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Πάντα ρεῖ

*Change in Thirteenth-Century Byzantine Architecture, Art, and
Material Culture*

Edited by

JENNY P. ALBANI and
IOANNA CHRISTOFORAKI

BREPOLS

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Chapter 2 Brickwork and Façade

*Envisioning the Apse of the Church of Saint John the Baptist at the Lips Monastery**

The façade in medieval culture has been extensively studied as an object or composition executed mainly in stone, giving rise to the development of a pictorial perception of the wall.¹ This article expands research by focusing on the thirteenth-century addition to the Constantinopolitan monastery of Constantine Lips – the church of Saint John the Baptist – and explores the context of continuity and change of the brickwork ornamentation and its exegetic understanding in association with the vision of the Divine (Figures 1, 1a).

In the historiography of Byzantine architecture, architectural ideas at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century were often marked by qualities, which, ‘quite possibly because of the visual habits thus engendered, we now underrate.’² It has been widely argued by scholars that, as early as the twelfth century, in the Komnenian period, the decoration of façades with blind arches and meanders is carefully executed: the north and south churches of the Pantokrator monastery (c. 1118–36) and the church of Christ Pantepoptes (c. 1081–87) in Constantinople are a case in point.³ During the reign of the Palaiologan dynasty, the tradition was restored and became visible both inside the church and on the façades. The façade and its rich ornament repertoire is a masterwork of the Palaiologans due to careful ordering, complexity, and aesthetic aspects. Between 1282 and 1320, numerous monuments were restored mainly in Constantinople: the church of Saint John the Baptist at the Lips monastery was added to the existing church of the Mother of God; similarly, funerary chapels were attached to the church of Saint Mary Pammakaristos

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- 1 For further more understanding of reading the contents of the wall in West European architecture during the Middle Ages, cf. LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History’, pp. 248–51; Roy and Zumthor ed., *Jeux de Memoire*, pp. 169–83; Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*.
- 2 Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, p. 440.
- 3 Ćurčić, ‘Articulation of Church Façades’, pp. 21, 22.





Figure 1: East façade from the South. Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.



Figure 1a: East façade from the North. Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.

(shortly after 1310) and the Chora church (c. 1316–21). All churches built in the abovementioned period display an array of ornamental techniques and a budding interest in elements of façade articulation. In late Byzantine churches, the external surface of the apse was the most lavishly articulated.⁴ Apses continuously repeated articulation elements, such as colonettes, alternating flat and semicircular niches, and various ornaments. The schemes of the east façade underwent radical alternations from one monument to another, revealing transformations in the general aesthetic concept.⁵ These carefully joined patterns and their aesthetic selection may suggest various kinds of imagery both to the Byzantine and the modern viewer.

For a broader interpretation of the aesthetic ideas encapsulated in Constantinopolitan architecture during the last quarter of the thirteenth century, it is of utmost importance to understand that, by viewing random patterns, we tend to recognize and identify something. But do all patterns convey a specific meaning, or are they to be considered simple nonfigurative ornaments? I would suggest that there is more in the image than what we can immediately see, that is the *epiphaneia* or the meaning beyond the surface of the church.⁶

4 For Constantinopolitan churches from c. 1282 to 1320, see Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii*, pp. 93–100; Ousterhout, *Master Builders*, p. 108; Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, pp. 597–614, esp. 601, 603, 605, 606.

5 Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, pp. 597–614, esp. 601, 607.

6 Papaioannou, 'Byzantine Enargeia', pp. 48–60.





Figure 2: East façade from the North. Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.

Focusing on the east façade, the architects placed numerous perfectly ordered bricks, reaching an overall unity in variety. Our analysis of the apse of the south church of the Lips monastery is the starting point of our investigation. The expansion of the Lips monastery is the first important undertaking at the end of the thirteenth century commissioned by Theodora Palaiologina, the widow of Michael VIII (r. 1261–82). Empress Theodora Palaiologina (c. 1240–1303) chose the convent of Lips (Figure 2) as the burial place of her family due to its proximity to the church of the Holy Apostles. The church of Saint John is one of the most significant Palaiologan foundations, preserved in Constantinople, with a remarkable aesthetic value related to the playful, elegant shaping of its compartments and brickwork patterns.⁷

⁷ Selected bibliography about the convent of Lips: Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople*, pp. 122–37; Ebersolt and Thiers, *Les églises de Constantinople*, pp. 211–13; Megaw, 'Notes on Recent Work', pp. 333–35; Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines de Constantinople*, pp. 100–22; Macridy, 'The Monastery of Lips', pp. 253–78; Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul*, pp. 322–45; Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, pp. 261–63; Marinis, 'The Monastery tou Libos'; Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, pp. 601–02.

