount of material, as in Greek and Gothic constructions. Rome, then, in effect, offered only examples of technical submission of masses, in systems economically disadvantageous, though serviceable enough to the conquering spirit of Rome, in that they allowed speedy execution and produced durable structures—material advantages, however, which lent little artistic value to the work. The ruins of Roman architecture, hence, are misshapen piles, in which we discover that the skeleton and the flesh are not separated, and that only a showy veneer covered on occasion, more or less tolerably from the aesthetic point of view, this inorganic constructional ugliness. The system of facing the cheap material then (though, indeed, this was but an indirect contribution of Rome) found its more artistic application in Byzantium. It was so also with plastic decoration with the drill, displayed in Roman sculpture. Mosaic, as far as Rome is concerned, is an importation from Hellenistic art.

Certain types of basilicas, such as that of Maxentius, as well as certain circular and polygonal buildings, although known in the Orient,¹ have been regarded as Roman contributions to Byzantine architecture. In earlier times, in fact, the view was held that the Justinian buildings could be traced back to the halls of the Roman *thermae*, and Zaloziecky² goes so far as to see in the "oval arrangement" of Haghia Sophia and its system of buttressing the vaults late products of Roman architecture (Figs. 138 and 139). As a rule the historian, in comparing similar ground plans, does not pause to consider



138 *Plan of Roman Baths, Tivoli*



↓ 6.66 ↓

139 *Palace Hall, Kasr Ibn Wardan*

whether these plans are inwardly related in conception or expression: he overlooks the fact that external similarity may still conceal considerable internal differences. Logically, of course, it would appear axiomatic that, for example, if a building such as the *Minerva Medica* (Fig. 140) or the centrally planned building in the *Villa Medici*, with niches and a peripheral aisle (Fig. 141), apparently similar to *San Vitale* at Ravenna (Fig. 41), pre-existed in Rome, then the later church (like the other also of *SS. Sergius and Bacchus* in Constantinople, Fig. 14) must naturally have followed its precursors. Logic, however, in matters of art is usually disappointing: for instance, by another syllogism, more axio-

matic than the former, we may affirm that the composition of *San Vitale*, conceived as a whole, is so radically different from the older buildings as completely to defy comparison. And unless we admit in the *San Vitale* architect an aim altogether different from that of his predecessors, we shall find it hard to explain his very

¹ G. Soteriou, *Christian and Byzantine Archaeology*, I, p. 324 (Athens, 1942).

² Zaloziecky, *Die Sophienkirche in Konstantinopel*, pp. 78 and 82 (Rome-Freiburg, 1936).

considerable departure from the former works, whose domed circular spaces he employed merely because in his day they were a technical possibility. If, then, the Roman buildings had suggested, they were certainly not the cause of this progress, the development of which demanded, if nothing else, a new technical conquest.

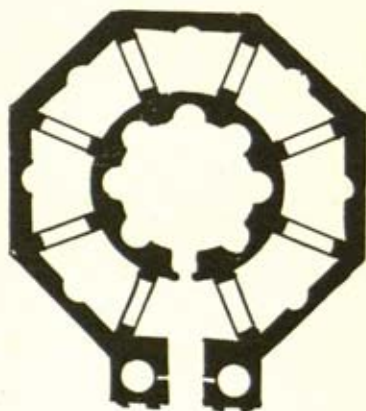


140 *Minerva Medica*

And this was effected in the Byzantine system of vault construction, that built with light bricks in empty space, combined the thrusts and counterthrusts of the vaults, and placed them directly upon piers. In brief, the Byzantine system of construction, instead of taking away the statically useless material from the massive walls, and thus creating niches in the circumference, placed the pierced niches in from the first (*ab initio*) in order to

counter-support a light circular colonnade roofed by the dome. Hence the novel architecture of San Vitale cannot be explained from below upward, but from above downward. San Vitale in itself shows the technical inferiority of, and certainly a quite different conception of art from, the Roman buildings.

Looking from above downward, we may perceive the radical differences between San Vitale and the older apparently similar buildings. And indeed these differences, these innovations, would never have been introduced were it not for the new spirit that now informed art. We would, then, in vain study all similar pre-existing buildings for San Vitale's like; for without knowledge of the new inspiration that prompted its original architecture, San Vitale cannot be conceived before being seen.



141 *Centralised Building, Rome, Villa Medici*

Had Christianity not emerged, the evolution of the centrally planned building might have come to a halt exactly before San Vitale was built; or it might have assumed a different form, in which case the explanation for it would have again been sought in the older and the very same buildings which are now supposed to

account for San Vitale. The very good chance that we might have found in the same source as plausible an explanation for two probably widely divergent results shows how dangerous it is to draw logical conclusions in studying works of art; for logic is but a tool, which only the initiate's knowledge will tell us how to apply correctly. In the specific case of San Vitale, we are seeking, not an unknown quantity x in an algebraic equation, but the explanation for an unpredicted phenomenon. Historical research forgets that San Vitale is unpredictable until seen: it is useless to endeavour to define it by studying the preceding buildings, as though they had predetermined it or as the astronomer may predict a comet. True, in the circular buildings ranging from the Minerva Medica to San Vitale, the niches crowd continuously nearer each other, until finally the thin walls remaining between them might be taken for carriers of the dome, independent from the intervening walls. "This argument", as Seldmayr correctly remarks, however, "is based on the system, first evident in Justinian¹ architecture, of the ciborium (*Baldachinsystem*)."¹ Here, in order to raise the ciborium and make it steady, the intervening walls—the niches—were used as counter-thrusts. In this lies a completely new conception of architecture.

Resulting from its taste for the grandiose and the pompous, Rome's chief legacy to Byzantine architecture was external monumentality based on weight and volume; this inheritance proved useful to Byzantine Imperial art, which eventually informed it with inner feeling, made of it an instrument of the "extension" it had found necessary in expressing the sublime in its first period; indeed, in the case of Haghia Sophia it proved especially valuable. The lack of a profound feeling for the sublime in Rome caused the feeling for the internal space also to remain barren in Roman art, as has been earlier explained.

In the case of the Pantheon, specifically, space is grotto-shaped, and this was due to unassimilated Oriental influences. Indeed, as we enter the Pantheon we have the impression, as others have also remarked, that we are entering a tumulus, very much as we feel in the case of the Treasury of Atreus at Mycenae; with this difference, however—that in the Pantheon the lantern of the dome seems to emerge above the mound of earth. This impression is not only due to the lantern but also to the manner of construction, which makes it appear as though space had been introduced by carving out the mass and taking away the material, exactly as if we were making a grotto within a rock. In Byzantine buildings, on the contrary,

¹ Seldmayr, *Zur Geschichte des Justinianischen Architektursystems*, p. 53.

the construction is evident—it consists of the creation of spaces, not by the subtraction of the mass, but by the erection of walls, piers and enveloping shells. This difference comes out in their formation also. The classicist spirit of Rome was unable to find a suitable morphological cloak for these Oriental influences. It exploited space, certainly, but a too shallow sense of the sublime prevented it from assimilating these influences. We can see how effortlessly, on the contrary, the Hellenic spirit did so, and with what wisdom it promoted them, in the examples not only of circular, octagonal buildings, or in Haghia Sophia, but even of simple basilicas. Already in the early Christian period the Acheiropoietos in Thessalonike (Figs. 142, 143), with the Oriental influence manifest in the large apse of its sanctuary, in its illumination and in its whole non-



142 *The Church of the Acheiropoietos, Thessalonike*

plastic arrangement, testifies to the degree to which the suggestion of the infinite and of the sublime had become a conscious purpose.

The feeling of the nest, of a physical embrace that we get from Oriental buildings, where the spaces are separated from each other by massive walls, is transformed in Byzantine buildings into an illusion of an ethereal, immaterial embrace wherein we breathe lightly as beneath heaven's dome.

There is little need to contradict here the view held by some recent art historians, such as Bettini,¹ that the anti-classical arrangement of forms, which led to the pictorial quality of Christian art in Byzantium and the West, was mainly Rome's contribution, and not that of an "imaginary Orient". The pictorial

¹ Bettini, *Frühchristliche Malerei* (Vienna, 1942). See also Swift, *Roman Sources of Christianity* (New York, 1954).

tendency of Creto-Mycenean art and, especially, the pictorial strain in the Ionian mentality which, in classical Greece, had been in constant conflict with Doric severity are sufficient to persuade us that Hellenism itself carried the anti-classical pictorial spirit to the very source of classicism.

It is indeed this very dualism in Greek art which gives it its strength, and which probably accounts for its ability to embrace afresh Oriental elements in the Hellenistic period. The pictorial sense of the Hellene found its new flowering in works which, manifestly anti-classical, are yet not bereft of the virtues of classical tradition—viz. simplicity, measure and rhythmic feeling. The re-emergence of this dualism in Byzantine art greatly astonished the



143 *The Church of the Acheiropoietos, Thessalonike*
(interior)

Romans, who, all of a piece themselves, based their strength on their very stolidity, which was also their spiritual weakness. Unfortunately, however, too many people had too long admired Roman art, and the taste for it died hard. This pictorial tendency of the Ionians pertains to the aesthetic category of the graceful; grace is indeed inherent in them. The graceful—related both to the beautiful and to the sublime—was thus later to become the most important mediating factor when they crossed in Byzantine art.

From the point of view of Western civilisation, Rome first, after Alexander the Great, established the idea of the universal empire, thus paving the way for cosmopolitan unity, if not for a cosmopolitan consciousness that was, perhaps, more deep-rooted in the much travelled Greek. Political reasons would naturally have

shown the expediency of adopting a universal religion in Rome, but its irreconcilability with the national character of the pagan religion compelled Rome to tolerate the co-existence of many religions. It is therefore not to be wondered at that she was the first to react unfavourably to a religion of as universal a character as Christianity; particularly as the Christian religion preached unity of conscience and not unity of interests. Rome, in any case, with its "cult of the Caesars",¹ in Wulff's words, having created a multitude of slaves and needy freedmen, involuntarily formed the suitable material for the new universal religion of the poor and the slave,² who with little enough to lose were the only people psychologically free to grasp the teaching of the God-man and to accept Him as a Saviour. Rome thus lit the very flame that was to destroy her.

Hellas

Hellas bequeathed to Byzantine architecture, not only certain concrete technical data, but virtually all that was most valuable in it; for it endowed the Byzantine architect with that fine technical perception which knew how to assimilate and originally refashion the Orient's and Rome's gifts. In the case of the more important buildings, the architect was replaced by the engineer (*μηχανικὸς* or *μηχανοποιὸς*), as Anthemius and Isidorus are called by Procopius, who thus wishes to imply that they had wide theoretical knowledge which enabled them to solve new problems of statics which inevitably arose from the new system of construction.³ Thanks to this subtle technical grasp, the Byzantine architect knew how to replace felicitously the heavy vault construction of the Romans, the handiwork of masses of irresponsible workers, with light brick vaults in free space erected by responsible workers on the Oriental pattern. To separate clearly special walls for the abutment of domes would have seemed to the Byzantine architect, as Choisy says,⁴ "a lamentable and almost barbaric method". The synthesising, integrating Hellenic mind would not allow, as did the analytical Western mind later in Gothic architecture, a system of vaulting which, heedless of the serenity of form and thanks to the introduction of the ribs, could exhibit flying buttresses. Yet the localisation of the thrusts and burdens at certain

¹ *Kaiserkult* (Wulff, *Altchristliche und byzantinische Kunst*, I, p. 2).

² In the words of Burekhardt (*Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, pp. 49-50, Stuttgart, 1941), who included Buddhism in this characterisation.

³ See G. Downey, "Byzantine Architects, their Training and Methods", in H. Gregoire's *Byzantion*, Vol. XVIII, 1946-48, pp. 99-118.

⁴ Choisy, *L'Art de bâtir chez les byzantins*, p. 126.

points, forming a kind of carrying organism in the vaulted construction, may already be observed in Byzantine architecture. Indeed, according to Seldmayr, the placing of the dome on independent carriers suggests a sort of "ciborium system" as already mentioned; for in it, not the walls, afterwards covered by vaults, are the main feature, but the vaults set directly on supports, so that the walls become mere screens.¹ Of course, the history of architecture is, to a large extent, the history of the roof, because its construction determines the possibilities of the spaces below—their potential development and expression.

Now, whereas in classical architecture it is the parts supporting



144 *Galla Placidia (interior)*

the roof which predominate, in Justinian architecture, on the contrary, the supported members predominate over the supports. This change is not yet clearly marked in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia at Ravenna (Fig. 144), as Seldmayr observes, where the tips of the pendentives supporting the dome do not reach as far as the building's base. In any case, the principle of planning from above downward, and of making this design conspicuous in the composition, governs all mediaeval art; for, along with Byzantium the West also made radical departures from the Roman tradition. The skeleton came into being, and with the vaults co-operating with thrust and counterthrust to establish the equilibrium of the whole, the supports became slenderer and allowed the walls between to stand free of a burden and be pierced. That is why

¹ Seldmayr, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

Seldmayr¹ further remarks that the principle of supporting arch and vaults on a separate column, instead of—as in Roman architecture—on the mass of the wall, is decidedly Hellenic. The Justinian system, he believes, however, is a combination of Roman vault construction and of the Greek system of supports—and he considers it a momentous architectural innovation, which the genius of Anthemius and Isidorus revealed all at once in Hagia Sophia. The only example he finds of the ciborium system of construction in Roman architecture is a vaulted hall in the Piazza d'Oro in Hadrian's villa in Rome. Yet here, although the dome rests upon piers separated by screen-walls, the structure is not artistically displayed but concealed—just as in the nineteenth century the steel constructions were concealed behind façades in the Renaissance style. He does not exclude, however, the possibility that the Justinian system may have resulted from a co-ordination of form and function.²

Seldmayr's example, besides being somewhat far-fetched, ignores the fact that the detachment of the screen-walls from the carrying skeleton presupposed a change in the whole system of vault construction, necessitating as it did lighter materials for its vaults, so that burdens and thrusts could concentrate at certain points without danger. Such work, again, demanded new conditions of individual craftsmanship that Roman civilisation had never been in a position to cultivate. All honour, then, is due to Greek civilisation for its vision in first recognising the technical value of such a system, impelled by its natural ability to co-ordinate art and technique. Choisy,³ in commenting on a similar instance of technical foresight and technical improvements, writes: "The independence of walls unequally burdened is a Byzantine idea." And further: "When a support receives the side of a large vault, since it carries a greater burden than the walls of a simple barrier, it is not tied up with it at all."

Greek technical ingenuity, finally, starting from the principle of inter-counterbalancing the vault's thrusts (the system of counter-thrusts), naturally enough organised the church's ground plan correspondingly, and ended by producing types of churches in which the major lines emerge rationally from the construction. Historians like Strzygowski have not paid sufficient attention to this when attempting to explain Byzantine churches, relying exclusively on

¹ Seldmayr, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

² *Form and Function* according to Seldmayr, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³ Choisy, *op. cit.*, pp. 112.

Armenian and other examples from the Orient. They have overlooked the possibility of the simultaneous emergence in two far remote places of the same type of building, given the same organic possibilities of construction and their rational exploitation.

The technical perception of the Greeks, further, brought enlightened ideas to sculpture, making an artistic achievement of the Roman inartistic drill-work, and producing from the features of a newly acquired technique a flat relief or pierced sculpture. Of mosaic, the Hellenic hand made an art at once more robust and more refined than heretofore. Finally, it brought the influence of the Hellenistic painting to bear on the anti-representational tendency of the new religion, and provided the representations of antiquity for the decoration of the catacombs in the first years of Christianity.

Artistically, the influence of Hellas was of the highest value, in that its sense of beauty instilled into the prevailing sense of the sublime (a sense essentially of the immeasurable and of the chaotic) the intellectual values of measure and order, which were to become evident in the simplicity, the clarity and serenity of Byzantine works. It is this Hellenic sense of beauty in Byzantine art which preserved throughout its Oriental pictorial decorativeness a hint of classical plasticity and a feeling for rhythm which gave substance to an art that was in danger of becoming all expression. Hellas, in other words, brought a breath of beauty into, without for a moment weakening, the sublime. In Byzantine art we have a clear-cut style, in which an older tendency lives on and not only effectively combines with the now predominant quality, but indeed serves to set it off. And the originality of Byzantine art lies precisely in that, ever a suggestive expression of the spiritual, it is yet subjected to an idealistic treatment that proceeds from a serene approach to the transcendental experience—an approach which the mystical fervour of Western art, almost completely abolishing mystic contemplation, and restricting itself exclusively to the pursuit of mystical experiences, necessarily precluded.

