EN TOYΤΩ NIKA: BRICKWORK AND NARRATIVE IN CONSTANTINOPOLITAN ARCHITECTURE DURING THE PERIOD OF PALAIIOLOGI

In Byzantium a technical sphere can be found and recognized as highly connected with iconism of signs (fig. 1), sophistication of the space sacredness, architecture as visual narrative and iconic vision. Byzantine written sources up to the end of 14th century allow us to distinguish craftsmen engaged in brick and tile production, plinthourgia, cuparii or scamni at the end of 14th century. They produced brick in so called oxiđo – reduction atmosphere. The heating and cooling cycle of the bricks was 150 – 200 hours. Utilisation and thermal analysis and dilatometry of brick showed that bricks from several Constantinopolitan monasteries were fired at temperatures from 800 – 900 degrees. These are experimental results of technical brick analysis which possibly can help us to clarify how the medieval brick was resisted the most severe climatic conditions and have secured high static resistance of church. Brick appeared in Constantinopolitan architecture during the construction of the monuments such as one of the most remarkable structures of Land Walls (fig. 2) between 408th and 413th year. The inner, great wall - μέγα τείχος is faced with carefully cut limestone blocks, while its core is filled with mortar made of lime and crushed bricks.

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2 S. Novaković, Matije Vlastara Sintagmat, azbučni Zbornik vizantijskih crkvenih i državnih zakona i pravila, Beograd 1907, 490.

3 D. Roller, Dubrovački zanati u XV i XVI stoljeću, Zagreb 1951, 123 – 126.

4 For results obtained by differential thermal analysis of a bricks sample from medieval churches in Serbia compare: Bricks from Serbian medieval monasteries, ed. M. Ristić, S. M. Ćirković, V. R. Korač, Beograd 1989, 80, 81.

between seven and eleven bands of brick, traverse the structure, not only as a form of decoration, but also strengthening the cohesion of the structure by bonding the stone façade with the mortar core, and increasing endurance to earthquakes. This was an important architectural achievement, testimony of architectural polychromy made by earthly materials. The importance of earth and ground inside and outside the walls was used for fruit and vegetable gardens, probably used in allusive creation of Paradeisos Garden. This earth-use can still be seen outside the Theodosian walls, which is now managed as city greenway-buffers.


On the other side, the ekphraseis of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople eloquently pictured how the poets could turn materials – brick and marble – into flesh, skin and stillness of the motion. An exercise of imagination should help us re-create the impression made upon Byzantine beholder of true living flesh, skin and body of the church columns, exedras and walls.9

A cliché found in almost every modern work on the Byzantine Empire is that the Palaiologan period was time of decline in all domains except arts and culture, which, paradoxically, flourished and revived during the same period. Among contemporary Byzantines perhaps no one exemplifies this paradox better than Theodore Metochites (1270 – 1332) (fig. 3).10 Byzantios, his oration in praise of Constantinople deserves to be treated as an important piece of evidence for the context in which late Byzantine architecture was conceived. The message of Byzantios is the providential greatness of Constantinople as noble, highly beneficent city. As for the buildings, words cannot describe or number them.11 Temples are like stars in the heaven, reservoirs of faith or safe heavens.
in the sea of life. Not only visual effects created were thus transmitted to the eyes as visual ekphraseis, but also materials: “arranged, ordered in accordance with all harmony, fitted together in both alternating and interlacing fashion”. Visual narrative resists the evidentiary sequential models of written narrative. The complex visual structures trouble the linear logic of written text, and have often left modern interpreters frustrated in their lack of allegiance to those texts. Narrative is not only written, it can be spoken as well and the impact of this duality is keenly felt in Byzantine narrative imagery. It is the practice or art of narration or story-telling. In examining images in performative spaces enlivened by Paolo Odorico et Charis Messis, Paris 2012, 81 – 99.