The exterior of the apse of the church represents a new creation that consists of various, often heterogeneous components. It suggests that understanding such image of the exterior architecture during the reign of the Palaiologoi relies on the specificity of brickwork and cognitive mechanisms of the beholders.⁸ Exteriorized images (χιτώνες δερμάτινοι), 'depicted' on the façades, exposed essentially the dialectic of the relationship between the image, as a material object made of brick, and the beholder.⁹

The façades of the church of Saint John at the Lips monastery were comprehensively described in architectural studies¹⁰ but rarely examined as carefully constructed surfaces encircling the church, as *phantasiai* – embodied, sacred imprints on the apse.¹¹ Due to restoration works by Fatih Municipality,¹² these ornaments were unavailable for examinations from 2012 to 2018 (Figure 3). Nevertheless, the church restoration provided us again with the possibility of reconsidering in depth and qualifying the degree of visual engagement, how the brick mediated perception of the façade and how narratives and 'stories' are placed before one's eyes via the imagination (Figure 3a).¹³

Before discussing the details of the narrative on the east façade, it is necessary to recall Patriarch Photios's words about Byzantine approaches to ancient theories of cognition of the visible and mnemotechniques. According to Photios, 'For even if each one [the hearing] introduces (συνεισάγεται) the other [the seeing], still the comprehension (κατάληψις) that comes about through sight is shown in fact to be far superior to the learning that penetrates through the ears.' This notion – that the two senses are 'brought in together' (συνεισάγεται) – confirms the power of the imagination and narratives in the mind. Photios also offered a list of the instruments of knowledge, including sensation, imagination, art, belief, understanding, knowledge, wisdom, and mind.¹⁴

Although every church is a material construction, it also contains specific grace that does not belong to this world. If we study the apse as part of the physical space, which supports the very purpose of the liturgical process, reincorporating the mundane into the sacred, we can understand how the apse appears to transcend the reality of material. The profuse glory, power, and grace of God, who dwells in the church, sanctifies the lifeless material (brick, stone, and mortar). The church becomes a consecrated abode of the Holy Trinity.¹⁵ The apse should be primarily

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- 8 Cf. Pasadaios, 'Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος; Velenis, *Ερμηνεία του εξωτερικού διακόσμου*, I; Vocotopoulos, 'Church Architecture', pp. 79–92; Trkulja, 'Aesthetics and Symbolism', pp. 46, 213–15 (with references); Korać, 'Monumentalna arhitektura', pp. 209–31; Ćirić, 'Brick by Brick', pp. 206–15.
- 9 Harrison, *The Human Person*, pp. 78–93, especially p. 88; Webb, *Ekphrasis*, pp. 85–130.
- 10 Marinis, 'The Monastery *tu Libos*', pp. 23–27, 29–31 (with detailed bibliography); Ćirić, 'East Façade', pp. 315–29; Spingou, 'Revisiting Lips Monastery', pp. 16–19.
- 11 Pasadaios, 'Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος', pp. 14–18; Marinis, 'The Monastery *tu Libos*', pp. 124–25. See also: Pentcheva, 'Moving Eyes', pp. 223–34; Pentcheva, 'Hagia Sophia and Multisensory Aesthetics', pp. 93–111; Isar, 'Dazzling Presence', pp. 130–09. Generally on *phantasia*, see Tanner, *The Invention of Art History*, pp. 293–87; Sheppard, *The Poetics of Phantasia*.
- 12 Kahraman, 'Osmanli Arşiv', pp. 11–23.
- 13 Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, pp. 194–98. See also the bibliography in Webb, *Ekphrasis*.
- 14 Photios, *Bibliothèque*, ed. by René and Schamp, III, p. 132.
- 15 Symeon of Thessalonike, *Περί τοῦ ἱεροῦ ναοῦ καὶ τῆς τοῦτου καθιερώσεως*, ed. by Migne, chapter PKH', col. 336A–C.





