The intent to originality dominates modern cultural output and has convinced us of the superiority of those periods that can claim a high degree of artistic and intellectual creativity. It also challenges us to trace elements of originality in cultures that are generally agreed to have been conservative, such as Byzantine culture. A collective volume published some ten years ago by A. R. Littlewood assembled fifteen systematic studies on originality in the literature, art and music of Byzantium, in an attempt to investigate and interpret every form of originality in these spheres.

With regard to matters of architecture, especially that of the Middle and Late Byzantine period, R. Ousterhout restated his familiar views and developed the theory that Byzantine architecture created a variety of types and distinctive stylistic features, mainly when it was responding to certain demands of place, function and decoration, or when these types derived from changes that were dictated during the erection of the buildings. These views are essentially correct, but relegate to second place the individual creativity of the architects, or the artistic intentions of those who took the initiative in the erection, the founders: state officials in the case of public buildings or ordinary users. The question needs to be posed in a different manner.


buildings were erected only by practically experienced Byzantines to the idea of originality. The literary sources, certainly, are silent on the question of creativity and the tendency to innovation in art and architecture. The very few cases in which a building was regarded as notable because it possessed variety and the sumptuous materials used, or to the founder. Never, or very rarely, to the architect or the compositional virtues of the building.

If, however, the Byzantine critique of architecture passes over its essence in silence, so, too, to a great degree, does the modern history of Byzantine architecture over the last hundred years. Adherence to typology, comparison of ground plans and the search for a model in every case, combined with a defective knowledge of non-ecclesiastical architecture and with the view that in the Middle Byzantine period buildings were erected only by practically experienced master-craftsmen, has arrested any inclination to detect creativity, originality, or even improvisation. The excessive importance attached to the role played by Constantinople as the only artistic centre in the Middle and Late Byzantine period is also unjustified, and is due once more to the one-sided nature of the literary sources of the period.

The large number of Middle and Late Byzantine monuments known today allows us to divert attention for a while from the literary sources to the study of the buildings themselves and to an analysis of the elements of originality in them. That is, to a search for general design features that made some buildings unique, or which led them to play the role of model for other, later structures.

R. Ousterhout’s dictum that Byzantine architecture is a response to needs is indeed valid in many cases: it represents the solution of architectural problems. To these monuments may be assigned a large number of examples in which the desire to inhumed distinguished personages in immediate proximity to the place of the divine liturgy led to variations of existing building types, and occasionally to unprecedented compositions with chapels, porticoes, narthexes surmounted with two domes, and closed burial passageways. These were sometimes incorporated in the original design of the church and sometimes added later. Occasionally, however, things go beyond direct or indirect needs. And it is here, mainly, that we can detect the artistic intent of the architects or founders, and by extension the new artistic creation.

The modification of existing types is the most common way of creating variations, with immediate repercussions on the interior space and exterior form of the churches. Variations of existing types are due to:

a) The abandonment of functions, which may lead to original variations. An example here is provided by two domed cruciform churches in Greece, which were built without a diakonikon: the ceremony of the Lesser Exit from the sanctuary had long fallen into disuse and the diakonikon now served simply as a sacristy, which might easily be located at a different point.

b) Structural reasons. Nea Moni on Chios, the model for churches of the so-called island octagon type, was susceptible to earthquakes because only limited buttressing was provided for the disproportionately large dome by the shallow side niches. In all the copies of it, both on Chios and in the region of Macedonia and Thrace, the shallow side niches were replaced by much stronger barrel vaults.

c) Reasons concerning the appropriate size, that is, the relationship of the size to the type of the building. A domed cruciform church, for example, could be neither very large nor very small. When a large congregation had to be housed, as in the case of Hagia Sophia in Kiev, a new variation of it was created through the addition of

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5. A. Cutler, Originality (cit. n. 4), p. 203. The word ἀνακόσμητος, which means "originality" in Modern Greek, had a completely different sense in Byzantium: see Du Cange, col. 1269.

6. Between the buildings of the palace of Digenis Acritas, one could see "...πεντάκοσιοί ζέντα, μετά μικροίρων φωλιών λίθων άρτος άπαθος, ...", ed. I. Maurokordatos, Διενές Ακρίτης, Oxford 1956, p. 21, v. 50.


8. The restoration or the renovation of old buildings was also praiseworthy, Cutler, Originality (cit. n. 4), p. 208.


11. "...it is we, not the Byzantines who see (and applaud) innovations in a dozen fields of activity...," Cutler, Originality (cit. n. 4), p. 214.