This aesthetic difference is a direct result of the influence of the Hellenic civilisation on Christian theology and the Christian outlook in Byzantium. For Greece, be it remembered, offered the new religion, besides the language that made its propagation possible, a philosophical framework also, through the Alexandrian philosophers. Thus, the Church Fathers transformed the dogma of the new religion into an intelligible faith which the questioning mind of Western civilisation could assimilate. They raised the religious

fanaticism of the Orient to the dialectical plane of philosophy and made of a religion that had been the property of the irrational masses one that appealed to logical consciences. In the West the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages confined reasoning to a shallow and complicated set of rules. Be that as it may, the conception of the infinite which in the Orient was attained by passive introspection, was arrived at in the West through active effort, which gives the age a strained air of "Faustian" anxiety that contrasts strangely with the contemplative and sublime temper of Byzantium. We may, still further, see the Greek influence in the liberality of the Greek church and its objectivism, which contrasts with the Western emphasis on subjectivism and on the importance of practical acts.¹

The Duality of Byzantine Art

Two influences, it may safely be asserted, were of paramount importance in the formation of Byzantine art—the Oriental and the Hellenic (for Rome's legacy proved ineffective owing to its materialistic nature, which was incompatible with the wholly unworldly character of the new religion). But the intellectual texture of Byzantine art and civilisation, generally, is due mainly to the Hellenic spirit. Byzantine art, despite its sublime scope and its pictorial "anti-classical" expression, may unhesitatingly be designated a Greek art. Its very duality, seemingly the result only of the Oriental and the Hellenic influence, is in fact also a purely Hellenic trait, to be traced to ancient Greece, in which the Ionic and Doric spirits are an outstanding instance of it.

As in life, so too in art, it would seem, the feminine and masculine elements have always co-operated, assuming this or that expression, according to place and age—Dionysiac and Apollonic, subjective and objective, or pictorial and plastic. Duality was ever congenial to the Hellenic spirit, and it is therefore also present in Byzantium, whose art and life as a whole it provided with the contrast necessary to its genius for synthesis.

The antagonism between iconoclasts and iconolaters is one of the most dramatic episodes in Byzantine history, which, at first sight, appears to be a struggle between the "aniconical" spirit of the Orient and the representational spirit of the Greek race. Yet the iconoclasts were ever decorating the churches with representations of trees, birds and animals, using Hellenistic motifs wholly

¹ See B. Tatakis, "Philosophie Byzantine", in Bréhier's *Histoire de la Philosophie* p. 108 (Paris, 1949).

alien to Islam. The representational Greek spirit, therefore, was never absent from Byzantine art, even when the latter did away with sacred figures. The true origin of the iconomachy, then, whatever its direct causes—whether the exaggerations of iconolatry versus the anti-representation influence of the Orient, or whether transcendentalism versus logic in the dogma—is to be sought in the self-bisecting tendency of the Greek spirit itself, which kept it ever alert. So that when the iconomachy ceased, with the reinstatement of the icons, this same Greek spirit, now mature in Byzantium, taught Court and people to learn from one another. It led Byzantine culture to draw its inspiration, far more than heretofore, from the people, and so brought fresh vigour to the Imperial Court.

The view that the people of Byzantium represent exclusively the realism of the Oriental spirit, and the cultured Court the ancient Greek tradition exclusively, is one-sided. For the people, on the one hand, even if they knew little about the ancient Greek tradition, nevertheless felt it instinctively, while the Court, on the other hand, even though it had not embraced the realistic spirit of the Orient, yet had caught its anti-representation prejudice.

The duality present in both Court and people might surely have much to teach anyone curious enough to analyse it and might afford us a deep insight into the Byzantine psychological make-up. This duality is again evident in the contrast between courtly and conventual art. The Court represents the monarchical spirit, the monks the popular spirit, but a monarchical spirit more liberal, and a popular spirit more sturdy, than Rome or the Orient had known. For the people of the Byzantine Empire, who consisted mainly of Greeks, could not accept the Roman or Oriental brand of imperialism, as is testified indeed by the numerous political and personal struggles for power that occurred in Byzantine history, as well as by the participation of the people in revolts and *coups d'état*, for the regulation of the Empire's acts. The Hippodrome is a characteristic symbol of the people's conception of, and its relations with, the Emperor. This opposition brought into being a popular art in Byzantium which, perhaps for the first time in the history of art, claimed a place next to official art. It may, of course, be argued that in ancient Greece also a popular art existed, as witness vase-making; but there, one feels, it is a question of Ionic versus Doric spirit, rather than of popular versus official art. In Byzantium, for the first time, popular art is not only inspired by but also influences official art, while itself retaining complete

independence in its principles and characteristics—not unnaturally, since it was cultivated in the monasteries with an almost fanatical exclusiveness. The art of the monks is dominated by feeling, whereas official art is ruled by the intellect and the dogma. Byzantine art profited here again by an antagonism which renovated both courtly and conventual art, preventing the first from falling into formalism and obeying the rigid demands of a dogmatic theology, and the other from degenerating into religious realism and from over-humanising the sublime concepts of Byzantine art. Humanisation and “naturalism” gained ground in the third period of Byzantine art—the decadent period of the Palaeologi. Man, at that time, had come to the forefront. That he never quite filled the whole canvas in Byzantine art, or that he did not earlier appear there, is not due to a weakness in Byzantine civilisation—to a lack of freedom, as Millet asserts. For, as we have seen, both freedom and humanisation played an active part there. But the predominance of the human element and of naturalism in an art eminently “sublime” would have spelt the negation of its very spirit. Millet’s statement, then, that in Byzantium “culture and discipline, the elevated manner of thought and disposition, suppressed all spontaneity and dried up any creative sap at its source”, is surprising.

“Byzantium”, he further alleges, “spent its energy in the defence of a very weighty heritage. The heavy conservatism of the Orient, which subjugates men to absolute monarchies and to rigid theologies, strangled the creative spirit upon its territory and necessarily led its first steps towards distant Italy, as it had, previously, towards Greece, a land of freedom.”¹

Strangely enough, Byzantine art is accused for what is, in fact, its highest merit—namely, that it preserved throughout form, style and a sense of rhythm in expression. This sense of rhythm in the West deviated into a realistic expressionism, which the history of art designates as “Romanticism”. Romanticism, according to Vischer,² “puts new heart into the myth—the infinity of an inner sentimental world—it reveals the treasures of the subjective life, gives subjectivity its value . . .”. Yet this very tendency towards unbridled freedom, towards complete subjectivity, was the dangerously anti-artistic point of the current of Romanticism which prevailed henceforward in the West. Romanticism has misled European art critics in their judgement of Byzantine works, from which, indeed, it seems to proceed, and led them to overlook the “rhythmical principle” which, as

¹ Millet, *L'Art byzantin*, p. 299.

² Vischer, *Aesthetik*, IV, p. 422.

Muratoff¹ affirms, was Byzantium's historic legacy to Renaissance art. These students, then, have evidently not realised, as the Byzantine artist did, that uncontrolled liberty in art, as in all else, leads ultimately to slavery; that only the bonds of rhythm will allow its perfect expression. In other words, the critics of Byzantine art disregard, first, that the apparent rigidity of its style denotes artistic power; and secondly, that Byzantine art died because, obeying like any other art the natural laws of birth, maturity and decay, it had inevitably to come to an end.

In studying any particular art, a more profitable task than seeking the causes of its decadence is to examine what it contributed to, and how it influenced civilisation and the evolution of Art. Now Byzantine art had practical results to show, for, thanks to its official prestige and its impressive character, it was instrumental in Christianising the barbaric neighbours of the Empire. In providing those peoples with its models for imitation, it roused their artistic instinct, and so became, as it were, the trunk from which their national arts—mainly the Serbian and Russian—flowered. Its twofold official and popular nature, appealing to all sections of these primitive societies, made its adoption easy.

Inevitably, the naïve, popular character of Byzantine art gained more common currency than its idealistic traits, for simple, uncivilised man is more instinctively familiar with a sense of the sublime than he is with the sense of the beautiful, and the original virtues of the Greek spirit—measure, simplicity and rhythm—were therefore preserved only in Byzantine art proper.

Finally, thanks to Byzantium's commercial traffic with the West, to the Crusades, the court marriages and other contacts at the time, Byzantine art influenced the mediaeval West; specifically, it influenced Italy of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, showing her the way to a revival of the classical spirit in her painting, as well as in her architecture. That the Renaissance later fallaciously believed the Roman examples to have served as her sole models was not unnatural, since it held them equal to those of Greece. Furthermore, Muratoff is of the opinion that Bramante's plan for St. Peter's and Vignola's Gesù show a Byzantine and not an Armenian influence, as Strzygowski believes.²

It does not seem too much to assume that Byzantine art taught the world for the first time the lyricism of the lofty mind, until, in its decadence, the wave of humanism which first rose in Byzantium insinuated itself also into its contemplative art, making of it the

¹ Muratoff, *La Peinture byzantine*, pp. 157-59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

forerunner of the Italian Renaissance. It was to continue, indeed, also as its fellow-traveller until 1453 (as Wulff points out¹) and, be it added, as its guide too. The fact that the Italian Renaissance was powerless to breathe new life into Byzantine art (which still survived for the next few centuries on Mount Athos) shows that the naturalistic character of the former, its rationalism and Roman-inspired formalistic order, were wholly alien to the Greek spirit of Byzantium. So much so, indeed, that Theotocopoulos, in order to break away from its foreign bonds, had to isolate himself in Toledo and, drawing on his memories of the Cretan School, nourish his genius from that treasure-store, that is, from the Renaissance as Byzantium understood it. Traces of the Greek spirit now lurked only in enslaved Greece, where the tradition of post-Byzantine art still survived.

This tradition is one of the precious inheritances not only of modern Greek but also of universal art, for it has handed down to us noble values only waiting to resurge again.

¹ Wulff, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

PART THREE

*The Aesthetic Approach to
the History of Art*

CHAPTER VIII

Art in Time

Wölfflin's Theory

History co-ordinates events; the philosophy of history subordinates them. History marshals events in chronological order, classifies them into principal and secondary, and groups them into periods, in order to describe and explain them. The philosophy of history, on the other hand, justifies historical evolution through general laws, which it infers inductively from the study of events, and deductively from the study of the mind. The two thus complement one another.

It was natural that the study of Art should have advanced along similar lines, and after first assembling and classifying the various works according to period, style and school, in order to describe and explain them, should have sought general laws mediately responsible for the various stages of its development: to have sought, that is, a philosophy—as distinct from Aesthetics, which is the philosophy of art itself—a philosophy of its history. Aesthetics as a “normative” science lays down certain principles which are *a priori* necessary in every work of art, irrespective of the period to which it belongs. The philosophy of art history is its innermost history. It rests on certain “fundamental concepts”, or “categories of perception” (*Auschauung*), inferred either inductively or deductively. Going beyond art history, which tells us *what* a work represents and *how* it was formed, the philosophy of art history explains *why* it assumed this or that form, in each style, and explains the succession of styles.

Wölfflin's theory¹ of the “fundamental concepts of the history of art” is today considered classical. Starting from Riegl's premise that in the historical evolution of art, form assumes visual as it loses its tactile properties, Wölfflin proceeds to a comparative analysis of Italian Renaissance and Baroque art, and deduces thence five pairs of “basic concepts” which characterise, as he claims, the course of art's evolution.

¹ H. Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* ((München, 1915).

The five pairs of "fundamental concepts" are:

- (1) Linear-Painterly (*Linear-Malerisch*);
- (2) Surface-depth (*Flächenhaftes-Tiefenhaftes*);
- (3) Closed form-open form (*Geschlossene-Offene Form*);
- (4) Multiple-uniform (*Vielheitlich-Einheitlich*);
- (5) Absolute-relative, clarity of the objective (*Absolute-Relative, Klarheit des Gegenständlichen*).¹

In the Renaissance the stress rests on the first concept in each pair, while during the Baroque it rests on the second. We have



145 *Painting by Dirk Bout (or his School)*

thus five interrelated and indispensable concepts marking the Renaissance, and five others marking the Baroque period which succeeds it. The theory was advanced by Wölfflin's disciples that these concepts alternate periodically throughout the development of art as a whole.

The first concept of each of the five pairs, that is, the first five concepts, characterise the Renaissance; the other five the Baroque. In consequence a painting, or a piece of sculpture or architecture, of the Italian Renaissance has the following characteristics in contrast to a

work of the Baroque.

(1) Forms in Renaissance work are linearly outlined, because the classical view of objects is "tactile" or "plastic", so that they are clearly distinguished and differentiated; in Baroque work outlines are blurred, merging into the background and sometimes getting lost, because the Baroque view of objects is "visual" or "painterly" and therefore disregards contours (Wölfflin gives Figs. 145, 146 and 147 as examples).

(2) Renaissance painting keeps the forms aligned side by side in

¹ Wölfflin, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

the foreground, although it reproduces them plastically; in Baroque painting, in which the contour, and therefore the foreground also, weakens, forms are shown in depth—one behind the other.

(3) Form is closed in Renaissance work, that is to say, it is static, steadily balanced by vertical and horizontal axes; in the Baroque, it is dynamic, a fleeting spectacle, promoting the impression of boundless space.

(4) In Renaissance composition each part preserves its independence—thence its multiplicity; in Baroque all parts are subordinated to a central motif or merged into a single unit, so that their independence is sacrificed to the unity of the whole.

(5) Classical art, finally, clearly defines the objects as the "tactile" or "plastic" sense presents them; Baroque art gives the transitory and vague impression of objects derived from a "visual" sense of things.

The interdependent pairs of concepts, then, which define the art peculiar to the Renaissance and the Baroque periods show at the same time the inner necessity, the psychological process¹ which led to the transition from the one period to the next.

"The transition from the tactile-plastic to a clearly visual-painterly view follows" according to Wölfflin, "a natural logic, and

could not be reversed." Even less possible would it be to reverse the transition from the "tectonic to the atectonic, from the severely to the freely regulated, from the multiple to the uniform". He continues: "The stone which rolls down the side of a mountain may, in its fall, make different movements according to the gradient and the quality of the ground according as it is rough or smooth; but all these possibilities are subject to one and the same law of gravity."²



146 *Painting by Vermeer*

¹ *Psychologischer Prozess.*

² Wölfflin, *op. cit.*, p. 18.



147 *Sculpture by Bernini*

Thus, according to Wölfflin, vision has a history, an evolution more or less exclusively its own, and does not reflect things with the unchanging constancy of the lifeless mirror. As a result, the five pairs of concepts are "categories of perception"¹—are, that is, forms both of apperception (*Auffassungs-*) and of representation (*Darstellungsformen*)² in themselves inexpressive, but showing what possibilities the historical moment offers the artist. Moreover, they

are indicative of national mentality, as is proved by the permanent "classical-mindedness" of the Italians, as against the permanent "anti-classical" or "painterly" mentality of Northern peoples, even when practising classical art.

The Basic Concepts

The foregoing brief analysis of Wölfflin's theory was an attempt to arrive at a safe point of departure for the examination of the fundamental concepts of the history of art. The discovery of these concepts is important, if the history of art is not to become a mere chronicle or description of art works.

The history of art, if it is to provide an accurate assessment of art and so serve its deeper educational scope, must project its chronicle not only through aesthetics, but also from the background of a world-theory that throws light on the history of civilisation (of which art is one manifestation). In thus projecting its account, it will reveal whether man's aesthetic concepts change independently or according to the theory of the age; or are the

¹ *Kategorien der Anschauung* (*ibid.*, p. 242).

² *Ibid.*, p. 243.

independent offspring of the artist's vision. In a wider sense, the basic concepts of art history must be sought in a relation of art to time. If this relation exists and obeys a law, we must attempt to define the latter in "categories of perception" (*Anschaung*) of art history.

Aesthetics was first associated with the historical evolution of art by Hegel. Art, which in his opinion consists of revealing and making the Idea directly perceptible, used symbols to this end. While these symbols were, at the beginning, the abstract forms of a cosmic order, they became later the forms of an anthropocentric conception, and finally purely spiritual forms. Hence (according to Hegel) art in the first period is described as "symbolic" and expressed mainly through architecture; in the second period as "classical" and expressed chiefly through sculpture; while in the third period it is described as "romantic" and is expressed mainly through music. Hegel, however, arrives at these conclusions through his cosmic view of history, which, in his opinion, consists of the dialectic of reason (*Vernunft*) aiming at self-consciousness. Hegel's view of history in general is teleological. A kind of theodicy predefines its evolution and, as a result, each earlier stage is a lower step on which we stand in the movement towards perfection, to free ourselves from necessity through liberty. Thus, the art of any earlier period is, at least as regards content, inferior; but the only really beautiful art, is the classical.

