

CHURCHES OF EASTERN CHRISTENDOM

BYZANTIUM

From what has been written it will be plain that, during the early centuries of Christianity, there was not one style of religious architecture, but several. All the known types were in competition, the religious and secular styles of Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia, as well as those in Italy and Greece. The unity achieved in a Gothic cathedral was secured by drawing upon numerous sources of invention, and continually rejecting methods which failed to meet Christian requirements. In one centre a Greco-Roman temple might be converted into a Christian church by cutting away the walls of the inner *cella* and blocking up the partitions between the outer columns of the colonnade, as was done in the seventh century at Syracuse. Elsewhere, a private house, a magistrate's basilica, or the domed hall of a public bath might be adapted. It remains to consider the special contribution which Eastern Christendom made to religious architecture and decorative art. The theme owes its content to the researches of Josef Strzygowski, who has shown that the influences arising from the East are no less significant than those derived from Italy and Greece. Hitherto, Christian historians have been apt to forget that just as the gospel message spread westward through Asia Minor, Northern Africa, Greece, Rome and Gaul to Britain and Ireland, so it spread eastward into Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. The writer of "The Acts" has recorded that Parthians, Medes, Elamites and dwellers in Mesopotamia were members of the early Christian church in Jerusalem, together with Phrygians from Asia Minor, Egyptians and Romans. In the second century A.D. there were Christian communities beyond the Tigris, and the churches included one which Bishop Isaac built at Arbela about 130 A.D. Within 600 years Christianity had reached China. It is said that in the seventh century the Emperor Kao Tsung caused Christian churches to be built in all the provinces of China.

Owing to the Babylonian origin of the Jewish faith and the later dispersion of the Ten Tribes over the Tigris Valley, circumstances were very favourable to the spread of Christianity. They were equally favourable to the rise of a Christian art based upon the well-tested brick architecture of Mesopotamia. Above all, Persia, the great rival of the Roman Empire, must be remembered. In Persia, Christianity was in competition with the doctrines of Zoroaster, as, in the West, it was struggling against Greco-Roman polytheism or the Orphic mysteries. In Egypt, Syria, Armenia and Persia, a domed House of God developed from the circular tomb, a nave with barrel vaulting being added where congregational requirements necessitated. Vault architecture develops naturally where brick is available and timber is scarce. In Mesopotamia and Persia, the basis of Christian architecture was not the classical column surmounted by a timber roof, but a vaulted dome of concrete or brick. Similarly, in Eastern Christendom, decoration was not personified, inasmuch as man was not the key to the whole philosophy of nature and humanity as in Greece and Rome. In Persia, religious art had long been non-representational and relied upon animal and bird imagery and such architectural forms as arcading and blind arches for its effects. Space-filling ornament, which the forerunners of the Persian people had used when still pastoral nomads, was general. Whereas in the West the development of a distinctive Christian architecture was crippled by the tradition of the timber-roofed and long-naved basilica, in Eastern Christendom vault architecture was quickly adapted for Christian worship, and the barrel vault, as well as the dome, was exploited as an element in Christian architecture. It is even suggested that the barrel vaulting of Armenia was a potent example when the Romanesque builders of Italy devised the vaulted churches which developed into the Gothic House of God.

Geographically, Armenia is a tableland in the upper valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates. At the time of the Seleucid Kings of Syria, Armenian authority reached to the Orontes, but it fell before the might of Rome, and later before the might of Persia. When King Tiridates was converted to Christianity by St. Gregory the Illuminator (AD 323) the mission of Armenia was plain. It was to be the bulwark of Christianity in the Hither East against the Fire-worshippers of Persia and the Moslems of Mesopotamia. For centuries, Armenia protected the Eastern flank of Christendom. The country was hilly and encouraged the growth of tribal principalities. The only binding

political force was Christianity. Without this Armenia was bound to fall to Persia, a fact the Persians also knew. On one occasion 300 Iranian priests entered Armenia with a Persian army, but the Armenian zeal for Christianity was unshaken.