13. In two 12th century churches of Thebes, Hagia Phoinea and a ruined chapel of unknown dedication, we have a bipartite sanctuary with prothesis and bema, without diakonikon. See Ch. and L. Bouras, "Η Ελληνική ναυσίδη τού τόν ιδίου, Athens 2002, p. 150, 151, 154, 155, 159.


15. The church of Metaxaorphosis on Chortias near Thrassoliki (N. Nikonas, Η εκκλησία της Μεταμορφώσεως του Σωτήρος στον χορτιάτη Κέρνος, Thessaloniki 1972, p. 102-110) and possibly the church of Hagios Spyridon of Selymbria, in the case of Hagia Sophia in Kiev, a new variation of it was created through the addition of...
side aisles and a series of narthexes. When, on the other hand, the building was small, as in domed cruciform churches intended as side chapels, the katholika of small monasteries or metochia, in addition to a variety of transitional architectural solutions, masonry filling the four corner bays was considered sufficient and columns were abandoned, leading to the emergence of the variations of the contracted in-square churches intended as side chapels, the "Athonite" type with semicircular side conches, found in a large number of small churches, most of them later examples.

d) Inadequate technical expertise. A successful innovation in Greece during the 13th century was the creation of a new type, that of the cross-vaulted church. Three-aisled cross-vaulted churches, which are divided into two groups, may be regarded as a variation of cross-in-square churches in which the dome, carried on pendentives, is replaced by barrel vaults, a form of vaulting much more easy to construct. Aisleless cross-vaulted churches, early examples of which are to be found in the Peloponnesia, were invariably small buildings whose roofing took the form of plain barrel vaults and was of a much simpler form than that of domed churches.

e) Purely aesthetic considerations. Some of the modifications of existing types seem to have had no other reason than to produce aesthetic interest in the interior of the churches. The addition of columns that did not carry any load increased the visual interest and monumental impression of the building as a whole. An extreme example of the non-functional use of columns is provided, of course, by San Marco in Venice, while columns placed in contact with the walls in order to set off the church's impression of the main square space, the pseudo-kufic decorative brickwork in the masonry, the series of horizontal dentil bands, and the early date, leave no doubt that the Hagiot space are to be found in the Fatih mosque at Ainos, the church of the Mouchiotissa in Constantinople, and in narthexes like those of Nea Moni on Chios, Hagios Andreas en te krisel, and the Hagios Theodoroi, also in Constantinople. In the last named church, non-bearing columns were attached to the south wall, with the objective of enhancing its visual appearance. In Hagios Nikolaos at Kambia and Hagios Nikolaos at Korith on Andros, the use of columns in place of a wall between nave and narthex created a new impression of the interior space and produced original variations of the types of these two churches.

The opening of niches in the thickness of the walls, that have no obvious function and whose sole purpose is to organise the interior space of the church, created some original designs in a limited number of cases.

The intent to originality and the creation of interior spaces of special interest is also to be detected in the combination of two different types in certain churches.

The Hagioi Apostoloi in the Athenian Agora is a true typological unicum in Byzantine architecture and (as Choisy noted), a masterpiece of harmony and clarity in its conception. In it, an octonarch church with a circular tracing and four axes of symmetry is combined with a domed tetrastyle cross-in-square church that retains the hallmarks of its Constantinopolitan descent. The composition of the church attests to a carefully studied design, as does the relationship between the narthex and the conches on the two side facades of the church. The form of the dome, the tracing of the main square space, the pseudo-kufic decorative brickwork in the masonry, the series of horizontal dentil bands, and the early date, leave no doubt that the Hagiot
Apostoloi is directly connected with the Panagia in the Hosios Loukas monastery, a monument that also has a large number of new formal features.

Another example of types being combined in the interests of originality is provided by the Palaiopanagia at Manolada in the western Peloponnese. The church is in the type of the domed free-cross church combined with a wide ambulatory roofed with low hemispherical vaults. Churches of the free cross type are usually curved corners of the bearing square, a rare arrangement that was of decisive importance for the impression of the interior space of the monument.

A combination of basilica and the Constantinopolitan five-domed cross-in-square church created the Mystras type, the earliest example of which is the Hodiagiria, one of the two churches in the Vrontochi monastery. The precision of the calculation of the dimensions at ground floor level in order to produce the cross-shape of the first floor reveals that the Hodiagiria is the product of systematic design and precludes the view that it derived from modifications made during the course of its erection. The intent to originality is evident in the overall composition of the building.