Many art critics, like Schnaase, moving on the lines of this idealistic philosophy, had associated the philosophy of art history with the philosophy of history generally. Reaction, however, was not slow in coming. Later thinkers, like Burckhardt, began to dissociate the history of art at least from the philosophy of the ideal, if not from the history of culture, and examined the works of art in themselves mainly morphologically, in order to reach specific conclusions on art. Riegl, first, coined the term "artistic will" (*Kunstwollen*), maintaining that this "artistic will" determines the history of art independently of the other history, and asserting that there are no periods of decadence in art. Furthermore, the "artistic will" shows the work of art to be not a mechanical product, as Semper held, but teleological. At any rate, the concept of the "artistic will" was the basic concept henceforward of any modern philosophy of art history and it raised the question of the "fundamental concepts" peculiar to art only—a pursuit previously excluded on Hegel's principle.

The controversy which attended this question should be briefly

expounded here following the work of Passarge.¹ A number of art critics, like Wölfflin, infer these fundamental concepts inductively, while others, like Schmarsow, use the deductive method. However, while to Riegl the term "artistic will" had a spiritual and historical connotation, and Schmarsow continuously emphasised the relation of art to culture, Wölfflin confined his analysis of it to the purely morphological field. He was accused of being unilateral and it was argued that the linear and painterly vision, being not the causes but the phenomena of style,² needed explaining as such. In addition, Wölfflin's ideas were criticised as lacking universal validity³ and as being inadequate to support the inner law of the evolution of art. It was claimed that the "history of the human vision", as he assumed it, did not exist, since, as Wulff says and Panofsky agrees, "man at each period sees the world in the same way". The difference lies not in the manner of seeing but in the manner of shaping the forms; and this is the result of a difference between two basic types of man—the sensory-kinetic type and the sensory-visual type.⁴ The former treats his shapes plastically, sometimes to the point of ossification; the latter, with his painterly treatment, softens and liquefies everything. From the point of view of racial psychology, the different treatment of forms is claimed to be due to the imitative or the emotional tendency of each race, as the case may be. According to other critics of Wölfflin, then, it is not the linear which is the direct opposite of the painterly, but the plastic, which Wölfflin presents only indirectly under the concept of the linear. Others have maintained that specific "basic concepts" must be derived from and applied to each respective art, if they are not to be confused. While sculpture, for instance, separates its work in space and defines it with surfaces, painting combines forms on one surface only and separates them with contours. Thus, according to Schweitzer, plastic and painterly treatment alternate periodically throughout the history of art from the most ancient times, beginning with Egyptian-Mesopotamian (in which the plastic and painterly element appears respectively) on to Persian-Creto-Mycenean, and down to Greek-late-Roman art. The architect Schumacher accuses Wölfflin of being superficial in his examination of architecture, and of not taking the tectonic structure of the building into account. Justly so, indeed, for Wölfflin's

¹ Passarge, *Philosophie der Kunstgeschichte* (Junker und Dünhaupt, 1930).

² *Stilphänomene, not Stilursachen.*

³ *Allgemeingültigkeit.*

⁴ *Sensorisch-motorische and sensorisch-visuelle Typ.*

theories applied to architecture touch only the surface of an art which not only has a concrete function, but is also determined by technical laws. In general, many authors criticised Wölfflin's concepts as being more applicable to painting than to other arts.

Impelled by Wölfflin's example, other critics likewise formulated basic concepts of art, which were the result now of inductive, now of deductive reasoning, their point of departure being now the form, now the content. Frankl, explaining the evolution of architecture,¹ arrives at two supreme basic concepts—that of the "total" and that of the "partial" (as he defines it). In his view, while the Renaissance aims at the "total", at completion, the Baroque tends towards the "partial", towards relation with the infinite. Brinckman, again, speaks of plasticity and space. Panofsky, finally, maintains that every work of art is the reconciliation and balance of pairs of opposites, springing from the ultimate problem of "fullness" (*Fülle*) and "form", which corresponds to the methodological opposition of time and space. He thus distinguishes between *a priori* and *a posteriori* concepts and elaborates a complex system. He, too, none the less stresses that, in essence, "fundamental concepts" serve only to characterise art's manifestations, without examining the problems each work had to solve.

So much for the theories of art historians.

Naturally, the applicability of such fundamental concepts to a work of art is no criterion of its artistic value. A work may or may not have artistic merit in itself, but is subject to the basic concepts of the age to which it belongs. It may be asked, however, since these concepts are peculiar to the history of art, should they not be so selected as to refer to the deeper aesthetic tendency possessed by all the works of art of an age? For, after all, it is the tendency that decides the expression. It is not common morphological traits, often varying as they do from place to place (and to be found even in unsuccessful works), which stamp the works of a period, so much as the artistic feeling of the age they express. This common feeling which runs through all works of a period is their very source, the motive power in their creator, and the quality in them that first moves the spectator and perhaps outlives all the others, since it enables him to grasp the inspiration behind and beyond the form, and to recreate the idea.

Now the "artistic will", so long as it is not related to the history of civilisation and aesthetics, remains a blind force of which the course is defined by "basic" concepts from without. The only way

¹ Frankl, *Die Entwicklungsphasen der neueren Baukunst* (Leipzig, 1914).

to convert it into an intelligible self-determining force is by relating it to both the history of civilisation and aesthetics through aesthetic categories. These mediate between the artistic feeling and world-theory of the age, characterising and directing the first, while reflecting the second.

Consequently, it is the aesthetic categories which should be considered as the "basic concepts" of art history and their sequence in time studied; for the artist's main concern, unless he is a barren imitator, is not to obey the current morphological rules but to express the spirit of his time. Local conditions, available materials and his idiosyncrasy may impel him indeed, to adopt a technique quite dissimilar to the conventional one, or even wholly original. We have such examples in Gothic art and the Christian



148 *Basilica, Syria, Kalat Siman,
Church of St. Simeon*

art of Syria (Fig. 148), which although a branch of Eastern Christian art, showed, like the Gothic, and in contrast to the Byzantine, a distinct plasticity; while all three express the same Christian ideal and the aim of all three is to express the sublime.

In other words, the aesthetic category of the sublime corresponds to the spirit of the Christian devotee and is the artistic reflection of his religious sentiment. This truth escaped Wölfflin, and he therefore formulated concepts which, on the face of it, might almost equally well apply, say, to Byzantine as to Baroque art, widely as these differ both in their deeper tendency and their outer features (for Byzantine art, although pictorial, was certainly not painterly, in the sense in which Wölfflin uses the term). Moreover, in drawing general conclusions from one particular art-

period (and that a decadent one, as he himself admits), he invites their application to other periods which, unlike the Baroque, far from marking the decadence of a previous classical era, were probably completely new—as again, for instance, Byzantine art.¹ The baroque following on the classical period marks a transition from acme to decline for every style, and not the succession of one robust style by another equally robust. That is why we describe the acme of Gothic art as its “classical” period, and decadent Byzantine art as “Byzantine Baroque”. “Classical” and “Baroque”, then, are secondary concepts designating the state of an art and cannot do duty for such primary concepts as aesthetic categories, which determine the style of an age.

It is true that Wölfflin, in a more recent work,² explained that his “fundamental” concepts referred specifically to modern art, and that different concepts may be applied to another period. But if these concepts change each time, they have but slight philosophical value. Now aesthetic categories are surely such fundamental concepts if they recur in the history of art as media of the prevailing sentiments, even though in different guises—as, for instance, in Byzantine and Gothic art, both of which, and each with its own individual technique, express the sublime. (Fundamental concepts of the history of art, then, if they are synonymous with aesthetic categories, are not merely the phenomena but the cause of style.) It is only thanks to the aesthetic categories that we perceive the value and tendency of a past work of art, inasmuch as aesthetic categories will ever move man, being innate tendencies of the artistic nature. Conversely, in the historical setting of the works of art, morphological traits remain external features—disconnected and unintelligible, so long as we are not aware of the feeling that went into their making and that, as it sought expression, employed and combined them.

I would call the philosophical approach to the history of art in the light of aesthetic categories an *aesthetic approach to the history of art*. My premise fundamentally presupposes that at least two aesthetic categories must predominate and constitute an inter-related pair, inwardly opposed. This we have seen to be the case in the aesthetic category of the beautiful, characteristic of the whole of classical art, followed by the rival aesthetic category of the sublime in the period of Christian art, succeeded anew by the category

¹ Andreades in his study of Haghia Sophia fell into this error, applying Wölfflin's and mainly Frankl's categories.

² Wölfflin, *Gedanken zur Kunstgeschichte* (Basle, 1941).

of the beautiful in the Renaissance, and so forth—a subject to which attention will again be directed in a subsequent chapter, showing why aesthetic categories alternate in time, and the order of their succession.

Auxiliary Concepts

In an aesthetic approach to the history of art, its history is directly bound up with aesthetics, since all works of art, irrespective of the category to which they belong, obey certain rules—rules which, indeed, according to “normative” aesthetics, are *a priori* necessary for the composition of any work of art. From the point of view of aesthetics, these rules, of course, are subordinate concepts of genus, in relation to which the aesthetic categories are concepts of species. In the philosophy of art history, however, where the aesthetic categories act in time, with now the one, now the other predominating as a concrete artistic will, the general rules of aesthetics are subordinated to these categories as concepts of species. In other words, the terms are reversed. After discovering the relationship and order of the aesthetic categories in time, we seek to ascertain the relationship of the rules classified under the categories. To give specific examples: When the beautiful prevails, what is the relation of, for example, harmony with rhythm? What, when the sublime prevails? For, as there is an opposition in the pair of categories that is solved in aesthetic joy, so also there is in every pair of aesthetic rules, an opposition that, in the integrated work of art, is reconciled in their necessary co-existence—as, for example, unity in variety, or harmony in rhythm. Each time, however, it is the one feature in every pair of rules that is accentuated, in accordance with the prevailing aesthetic category. Viewed as the result of subjective conditions, art provides corresponding auxiliary concepts.

The artist's personality undoubtedly influences both work and period. Even less than the artist's personality is the racial element to be lightly dismissed. The great role played by the Greek element in the formation of Byzantine art, for example, is clear enough in the difference of the latter from Gothic art in expressing the sublime. So too classical Roman art and the Renaissance, because they are the arts of Italians, differ from Greek art, even though all three are manifestations of the beautiful. The expression of the racial artistic will was developed by Worringer into a psychology of races, when he distinguished two categories, *Abstraktion* and *Einfühlung*, to express the opposition between the “classical”

southern and the "Gothic" northern races. Spengler, again, considers that each culture has its style, that each style passes through phases of childhood, youth, maturity and age, and he distinguishes three civilisations: the ancient or Apollonian, the Arabian or Magian, and the Western or Faustian. Dvořák, Schmarsow and Coellen stressed the spiritual (*geistig*) content of art.

The role of the racial element in the creation of art should not be exaggerated. The works of a period move us primarily through their aesthetic idiosyncrasy, and before we diagnose them as Faustian or Magian, we sense them as sublime, beautiful, graceful, tragic. The reason is simply that each race possesses grace, sublimity or beauty inherently, and will therefore express any tendency—as that towards "Faustian" anxiety or magic—through these categories in art: while it may also manifest them independently of art, in philosophy or alchemy, say. In the philosophy of art history, then, the subjective conditions necessary to creation are again auxiliary concepts, subordinated to the aesthetic categories.

However, a clearly aesthetic confrontation of the problem by Spengler or Worringer was not possible because their school, considering art an independent discipline nurtured now by the Greeks, now by other peoples, as it was periodically transferred to biological centres, did not believe its evolution to be continuous. For them there is no return, no rhythmical fluctuation between two poles. These poles of thesis and antithesis are, to the form-dominated school of Wölfflin, the supreme categories of "classical" and "anticlassical", whereas to the school concerned with the content of art works, the supreme categories are "idealism" and "naturalism". Yet idealism and naturalism are categories which again are more applicable to painting and sculpture than to architecture. That is why, perhaps, a number of representatives of this school—as, for instance, Cohn-Wiener—ended by using such terms as "cubic-organic" or "tectonic-atectonic". Furthermore, the view of rhythmic polarity in art-history was complemented by admitting its continuous evolution.

Broadly speaking, the negation of the rhythmic sequence of thesis and antithesis is inadmissible. First of all, from the logical point of view, no thesis is intelligible without its antithesis. Then, again, the rhythmic cyclical process, far from debarring the emergence of new forms, promotes originality, and this tendency to originality, in turn, makes the cyclical process necessary; for it provides originality with the stable foundations of categories

inherent in man's artistic nature—categories eternal, since they are always recognised and always move us.

The problem of space in art has been advanced in support of the theory of an independently progressing artistic will. It has been affirmed that while the ancients saw space as a cubic and material dimension, in modern times it was seen as infinite and formless. But this viewpoint becomes one-sided if we grant that in the aesthetic feeling of space (to which particular attention was drawn in a preceding chapter) infinite and finite necessarily co-exist, with the emphasis recurring on the finite, as the beautiful succeeds the sublime, and *vice versa*. The geometrical urban groups of the Baroque, where flight towards infinity is stressed, existed previously in the Hippodamean designs, just as the painterly quality and the tendency to suggest the infinite pre-existed in the Baroque of the classical period; the fact that these compositions have a heavy, materialistic quality about them, so that space also appears to co-operate although itself a mass, is due to the fact that, despite their spiritual undertone, the sublime-aspiring sentiment could not prevail in the classical period.

The variety of views briefly touched on here would seem to suggest that, necessary as the choice of a certain premise may be on which to build up a system, we yet cannot preclude that all of them may contain some truth, though none of them may contain all the truth. This resides only in the universal history of style; and it is on such a history that all theories are trying to shed light.

In any case, an aesthetic approach to the history of art seems to point to the direct relation between the philosophy of art-history and aesthetics. Four questions must then be considered, if we are to arrive at the basic concepts of such an approach:

- (a) What does art express periodically?
- (b) How does it express it?
- (c) Who expresses it?
- (d) Why is art thus expressed?

This last question will be the subject of the next chapter.

(a) *What does art express periodically?*

Two main, inwardly opposed and therefore alternating, categories—the beautiful and the sublime—define the main evolution of European art. Each of these aesthetic categories characterises the artistic feeling corresponding to the world-theory of the period, and succeeds the other, as theocracy and anthropocracy alternately

prevail in the civilised world. For God and Man are the ultimate problems, or rather the fundamental symbolic forms of the eschatological problems, which give rise to all others in history. With theocracy the sense of the sublime, and with anthropocracy the sense of beauty, prevail in turn.

(b) How does art express itself periodically?

Each of the two aesthetic categories—the beautiful and the sublime—in order to express itself, accentuates in its own right one or other member in the three pairs of rules considered indispensable in any work of art. Those rules emerge objectively as concepts of “normative” aesthetics, and are:

form-content;
variety-unity;
static harmony-rhythmic dynamism.

(c) Who expresses the art of various periods?

The contemplation of the beautiful and the experience of the sublime imply a different attitude on the part of the artist to the world and his work. Three subjective concepts, three conditions depending on the artist, therefore arise:

Objective approach-subjective experience;
Plastic-pictorial feeling;
Tectonic composition-expression.

The first members in each pair of concepts correspond to the category of the beautiful, the second to that of the sublime. When the beautiful dominates works of art, attention is turned mainly to form, the members are varied and differentiated, and a static harmony prevails. This occurs because at such times man sees objectively, feels plastically and attends to the tectonic composition of the work. But when the sublime dominates attention is turned mainly to content, the members are subordinated to a unit in a monarchical way, and rhythmic dynamism prevails. This occurs because at such times man sees subjectively, feels pictorially and attends to expression. The study of Byzantine art in comparison with classical should, I think, sufficiently convince us of the truth of this.