Figure 3: East façade from the South. Saint John the Baptist Constantinople. After the restoration works. Photo by David Hendrix.



Figure 3a: Apse. Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. After the restoration works. Photo by David Hendrix.

considered in the context of shaping the space around the ritual. As a graceful and harmonious whole, the apse delineates the spatial and celestial centre of the world. The apse is organized in such a way that there is a natural 'draw' toward the heart of the mysteries, the focus of attention and desire.

Thus, design elements, by combining visual, flickering sensations with 'aniconic' or abstract themes, follow some principles of divine organization: horizontal dividing of the façades, arrangement of niches, blind arches (Figure 4).¹⁶ The master builder created brick panels emulating luxurious wall revetment composed of geometric ornaments in rhomboid frames.¹⁷

As Symeon of Thessalonike wrote, 'The splendour of the church signifies the beauty of Paradise. Therefore the sacred church pictures heavenly gifts of Paradise, including in itself not just the Tree of Life, but Life itself consecrated.'¹⁸ This Life is envisioned though profoundly symbolic brick patterns created from ornamental symmetry: zigzags, lozenge patterns whose framing embodies the 'illusionistic' panorama comprised of cuboid geometric motifs, swastika-meander friezes, various whirling discs, the Tree of Life,¹⁹ and specifically, heraldic signs based on the heart motif.²⁰ Based on the study of the inherently logical relationship between the interior and the exterior, the codified ornaments were mainly understood as a universal archetype because 'On the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer rooms, He carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers' (I Kings 6. 29).

We also find the indented heart motif on the church of Saint John Aleiturgetos in Nessebar,²¹ while another variation of the motif appears on the north façade of the Chora church.²² A particularly striking perspectival meander (Greek key or Greek fret), encountered in the Hellenistic tradition, occurs on a perimeter frieze of the apse of the south church at the Lips monastery.²³ As seen from below, it seems that the meander is rendered in perspective, and it appears three-dimensional. When viewed frontally, the meander tends to appear flat. Consequently, it wavers between being

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- 16 Küllerich, 'Savedoff, Frames, and Parergonality', pp. 320–23. The term aniconic was considered in Brubaker, 'Aniconic Decoration in the Christian World', pp. 573–90. See also Küllerich, 'Abstraction in Late Antique Art', pp. 77–94.
- 17 For early Christian examples of squares and their later repetitions, cf. Brenk, 'Early Christian Mosaics', pp. 647–57.
- 18 Salonijs, 'The Tree of Life in Medieval Iconography', pp. 280–343.
- 19 Ćirić, 'Décryptage du mur', pp. 17–30.
- 20 Ćirić, 'Εν τούτω νικά', pp. 231–44. In Serbian historiography, the only one study published with the aim of further examination of brick and differential brick analysis is Ristić, Ćirković, and Korac eds, *Bricks from Serbian Medieval Monasteries*, pp. 80–81.
- 21 Bakalova, 'Messemvria's Churches', pp. 555, 561, 563.
- 22 For the heart motif, cf. Tulnay, 'Masonry', pp. 76–79; Ousterhout, 'The Byzantine Heart', pp. 36–44; Bakalova, 'Messemvria's Churches', 563.
- 23 There are numerous examples of this type of perspectival meander. Except on the apsidal façade of the Virgin Mary Pribleptos church in Ohrid it appears on the lateral walls of the Virgin church in Zaum; at the apse, the north and south sides of Saint Nicholas tes Rhodias, the northern register of the apse of the Paregoretissa church, apse of Kato Panagia, and the east façade of Saint Basileios church in Arta. Papadopoulou, *The Monuments of Byzantine Arta*, pp. 62, 136, passim; Ćirić, 'Brick Substance at Zaum Church', pp. 102–03.





Figure 4: East façade from the South, brickwork details. Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.