An intent to originality, possibly imposed by the founders, is also to be found in cases of the free interpretation of an ancient model. This is true of Nea Moni on Chios, the centralised octagonal shape of which, and the pairs of columns attached to the walls between the conches, imitate an Early Christian mausoleum. However, it acquires its own medieval character thanks to the disproportionately large dome, the modification in the form of the columns, and the elevation of the octaconch to a second vertical level. The clear intention of the architect to make the centralised octaconch shape the dominating feature of his creation can be seen in the reduction of the height and the overshadowing of both the sanctuary and the narthex, the concealing of the Platytera from the east niche of the nave and the clear distinction between the first and second level.

Views have been expressed attributing the originality of Nea Moni a) to the modification of a cruciform church during the course of its erection, b) to the intent to give it an “exotic air”, and c) to the adaptation of the architecture to a broad iconographic programme in its mosaic decoration. None of these, however, withstand scrutiny. The evident originality of the building can only be interpreted as a medieval version of an ancient centralised model, dictated by a specific artistic will, on the part either of the founders or of the architect, regarding the design of the interior space of the church.

The intentions of the founders, however, did not invariably lead to such successful results. Some of the most important and original churches in the kingdom of Serbia were built by craftsmen who were ignorant of Byzantine building and vaulting methods, but who were obliged to incorporate domes in their work and create surfaces destined to receive extensive iconographic programmes. These churches can hardly be described as Byzantine.

The intent to originality, to the creation of a work of architecture that is not an imitation of what has gone before and corresponds fully to the demands firmly established since ancient times, for functionality, solidity and beauty, is to be found in “the most impressive Middle Byzantine church plan” or “the most sophisticated achievement in structural design since Hagia Sophia”, the katholikon of the monastery of Hosios Loukas in Phokis.

Systematic analysis of this building reveals not only its adaptation to the demands of a major shrine of pilgrimage in medieval Greece, but also its exceptional statics, which have kept the building virtually intact, and the maturity of its morphology, which is inexplicable in a pioneering work. In fact, nothing in the interior space, in the proportions of masses and spatial units, the handling of the natural light, and the balance of static forces, is suggestive of experimentation. We have a church that is large by Byzantine standards, with a number of Constantinopolitan

42. Bours, "Η Παλαιοπαναγία (cit. n. 41), p. 247, 249.
43. Ibid., p. 231 n. 1-7, 252 n. 1-5
44. H. Hallenser, Untersuchungen zur Genesis und Typologie des Mysterotypos, Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft, 18, 1969, p. 105-118.
45. The galleries were necessary for the ceremonies of the Missia court and the security of its members. For the arithmetical relationships between the diameter of the central dome and the width of the aisles see ibid., p. 113-115, fig. 8.
47. H. Buchwald, JOB 51, 2001, p. 477, considers the above statement as completely hypothetical.
morphic elements, but also with some that are new and which made it truly unique at the time of its erection, a little after the year 1000. Naturally enough, the katholikon of Hosios Loukas became the model for the largest and most opulent churches of Greece in the following two hundred years.

All this may be explained not only in terms of the financial means available, but also of the presence of a creative architect who had great design skills. As has properly been observed, the katholikon of Hosios Loukas could not possibly have been erected without a design, given the exceptional complexity of its forms and structures. The decisive presence of a talented architect in the monastery of Hosios Loukas is also indicated by the existence of two more original, unparalleled monuments contemporary with the katholikon, in which the dome is supported on a octagon: the church in the monastery’s metochion at Antikyra and that of the small “contracted” church on which the modern campanile of the monastery, which has already been mentioned, now stands.

The church at Antikyra, which no longer survives, had a strong substructure (like the katholikon) and a system of eight columns in contact with the walls, which supported the dome by way of arches. Publications of the monument are unfortunately inadequate and the comments on it contain many errors. It is clear, however, that this was a simplified variation of the monastery katholikon, adapted to the smaller scale and with morphological features similar to those of the katholikon, which assign it to the same building programme.

Precisely the same is true of the little church beneath the campanile, which also has a strong substructure and retains the vaulting with squinches identical in every way to that of the katholikon. The coincidence of three typologically similar churches in the same monastery and at the same period is strong evidence that all three were the work of the same architect, who was noted for his creativity and artistic originality.

The state of our knowledge of a large number of Middle and Late Byzantine monuments precludes generalisations. It is apparent that in the Byzantine empire, architects existed alongside master craftsmen, repeated models alongside new creations, the dynamic evolution of buildings alongside design. Dynamic development involving annexes and modifications was commonly found in churches and secular buildings, but we should not regard it as generalised phenomenon, nor exaggerate its significance. The two well-known passages in Michael Psellus’ Chronicle concerning the successive radical modifications during the erection of the Peribleptos on the one hand and of Hagios Georgios of Mangana on the other are excessive and reflect Psellus’ intent to defame the royal founders by accusing them of squandering public funds, arrogance and superficiality.