This periodical alternation between the sublime and the beautiful is expressed outwardly each time in a different way—owing to the difference, first, of technical means; secondly, of environment; and thirdly, of the artist's psychological make-up. Artists

vary not only individually but also nationally, seeing objectively or subjectively, plastically or pictorially, as the case may be. On the whole, the people of the South, in their contemplation of the meaning and spectacle of the world, seem to tend to the beautiful; the people of the North, to the sublime, even when handling an opposite category. This partly explains the inter-crossing of categories, so that we find, for example, the beautiful influencing sublime Byzantine art, thanks to the Greek artists. Partly, also, it explains why it was possible for two different periods, dominated by the same aesthetic category, to employ two different techniques in expression. For instance, the sublime in Eastern and Western Christian art employ a flat-relief and a full-relief sculpture respectively. Morphologically, of course, both sculptures share a common feature—the pictorial element; yet high relief, with its clearly defined third dimension, seems somewhat remote from the pictorial, even while it strives to express the sublime. In the nature of things, then, sculpture could best express the sublime by achieving extension through mass (as in the case of the Zeus of Phidias, or of works of Egyptian art), and not by aiming at passionate emphasis (as in the Baroque) or expressionistic deformity (as in Gothic sculpture). We see clearly here that none of Wölfflin's concepts uniformly applies to both Gothic and Byzantine art, whereas an aesthetic category does—the same basic sense of the sublime characterises them both. Not only are the remaining basic rules of aesthetics that support the work of art regulated by this supreme category, but also through it the oppositions of the categories, when they co-exist in a work of art, are solved, because we know which one strives to dominate and must in the end do so.

Only in the light of such categories does the artistic will become a contributive instead of the undefined factor it must otherwise remain, frequently in conflict with a period's world-theory, leaving art to write its own history independently of the course of culture—a logical impossibility—or relating it to its respective eras merely intellectually. For these categories alone in art reflect the artistic feeling of an age—and it is this feeling which—even before the intellect has conceived the contemporary idiosyncrasies and current demands—shapes both the philosophy and art of an age. Has the artist today, for instance, yet clarified in his mind what the world-theory of his times is, and what forms his times have prescribed for his art? He departs from the mere feeling—those undefined aspirations—diffused in the society in which he lives, and creates something new, which will be explained only later, as it is

classified by historians. And before this feeling of the age can mould his art, it must find the aesthetic category that shall supply both the emotional colour and the intellectual light, to rouse and direct the otherwise blind artistic will. Only then does the artistic will become a real will, a sentient will to experience and express the needs of the period—necessarily, in accordance with the available technical means, the artist's psychological make-up, and the innate tendency of the race whence it has sprung.

Behind this feeling of an age, a rational faculty which overcomes boundaries of time, sometimes abolishing the past, sometimes foreshadowing the future, is of course at work. But this faculty could not alone create works of art, or even conceive great theories, without the profound feeling of faith in a new vision of life to direct it.

An aesthetic approach to the history of art, as defined in this work, does not entail, then, as Wölfflin contends, a history of vision, and therefore the recognition merely of categories of perception (*Anschauung*) or of form, but acquaintance with the history of the artistic feeling learnt from the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime, between which this artistic feeling alternately fluctuates.

There are other aesthetic categories also—the tragic, the comic, the graceful, the ugly—which may characterise certain works of art of any period: the graceful, indeed, throughout whole periods. These will be dealt with in due course, after explaining why art develops between aesthetic categories, through which we must approach it.

Of course, such an aesthetic approach to art must necessarily constitute a "history of art that names no artists"—the charge unjustly made against Wölfflin's system;¹ unjustly, indeed, since any philosophical approach to the history of art must inevitably rise above the particular to the general, in an effort to clarify the history proper which describes the specific works, and in an effort to explain such history correctly by submitting it to the more general laws of aesthetics and of the philosophy of art's evolution. Without a direct link between aesthetics and the history of art and of civilisation, there can be no integrated and unified philosophical system of approach to the development of art through the ages. The aesthetic approach to the history of art provides this link in the aesthetic categories.

¹ Wölfflin, *Gedanken zur Kunstgeschichte*, p. 15.

CHAPTER IX

The Periodical Alternations of the Beautiful and the Sublime in Art

The Three Questions

The manifest purpose of the whole first and second part of the present study was to demonstrate that Byzantine art is dominated by the aesthetic category of the sublime, in contrast to classical art which is dominated by the category of the beautiful. Simultaneously, however, in the course of the analysis the problem of the fundamental concepts of the history of art has been placed on a new basis; for we have seen in both Byzantine and classical art certain opposed characteristics becoming reconciled in the prevailing aesthetic category. Auxiliary concepts indispensable to the philosophical approach to the history of art have thus emerged inductively.

If we may assume from what has been said in the preceding chapter that the philosophical approach to the history of art, in the light of aesthetic categories, becomes an aesthetic approach, in which the auxiliary concepts derive from the aesthetic categories and are objective and subjective, we may now follow the reverse process, the deductive method, and indicate:

- (a) Why two aesthetic categories—the beautiful and the sublime—dominate alternately throughout the history of art.
- (b) Why the couples of auxiliary concepts each time transfer their weight on the member which corresponds to the beautiful or to the sublime, as the case may be.
- (c) Why the art of each period evolves from birth to maturity and decadence showing the characteristics of extension, intensity and emphasis respectively.

The answer to these questions is surely to be given here from the point of view of a world-theory. The role of art in those basic problems of Universe, of God and of man which regulate man's

life is no more than to express with sensible symbols his ideas on, and experience of, those problems. Inevitably, then, art each time must follow the growth and decline of the various human conceptions of the scheme of things.

Theocracy and Anthropocracy

Throughout history, man is forever confronting the problem of the divine. Moulding his own gods, he yet accepts that the gods have created man, in his effort, if not to explain the mystery of life, at least to regulate its manifestations in society, and in an effort, especially, to envisage the problem of life and death.

Between man and divinity stands nature, the Universe, which provided him with his first images for contemplation—the sun, the stars, wild beasts or trees—and with the first stimuli of great emotions, like fear, courage, turmoil or calm. The images and the impressions of the external world are, in the beginning, part and parcel of a religious experience. Man, the microcosm, is not only opposed to the macrocosm, but is also related to it through the divine.

Moreover, these impressions are not devoid of an aesthetic character, and nature's images and rhythms, therefore, as they nourish religious imagination, also provide the craftsman with his models and inspire the artist to express himself through them.

By means of his art and craft (and the two are not at first to be distinguished) primitive man not merely imitates and symbolises but also conquers the elements, because *homo faber* constructs and engineers. He not only captures the spirit of the wild animal through his art in the pictures he draws in his caves, but he also erects roofed shelters, keeps water in receptacles, discovers the wheel. The microcosm thus able by its art and craft, by its spiritual and technical conquests, to stand up to the macrocosm, we have in the relations of God and man alternating periods of theocracy and anthropocracy, with now the divine, now man predominating; with man now standing full of fear and awe before the divine, now full of confidence in his rational faculties, himself the "measure of all things".

Naturally, in each of these phases it is a diametrically opposed incentive which moves man to works of art. When, as in the Oriental religions, the gods prevail, man is possessed by fear of the sublime; when, as in ancient Greece, man predominates, he is conscious of the serene harmony of the beautiful.

Natural environment, of course, also plays its part in these

differing attitudes to the Universe, and the resultant aesthetic conceptions. In the South, though of course life is not without its cares, yet the climate is mild, nature is gentle, and man's victory over the elements easier; the gods are therefore not terrifying and monstrous demons, but resemble men, sharing their passions and virtues. Indeed, the southern seas and landscape themselves rouse in one an Olympian sense of the beautiful rather than an awed sense of the sublime. In the North, on the contrary, where the climate is bleak and fierce, nature is implacable; the gods are therefore tragic, eerie ghosts. The dark forests and the huge mountains, whose summits are lost in the clouds, awaken above all a sense of the sublime. We find it fully roused again in the East, though here it springs from a tremendous silence and an infinite calm, in direct opposition to the fiercely animated nature of the North. In the Orient, it is the vast star-bejewelled skies of Mesopotamia or the limitless tracts of the Arabian deserts that rouse it forcibly. Man's very impotence before certain relentlessly recurrent natural phenomena—an inescapable rhythm about nature's ways, more marked in the Orient than elsewhere, as the periodical floods of the Nile—adds to this sense of the sublime. And we may certainly not too fancifully trace the Oriental's fatalism to the placid but invincible nature that surrounds him; the utter futility of any effort to conquer the barren, silent desert, compelling submission and resignation to the powers that be, while stimulating passive introspection. Certain it is, in any case, that the sense of the sublime in the Orient has a strong element of ecstasy, as though before a dazzling vision of light; and in the West, a strong element of awe, as though before a vision of darkness.

But whatever the prevailing attitude to life, to the problems of God and man, whether in an anthropocracy or a theocracy, the relation of God and man is never lost. Theocracy does not spell the annihilation of man, any more than anthropocracy stands for atheism. Gods and men are interdependent, for what would the sun be if the eyes of men did not see it, and what would gods be if they were not there to govern the fates of men? A suggestion of the sublime, therefore, there always is in the art of the beautiful (as, for instance, in classical art), as a suggestion of the beautiful is never absent from the art of the sublime (as, for instance, from Christian art). Indeed, we find it to be so in nature also, and frequently see, as in the South, a sublime spectacle in nature's beauty, or see in the sublime nature of the North a spectacle of beauty. Our innate sense of the beautiful and the sublime are both aes-

thetic categories—that is, alternations of the aesthetic experience. The mutation from one category to the other is therefore possible even where natural conditions and man's primary tendencies would seem not absolutely favourable to it. It is inevitable, because life means movement and movement entails alternation. But random alternation would mean blind movement. If there is reason in men, and a tendency towards evolution, and if the Universe is governed by Mind, movement must occur between antitheses: only thus will alternation bring evolution, if not progress. And, indeed, in an ever alternating anthropocracy and theocracy throughout history, we find each phase as it recurs revived by a new conception that has evolved from the preceding rival thesis.

As in dialogue there is a point and counterpoint (*logos* and *antilogos*), so too in the history of life and art one period poses and the other opposes: the one asserts the beautiful, which in the next is countered by the sublime. None of the counterpoints, however, is a total negation of the previous point, but a building on it that brings a new conception, and so both forms a synthesis of the previous objections and proceeds to a dialectical progress in the discussion. When we speak, then, in history of a return from theocracy to anthropocracy, the word is not intended to imply the repetition of a past period, but an evolutionary cyclical movement—a progressive process from point to counterpoint. Notwithstanding this progress, all the points possess a certain positive, and all the counterpoints a certain negative, character. Thus, in history, although the religions of the Orient and Christianity are far remote, yet both thrive in theocracies. Correspondingly, the ancient Greek period and the Renaissance are both anthropocracies (although the latter, in raising the individual to a place of high eminence, was following a tradition instilled by Christianity). Similarly, in art the turn to the beautiful is not a return to classical Greek art, that is, to "beautiful art" exactly as it was understood by the Greeks; nor is the turn to the sublime in Christian art a return to the Egyptian or Babylonian manner. If in Oriental art fear and terror were the main elements of its sublimity, in Christian art those elements were transformed into ecstasy and beatific joy, which had their source in the more spiritual Christian conception of a one and only God. These differences notwithstanding, both ancient Greek and Renaissance art are subsumed under the aesthetic category of the beautiful, and Oriental and Christian art under the category of the sublime. In history there is no return, but an evolutionary cyclical movement, a progressive fluctuation.

The question arises here, does progressive cyclical movement mean that the art of each preceding period is inferior to that of the following one? In that case the art-era that preceded all others would not be worthy even of the name. If we examine art in the light of a teleological philosophy such as Hegel's, we must then admit that each preceding stage is inferior in content and ideals. If we grant that each period has its own specific character, and by virtue of this something new and original to display, something exclusively its own, then its originality, given consummate artistic expression, will make of it an art epoch commensurate with the best. If this is not always the case—whether through a dearth of artistic talent, or through lack of originality in an era—it in no way proves either progress or decline in the evolution of art. The fact that it occurs at all, so that periodically we find artistic manifestations of equal merit, convinces us that art is a means to accomplishment, aesthetic vision a reality, and both are unchangeable in their essence. So long as man is moved aesthetically by events and ideas, whatever these may be, the art which expresses them will move him, whatever its character.

Until this point, the change from theocracy to anthropocracy has been attributed to man's imaginative and inventive abilities and conquests, which encourage him to confront the divine, confident in his own rational faculties; or explained on philosophical grounds—namely, by the synthesis of antitheses in a dialectical process of the mind. The first ascription is external and does not explain why, for example, with the rapid development of scientific knowledge from the Renaissance onward, a wave of theocracy again swept over mankind; or why, in the North, the sublime tendency persists as an inherent racial characteristic—unless, indeed, in the latter instance we seek the explanation in the natural environment. Yet this explanation, although permanent, would be as external as the first. The second—the philosophical justification—is too abstract. There is, however, a middle course which lies between the other two—man's psychology, which evidently reflects the need for change and shifts from anthropocracy to theocracy, even though not compelled by external reasons. This analysis may help us to widen the meaning of the terms anthropocracy and theocracy. For one might well ask what sort of an anthropocracy was that of the Renaissance, when Christianity still prevailed and the Popes were the greatest patrons? Or what sort of gods are our present gods, now that Christian faith has declined?

The concepts of God and man symbolically concentrate the in-

centives of all eschatological problems. The concept of God in modern times is still impersonal, abstract and, unfortunately, weak. We believe in vain that the two-faced demons which science has revealed to us—for example, electricity, atomic energy—may prove a tonic and awaken in us the power of God. To the realist of the new technical civilisation these demons cannot supersede the angels and heavenly spirits of Christianity, since they lack moral content and a comparative relation to truth. Although they are such inconceivable, tremendous, incalculable forces, annihilating man, they do not impel him to become worthy of them, nor to seek in them values for his works, and are, hence, powerless to lead him if not to contemplation of the divine, at least to self-elevation. It was for the same reason that in the Renaissance—itsself a period of discoveries and scientific rationalisation—man stood for a micro-theos, misunderstanding the significance which Christianity had bestowed on the individual. Thus, the prince, the politician and the cultured nobleman, like the Medici and the Sforza, or the artist and versatile scientist, like Leonardo da Vinci, or the possessor of all artistic capabilities, like Michelangelo, came to represent the ideal type of man. Those types were revered at the time, and to this day we still regard them as demi-gods, and as heroes of the modern anthropocracy, which continued until the end of the nineteenth century and degenerated when over-estimation of individual genius set in, focusing attention on numerous insignificant personalities. It is only in our day that the sense of collectivity is beginning once more to rob the individual of the arrogant attitude of mind resulting from an empty and inflated concept of personality. This relation and opposition between individuality and collectivity, indeed, underlies the fundamental psychological motives which are responsible for the alternation of theocracy and anthropocracy.

In a theocracy man's individuality is almost effaced because gods are, in principle, monarchical by nature. They belittle man, herding him with his kind. Man, for his part, does not passively resign himself to this role, because although by nature gregarious and revering the divine, it is also in his nature to be individualistic—to possess an ego—and create gods. Since, however, he recognises these gods as monarchs, he finds a way of demeaning them by humanising them. He brings them down, very gradually, almost to his own level, and vests them with human virtues, but also with human passions. In this manner he changes them from monarchs to democratic beings, as in the case of the gods of Olympus. We

have seen this phase clearly in the third period of Byzantine art. Inevitably, then, humanism, the turn towards man, follows and man becomes through his rationalism a small god, an earthly prince of the Universe and of the heavens, as during the Renaissance. We thus fall into an anthropocracy which frees man, differentiates him from the mass, gives him individuality and value as a personality. An anthropocracy, in principle, is democratic by nature, but in its decadence it becomes tyrannical. And the masses living under it, who have lost their ego, in order to tolerate their tyrants identify them with the divine, as happened in the case of the Roman Emperors, the princes of the Renaissance or the Popes. The worship of living idols, however, is in the nature of things short-lived, and, therefore, finally turns from the secular to the heavenly ruler, as it did during the period of the Counter-Reformation (Baroque). Each transitional period, then, from theocracy to anthropocracy humanises the gods; and each transitional period from anthropocracy to theocracy deifies men and so psychologically prepares the turn towards its antithesis.

Corresponding changes must occur in the artistic feeling of each period. The democratic, egocentrically differentiated man of the anthropocracy judges objectively, systematises his knowledge rationally and thus establishes scientific theories on objective reality. At such times he turns outwards. He becomes serene, the measure of all things, and the contemplator of a harmony, static in nature. As a result, he views the world anthropomorphically, endowing everything with human form and significance, as occurred in classical Greek and Renaissance art. In a theocracy, on the contrary, man is lost in the group, becomes anonymous, does not judge objectively but mainly subjectively; he receives, that is, impressions passively and concentrates on his emotional reactions rather than on the objective contemplation of reality. Therefore, he does not arrive at scientific conclusions through rationalism, but usually at dogmatic conceptions through the irrational element. He thus tends to become, from the "measure of all things", a participant in the divine, as the Christian period testifies. This turn inwards renders him, if not a mystic, at least a contemplator of the transcendental. As a result, his art cannot imitate the forms of the external world for their own sake, but employs them only as symbols of the sovereign powers, towards which he tries to ascend through asceticism and mental and spiritual elevation.