St. Gregory founded several churches in Armenia, notably at Vagharshapat, the best known being built on the site of the martyrdom of St. Gaiana, Gregory using stone, brick and cedar wood, collected specially for the purpose. The existing church of St. Gaiana dates from the seventh century and is a concrete building, faced with stone, having a central dome raised upon a drum. Spirelets and bell turrets, suggesting an open lantern, were added in the thirteenth century. Architecturally, the golden age of Armenia was from the sixth to the thirteenth century. The churches and monasteries may be studied in Mr. H. F. B. Lynch's *Travels in Armenia*, in numerous volumes by Professor Strzygowski, and in the sketches of Mr. A. Fetvadjan, who spent 20 years in making detailed drawings of Armenian churches and their decoration. Armenia was deforested early in its history and, in place of wood, builders used concrete made from river mud mixed with lime. Finely jointed masonry in large blocks was added to the concrete core with such effect that after 1000 years and more, and after 500 years of abandonment, the wrought stone can hardly be detached from the concrete. In planning round and cruciform designs, in roofing their concrete vaults, and ornamenting their churches, the Armenians showed remarkable invention. In form, the Armenian church seems to owe much to the domed tomb of Zoroaster, the founder of the faith enshrined in the Zend Avesta. A surviving example of the one-domed church based upon the typical Persian tomb is the Baptistry at Nisibis in Mesopotamia, which was built in AD 359. The single-domed tomb was enlarged so that it became a hall of assembly, an apse being added on one side and, if necessary, a barrel vaulted nave. King Gagik built some remarkable churches in the tenth century at Ani and Vaspurakan with the aid of his court architects, Manuel and Trdat, who based their designs upon a dome building, arising from a square plan, in the Persian manner.



The Church of the Citadel, Ani, Armenia

The Cathedral of Ani, which is 100 feet long and 65 feet wide, was commenced about 989 and was completed by Trdat in 1001, the architect using piers of clustered columns and slightly pointed arches for the support of his dome. The date of the Cathedral at Ani is important, especially as the Gothic features can be traced in Armenian architecture even earlier. Apart from the dome, other arches in the Cathedral at Ani are rounded. The Church of St. Gregory, also built by King Gagik, the Church of the Holy Redeemer (twelfth century) and the Church on the Citadel, with its circular tower crowned with a dome, are other notable buildings at Ani. Generally, the dome was raised on a lofty drum and covered the crossing, the rest of the church being covered with barrel vaults. Other features of Armenian design were triapsal endings and the use of blind arcading for the decoration of the lower walls and the drum beneath the dome. Western architects who attempted to adapt the Roman basilica to Christian usage had found it difficult to give a sense of spaciousness and secure unity of design. This was partly due to the narrowness of the western nave with its timbered roof, and partly to the importance of the apse in early ritual, which made it difficult to exploit the device of a spacious dome over the crossing. In Armenian designs, the space under the dome was utilised as a means for awakening the devotional mood, and developing the sense of solemnity and awe which accompanies the religious mood as surely as joyful exaltation. Nevertheless, it must not be thought that the builder in Armenia had freedom to develop his art, guided by architectural considerations alone. On the contrary, authority continually controlled his use of material and design. Canon 182 the Armenian Church Law, which was drafted well before the eighth century, lays it down :

" Only the bishop orthodox in faith may design the plan of a church, or the Chorepiscopus or the Peredut with the bishop's consent. If any presume to plan a church without the bishop or Chorepiscopus, we ordain the destruction of the plans. Should, however, an unauthorised plan be sanctioned, we recommend that it be again submitted for approval. Thus shall the designing of the church be blameless."

The altar in an Armenian church was raised 3 feet above the floor for the congregation and was approached by a flight of steps. In the cupola was often placed a figure of Christ Pantokrator, Christ as the all-powerful ruler, a form which was natural in the East where power had long been associated with despotism. Painted and carved symbolism can be studied in the remarkable monastic Church of the Cross at Achthamar, an island in Lake Van, where the carved decoration dates from the early part of the tenth century. The church was built by Gagik, then Prince of Van, from material taken from a fortress destroyed in war. A frieze in low relief runs round the church, showing a hunting scene set in a conventional " forest " of vine leaves and pomegranates, as if to suggest at one and the same time the joys of the chase and the goodfellowship of the wine cup. From the religious standpoint the design seems to be connected with the Hvarenah landscape theme in Persian art, which is connected with the cult of the dead, Hvarenah being the power of vital growth in nature and humanity, which is also regarded as governing the course of the sun, the moon and the stars in the heavens. In Zoroastrianism, Mazda the Brilliant, the Majestic, Greatest, Best and Most Beautiful, was the source of Hvarenah, and the All-knowing was, therefore, the source of the life in the vine and the pomegranate, as he was the source of life in the lions, bears, bulls and birds which also mingled in the vine scroll. On the exterior of the Church of the Cross are also carved scenes from the life of Jonah, while on the western side King Gagik is represented standing before Christ and holding a model of the Church. Elsewhere evangelists and saints are carved with winged monsters which recall the decorations of an Assyrian palace, all evidence of the manner in which a score of national styles were struggling one against another for a part in the final unity which would represent Christian symbolical decoration. Persian, Syrian, Mesopotamian, and Byzantine influences are apparent in the Armenian House of God between the sixth and the twelfth centuries, and, in its turn, Armenian architecture influenced Byzantine and other Christian art in the West. What precise form this Eastern influence took and what was its extent have still to be determined, but that the domed church of Armenia was a

factor in the evolution of Christian architecture seems beyond doubt.