The dynamic interventions of the Byzantine founders or the later managers of the monuments stand in contrast with the design of buildings. The direct connection between originality and design is evident from the foregoing, given that new ideas require a process of trial and error that is carried out on paper or in models. By definition “design is a process, a dynamic interaction between concept and contingency, between the generic and the specific; it evolves progressively as multiple individual decisions are assimilated into the whole.” The fact that no Byzantine designs or models have so far been discovered does not mean that there was no design in several, at least, Middle and Late Byzantine buildings. The mathematical knowledge essential to design is attested by the widespread applications of arithmetic and practical geometry, which were widely deployed in the military arts.

Against the flat denial that architectural design was practised by the Byzantines may be marshalled the following fact: the erection of an exact copy of a building can only be achieved by way of a design. We may mention the cases of the katholika of

Vatopedi and Iviron monasteries,74 the church of Profitis Ilias in Thessaloniki and the Komnenion in Thessaly,75 and finally the katholikon of the Hosios Loukas monastery and the church of the Soteira Lykodemou in Athens.76 The transfer of dozens of numbers relating to dimensions from the original to the copy through memory alone is inconceivable.

The monuments cited above attest to the fact that, despite the silence of the literary sources, and above and beyond the usual repetitions of buildings, there were certain tendencies to artistic originality in Byzantine architecture that derived either from the founders or from the architects, when the latter were in a position to make use of a design and had the instructions or consent of the person commissioning the building.

The most important of our examples were built in the 11th century, and indeed at its beginning. The increased interest in painting shown by the urban aristocracy of Constantinople at this period, and the emergence of amateur painters, who were members of the aristocracy or educated clerics,77 has already been noted. Against the background of a progressive78 society with a wide range of interests, it is likely that men of the same social class also held views on architecture, which they discussed with architects.79

Against this view it could be argued that almost all the phenomena of originality are to be found in Greece, not in the Byzantine capital. Provincial Helladic church building was more progressive than that of the cultural centre of Constantinople.80 Unfortunately, the literary sources reveal nothing of the social and economic conditions in the provinces, or the relations of the local Greek aristocracy with the capital.81

These are matters that remain to be dealt with by historical research in the future.

ARCHITECTURE D'INTÉRIEUR :
LE PENTAPYRGION
par Gilbert DAGRON

Summary: The pentapyrgion described in De cerimoniis II 15 is an arrangement of five "towers" or show-cases, a unique ensemble designed, allegedly by the emperor Theophilos, for decorating the nuptial chamber of the Magnaura. For the festivities of Easter — and for the reception of important embassies should they arrive around that date — this ensemble, symbolizing fertility and renewal, was moved to the apse of the throne room, the Chrysotriklinos. This paper attempts to explain the texts, their context and the symbolism they convey, with no claim however to a complete reconstruction of the decorum.

Les historiens ou philologues qui ont travaillé sur le cérémonial de la cour byzantine des IXe-XIIe siècles, à commencer par Du Cange et Reiske, ont eu à imaginer la forme et la fonction de ce meuble ou décor auquel les sources donnent le nom de pentapyrgion. Leurs définitions sont très variées, mais presque toujours imprécises.

— Jean Ebersolt : « Vaste armoire composée de cinq tours, dans les compartiments desquels on exposait, au moment des réceptions, différents objets » ; il ajoute en note que chacune des tours (rupyia) avait des compartiments (μεσοκόρδιον).1

— René Janin : « Une vaste armoire à cinq pans, œuvre de Théophile, dans laquelle on exposait des vases, des couronnes, etc. ».

— Albert Vogt : « Une sorte de vaste armoire — un trésor — composée de cinq tours séparées les unes des autres par des panneaux (μεσοκόρδιον), à l'intérieur desquels étaient exposés des couronnes, des vases et autres œuvres de prix. Ce genre de meuble était connu à Byzance, et ceux du Chrysotriklinos et de la Magnaura n'étaient pas d'une extraordinaire rareté... Généralement, ces armoires à tours se plaçaient dans l'atrium des palais. » Ici, il semble qu'on le plaçait

2. Le Grand Palais de Constantinopole et le Livre des cérémonies, Paris 1910, p. 82.
4. Cette indication vient de Reiske (loc. cit. n. 1), qui, dans une première interprétation à laquelle il renonce, renvoie à Chron. Cassinense, III, 34.