The alternation of theocracy and anthropocracy, with its corresponding reversion to the aesthetic concepts of the sublime and

the beautiful, is to be clearly traced in the succession of Oriental by ancient Greek art, and of Christian by Renaissance art. Each time a period of humanisation of the gods, or of deification of men, mediates, which in art may be designated as Baroque, because emphasis and externality and redundancy always characterise it. Of course, able as we are to observe modern times at comparatively close quarters, we can see the fluctuations occurring after the Baroque—slight as these may be—between the beautiful and the sublime (to wit, Italian Renaissance to Baroque, neo-classicist to neo-romanticist), until we come to the twentieth century. But examined from a distance these wave-like movements are seen to be swayed by formalism, to be, that is, wavelets which follow and repeat on the surface the rhythm of a great wave and finally disappear. It is only when we come to the twentieth century that—after the Italian Renaissance and the Baroque, with their influence in the various countries of Europe—we begin to divine a new large wave of art, of a revolutionary art which gives every promise of being sublime in character. What gods will the powers of this new theocracy of ours model? Science can never take the place of religion, but if we bear in mind that the modern science of nature is not the statically rationalising, empirical science established by the Renaissance, but one in which the dynamic concept of reality and the supra-rational element play a primary role, one that makes us increasingly aware of the mystery beyond physical reality, we may reasonably anticipate that it will ultimately help man towards a new contemplative mysticism.

Let us, however, examine now how the objective and subjective auxiliary concepts in the history of art are influenced, so that in each pair of concepts the stress falls successively on the member which corresponds to the beautiful or to the sublime, according to the category predominating in the period.

The Objective Auxiliary Concepts of the History of Art

The objective auxiliary concepts of the history of art are, as we know, three: form-content, variety-unity, harmony-rhythmic dynamism. To take them in order:

(a) *Form-content.* In each work of art, form and content are moulded together, inasmuch as the content includes, besides the subject matter, the artist's original conception of it and the feeling with which it is represented in the specific work. A discrimination, therefore, between form and content destroys the work of art as a

whole. Form and content do, however, differ in status, if not in nature. For before the content takes form, it is possessed by an irresistible tendency to reveal itself as a thing concrete, and becomes serene only when it has found the suitable form which unifies, fulfils and makes it manifest. Whereas form, as the fulfilled expression and concrete definition of content, is of a static disposition. Where the form is inferior, we may be certain that the artist had little to convey—that is, that content is either entirely lacking or is confused and does not therefore lend itself to felicitous expression. When form and content, however, are fully in harmony, the work of art achieves balance and movement which make it vibrate as though alive before our eye, despite the fact that in reality it is a dead object.

It is natural, then, that in works of sublime scope, dynamism of content prevails over the static nature of form, which therefore becomes an impulsive recording of a spiritual state—a “psychogram”, so to speak, rather than a “calligram”, a thing of perfect line. Form here is not self-sufficient and satisfies us aesthetically only from the moment we are moved by the content, in guiding us towards which it will not hesitate to employ even ugliness. On the other hand, in works aspiring to beauty the static character of form dominates the content; it is, therefore, fine in line and so harmonious that of itself it arrests our eye in its contemplation. The artist of the beautiful appears to carve the marble inwards from without, while the artist of the sublime as it were moulds the clay, like the vase-maker; he works, that is, outwards from within. This characteristic difference is manifest in the contrast between the Greek outward-turning temple and the Byzantine “inward-turning” Christian church. In ancient Greek sculpture likewise it is the form which dominates, whereas in Byzantine painting it is mainly the content. On the funereal *stelae* of the ancient Greeks, the dead and the living and, in general, gods and men fraternise in a world where everything lives in harmony governed by *Anaghe*. In Christian art, conversely, the distance between man and God is immeasurable, and if the divine spark is latent in us, its revelation presupposes asceticism, piety, negation of the body, mysticism and uplift. Painting for this reason depicts dematerialised bodies, that is to say, unnatural figures, forms not satisfactory in themselves unless we perceive all they stand for and share the feeling and significance they contain.

The term “form-content”, of course, could be substituted by the term “external-internal”; but the latter does not belong to

"normative" aesthetics, so that in dealing with works of art we must adhere to the former. Nevertheless, the more general term "external-internal", which illustrates the inherent quality of human nature, explains why the difference between content and form favours formalism, which induces man to imitate form from without, and when he cannot tolerate this superficiality, to turn again to content, or *vice versa*. The problem will be studied at greater length at the end of this chapter, but in the meantime these very transitions of man from form to content or the reverse explain sufficiently the transitions from one member in the pair of rules to its contrary member, even were they not dictated by the alternating aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful. These, however, as supreme categories, explain why we can tolerate the occasional digressions of auxiliary concepts and the spirit in which we must look upon contrasts in the formation of a work: how a sublime Byzantine work, for example, may possess exquisite beauty, which at first sight makes it appear as though it attached more importance to its form than its content.

(b) *Variety-unity*. Each artistic composition achieves unity within variety. To this end, two laws come into play—those of co-ordination and of subordination. The law of co-ordination may predominate in a composition, in which case the members of the work clearly retain their independence and relative completeness; or, again, the law of subordination may prevail, in which case the members are weak and submit to a sovereign unit which reigns monarchically over the whole composition. In consequence, we have an artistic composition in which variety is displayed in the first and unity emphasised in the second case. In neither case, however, is the secondary law necessarily overridden in the composition. This distinction has been ascertained in Byzantine as compared with classical works of art. When the sublime dominates, its inner dynamism proclaims a dominant unit, such as the dome in Byzantine churches, or the tower in Gothic cathedrals; and this unit subjugates all the other members which are aligned and co-ordinated beneath it, as are the lesser divinities under the Kingdom of God in painting. When the beautiful predominates, however, its inner harmony and static serenity of form allow the co-ordination of the members in a democratic spirit. It is for this reason that any part of a Greek temple, even separated from its building, will still retain its completeness and by itself continue to define the whole, whereas every part of the Byzantine church merely characterises the whole.

In the previous analysis, instead of the term variety-unity, we have frequently referred to the terms "members" and "whole". It comes to the same, since in logic also the members are inconceivable without the whole; how much less so, then, in art, where, since a composition is no mere conglomeration of parts, lack of unity in variety would spell its radical failure.

In space, which in the nature of things entails alignment (of things beside one another), differentiation of parts and whole is more easily achieved than in time, which entails succession (of things after one another). Where everything is thus in process of becoming, differentiation is difficult and vague.

The objective contemplator, then, the product of anthropocracy, treated the arts of time as he did those of space—to wit, sculpture and architecture—statically. The subjective contemplator, on the other hand, did the reverse, treating the arts of space like those of time—lyrical poetry, musical hymnody—dynamically. The former represented cosmos in being, the latter the cosmos in process of becoming.

(c) *Harmony-rhythmic dynamism*. Every great work of art has, finally, rhythm and harmony. And whereas rhythm is dynamic by nature, harmony is static. Rhythmic order, to begin with, aligns in space identical elements beside one another, and, in time, allows them to succeed one another. In essence, rhythm is a musical flow which differentiates the elements of composition, as it moves them towards repetition, change and continuity. Harmony, in contrast, orders and composes varied elements simultaneously in such a way as to achieve the greatest variety in complete unity. Consequently, in a point in space and in an instant in time, it integrates the varied and contrasting elements into a unified whole. Rhythm moves a melody, harmony binds polyphony together.

Rhythmic dynamism, therefore, is the primary quality of the content, and harmony the last demand of the form of any work; and if rhythmic dynamism creates "open" forms which reverberate *ad infinitum*, harmony creates "closed" forms which confine these endless vibrations within themselves. We have seen how in Byzantine art the dynamism of the sublime causes the content to dominate, and that the rhythmical dynamism of the content moves the masses, dematerialises matter, increases space to the infinite, and creates pictorial open forms; while in the classical art of the beautiful, on the contrary, static serenity is based upon the proportional character of the form, the finiteness of space, and upon varied elements which harmonise themselves in unity. In one word,

harmony suggests the world's being, and rhythmic dynamism its becoming.

The Subjective Auxiliary Concepts of the History of Art

In the history of art the subjective auxiliary concepts are again three: objective approach—subjective experience; plastic—pictorial feeling; and tectonic composition—expression.

(a) *Objective approach—subjective experience.* In an anthropocracy man gives free play to his judgement, regains his ego, is differentiated as an individual; he contemplates the world objectively and, indeed, views it anthropomorphically. He is therefore able to conceive ideas; to idealise reality, and thus rise above the realism into which he might otherwise fall. This idealism defines the character of the classical style.

In a theocracy, on the contrary, the reigning monarchical conception robs man of his individuality, subjects him to the aggregate, and awakens his non-ego. The distance between God and man becomes infinite and the transcendental is revealed and attained only through the mystical experience which suddenly annihilates distance. As a result, theoretical objective contemplation is superseded by feeling, by the subjective experience of the inconceivable. That is why the artist in a theocracy, with his vision soaring in transcendental spheres, is yet, in reaction to the measureless sublimity of his own visions, extremely realistic in expression. The two extremes meet in his work, producing characteristic, in contrast to abstract, beauty—as in Byzantine compared with ancient Greek art, for instance.

The objective contemplator, finally, takes the object as his point of departure in painting; he aligns things on his canvas as they present themselves and as though he played no part in their arrangement. The subjective observer, on the other hand, takes his inner vision as his point of departure and in painting registers a spectacle narratively, as he sees it unfolding.

(b) *Plastic—pictorial feeling.* In Riegl's view, the tactile extends along the surface, and the visual gains in depth. It is for this reason that Wölfflin regards the boundaries of the tactile as linear, and those of the visual as painterly. I have reversed the terms because I believe that touch is conscious mainly of volume, and vision of surface. The sense of touch is primarily required by sculpture, which moulds; the sense of vision by painting, which delineates. Painting in tactile form is an advanced product of a general plastic tendency, while sculpture with visual forms shows

a general painterly tendency. This is so because the sense of the tactile and the visual co-exist, the one complementing the other. Without the experience of touch we would not perceive the depth of things, and without sight we would not feel the unity of plastic masses in the world, nor their harmony, since vision projects them upon a single surface as a panorama. It follows that the transition in art from the tactile to the visual tendency is not merely automatic, as Wölfflin attempted to prove, but the result of this or that dominant artistic experience—to my mind, the result of the periodical predominance of the cult of the beautiful or the sublime. Indeed, neither of these aesthetic categories addresses itself directly to the sense of touch or of vision, but primarily to the plastic or pictorial feeling; these, as artistic concepts, are superior to the specific impressions of the separate senses which they are supposed to employ in order to express themselves. The plastic sense does not use only the tactile in expressing itself, nor the pictorial sense only the visual—although sculpture has the tendency to touch the concrete, and painting to look from afar in order to grasp unity in variety.

The beautiful is by nature plastic because the primary tendency of the objective contemplator is to differentiate the objects and to separate them as plastic volumes he can see, as palpable things he can touch. In the classical period sculpture dominates, and architecture is also sculptural in character. The sublime, on the contrary, is by nature pictorial, because the primary tendency of the person going through a subjective experience is to see all objects subordinated to a unity, instead of differentiated; to see them as though unfolding in time. From the particular he registers only its characteristic expression. In consequence, he derives from a scene impressions that are almost fugitive, drawn on the surface. We should, however, distinguish between the monumental pictorialism produced by the sublime-aspiring work, with great smooth surfaces, monotonous lines, simple volumes; and the playful pictorialism created with variegated and decorated surfaces, the broken lines and the diminutive volumes, which the graceful work affects. This distinction is necessary because both the sublime and the graceful are possessed by dynamism, in each case, however, with a contrary tendency and of a different degree (as will be analysed in Chapter X). Thus, both Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Kapnikarea in Athens have the quality of pictorialness. Plasticity, then, cannot be made dependent on the linearity of the contours, nor pictorialness on the painterly quality of these

contours; these are clearly superficial and secondary attributes and are not always realised; the Byzantine mosaics, for instance, have representations with linear contours, that is, silhouettes, despite their pictorial character. Plasticity and pictorialness express more fundamental feelings than do the more superficial linear and painterly or tactile and visual features.

(c) *Tectonic composition-expression*. The result of objective contemplation and of the plastic feeling is the imitation of the tectonic quality of the forms of nature; the craftsman in the artist then constructs the work like an architect, even when it is a painting; he reproduces, not the characteristics of the individual object, but subtracting its individual peculiarities, he reverts to the type, and finally to the idea, of object. On the contrary, the result of the subjective experience and of the pictorial feeling is the imitation by the artist of the expression of nature's forms and his reproduction (despite the inevitable subtractions) even of the special characteristic of each form. He does not construct like an architect but, rather, draws his impressions like a painter, endeavouring to express his experience. That is why any sublimely-minded art is primarily expressive.

Birth, Maturity and Decadence

The third and last question remains to be answered: Why does the art of each period evolve from birth to maturity and decadence, accompanied by the characteristics of extension, intensity and emphasis respectively?

We have seen it do so morphologically in Byzantine art. In order to prove this deductively, we must have recourse to style as a concept.

Every concept springs from a feeling, or contains one as a primeval deeper motive. This feeling is constantly demanding to take form in its quest of balance and self-revelation. Every style, therefore, also springs from a feeling which, new and original, seeks to take shape; that is, to manifest and consolidate itself. Its very consolidation completes it, making it intelligible and open to appreciation. That is the reason why the truest and the most faithful expression of each style, both as regards content and form, is achieved in its maturity, when feeling and meaning, content and form, are harmonised. From the moment, however, the feeling is rationalised into a concept, and style finds its form, the artist begins to be governed by formalism. The static nature of the form influences him and instead of regarding form as the dynamic

expression of an aspiration, he considers it as an immutable rule. He begins then to imitate it, because he sees it as an acquisition. And, to the degree to which the feeling is still vital, he imitates the form successfully, because he imitates from within and completes it. Again, to the degree to which the feeling is vitiated, the form loses power, because the artist then imitates it from without. The recapture of the elemental feeling is no longer possible; return to it is excluded and only one turn remains open to the artist in its pursuit—passionate yearning for the lost original feeling. This passionate yearning, remote as it is from the original feeling, yet shows recognition of its value.



149 Head, Pergamon Sculptures

Thus, what was in the beginning the objective, spontaneous expression of a period's impersonal aspiration, declines into subjective perception—necessarily, since emotion in any form is a purely subjective reaction. At such times, the unimpassioned adhere to the rules and letter of the "classical" achievements of the period's acme. They are the so-called "academic" and "literal" artists, belated partisans of evolution. For emotionalism itself is part of an evolution, even though it leads to decadence: it brings something new, the humanisation of the sublime idea, or the realistic rendering

of the beautiful form. Thus, in the Greek Baroque, we see realism overflowing, sweeping aside ideal beauty (Fig. 149); and in Byzantine Baroque, idealism rising up to humanise the transcendental and to eliminate the realism of characteristic beauty. To sum up, in the Baroque period the beautiful tends towards the sublime, and the sublime towards the beautiful, each employing to this end external devices and means, which are in any case contrary to the original spirit of either style, since they have their source in passionate emotion. And passionate emotion evinces itself violently.

These trends coincide with the transitions from theocracy to anthropocracy and *vice versa*.

Thus, the concepts "classical" and "baroque" may serve to define the maturity and the decadence of all styles. Classical implies the harmonisation of content with form, in accordance with a universal feeling. Baroque implies their fission, resulting from subjective emotionalism, which through external means tends to turn towards antithesis. We may define a style's period of birth as "archaic" or "early", because the first manifestations of each style are in reality slightly primitive and rough in form, as is archaic Greek art, while simultaneously they vibrate with an elemental warm feeling which has not yet quite found its balance in the form which best suits it.

The archaic period, moved by a spontaneous inner feeling, expresses itself in extension; while the period of the Baroque, charged with external passion, expresses itself in emphasis. The first period shows a disposition, the latter an intention. Therefore the means employed by the former are more esoteric and controlled, whereas the means employed by the latter more external, consisting of uncontrolled movements and superfluous devices. Balance of the internal and external, and intensity towards perfection are found only in the classical period.