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of physicality and space encircling will be reinserted into the understanding of Byzantine visual narrative of "Εν τούτω νίκα". Similar sublime thought appears in Nikaeus, where Metochites developed encomiastic ekphraseis of the walls structured in principles of regularity of arrangement.  

Ekphrastic elements proved to be par excellence evidences for understanding of blurred meanings of the exterior of the wall. The transmission of these words to material should be understood as a picture of both rhetoric and visual.

In Constantinopolitan architecture during the period of Palaiologoi brick was used extensively as main material for creating of optic illusion (fig.4). Brick as product of dry exaltation of earth in Platon’s Timaeus was recognized as the element with energy of Creation. The Timaeus makes conjectures on the composition of the four elements. The element of earth would be a cube, and of fire a tetrahedron a polyhedron composed of four triangular faces, three of which meet at each vertex the same as executed at several late Byzantine

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16 “Of each of these kinds which I must endeavor to explain to you in an exposition of an unusual type; yet, inasmuch as you have some acquaintance with the technical method which I must necessarily employ in my exposition, you will follow me. In the first place, then, it is plain I presume to everyone that fire and earth and water and air are solid bodies; and the form of a body, in every case, possesses depth also. Further, it is absolutely necessary that depth should be bounded by a plane surface; and the rectilinear plane is composed of triangles.” Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9 transl. by W.R.M. Lamb. London 1925, Timaeus, 53c.
apses: Constantine Lips Monastery in Constantinople, Hagia Theodora in Arta, Holy Apostles and Prophet Elijah in Thessaloniki. Theories of vision like those formulated by Timaeus, refer that brick is the product of fire. In the same time brickwork exists as “fire” of the eye, that is meets the shining of the fire coming from the object seen, which results in a visual stream.

It must be stressed that such a kind of vision blurs the distinction between subject ad object; it unifies seen and seer.

Fire is immanence; it is why the heavenly beings are described as fiery: “For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebr. 12: 29).

Earth seems to pervade brick and animates it; brick seems to be traversed (outspread) by an invisible stream which transfigures and ensouls the epidermis of wall. Fire is a mode of being uplifted to God because “the power of fire causes a lifting up to the godlike”.

Regarding brickwork compositions preserved at main examples of last phase of Constantinopolitan architecture (south church of Constantine Lips; Pantokrator Monastery; Christ in Chora Monastery; Pammakaristos parekklesion; the Palace of the Porphyrogenitus / Tekfur Sarayı), art historians followed the convention and used term “aniconic” to designate the nature of the wall exterior articulation: system of semiotic signifiers disguised as non-representational, non-figural representations of crosses or vegetal patterns but imbued

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20 The Celestial Hierarchy 15.2, 329C; 15.7, 336C.
21 The Celestial Hierarchy 13.4, 305A.
with symbolic meanings (fig. 5).\footnote{J. S. Ćirić, \textit{West facade of Holy Archangels church in Štip: Economy of the wall}, PATRIMONIUM. MK Year 5, No.10 (2012), 139 – 148.}

Narrative voice of these patterns (zigzags, dog–tooth friezes, meanders, chess fields, various whirling disci, Tree of Life motives and heraldic signs such as patterns based on swastika and “Byzantine heart”) plays substantial role in late Byzantine architecture: the entire surface of the façade as sacred skin and substance of the church turns into a kind of tapestry.\footnote{Eadem, \textit{Les emblèmes sur l’abside de l’église de Lesnovo}, Zograf 35 (2012), 189 – 197.} The ornamentation of the façade is characterized by stacking bricks with which the entire surface of the façade turns into a kind of tapestry. Brick structures the meaning of visual communication and directs the viewer to understand what is seen in a particular way.\footnote{Eadem, \textit{Optic desires: toward better understanding of wall arrangement at the late 13th century Byzantine Architecture, Before and After the Fall of Constantinople The Center and Peripheries of Byzantine World in the Turbulent Times Before and After the Conquests of Constantinople in 1204 and 1453}, ed. V. Stanković (forthcoming).}