Figure 5: Brickwork patterns. Bottom zone of the apse, Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.

two- and three-dimensional.²⁴ The meander creates the illusion of three-dimensional efflux imbued with the polychrome effect of brick and mortar.²⁵

Although these descriptions are accurate and precise, it is possible to interpret ornamental frames, or better to say entities, in the mode of imaging, vision, and visual rhetoric. Brickwork images, as visual sensations that stimulate the nerve cells in the eyes and convey information to the brain, frames, or entities are identified by enumerating the objects and elements shown in the visual frames, endowed with special meaning. The overall image, the vertical and horizontal axis of the apse of the south church at the Lips monastery, creates the impression of the otherworldliness of basically antique motifs. These ornamental units beckon the worshipper and fill the believer with longing and the joy of contemplating the vast surfaces of the walls.²⁶ Thus, the design elements, combining visual, flickering sensations into ‘themes’, follow some organizational principles that consist mainly in the horizontal division of the façades. Geometry was, therefore, the domain par excellence of the architect,

24 Guimier-Sorbets, ‘Le méandre à pannetons de clef’, pp. 195–213; Polito, ‘Il meandro dall’arte greca’, pp. 101–12 (with bibliography).

25 Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul*, pp. 386; Marinis, ‘The Monastery *tou Libos*’, pp. 118–19. Cf. also: Ćirić, ‘Εν τούτω νικά’, pp. 231–44, esp. 235.

26 Gerstel, ‘Images in Churches’, pp. 93–120.





Figure 5a: Brickwork patterns. Bottom zone of the apse, Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.

the artist, whose task was to construct a model of the earth and its exegesis through the rules of geometry and provide the space with meanings.

In the bottom register of the apse, the ornament resembling a rhomb/diamond appears inside the blind niche. A diamond is depicted in pseudo-three-dimensional perspective (Figure 5), namely a Tree of Life diagram, and in the geometry of a simple hexagon. Symbolically, it represents the structural elements of the ‘ecclesiastic sky’ that crowned the elaborate exterior of this church. The diamond symbol will appear later on the fourteenth-century façades when the sacralization of the exterior in the architectural design process acquired its specific encyclopaedic character.²⁷ The emergence of the diamond symbolism was away from representing the concept of vision and knowledge of God seen as light during Christ’s Metamorphosis.²⁸ This feature affirms the Hesychast teaching about the unlimited splitting of the Divine splendour of the inaccessible light in the altar area.²⁹ Curiously enough, the rhomb or diamond is also a symbol of Christ the Saviour, whose coming was announced in the prophecy of Physiologos in Amos 7. 8–9 (‘Behold I will set a diamond among

27 Ćirić, ‘Les emblèmes’, pp. 189–97; Ćirić, ‘Brick by Brick’, pp. 206–15.

28 Theodosiou, Manimanis, Danezis, and Dimitrijevic, ‘The Cosmology of the Gnostics’, pp. 47–52.

29 Meyendorf, ‘Spiritual Trends in Byzantium’, pp. 19–84; Meyendorf, ‘Is “Hesychasm” the Right Word?’, pp. 447–56.



Figure 6: Triangle brick pattern. Bottom zone of the apse, Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.



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Figure 7: Swastika brick frieze. Upper zone of the apse, Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.

my people Israel'). However, its implementation in architecture may be regarded as a relation between the believer and the Divine. It is the reminder of the light that 'shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1. 5).³⁰

Rules of geometry, providing the space with meaning, are essentially an act of worship in themselves, the prayer embodied in brick (Figure 6). Therefore, geometry was also the tool of the architect, the artist, to construct a model of Paradise and create an atmosphere of the desire of sublime presence.³¹

In contrast to the lower zone of the apse, in the top one, swastikas are placed which frequently served as apotropaic devices, both in pagan and Christian contexts (Figure 7). Applied in a Christian context, swastikas could be seen as a form of the cross. In this respect, we have to bear in mind that a large number of early Christian pavements exist on which one can find an endless repetition of ornaments, among which rows of swastikas appear. Many of them have been found in Greece and the Middle East, as revealed by the studies of Panayota Assimakopoulou-Atzaka.³² Although subtle traces of the apotropaic meaning may

30 Ćurčić, 'Divine Light', pp. 307–37.