If Byzantine art, studied in the light of its sublime scope, is sufficient to persuade us of the truth of all this, a short review of classical Greek or of Italian Renaissance art will show empirically what we have deduced theoretically above—namely, that the same thing occurred during the periods moved by the spirit of beauty. Observe Greek art. It is the offspring of the age of the beautiful. However, during the archaic period a sublime disposition is felt in it, as may be testified to by the archaic Doric temples of Magna Grecia or of Corinth, the Kouroi and the Korae even, despite the fact that in the latter grace also comes into play. In the classical period the beautiful dominates absolutely: form tends towards perfection in the Parthenon, until it is superseded by the Baroque-like quality of the sculptures of Pergamon, by the curves of the circular temple at Baalbek, and so forth. Here, too, we fall from extension to intensity and finally into an emphasis not devoid of a certain sublimity, yet passionately expressed, and showing an extrovert tendency, exactly like the Baroque of the Italian Renaissance. Regarding their curiously close analogy, I shall allow pictures to speak for themselves (Figs. 149 and 150). In Byzantine art, ruled by the sublime, the early Christian style still retains traces of beauty-mindedness; but in the Justinian period, the style is magnified and verges on the colossal. In its classical period,

Byzantine art becomes more measured and acquires the intensity and the movement peculiar to the graceful. Finally, in its decadence, emphasis acts negatively and beauty-aspiring expression is created, just as a sublime-aspiring passion marks the decadence of classical art. Each transitional art, then, bears the stamp of things to come, while it preserves something of the things passing away. Thus, early Christian art, in comparison with Byzantine art, is morphologically still beauty-minded while in comparison with classical it seems in its wholly sublime aspirations devoid of beauty.



150 *A Sketch by Michelangelo*

Of course a more detailed study of its evolution would reveal, after the Baroque, a Rococo and an Empire style, corresponding to the Rococo and Empire styles proper in Europe later. This parallel between the Hellenistic period and the art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been ascertained by Von Salis¹ and accepted by many other authors. Von Salis distinguishes five periods in the evolution of all styles, and says: "This spiral has something of a compelling logic . . . already the fact that it is repeated many times in history concurs to its necessity."

The Empire style may well be regarded as a neo-classicist re-

¹ Arnold von Salis, *Die Kunst der Griechen*, p. 292.

vival of the cult of the beautiful; the Baroque as a passionate revival of the lofty spirit of archaic art; and the Rococo, finally, with its worship of the graceful, as a slipping from the bonds with the past, and an earnest and inevitable movement forward towards the sublime aspirations of the new period. The characteristics of these intermediate periods will emerge from the following chapter, which is devoted to the study of the various aesthetic categories and their inter-relation. In it an attempt will be made to show why grace is the only category of the remaining ones, which may characterise certain periods of art (Rococo), as also the art of certain races in which it is inherent (Ionians); and finally, that it is the great mediator between the beautiful and the sublime and therefore predominates in the decadence of any style. Byzantine art shows this clearly enough. In it grace was ever mediating between the beautiful and the sublime and scintillating in its sublime-minded works, until it ultimately prevailed in the decadence, propelling art towards the Renaissance conception of the beautiful.

CHAPTER X

The Interdependence of the Aesthetic Categories

The Historical Action of the Aesthetic Categories

In the early part of this work, in an examination of the sublime and the beautiful in art, we distinguished between various aesthetic categories and observed that the practice of loosely and indiscriminately classifying all works of art as "beautiful" is fallacious. This practice, with its past and present grave fallacies in matters of art, is due partly to historical reasons, to which attention should be directed; for we may thus reach many conclusions both as regards the interdependence of the aesthetic categories and their life in time during the historical evolution of art.

The theoretical research of art problems began with the Pythagoreans. However, the observations of the pre-Socratic philosophers and of Socrates and Plato on the *calon* did not at the time constitute a system of Aesthetics. The first systematic work of this type was the *Poetica* of Aristotle, which examines tragedy mainly, in addition to other forms of literature, but ignores the remaining arts and the more general aesthetic problems which confront modern specialised Aesthetics. Aristotle does not analyse the aesthetic category of the tragic: he merely gives the definition of tragedy and then expounds indispensable rules for its composition, and hence for the composition of any "beautiful" work, since these rules spring from the classical conception of the *calon*—that is, from the aesthetic category of the beautiful, which dominated the art and life of the age. Aristotle demands that the work possess measure; be easy to memorise, and therefore not too long; with a beginning, a middle and an end; and finally, that it have order, unity, etc. A comparison of a classical Greek tragedy with one by Shakespeare, therefore, will show the former to be static, controlled by the dictates of form, and the latter to be dynamic, abandoning itself to its impulsive content. Greek tragedy is a closed form of dialectic between the chorus and the hero, who symbolises an Idea and comes in conflict with divine law; the

Shakespearean tragedy is a free composition including various elements—the graceful, the comic and others. In contrast with the idealism of classical tragedy, its tendency towards the historical narration of events, the realism with which the characters and their romantic feelings are presented, is characteristic in the Shakespearean work of the pictorial form-liberated style, which comes into its own when the sublime prevails exclusively, without reference to the beautiful.

The second systematic aesthetic study in antiquity is Longinus' *On the Sublime*, written in Greek in approximately the third century A.D.—just as the aesthetic category of the sublime began to dawn in art and life. Longinus, like Aristotle, is concerned with literature and seeks, in examples from Homer's epics, Sappho's lyrical poetry, the speeches of the orators or the tragedies, characteristic features of the sublime. In consequence, he does not distinguish the sublime as an aesthetic category, by which to characterise a whole work of art, but simply seeks in a work of art signs of sublimity naturally subordinated to its classical beauty—as it were, highlights at those points where the work seeks to surpass itself and rise to something beyond. And this something beyond is, to Longinus, in the last analysis, God. "Sublimity", he says, "raises us next to the lofty idea of God"¹—an idea not alien to the Greek mind since the ecstatic philosophy of Plotinus.² For Plotinus, despite the fact that he treats of the *calon* in the sense of the classically beautiful, yet writes about art on so lofty a note that he unconsciously invests it with a transcendental character that influenced the art of his period.

Plotinus transfers dialectics to metaphysics. According to his theory of emanation, all springs from the impersonal "One", which engenders life by illumination. The highest degree of knowledge is, according to Plotinus, ecstasy which is a participation in the One. Man, in reaching out for this experience, must look at nature with his inner vision. He thus discovers beauty, which does not depend on pleasing colour (*εὐχροία*) and right proportions (*συμμετρία*), but on the expression of an Idea, which gives the composition unity. In such a composition, the whole predominates over its parts, and should be grasped at once, as a unit (as

¹ Longinus, *On the Sublime*.

² According to Kühn, the historical precedent of the concept of the sublime made itself apparent in Poseidonius before Longinus, as well as in Philo the Alexandrian. Its source, he maintains, is to be traced to Plato, who speaks of "grades of philosophical elevation to the supreme vision" (J. K. Kühn, *Υψος*, pp. 72-111, Stuttgart, 1941).

in the Egyptian script, for instance, a single symbol signifies a whole word, which the Greek and Latin scripts can give only by adding several letters). The beautiful is, to Plotinus, the vehicle of the soul's salvation, because its source is in the good.

Grabar¹ says that Plotinus heralds the spectator of the Middle Ages and that his philosophy finds expression in mediaeval art. Yet, as he is the forerunner of mediaeval art-concepts, Plotinus is also the last of the Greeks; for, despite his mystic tendencies, he still seeks a form and an end in the infinite.² The art of his age was still classical, in that, though romantic in spirit, it was formalistic. It was, in fact, this opposition of romanticism and formalism that brought about the revival of classical art in Plotinus' age—an art perfectly in keeping with his view, be it stressed. Grabar's assumption that Plotinus was not understood until the Middle Ages is ill-founded. Although, of course, both the philosophy and art of the Middle Ages are to a great extent based on his metaphysics, Plotinus had by that time first been translated in terms of the Christian dogma. Now, there are, let us remember, fundamental differences between the Christian dogma and Plotinus' philosophy, the most important of them being that the first is founded on the belief in a God Incarnate, the second on an impersonal "One". This fundamental difference had a corresponding effect on the two arts—the Christian and that of the last antiquity. Christian art rejected classical form in order to express the transcendental, and to this end it used all the means it found necessary. In the radical turn that occurred in feeling, thinking and expression, in the reaching out of the age for sublime experience, Plotinian metaphysics certainly played an important part. But the cause is to be sought rather in the teachings of Revelation.³

We see, thus, not only art, but the philosophy itself of the *calon* assimilating, then proclaiming the dominant aesthetic category that, in the realm of art, corresponded to the era's world-theory. It was so with the graceful again: it had to flourish both in art and life, before it was critically studied—mainly in the eighteenth century.

Moreover, when in the West, with Boileau and Winckelman,

¹ Grabar, *Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale*, p. 16.

² J. Theodoropoulos, *Plotinus Metaphysik des Seins*, pp. 112-21 (Buhl., Baden, 1928).

³ For a criticism of Grabar's theory see my article, "Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Byzantine Art", in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art-Criticism*, Vol. XI, No. 1, Sept. 1952.

modern aesthetics began to take shape as a science,¹ it was mainly ancient Greek or Renaissance works—works representing the beautiful only—which were taken as prototypes of art. Modern aesthetics was named the “philosophy of the beautiful” or “science, of the beautiful”, which in itself shows that aesthetics at its inception demanded the submission of every artistic manifestation to the laws of the beautiful, at least in regard to form. For, as far as content was concerned, or rather the aspirations and special character of a work, the stipulation was impossible in the face of the variety of works of every nature—tragic, charming, ugly, comic—which art presented. Even more disturbing for aestheticians was the fact that certain works of poetry and painting, such as the tragedies of Shakespeare, the statue of Laocoon or the painting of the Middle Ages, combined in themselves the tragic and comic, the sublime and the ugly elements.

Aestheticians, therefore, in order to embrace all these elements in the supreme category of the beautiful, had perforce to extend its definition into an exaggeratedly comprehensive term, which, in including, weakened and robbed of their independence the remaining aesthetic categories; later attempts to define their status classified them as “modifications of the beautiful”.

The study of the aesthetic categories was begun by the English philosopher Burke, who distinguished the sublime from the beautiful, placing the feeling of “self-preservation” at the basis of the sublime, and the “social instinct” at the basis of the beautiful.² Kant followed suit, daring to compare the sublime with the beautiful without making it dependent on the latter (as aestheticians did later),³ and confining himself to marking its contrary and differing attributes.⁴ It is characteristic of the period that among the representatives of classical German literature, Schiller, who was more romantic than Goethe, studied⁵ the sublime with special interest. After Kant, however, the idealistic philosophy of Fichte, Schelling and mainly of Hegel reached its zenith. It was the latter who established the dialectics of the Idea. Since, at that time, aesthetics drew its basic principles from metaphysics, Vischer, the most representative type of aesthetician of the idealistic school, says of Kant and the English philosophers who preceded him, referring to aesthetic categories: “Previously, it was

¹ Baumgarten was the first to adopt this term in Germany.

² Zimmerman *Geschichte der Aesthetik*, p. 259 (Vienna 1858).

³ V. Basch *Essai critique sur l'esthétique de Kant*, p. 552 (J. Vrim, 1927).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 553.

⁵ Schiller, *Vom Erhabenen* (Beclam. Univ. Bibl. No. 2731).

not possible to speak about a real derivation of the categories from the beautiful as essential moments of its inner movement, until philosophy reached the stage of the dialectically moving Idea, and so found the means to understand contradiction in unity".¹ Vischer, thus, had the means of defining the categories as modifications of the beautiful. In his opinion, the beautiful is the unity of representation and Idea. When, however, "the Idea breaks away from the serene unity in which it had been merged with the image (*Gebilde*) it stands without the image opposing its own infinity to it as a finite thing. Thus, the first dialectical contradiction is created within the beautiful—the sublime."² One has only to follow, according to the system of dialectics (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), the movement of the Idea, in order to discern the tragic, the comic and the return of the beautiful to itself through the antithesis of its moments.

Inevitably, then, the various aesthetic categories came to be regarded as modifications of the beautiful, which embraced the whole aesthetic field or was identified with it—obviously fallaciously, since the moment we seek to subordinate tragic or sublime works to the form of the beautiful, the original spontaneous feeling is necessarily perverted in the impossible effort. Forcing the impetuous inspiration to conform to the external attributes of the beautiful will yield at best a toneless air of tragedy or sublimity. So it is that weak, beauty-smitten or beautifully worded works are created: as, for instance, the tragedies of Racine, which merely wear the mask of the beautiful, while simultaneously they have lost the elemental quality of the tragic; they are neither beautiful tragedies, in the sense of being inwardly fraught with the spirit of beauty, as were the Greek tragedies, nor beautiful works, fraught with tragedy.

Before this error could be recognised, however, philosophy as a whole had to react against Hegel's idealistic system, and aesthetics to turn to an impartial study of concrete facts. Fechner's "aesthetics from below" contrasted with the "aesthetics from above" which had their source in metaphysics; and Karl Groos asserted that while whatever is beautiful does indeed belong to aesthetics, the reverse does not necessarily hold true—namely, whatever is aesthetic is not always also beautiful.³ Thenceforward, the various

¹ Vischer, *Aesthetik*, I, p. 227.

² *Ibid.*, I., p. 231.

³ Karl Groos, *Einleitung in die Aesthetik*, pp. 46-51 (Giessen, 1892). See also Basch, *op. cit.*, pp. 556-57; Dessoir, *Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, pp. 2 and 139-42. (Stuttgart, 1923).

categories were considered as modifications, no longer of the beautiful, but of the aesthetic generally (*des Aesthetischen*), and were named "aesthetic categories", or "aesthetic modifications"; the beautiful itself was regarded as one such category, and the remaining ones were the sublime, the tragic, the comic, the graceful and the ugly. Later aestheticians took up the specific and impartial examination of each aesthetic category separately. Thus, Volkelt has given us the aesthetics of the tragic; Bayer, the aesthetics of the graceful; Bergson, of the comic. In our day the aesthetic categories are considered as objective rhythms, the equilibrium of structures.¹

Free, in any case, from the domination of the beautiful, the horizon of aesthetics was widened and art began to be judged more objectively.

(a) A work is no longer considered a tragedy, for example, when merely the subject is tragic. The subject is looked upon as a secondary element in the artistic composition. It is its content, its whole artistic conception, which must possess the characteristic attributes of the tragic disposition; it is these which define the form of the work.

(b) Beautifully worded works or those redolent of a beauty-aspiring emotionalism are considered as garbed in a morphological garment alien to the aesthetic category to which they belong; and

(c) Aesthetics does not seek to influence our judgement, nor to impose on art types and rules from the works of a certain category (even if it be of the beautiful). Aesthetics as a science treating of all Art should help us to judge an art-era in the light of its times, revealing its strength without overshadowing its faults. So it is that in the light of aesthetics we may see, for example, that beauty-aspiring emotionalism impaired neo-classical works, as sublime-aspiring religiosity impaired the Baroque, without being biased by the spirit of their age into justifying them.

Today we study the characteristics of each aesthetic category in order to discover the laws which govern its particular works, so that, for instance, a "tragedy" will be a consummate work of its kind only if it convey through the original artistic feeling that inspires it the necessary conflict, the *catharsis*, or any other law not implied in other aesthetic categories or represented there only in another form, in a varying degree of intensity, in a different sequence, and in other conditions. For all works of art, to what-

¹ R. Bayer, *L'Esthétique de la grâce*, II, p. 433 (Paris, 1923); and V. Feldman, *L'Esthétique française contemporaine*, pp. 107-10 (Paris, 1936).

ever category they may belong, are distinguished from the common works of nature by their very discipline to rules establishing the relation of form and content, rhythm and harmony, unity and variety, contrast and synthesis, augmentation and intensity, etc. Otherwise they would not be works of art, aesthetic entities. Each category ordains a different handling of the means of artistic composition, a different artistic sequence in binding and solving contrasts. One category stresses form and harmony, another content and rhythm; but all ultimately find the way to balance contrasts, by creating a counterweight in proportion to the values which atrophy or are exaggerated in a composition, according to its character. Thus, the beautiful pays attention to form, to harmony, to composition; while the sublime does not hesitate even before the formless and sharpens the contrasts in order to "hurl thunderbolts" (to use Longinus' words about the oration of Demosthenes). The sublime is bent on illuminating the lofty import of the content, on bringing out "an echo of great-mindedness"; while the purpose of the beautiful is to present its wise content fittingly for contemplation.