It is my assumption that, although it exceeds by far the temporal span of Byzantine Art History, the apse of Palaeologan churches profoundly reflects the Byzantine spiritual thoughts.\footnote{The problem of exterior decoration of the apse in Byzantine architecture is almost completely excluded from broader analyses and interpretations of space and ritual. By so far study of Sheron Gerstel is the only one dedicated to the problem of painting in this compartment of the church. S. Gerstel, \textit{Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary}. Seattle – London, Washington University Press 1999 [with bibliography].}

Apse is a part of a vaster ornamentation that completely covers the exterior walls. One example of narrative marker of the apse is a motif symbolizing the Railing of Paradise, formed by criss-cross ornament. Symptomatically, that ornament was carried out at the apse of the south church of Constantine Lips also at the
apse of Pantepoptes Church and the front facade of Tekfur Sarayi in Constantinople (fig. 6). These ornaments represented various attributes of the Divine, whose presence they announced to the faithful before they even ventured into the church. ‘Aniconic’ imagery of facade was developed over the centuries culminating in the richly decorated churches during the Palaiologan period.26 Part of this imagery is also the meander, a motif of equally antique origin but incomparably more commonly present in Byzantine art.27 Although investigation along meanders should certainly be further pursued,28 it seems that of swastika at upper register motif at central apse of Constantine Lips (fig. 5) appears to offers powerful stimulus for rather different optics. Like a vast membrane, the eastern facade of the church reveals on its exterior surface the hidden mystery performed behind the altar.29 It creates illusion that the wall is transparent; it

26 J. S. Ćirić, Décryptage de mur, 19.
27 Extensive bibliography on the motif and its symbolism from Antiquity to the Renaissance is given by E. Thomas, Monumentality and the Roman Empire, 320 (n. 12). For this motif in Late Byzantine architecture cf. J. S. Ćirić, “Writing in Light”: Same as Different at the West Façade of St. Sophia Church in Ohrid, Srpski jezik, književnost, umetnost 3, prir. V. Kanački, S. Pajić, Kragujevac 2013, 295-304.
Fig. 8. Swastika, above Deesis mosaic and south vault of narthex of Chora church, photo: J. S. Ćirić

Сл. 8. Мотив свастике изнад Деизиса и у јужном своду припрате цркве Христа Хоре, Цариград, фото: Ј. С. Ћирић

Fig. 9 Prophet Elias church in Thessaloniki, painted cross-swastika and details in brick, photo: J. S. Ćirić

Сл. 9. Црква Св. Пророка Илије у Солуну, slikani motiv свастике и исти детаљ изведен опеком, фото: Ј. С. Ћирић

Fig. 10 Brick ornaments, the apse of Paregoretissa church in Arta, photo: Rémi Terryn

Орнаменти изведени опеком, апсида цркве Богородице Паригоритисе у Арти, фото: Реми Теран
is a paradoxical vision which gives rise to the effect of the walls having been de-materialised. The membrane-like wall falls down around the church like a curtain, draping the body of the edifice, like a new skin. As Gregory of Nyssa stated, sense perception is a means of reaching the spiritual or as written in Ps 18: 29: “In your strength I can crush an army with my God I can scale any wall”. That motif relies on the same imagery as on the carved cornice above the floor of Hagia Sophia and interior cornice of south church of Constantine Lips (fig.7), the image of the Ocean – mosaic at Ain Témouchent Setif in the northeastern province of Algeria, brickwork at Eskihisar, near Gebze on the Sea of Marmara Walls (fig. 7a), which might have belonged to the Christ Philantropos Monastery at the Mangana and north side of Vefa Killise Mosque in Constantinople. It appears as a motif running above the Deesis mosaic in the inner narthex and south vault of Constantinopolitan Chora church (fig. 8). Cross-swastikas also appear on the apse dome and on the left side of the west door of the late 14th-century church of the Prophet Elias in Thessaloniki (fig.