31 Potamianos, 'Light into Architecture', pp. 120–31.

32 Polito, 'Il meandro dall'arte greca', pp. 91–112; Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Υψηλιωτά δάπεδα*.

linger on, the late antique meander can hardly be understood in the same manner as the Hellenistic one. Based on previous studies, it would be useful to raise the following question: do they represent a dilution of the motif into an ornament, or do they attempt to *intensify* the benefits brought by the potent sign? It is a reformulation of a conventional motif that was given a new function and thus acquired new significance.³³

The classical heritage was deeply rooted, a fact discretely indicated not only by the etymological structure of the name of the ruling dynasty but also by the artistic tendencies following antique patterns. The usage of swastika brickwork during the Palaiologan period strongly connects this dynastic symbol of power with the classical past and Hellenism.³⁴ In this sense, one of the key thoughts and a valuable framework for understanding the swastika brickwork on the apse and its contemporary visual *comparanda* appears in Theodore Metochites' commentary: '... ἡμῖν οἱ καὶ τοῦ γένους ἐσμὲν καὶ τῆς γλώσσης αὐτοῖς [τοῖς Ἑλλησι] κοινωνοὶ καὶ διάδοχοι' (to us, who share the same origin and language with them [partakers and successors to the Hellenes (Greeks)]).³⁵ The key sentence for understanding the usage of images from antiquity and its revivalism derives from *Seimeioseis Gnomikai* on the study of History where he declared that: 'without the collective experience of ancient historians, philosophers, and orators, no one, no matter how noble of nature, can succeed in life; even as a plant needs water, so only the ancients can provide the examples and guidance, to be inscribed on the image-producing **tablets of memory**'.³⁶

The structure of the east wall of the church of Saint John the Baptist provides performative interaction, the 'economy of the walls'. The thingness of the façade that flickers and appears to move, caused by the optic engagement of bricks, stacked vertically and horizontally (Figure 8), and solar discs, oriented in the same direction as the swastikas above, reveal that a relationship based on one's experience of the space is inevitably a transcendent one.³⁷ Zooming out and viewing these abstract images in their wider context, swastikas and circular motion of discs become significant accents in the visual ensemble. Having in mind the variety of previous approaches to the topic of the architecture of the south church, it is interesting to delineate the aesthetic context between the brickwork and certain core aspects of transcendental teachings, such as the idea of infiltrating transcendental vision mentioned by pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite. As seen on the brickwork of the apse, not only their shape but also their precise treatment as a kind of icons, observed in their elaborate framing, undoubtedly specify the iconic importance that brick creators ascribed to them. Like a vast membrane, the apsidal façade reveals on its exterior surface the

33 Grabar, 'The Artistic Climate in Byzantium', pp. 1–16.

34 Jevtić, 'The Antiquarianism and Revivalism', pp. 209–17; Boeck, *Imagining the Byzantine Past*.

35 Theodore Metochites, *Miscellanea philosophica et historica*, ed. by Müller and Kiessling pp. 14–16.

36 Featherstone, 'Theodore Metochites's *Semeioseis Gnomikai*', pp. 333–44.

37 Ćirić, 'As the Byzantines Saw It', pp. 303–12; Ćirić, 'Solar Discs', pp. 46–47; Ćirić, 'Materijalnost i opeka', p. 12.





Figure 8: Solar discs. Apse, Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by David Hendrix.



Figure 9: Selected ornamental friezes. Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photos by Jasmina S. Čirić.

powerful stimulus: the secret mystery performed behind the altar.³⁸ It creates the illusion that the apse wall is transparent; it is a paradoxical vision that gives rise to the effect of the walls having been de-materialized as the believer is placed inside the church and absorbed in the patterns depicted both in the interior and exterior.