Of course, the earlier aestheticians were correct in that, despite all these differences between each category, all art works as aesthetic achievements, as products of the *calon*, induce aesthetic joy in the spectator or listener. The reason is because the first feeling suggested by any work of art is one of escape on the wings of imagination from reality to the sphere of Ideas; while the immediate return is to a rarefied reality conjured up by the works which symbolise the ideas by images so harmonious that they present a "world within a world", integrated and self-illuminated. There one lives unimpeded in a spiritual freedom that is utter joy. All the respective aesthetic impressions roused by the various categories spring from and meet in this common source of heightened pleasure. This escape and return to a rarefied reality, resulting in spiritual freedom, occur instantaneously and are incessantly repeated as imagination is affected by the immediate charm of the work of art. This enchantment may proceed from the calm serenity of the beautiful, from the lofty force of the sublime, from the repulsion of the ugly, or from the winged fugitiveness of grace. But it springs primarily from two fountain-heads—beauty and sublimity. Two primary and fundamentally contrasted actions will cause this reaction of pure joy and sense of freedom in the recipient. One is the impression of completion, of a thing "in being", produced by the static, fine-lined form of the beautiful work; the

other, the impression of a thing in "becoming", produced by the dynamic content of the sublime work. And since the beautiful is more akin to the microcosm, and the sublime to the macrocosm, we have these two trends—now towards beauty, now towards sublimity—alternating through the history of art, as mankind focuses its attention now on being, now on becoming. It was natural, then, that there were times when the demand was for beautiful works only, and others when the beautiful lived only in name.

The recognition of these two basic categories as the fountain-head of all the other streams, and the realisation that all of them flow in time, shows why the works of any of them—tragedy, for instance—can assume either a static or a dynamic character, as the spirit of the age dictates, when it imposes one or other of the two basic categories, the beautiful or the sublime. And as these alternate throughout the ages, displaying their historical activity, the works of art do not merely borrow their external attributes from them, but are also internally affected. This fact is due to the identical synthetic rules which all aesthetic categories employ in manifesting themselves, though they each employ them in their own manner. For the categories are mutually interdependent and inseparable, as is easily proved, not only by works of art, but also by a comparison of the categories themselves with one another. So it is that a work can tolerate elements or even fairly pronounced traits of various aesthetic categories, only provided it has grown out of one distinctive category—whether of the sublime, or the beautiful, the tragic, the comic, the graceful, the ugly. The ugly, of course, itself an aesthetic category, is not a negation of the others, nor does it ignore the artistic laws of harmony, rhythm, etc.

The Beautiful and the Sublime

According to classical aesthetics, the beautiful is the fundamental category, of which all others are modifications. To us, however, the beautiful is only one such category. Equivalent and opposed to it is the category of the sublime; for if the ugly cannot be perceived without the existence of the beautiful, neither can the tragic or the comic be perceived without the existence of the sublime; the graceful, in its turn, partakes equally of both the sublime and the beautiful.

The beautiful is generally accepted as the hall-mark of classical art. If the foregoing analysis has shown the sublime to be that of mediaeval art, we have there an example of the two equivalent and diametrically opposed trends.

Now (a) from the point of view of its action on the spectator, the beautiful induces serene objective contemplation and a positive joy, because to gaze on a beautiful thing "with interest, yet disinterestedly", as aesthetics prescribes, requires no effort.

The sublime, on the contrary, stimulates a disturbing subjective experience in which from awe and fear we rise, by voluntary effort, to admiration and ecstasy. Schopenhauer attributes this to our instinct of self-preservation, which, he maintains, causes us thus to react to the initial shattering experience of awe and fear. From these mixed feelings, then, a negative joy ensues.

This sort of experience before the sublime is mainly true of its contemplation in nature—as, for instance, in a storm or an earthquake—since its contemplation in art causes no fear, and does not therefore bring the instinct of self-preservation into play. In looking at a Gothic cathedral, for instance, we are not confronted with an inimical force, so that we need make no effort to disregard danger, as the artist¹ must have done who tied himself to a ship's mast the better to observe and study a storm. Yet, in works of art also, the sublime causes in us something of awe, of a sense of annihilation and of being negated. It seems to empty the space around us, and only when we have renounced, then, by rising to its sphere, reasserted ourselves do we know ecstasy. This self-renunciation occurs instantaneously, because it is induced by art; but it occurs nevertheless. Then, as Longinus says, "Our spirit is naturally uplifted by true sublimity, and assuming a great stature, is filled with joy and greatness, as if it had itself created that which it divined."

Thus, in experiencing the sublime the subsequent feeling of ecstasy is, in fact, an act of liberation, by which we deny the sense of annihilation springing from our original fear and awe—a lifting of ourselves above the conflict of feelings. In contemplating the beautiful its sustained serenity has a conciliating effect on our feelings, which thus composed, do not, despite their inevitable contrasts, conflict violently and sharply. Therefore, the contemplation of the sublime is of dynamic, that of the beautiful of a static nature. The beautiful displays "harmonic equilibria", as Bayer says, whereas the sublime displays "equilibria of deficiency".²

(b) With regard to the features of the beautiful and the sublime work there is a fundamental distinction. A sublime work, like the Gothic cathedral, in order to produce the impression of conflict

¹ The painter Horace Vernet (quoted by Basch, *op. cit.*).

² Bayer, *op. cit.*, II, p. 391: *équilibres harmoniques* and *équilibres de déficience*.

must juxtapose the small to the big, and so bring out intense differences through comparison.

This peculiarity of the sublime shows that the sublime rests principally on quantity. The impression of the beautiful, in contrast, rests on quality—on the thing itself in which oppositions are harmoniously composed.

At the same time—like nature, which in the depth of an emerald can suggest the breadth of an ocean—art, too, often suggests, without directly displaying, the vast in the minute and *vice versa*. Think of the little Babe in any sacred painting and the deep import of Its glance. The sublime, therefore, is as often to be found in the vast as in the minute, where the idea of the measureless, if it is not apparent, is nevertheless suggested.

These conflicts in the sublime imply power concealed in the mass, an unbridled power which in its virtual indifference to form tends towards the formless, in contrast to the serenity of the beautiful which restrains itself within the limits of form and measure. However, the formless in the art of the sublime does not imply disregard of the laws of art: it stands rather for a pictorial quality which abolishes the independence of parts and unifies them into an entity. Thus, the surface of a wall may be considered as formless because it is startlingly simple, concealing infinite potentialities. Lipps¹ mentions as an example on this score the innocent gaze of the little child, rich with infinite promise of unpredictable possibilities.

To sum up, the form of the sublime emerges undifferentiated, in contrast to the form of the beautiful work, which possesses differentiated and independent members, notwithstanding their integration into a unit.

The difference between beautiful and sublime, therefore, lies in the opposition between form and formlessness, measure and immeasurability, quiescence and dynamism, differentiation and fusion, composition of contrasts and solution of conflicts. These differences are not only external for they have a deeper meaning which ultimately resolves itself in the contrasts between being and becoming, the complete and the incomplete, cosmos and cosmogony. Yet the deeper and more marked the contrasts, the more discernible their meeting-point; being is inconceivable without becoming, as is also becoming without being. No work of art can disregard these opposites. One conceived in the sublime style, for instance, no matter to what degree it negates measure, must still

¹ Lipps, *Aesthetik*, I, pp. 544–45 (Voss, 1923, 3rd edn.).

employ it for purposes of comparison; no matter how much it abhors the display of variety, it must still differentiate its identical members *ad infinitum*, in order to multiply its size and by this rhythmic flow harmonise a dynamic unity which tolerates infinite variety in its members. The sublime composition thus seems richer in variety than the beautiful, where unity is achieved by differentiated members. Finally, despite its dynamism, the sublime acquires a sort of static quality, through multiple monotony (like the rapid beating of drums, or the ever recurring silence of the Sphinx). Still further, beyond these contrasts, the beautiful and the sublime meet in the aesthetic joy which both induce in the escape from reality towards the sphere of Ideas, and the return to a rarefied reality suggested by the work of art—the reflection of spiritual freedom. This alternation of escape and return, from reality to Idea and back, the successive pause on form, and pull towards content and *vice versa*, is a continuous process in the aesthetic enjoyment of any work of art—be it tragic or comic, sublime or beautiful, graceful or ugly.

Nevertheless, older aestheticians ascribed this dynamic process of escape and return in aesthetic appreciation, generally, to the appreciation specifically of the sublime; as though, being a dynamic process, it was hardly in keeping with the static serenity emanating from the beautiful—a serenity which, in their view, was tantamount to lifelessness. That is why some critics, like Solger, defined the sublime as “beauty in becoming”¹, or as the Idea “descending into reality”; and others, like Weisse, as “the Idea departing from reality”. In order, that is, to establish the status of the sublime, they characterised it as aesthetically inferior and incomplete, in relation to the beautiful. Lotze² has said that the sublime depends on external appearance, since it is never contentedly at rest as is the beautiful.

Vischer³ brought forward certain concrete reasons in support of Solger's views, which, he says, “the history of all forms appears to confirm. The harmonious formation (*Gestalt*) of the present nature of our planet was preceded by those elemental upheavals of which the conception and the evidence are so lofty”. Prowess in war, he maintains, preceded a sense of beauty in people; and Oriental art, with its enigmatic sublimity, existed before Greek art. But the evolution of art did not follow the straight course from the sublime

¹ *Werdende Schönheit*.

² Lotze, *Geschichte der Aesthetik in Deutschland*, p. 327 (München, 1868).

³ Vischer, *op. cit.*, I, p. 228.

of Oriental to the beautiful of classical art (as observed by Vischer in his attempt to justify Solger). Obviously, it also described the reverse course, since from the beautiful of the classical period, it turned to the sublime of Christian art—no matter whether the concept of the sublime in Christian was more spiritual than in Oriental art. Historically, then, both Solger and Weisse are justified in affirming in turn that the sublime is created when the Idea “descends into reality”, and again when it “departs from reality”. In fact, the work of art comes into being only when they meet, when reality, that is, symbolises the Idea. Now this work of art may at times be beautiful, at others graceful, at others sublime; nor does the sublime quality in it imply that the Idea is divorced from reality (for if it were, there would of course be no work of art at all, no symbol, that is, of an Idea). The sublime, then, moves us aesthetically, not because it is an imperfection or variation of the beautiful, or because it marks a cleavage between Idea and reality, but because it symbolises (unexpectedly) a lofty Idea in reality in a strange rhythm, measure and harmony. It is a different category, but still an aesthetic category in its own right, and one basically distinct from the beautiful through its measureless dynamism and its dissonant harmonies. The alternating succession of the beautiful and the sublime in the history of art is explained by man’s attitude to his cosmos and by the inherent interdependence through aesthetic joy of the two dominant aesthetic categories. For aesthetic joy presupposes impressions both of a static and dynamic nature; of perfection and imperfection of form; of differentiation and integration; of variety and unity; measure and measurelessness; composition of contrasts and solution of conflicts—though each time received in a different order, rhythm and degree of intensity. And since aesthetic joy is ever aware of all these contrasts, it can always distinguish between them and appreciate their growth into innumerable combinations in a work of art.

This conclusion was excluded from the aesthetics of the idealists, who everywhere sought the beautiful, or, rather, considered the beautiful of classical art as the supreme criterion, before which all other artistic manifestations pale. Later aesthetics, for its part, although dealing impartially and scientifically with each specific category, denied the metaphysical approach with undue insistence, and thus debarred the possibility of making a purely aesthetic survey of the evolution of art. It sought the “fundamental concepts” the history of art either in the form or the content of art works, or in culture, or man, but not in the aesthetic categories

which also live in time, along with the artistic feeling which corresponds to the prevailing *Weltanschauung*. This approach has been designated in the present work "an aesthetic approach to the history of art".

It is interesting to observe how the idealist Vischer attempted to reduce the sublime itself to the category of the beautiful in art. To his justification of Solger he added the following corrective, dictated by his passion for the beautiful: "It should not be forgotten that though, in a certain sense, the sublime may be called formless, in strict definition it must also be beautiful in this its formlessness. The sublime, from the aesthetic point of view, is not a struggle from which beauty is created: the struggle itself must appear beautiful." The need to explain everything in terms of beauty is again here apparent, when Vischer, loath to make of sublimity a value in its own right, ascribes it to a formless but "beautiful" strife. He would thus all unwittingly rob the sublime of its peculiar character. So it was that, along with the beauty-smitten neo-classicists, he was unable to recognise beauty in the sublimity of Byzantine art, whose painted figures he called mummies.

The crossing of the beautiful and the graceful in the sublime Byzantine art does not entail beauty of form achieved at the expense of sublimity, but only the conversion, thanks to the influence of beauty, of what might have been worship before imposing matter into luminous ecstasy before the supremacy of the spirit. And since spiritual elevation, even to as remote a realm as the transcendental, inevitably concludes in serene contemplation, the forms of Byzantine art accept the Greek-inspired measure, simplicity and grace. In art the sublime lives on as an eternal aesthetic value, not because it appears as a beautiful form or as a beautiful struggle (this, indeed, would be contrary to its spirit), but because, where beauty charms by its harmony of form, sublimity amazes by its immeasurability. If the synthesis of opposites delights in the one, the solution of conflicts fills with ecstasy in the other; if serene contemplation calms the mind in the one, a stirring experience stimulates the spirit in the other. In each case the resultant aesthetic joy, though induced by different means and tinged with a different hue, amounts to a sense of salvation, to a catharsis. Aesthetic joy is, after all, also the source of artistic creation in every aesthetic category.

Aesthetic joy is a special but simple and varied experience. It partakes of surprise, fear, admiration, ecstasy, and also of charm, serenity and magic; sparkling elation and contemplative quiet are

harmonised in the oscillations of flight and return between reality and the ideal world. In this joy, when it derives from the sublime, the feeling of admiration predominates; when from the beautiful, the feeling of delight; when from the graceful, a sense of enchantment; when from the tragic, a sense of catharsis. If we are to allow the distinction that the beautiful induces delight and the sublime admiration, we should not from this assume that the beautiful appeals exclusively to the intellect and the sublime exclusively to the emotions. The sublime merely rouses the emotions more directly than the beautiful—indeed, occasionally rouses them so intensely that all sense of art is lost. The beautiful, again, which calms the mind, is more conducive than the sublime to contemplation and, indeed, occasionally so engrosses the intellect that all aesthetic feeling becomes attenuated. Most academic art is an instance in point.

The now emotional, now intellectual currents that run through the history of art explain many of the iconoclastic strifes in Byzantium, as they do also the cult of antiquity by the *logiōtatoi* and the unintelligibility of Byzantine art to the moderns. For the sublime, on its part, appeals to the mind, spurs it and impels it to rush headlong into transcendental concepts. Sometimes, indeed, the spirit's impulse towards a sublime experience is arrested, until the mind has grasped and formulated a fitting concept as a starting-point for the spirit's venture. The intellect at such times seems supra-human, and the emotional struggle involved is dramatic. It is perhaps for this reason that Kant, in a small work of his,¹ returns to the question and comments that the beautiful is more closely related to feeling, and the sublime to intellect, although he refers mainly to the sphere of ethics.

An important new student of aesthetics, Bayer, asserts the fundamental categories to be three—the sublime, the beautiful and the graceful, weighing the graceful against the sublime, to which he directly relates it by its very opposition. Bayer, however, refers to the objective forms of equilibrium he finds in the works of the various categories. He finds a common point of contact among all of them when he says, most characteristically, that "pure aesthetic joy is the joy of being rhythmically controlled and of receiving from without that joy's discipline as well as emotion".² Such an experience, however, is far more likely to be the mechanical result of influence. An established style may well, through force

¹ E. Kant, *Über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (F. Meiner, Leipzig).

² Bayer, *op. cit.*, II, p. 562.

of habit, induce this consciousness of disciplined emotion. But aesthetic joy, in order to be real, must be able to offer more. It must have the power to awake the feeling of spiritual freedom, by opening wide the wings of imagination.

The Tragic and the Comic

The fundamental nature of the categories of the beautiful and of the sublime may again be ascertained by a negative process if, on examining the remaining categories, we discover certain of their primary elements to derive from the first two. The tragic presupposes for its manifestation a conflict of man with fate, with the gods or with society. Each time a conflict is inevitable between contrary forces. Their gathering momentum, their sudden outbreak when the conflict comes to a head—when, as we say, the tragedy's plot is solved—is a sublime spectacle, evocative of a peal of thunder or an irrepressible *fortissimo* in music. "The pleasure we derive from drama", says Schopenhauer,¹ "does not pertain to the sense of the beautiful, but to that of the sublime at its highest." However, awareness of the sublime does not necessarily imply consciousness of tragedy, for before this last can be roused the conflict must refer to man, or to an ego. In nature, therefore, it is difficult to find an image of the tragic, and if the spectacle of one animal devouring another seems to us tragic, this is because we look upon the scene anthropomorphically.