30 Gregory of Nyssa, De Sancto Theodoro, trans. Leemans et al., Let us Die That We May Live, 86.


32 I want to express my most sincerest gratitude to Mr Tolga Ersoy, doctoral candidate at Mimar Sinan University - Istanbul for providing me photos of brick ornaments executed at Marmara see walls in Istanbul.
which was probably an imperial foundation, in a position where one would expect to find the founder’s monograms. In Thessaloniki the same imagery is found at the west façade of Agia Ekaterini church. Apart from the apse façades of Constantinopolitan and Thessaloniki churches, in the architecture of the period in question, this type of meander also appears in the center of the north and south wall of Theotokos Zahumska Church in Ohrid (Macedonia) while on the churches of Theotokos Peribleptos and Hagia Sophia in Ohrid appears on the apse. The same brickwork is found on the lateral walls of the Church of Hagios Nicholas, Hagios Demetrios at Varoš (Prilep) ca 1298th. On a similar position it is found at the apse, north and south side of the church of Agios Nikolaos of Rhodia, northern part of the apse of Paregoritissa (fig. 10), apse of Kato Panagia, Merbaka church and south side of Aghia Theodori church in Arta.

What is of significance here is the mechanism of understanding: the constitutive system of these ornamental phenomena which like a labyrinth encircled both interior and exterior of church in its organic, Divine attributes. The most perfect form of the Late Byzantine church labyrinth possesses a double – retrograding rhythm, turning and returning. Similarly, Christ’s journey from Heaven to Hades and back involved a recursive progress, a miraculous reversal, as medieval theologians often emphasized (fig.11). Since, Gregory of Nyssa imagined an

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army following in step beyond its general, the Redeemer, as it marches out of the labyrinth. This sign of swastika is metaphorical armor to be worn by the observer or pilgrim. Christ wrote on the earthly material, wrote with his finger on the ground like in the Bible verse John 1:14: “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.” It is a skin, Christ’s bodily substance. Dressed in Christ’s armor, Christian continues his pilgrimage: the perception of that act intensified with the approaching than with the entering through the doors into the interior of the church. The flesh of Christ therefore if composed of brick and marble, consists of earthly substances which clothe both Church and believers.

In context of mentioning entrances and facades, it is worth to mention our recent discovering from Chora. Metochites in his hands holds a model of church with carved crosses on the sides of doors executed with gold tesserae, as an allusion to Golden Gate (fig. 2). Depicted portal, as a powerful optic device in the center of founder’s model, represents portal with real carved crosses in marble jambs, between narthex and naos of the church, the same as carved in the west entrance of Saint Catherine catholicon at Sinai. Most likely, crosses were used to mark places where a procession would stop for prayer. Hypothetically this portal is modeled as possible appropriation of the south gallery entrance doors of the Great Church Doors, since details of T mouldings of the carving of the screens are almost the same (fig. 12). Incorporation of selective replicating idea through the idea of passage additionally could prove dialogical context between Chora, Great church, its founders and their ‘writing’ into the centre of contemporary imperial/religious symbolism or ideology. Again that is a reference to heuristic of adaptation and entering in the secret spaces and