38 Isar, 'Le mur aboli', pp. 611–32.

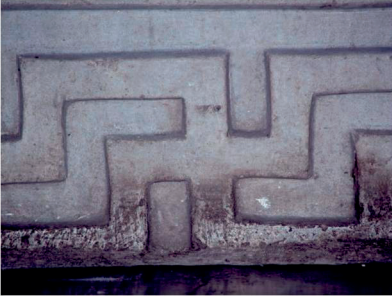


Figure 10: Swastika pattern. Cornice above the pavement, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.



Figure 11: Swastika pattern, sculpted detail of an interior cornice from Saint John the Baptist. Archaeological Museum of Istanbul. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.

The membrane-like wall falls 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.’³⁹

Some images combine optical and almost tactile qualities, thus enabling the beholder to have a variety of sensations (Figure 9). The swastika motif on the apse of the south church of the Lips monastery repeats the same imagery of the interior swastika (Figure 11). This ‘clothing’ of the church with the swastika motif relies on the same imagery on the carved cornice above the floor and the bronze door of Hagia Sophia (Figure 10);⁴⁰ the wall which probably belonged to the monastery of Christ Philanthropos at the Mangana quarter (Figure 12),⁴¹ and the central register below the tripartite window at the north façade of the Vefa Kilise mosque in Constantinople

39 Gregory of Nyssa, ‘Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὸν μέγαν μάρτυρα Θεόδωρον’, ed. by Migne, cols 735–48.

Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermones*, ed. by Heil and others, pp. 61–86.

40 Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, p. 223, fig. 246.

41 Ćirić and Terryn, ‘Marmara Sea Wall’, pp. 42–43.





Figure 12: Swastika pattern. Marmara Sea Wall, Constantinople. Photo by David Hendrix.

Figure 13: Swastika pattern. North façade, Vefa Kilise mosque, Constantinople. Drawing according to Lioba Theis.



(Figure 13). It also appears in a frieze running above the Deesis mosaic in the inner narthex and the south vault of the Chora church (Figures 14, 14a, 14b).⁴²

The hierarchy of geometric brickwork patterns and their semiotic content also culminates in 'swirling' circular patterns, disc motifs (Figure 8).⁴³ Discs were believed to be miraculous signs that, according to exegesis, had the power to physically fortify the church through the distribution of the sign of the Logos as a seal of security.⁴⁴

Prominently displayed and often framed by other patterns, the disc appears as a visual reminder of the Divine in the form of radiating presence expressed by the eternal symbol – the circle. Gregory Palamas used the circle and the sun in parallel to illustrate the distinction between essence and energies within God. Palamas

42 Ćirić, 'Through the Labyrinth', pp. 391–400.

43 Ćirić, 'I stade Sunce i zaustavi se Mesec', pp. 665–96.

44 Radojčić, *Mileševa*, p. 16.



Figure 14: Swastika frieze above the Deesis mosaic, detail. Chora church, Constantinople. Photo by David Hendrix.

established that, although humans cannot participate in the essence of the sun, they can participate in divine energies in the same way they share the rays of the sun.⁴⁵ Such optical imagery and semiotics are additionally stressed by the motif, which encircles the disc motif, that is to say, the vertically and horizontally stacked bricks which form the so-called *crux gemmata* motif that probably marked every side of the apse (Figures 15, 15a). The jeweled style is suggestive of the aforementioned biblical account on Heavenly Jerusalem that describes it as built of gold and precious stones.⁴⁶ The *crux gemmata*, whose prototype has been erected at Golgotha, was a sign of divine power and the victory of Christianity. These crosses, which appeared in several media of early Christian art, were strongly evocative of an eschatological interpretation signifying the ultimate Christian victory and Salvation, the embodiment of the transfigured Divine Light.⁴⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem claims that ‘a sign of a luminous cross shall go before the King, who was formerly crucified, plainly declaring him ... the sign of the cross shall be a terror to his foes; but a joy to his friends who have believed in Him or preached Him, or suffered for His sake’.⁴⁸ For Cyril, the cross is the unequivocal symbol of Christ’s power, also mentioned by John Chrysostom in *De cruce et latrone*, according to which Christ had taken the cross with him to Heaven to

45 Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, p. 90.

46 Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, p. 68.

47 Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, p. 193.

48 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Κατήχησις ΙΕ Φωτιζομένων*, ed. by Migne, cols 900–01.