Architecture cannot express the tragic, except, as Volkelt² says, "from within the smoking ruins, for example, in a personification of the destructive power of time"; music can suggest it only incompletely; sculpture and painting can represent it fairly successfully, as may be seen from the Laocoon group or the Crucifixion. But it is poetry mainly which, alone capable of depicting a personality and all the mental agitation which prepares and follows a tragic conflict, can most forcibly impart the tragic—provided, of course, the conflict depicted is so deep-rooted in some inner human dissension or inevitable antagonism to certain external forces that it finds immediate response in exaltation. Volkelt says that "lofty exaltation pertains to the tragic".³ It is indeed in exaltation that the tragic conflict solves itself and acquires value: in our feeling, that the hero's tragic sacrifice is his very triumph.

¹ Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, II, p. 808.

² Volkelt, *Ästhetik des Tragischen*, p. 12 (München, 1923).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

This view, which is supported by Lipps, Zeising and Dubost, is not accepted by all aestheticians. Some, like Plato, reject the value of the tragic, because they overlook the exaltation implied in it, and therefore the "catharsis" caused by tragedy, according to Aristotle, and see it only as giving rise to the distress, sorrows and catastrophes brought on by human passions.

The Christian ideal, in general, enfeebles the tragic element of life, because it promises heavenly joys to those who abandon it and recommends fortitude,¹ while the Greek ideal, on the contrary, with its gods implacable as fate, holding out no promise of future happiness, kindles the tragic element of life; in it man suffers heroically the blows of fate. As Vischer observes,² in the tragic nature of their conflict with fate, the Greeks possessed the fullest form of the sublime, while the Jews with a sublime religion possessed no tragedies. Yet Christianity, as Volkelt remarks, created tragic characters like Hamlet, Faust and others. It seems fairly obvious that each period has its own tragic heroes. Christianity, of course, equipped man with the means of inwardly conquering the tragic quality of life—it gave him love and faith, yet excluded neither martyrdom (which externally offers a tragic spectacle) nor the philosophic spirit (which we find splitting the personalities of Hamlet and Faust and bringing them into tragic conflict with life). There is a "pantragedy", so to call it, which governs even the divine hypostasis. In any case, man's aspiration to the infinite and the restraining bonds of the finite create the tragic contradiction which, as Volkelt³ remarks, pervades the human spirit.

None the less, no world-theory is based on the tragic, unless it be such pessimistic ones as Schopenhauer's; on the contrary, every world-theory, like every religion, offers man a solution for the tragedy of existence. That is why the tragic is never characteristic of a period of art, but only of certain phases of life—as, for instance, times of war, of earthquakes, of famine, of disasters, of religious passion or philosophical anxiety for knowledge. That is why every period of decadence (Baroque) has a dramatic air which, however, easily declines into the melo-dramatic.

The comic is the opposite of the tragic. When man is in conflict with life's great forces, he may become a hero like Ajax or Prometheus, because great passions endow him with personality. If, however, man become a slave to petty passions, becomes avaricious or hypocritical, say, he is considered as their impersonal slave and

¹ Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, II, p. 510.

² Vischer, *op. cit.*, II, p. 527.

³ Volkelt, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

provokes amusement. If, again, he deviates from the rational course, like Don Quixote, and comes in conflict with great imaginary forces, if he inopportunistically and inappropriately clashes with reality, he again provokes laughter. Bergson¹ has called laughter "a gesture of society", a "corrective", when man falls into life's automatism. The comic, then, like the tragic, concerns man almost exclusively; and transferred to nature (for example, the giraffe), the sense of the comic presupposes an anthropomorphic approach. Its inducement in music and architecture can only mean that the work lacks congruity in the pretentious means used to an insignificant end. Now, in the view of most aestheticians,² the comic, as it is opposed to the tragic, is therefore opposed to the sublime, which is a necessary factor in the solution of the tragic.

This very opposition, however, indicates that we must assume the sublime before we can appreciate the comic: the comic, in short, is a falling away from, or a falling short of, the sublime when this has been misunderstood or its heights not correctly calculated—hence the just remark that it is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous; just as, indeed, it is but a step from the tragic to the comic. The sense of the tragic presupposes experience of the sublime; while the comic, inability and failure to experience or understand it. An unexpected coincidence of tragic and comic rouses a mixed emotion of simultaneous mirth and distress, in which our joy at the happy solution of a tragic tension in life is followed by an intense melancholy, in the awareness of the imperfection and worthlessness of human existence. We laugh then with joyous relief because the anticipated inhuman tragedy did not occur; and weep because it might have occurred and we could not have escaped it, had fortune not intervened. Our tears are also partly due to surprise at the majesty of the tragic conflict we have escaped, as our amusement in part springs from our perception of the narrowness of human terms of life. Yet, indisputably, there is in our mixed emotion a certain sense of the sublime, derived from the fear of the anticipated but unrealised tragedy, just as our surprise at its non-occurrence springs from a sense of the graceful. It was a touch of grace, we begin to feel, which saved the situation—the graceful element which, ever rash, hovers carefree over an abyss, plays lightly with life, moves it and finally grants it. That is why in its finest expression the comic—that is, in wit, delicate irony, humour—is always graceful. Combined with the ugly, the

¹ H. Bergson, *Le Rire*, pp. 20, 136 and 199 (Paris, 1935).

² Basch, *op. cit.*, p. 597.

comic produces caricature, where the tragic element reappears more intensely.

The comic, being a fall into automatism—that is to say, a negation of the deeper meaning of life, a false step—cannot be part of any world-theory. It dominates sporadically only when the values of life are temporarily forgotten, or in a deliberate reaction to life's tragedy (as, for instance, during a carnival season). Again, it may assume a good deal of significance in its noblest form—in wit—in periods of refined decadence when the graceful predominates (*gracieux comique*). Thus, both the tragic and the comic are secondary aesthetic categories that do not play a part in the historical evolution of art.

The Graceful and the Ugly

The graceful—especially as a manifestation of the delicate and the minute¹—is, according to many aestheticians,² the opposite of the sublime. Nevertheless, this quantitative opposition is only external and implies none of the movement which is the fundamental characteristic of grace. Indeed, grace has been defined as “the beautiful in movement”. According to Schopenhauer,³ immobile things, like plants, possess grace only metaphorically, whereas human beings and animals display both beauty and grace. In that case, however, as Bayer⁴ correctly remarks, static arts, like architecture, sculpture and painting, could not possess grace either; and this is not true. If we take an example from nature—the flowering branches of an almond tree—we shall see, not only that there is grace in plants, but that, indeed, all its characteristic attributes are there.

The branch of the almond tree is full of small and ethereal flowers, which, blossoming there before the green leaves appear, resemble butterflies poised for flight. When the leaves come, the impression of grace weakens and is replaced by an impression rather of beauty. But bare of leaves, the branch, dotted with its intermittent leaf-buds and delicately gleaming flowers, induces the eye to travel along them, to halt, to move on again, from bud to flower. We have here, then, the main characteristics of grace—movement, syncopation, fast rhythm, fine measure, minute form and sudden change.

Most of these attributes the graceful shares with the sublime,

¹ In German, *mignon* and *niedliche*.

² *Schleiermacher, Fechner, Schassler*.

³ Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, I, p. 299.

⁴ Bayer, *op. cit.*, II, p. 408.

though to a different degree and scale: in the sublime the syncopations are slow in rhythm, the stretches immeasurable and the sudden movements rare and shatteringly abrupt. But dynamism remains common to both, as Bayer analyses. Grace, however, is also related to the beautiful through "eumetry". Hence, graceful works are, as such, qualitatively self-sufficient, needing no comparison of quantities, as in the sublime, to display their value.

The graceful then, partakes both of the sublime and of the beautiful, yet despite this relation, retains its independence. We have, however, a sublime grace and a grace of beauty, which even in antiquity were distinguished as "heavenly" (*οὐρανία χάρις*) and "physical" (*φυσική χάρις*).¹ According to Schiller, indeed, "grace in man is an indication of a beautiful soul",² because perceptible grace is nothing but an expression of heavenly grace. However, as the graceful detracts from the massive and powerful majesty of the sublime, making it human, small, sensitive by its eumetry, so it enhances the beautiful through its dynamism, a certain spirituality, a scintillating ethereal quality about it. Thus, we speak about the grace of the beautiful (*la grâce du beau*) in the work of artists like Mozart or Raphael,³ while sublime grace would be the apt characterisation of a Byzantine Virgin. Grace takes the bright star of beauty and makes it scintillate. If, in the process, the star loses some of its Olympian serenity, yet it becomes the more accessible to us for that, becomes a more intimate object, as it shines on with all the refinement and delicacy grace has lent it. Looking at the butterfly, on the other hand, that example of exquisite grace, its rippling flight fills us with a sort of fluttering anxiety accompanied by repeated joys and surprises to see this small creature save its life by sheer playfulness. Volkelt says that "grace is born from the sweet union of two trends: elevation towards the sublime and sudden abandon to the perceptible". Bayer⁴ perhaps better describes grace when he says that "with her we believe ourselves to be leaping into an abyss and go sliding on a lawn".

Grace may characterise certain periods of art, like the Rococo, usually following the Baroque; for the Rococo is indeed the last refuge of the Baroque—a superficial survival only, since the passionate feeling in it has deteriorated, leaving there only caprice and the tendency to facile decorativeness, acquired through handling themes technically all too familiar. To quote Bayer⁴ again, grace appears at the end of certain periods as "a technical promise,

¹ Bayer, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 23–24.

² *Ibid.*, I, p. 29.

³ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 410–18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 518, 348, 401.

a mastery of exigencies (*maitrise des exigences*)". And again, beneath Rubens we sense Michelangelo, and at the end, Watteau.

According to Bayer, this occurs because the Baroque has a "composite aesthetics" (*esthétique composée*). It is, that is, a period of a mixed aesthetic category which preserves a reflection of the sublime and co-operates with the graceful but is opposed to the beautiful. It may safely be said that when the Baroque follows a period in which the beautiful has dominated (classical and Renaissance period) it tends towards the sublime and is charged with sublime-aspiring intensity; on the other hand, after a period in which the sublime has dominated (as in Byzantium) it tends towards the opposite category of the beautiful and is charged with beauty-aspiring intensity. However, each Baroque may be followed by a period of Rococo, of the graceful, that is, because—as we have seen—grace partakes both of the sublime and of the beautiful, at times assuming spirituality, as in the elegant small Byzantine churches (which we may call Byzantine Rococo), at others displaying only its physical charms, as in the Hellenistic or French Rococo.

Grace is inherent also in certain races, as in the Chinese, the Ionians, the French and so forth. As a result we have a French, Florentine or Chinese type of grace. If the Doric strain forms the masculine element of classical Greek art, Ionian grace forms its feminine element. And Greek art is a mixture of both these elements—although the beautiful predominates—as any great art is a combination of two antitheses. Byzantine art, in a similar fusion of antitheses, contains both sublimity and beauty—although sublimity predominates—making grace the mediator with which on the one hand to elevate and magnify the beautiful, and on the other to spiritualise and bring serenity to the sublime. Grace achieved all this without losing its independence—that is to say, by lending certain works its own quality. This occurred especially the moment technique was fully mastered and artists began to play with its various possibilities; in the large output which ensued, the diminutive work came into its own, while in a decadent period, as was this, the ecstasy of the sublime declined and was superseded by the melancholy magic of an other-worldly grace.

We usually call "ugly" whatever does not please us, as conversely we call "beautiful" whatever pleases us. We also call ugly an unsuccessful work. But this type of ugliness has no relation to the aesthetically ugly. There are ugly animals or formless creatures

that art studies and does not exclude from its domain, just as there are certain evil things, deceptively beautiful outwardly, which the spirit rejects as an expression of the ugly. The ugly, then, has a peculiar connotation in aesthetics and constitutes a special aesthetic category.

The words "diabolical beauty" give us the key to what is aesthetically ugly. While externally Satan's figure may appear beautiful, nevertheless the evil intention of which it is redolent gives it a cold, icy quality that finally produces a repulsive impression. (Basch¹ describes the ugly as that for which we cannot feel affection, symbolically.) How, then, does an externally beautiful form produce this feeling of repulsion? It must, in some way, make manifest its inner tendency—its evil spirit; and it does so when it shows in its evil expression that beauty is a misleading means of which the express purpose is to conceal its inner tendency. In the ugly, then, beauty becomes an external covering, a pretext, a device. Thence the coldness of "diabolical" beauty, its glitter and its exhibition of legerdemain movements of the body, and its misleading grace. Thus, the ugly utilises the devices of both the beautiful and the graceful with which to conceal itself. But when it displays itself in all its nakedness, abandoning the mask of beauty and grace, it presents misshapen and ungraceful forms in themselves repulsive, like the Erinnyes and others; forms which do not lack rhythmic dynamism and harmony, but which express them in non-measured syncopations and dissonance. The repulsion caused by these forms makes one conscious, by a sort of reaction, of the innate harmony of the human soul. This negative quality of the ugly produces a sensation related to the shock of the sublime. Again, forms externally misshapen and ungraceful but with a noble content are not repulsive to look upon. On the contrary, as specimens of innocent ugliness, of unsuccessful beauty merely, they rouse a feeling of affection, the more appealing for the original feeling of revulsion. So also with sublime forms that—through rigidity, monotony or lack of discipline of the unloosed powers—tend towards the formless, the measureless and, on occasion, the deformed: while at first sight they repulse, they ultimately restore ecstatic delight. That is why sublimely-minded periods may well employ the ugly in art—as has sometimes been done in Byzantine painting and, chiefly, in Gothic art—to direct, through these repulsive effects, attention to their sublime content.

The ugly, then, may contribute to the sublime and such cate-

¹ Basch, *op. cit.*, p. 594.

gories deriving from it as the tragic, in order to intensify it; it may contribute to the comic, in which it produces caricature. In the case of the graceful it can have no part, except where grace stresses sublimity, and there it helps to exalt it. There is a touch of sublimity and unworldly grace about innocent ugliness. But one category with which the ugly cannot be reconciled is that of the beautiful; and when it employs beauty as a means of concealment, then the artificial association will appear incongruous. All this would seem to confirm that the ugly may infiltrate into all the remaining aesthetic categories, in which, through its initial repulsive impression, it directs the spectator's attention towards the reverse of its own external aspect and so accentuates the dominant intrinsic character of the work. Ugliness is, in consequence, always of a negative nature, since it can negate and break down equilibria. The sincere expression of the ugly cannot be the whole scope of a work, because man, who by nature tends towards harmony, cannot readily tolerate the purely ugly. Hence it is that ugly forms are usually subordinated to a general pattern of harmony. And, indeed, it is impossible to accept the domination of the ugly in any art-period. It is consciously expressed mainly in conjunction with the comic and the tragic, and, unconsciously, in the sublime.

Conclusions

(a) The source of every aesthetic category is not the beautiful, but that aesthetic joy which includes every potential aesthetic emotion—that roused by the beautiful, equally as much as that induced by the sublime, the tragic, the comic, the graceful or the ugly.

(b) In consequence, the aesthetic categories are interdependent and intercross.

(c) Any aesthetic category might dominate in a work of art, subordinating the others. In fact, a single aesthetic category must dominate in a work, before that work can acquire a definite aesthetic character.

(d) In the history of art, it is the two dominating categories of the beautiful and the sublime which mainly alternate, and the transition from the one to the other occurs through a period of passionate intensity—the Baroque—succeeded by a period of refinement and technical virtuosity, a period of grace—the Rococo. Baroque and Rococo are either beauty-aspiring or sublime-aspiring. This phenomenon is observed in European culture, where, after the sublime art of the Oriental peoples, classical art flourished

and was succeeded in its turn by that of the Middle Ages, then the Renaissance, and afterwards by the Baroque and the Rococo, until with the revival of neo-classicism and of neo-romanticism, the rhythmic wave receded, giving place to the revolutionary wave of contemporary art.

(e) It follows, then, that what we are in the habit of describing as the "beauty" of works of art is the expression of the dominant aesthetic category characteristic of the artistic feeling, corresponding to the world-theory of an age. The adaptation of the specific character of a work to the ruling category and as the conditions of place and time demand is the work of the individual creator's imagination. An original work of art is thus brought into being each time—an unforeseen event in the rhythm of art history, a birth of the spirit in Art.



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