35 Gregoire de Nyssse, La catheschese du foi, Paris 1978, 90.
36 Ibid.
39 S. Bojanin, Krst u seoskom ataru - sakralna topografija i njena društvena funkcija u parohiji srednjovekovne Srbije, Istorijeski časopis 56 (2008), 311-352.
church Mystery: μετεμορφώθη and transubstantiation μετουσίωσις in eucharistic manner. Through these intervisual devices one entered the womb, the church as Incarnation of the Word - Logos and its spreading through the teachings of the Church. With the passing into the interior of the building and coinia one was transferred into a different sphere, oriented towards accentuating movement, a dynamic interplay realized by directions of distribution of labyrinth and similar motifs, expressed with polychromatic masonry both in brick and veined marble. The whole space of the church is lasting vision of a skin of incarnated body with curving paths and dancing lines which enchant the brick and all earthly materials. Bound together by the regenerative power of the fire and the earth, that is, Christ “with eyes like flame of fire”, beholder is penetrating into the Wisdom, in the space of community as Land of the Living - Χώρα των ζώντων and Logos contained within the Virgin. That is elaborated in King David’s words: “I will please the Lord in the land of the living” [Ps 116, 9]. Also, Athanasius of Alexandria in his Homily on Psalm 114 mentioned: “you have come to Mount Zion, to the Land of the Living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem” [Hebr. 12, 22 – 24]. The flesh of Christ therefore is composed of brick and marble, consists of earthly substances which clothe both church founder and believers. This valorization spans from the concept of the creation - where the body is considered also as representing the image of God - to a representation of future life in which the body will participate, taking in the concept of the human being as indissolubly composed of a soul and a body. The exceptional value conferred on the body is undoubtedly linked to what constitutes the very keystone of Christianity: that is to say, the Incarnation.

Architecture during the Palaiologan dynasty thus facilitated not only choral notion and observer’s perception of art than the universality of the messages displayed on the façade: symbolic imagery to communicate hope and a warning to Christians who have grown apathetic and an encouragement to those who are faithfully enduring the struggles in this world. The spatial and narrative shifts of the ornaments play, invited a transformation of the identity of the spectator from viewer to participant, more specifically from viewer of narrative, violence, and body in the nave to participant in liturgy, reconciliation, and spirit in the apse. Thus, brick ornaments viscerally confirmed the universal Christian message, marching in and out of the labyrinth transformed with visible earthly substance in sacred skin. The entire repertoire of such architectural expression was the product of further practical elaboration of the fundamental idea of the Christ’s skin incarnated in the temple; both the late Byzantine builder and be-

holder thus became “lamplighters” of a sort, quite like Gregory of Naziansus wrote: “The earth and its surroundings are poised in the middle, and that the motion of all the revolving bodies is round this fixed and solid center, then, I say, there is an absolute necessity that, whatever may happen to each one of the atoms on the upper side of the earth, the same will happen on the opposite side”.47 That is “Ε’ν τούτῳ νίκα” late Byzantine visual theological context which resonates with divine perfection of façade both exterior and interior as truly immersed skin. Episodic structure of the wall frames provides performative interaction within Late Byzantine spatial organization. Still, future explorations of these exterior ornaments as performative surfaces, “thingness”48 that flicker and appear to move in brick, reveal a pronounced relationship based on the visual impact and its placement, moved from the lateral to the “draped” as main frame of late Byzantine architectural narrative.


After the Wars of Scottish Independence during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries England and Scotland were in a constant state of war with each other but by 1549 England and Scotland seemed to have settled into a relative state of peace with each other, however on the death of Elizabeth I in 1603 and of the accession of Charles I in 1625. Many of Charlie’s opponents mysteriously disappeared as the struggle for power continued, matters became worse when he began to levy taxes on the people and in particular the English and Scottish churches without parliamentary consent, this led many to increasingly be seen as those of an autocratic and tyrannical supreme monarch. Accused of being a tyrant, traitor and murderer. The decimation.

During the 1990s with support from government finding and the National Youth Association, several high street information shops (1) young people with ready access to a range of information under one roof in a town centre location. The scheme (3) to be popular. The hairdresser had a very small shop near Mathew’s office, and he worked alone, but he always cut Mathew’s hair exactly as Mathew liked it, and while he was doing it, the two men talked about football or cricket. But the hairdresser was, an old man, and one day, when Mathew was sitting in his chair, and his hair was being cut as usual, the old man said to him, ‘Mathew, I’m going to be sixty-five years old next month, so I’m going to retire. I’m going to sell my shop to a young man who wants to be a hairdresser. Complete your record collection. Discover 's full discography. Shop new and used Vinyl and CDs. Hello! We have selected English as your language preference. If you would like to browse in a different language, please choose a language using the dropdown. Deutsch English Español Italiano 日本語.