Figure 14a: Swastika frieze above the Deesis mosaic, detail. Chora church, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.



Figure 14b: South vault of the Chora church, Constantinople. Photo by Jasmina S. Ćirić.

bring it in his Second Coming.⁴⁹ These crosses of light symbolized the luminous cross of the *Parousia*. Through its association with Heavenly Jerusalem as the City of Light that ‘had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of the God did lighten it.’⁵⁰

The apse is designed to admit a shaft of light on the altar. In late Byzantine architecture, the apse exhibits an extensive repertoire of ornaments as part of the phenomenology of the mystery performed at the altar. The east façade of the Baptist church in the Lips monastery as the exterior shape of the sanctuary became the spot in which brickwork ornamentation developed, turns into the visual screening of the mysteries that take place inside the church.

The Eucharist was one of these mysteries. In numerous sources, the Eucharist remained the most sacred event in the life of the Church. The recognition of the Eucharistic presence of Christ on the altar during the divine liturgy and the directing of adoration toward that presence is strikingly attested in the writings of St John Chrysostom (347–407): ‘For thou dost see Him not in a manger but on an altar, not with a woman holding Him but with a priest standing before Him, and the Spirit descending upon the offerings with great bounty.’⁵¹ The identification of the altar as a symbol of Christ and, more importantly, the awareness that it was upon the altar that Christ became truly present during the Eucharistic liturgy would have made the apse the focus of attention for those who came for silent prayer, especially in the quiet of the night.⁵² Thus, exterior brick facilitated the universal understanding and dissemination of the messages displayed inside of the church.⁵³ Therefore, Theodore Metochites, praising his church in Chora, related the walls to a material object which memorializes the sacred.⁵⁴ The entire repertoire of such architectural potential was the product of further practical Constantinopolitan elaboration of the fundamental idea of Christ’s skin incarnated in the temple the same as the Holy Keramion, ‘a tile once made by hand now bears your form not made by hand.’⁵⁵

Having in mind all the above about images that visualize the processing of divine energies into visual patterns, it is possible to conclude that there is a possibility for

49 John Chrysostom, *Eis tòn stauròn kai eis tòn lηστὴν*, ed. by Migne, col. 403.

50 Revelation 20. 23.

51 In I Corinthians, Homily 24, no. 5, in Stone, *A History of the Doctrine*, p. 107. Cf. Ćirić, ‘As the Byzantines Saw It’, p. 311.

52 Isar, ‘Veiled Words’, pp. 27–43.

53 Kissas, ‘Srpski srednjovekovni spomenici u Solunu’, pp. 29–43; Ćirić, ‘The Role of Late Byzantine Thessaloniki’, pp. 65–84.

54 Featherstone, ‘Metochites Poems’, pp. 229–33.

55 Nikiphorova, ‘Nicholaos Mesarites’, p. 205. Cf. Ćirić, ‘Constantinopolitan Concepts’, p. 162.





Figure 15: Brick pattern. Upper zone, apse, detail, Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Vladimir Božinović.

the interpretation of the rhythmical repetition of ornament, as the antithesis between symmetry and beauty regarded by antique philosophers.⁵⁶ Although the combinations of ornaments in late Byzantine architecture will be repeated or interpreted in peculiar schemes, the apse of the south church of the Lips monastery could be considered an exegetic statement of the time. In its structure and iconography this façade is not only an expression of ecclesial consciousness but a theological cosmogram. Its ornaments are designed to convey the unity of the universe in God. The apse acts as a microcosm stretching and showing its particular brickwork details to become a macrocosm.

The development of the scientifically determined historiography of Byzantine architecture offers me the opportunity to express the sincerest hope that this modest contribution may serve as an indication of the possible new directions of future research of the brick patterns and interpretation of antiquity which brought about continuity and changes in late Byzantine art.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Cutting and Massironi, 'Pictures and Their Special Status', pp. 137–68.

⁵⁷ Kiilerich, 'Monochromy, Dichromy and Polychromy', pp. 169–86.



Figure 15a: Upper register, apse, detail. Saint John the Baptist, Constantinople. Photo by Vladimir Božinović.



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