Unfortunately, Armenia was not allowed to carry her architectural inventions to full accomplishment. Neither the leisure, which only peace can give, nor the wealth, which is another concomitant of major art productions, were at her command. A warrior like Tigranes the Great was not only able to make Armenia the seat of a self-supporting monarchy, but engaged in a policy of national expansion, attacking Persia and subduing Syria and Palestine. Armenia, however, was a chaos of tableland and mountain and had no fruitful plain or important trade-route to assure her of continued wealth. When the strong hand of a Tigranes was removed, Armenia became the battle-ground of contending civilizations and creeds, Byzantium on the west and Islam on the east, and the development of religious art in Armenia suffered accordingly.

When Constantine, by the Decree of Milan in A.D. 313, conceded religious liberty to his Empire, the days of classic Rome were numbered. The long threatened invasion of the Germanic tribes was at hand. Even in the time of Marcus Aurelius every Roman capable of bearing arms had been enrolled in the forces defending the Empire. Italy itself was secure. But such outposts as the Danubian provinces were only saved by calling upon the barbarian allies to assist in the defence of the Empire.

Constantine anticipated the inevitable when he determined upon the bold policy of transferring his capital to the shores of the Bosphorus, the site of the Greek towns of Byzantium and Chalcedon. This course was the logical outcome of Diocletian's policy of making the Imperial office an Oriental despotism. The foundation stone of Constantinople was laid in AD. 326. For a time the Emperor maintained his hold upon the western portions of his dominions, but during the century after Constantine's death, the Empire was definitely divided, and Rome became "a provincial city with a past." The immediate future was with the Eastern Empire.

Life in Constantinople closely resembled that in Rome. Senators were brought from the West and induced to settle in the new capital by bribes of estates on the shores of the Bosphorus. The mass of the population - artisans and labourers - were attracted by periodical distributions of oil and wine and by largesses of corn. Indeed, the very site of Constantinople, with its hills and cliffs, recalled that on which Imperial Rome had arisen. Constantinople also has its Seven Hills, crowned to-day with mosques built upon the pattern of Sancta Sophia. Unlike Rome, Constantinople was a city built about three seas - the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus and the Marmora - the last having a wondrous beauty, with its cliffs breaking into the sky-blue waters and, above, the mosque-crowned heights affording a lovely skyline of domes, half domes and minarets. To this site, works of art were brought from different parts of the Empire, until Constantinople was as richly furnished with art treasures as Rome or Athens had been.

The wealth of the city grew apace. All the greater trade routes between Europe and Asia converged naturally upon Constantinople. It became a recognised clearing-house between the two continents.

Two constructions of the time of Constantine remain, the Bin-Bir Derech, or cistern of One Thousand and One Columns, and the Yeribatan Serai, two underground reservoirs for storing water. Most of the Emperor's buildings at Constantinople were hastily built, however, and of poor material, and were rebuilt by Justinian in the sixth century. There were no stone quarries near Constantinople; when the supply of marble columns from Greece and Italy was exhausted, builders in the Eastern Empire relied upon rubble, mortar and particularly fine-quality, well-baked bricks about 1½ inches thick. This naturally led to arch-construction replacing the Greek method of lintel building. The most characteristic feature of the new buildings was their domes - shells of brick concrete veneered with marble and mosaic, the marble and mosaic not only

covering the vaults but the arches upon which the domes were built. The domes seem to have been largely the work of Eastern craftsmen, though Greeks were also employed. Byzantine architecture, in general, was a compromise between Eastern and Western influences, prominent among the Eastern influences being that of Persia with its exquisite sense of decorative detail.

Until the sixth century, then, Constantinople was a second Rome, touched with Christian and Oriental influences, but a second Rome. A change came in the time of the Emperor Justinian. The only existing church in Constantinople dating from pre-Justinian times is St. John Studios, a three-aisled basilica which was built in AD. 463. The church was part of the monastery of the *akoimetai* or Sleepless Monks, who were pledged to carry on a ceaseless divine service, day and night. Under Justinian, the Byzantine style not only developed but was perfected.

In general a Byzantine church stood apart in a close surrounded by trees, and was entered through a cloistered forecourt having a fountain in the middle. The vestibule was in the form of a *narthex*, while the apse at the opposite end was shut off from the body of the church by a screen. In the Eastern ritual the divine mysteries were celebrated behind this solid stone screen, which was pierced by doors, the centre one being curtained. During the prayer of consecration the doors of the screen were closed and the veil before the central door was drawn. Around the curved wall of the apse were seats, with the Patriarch's throne in the centre. Before the throne was the altar, under a baldachino held up by four columns.

Eastern monasticism did not favour great monastic churches, such as those which arose in the West under the rule of St. Benedict, St. Bruno and St. Bernard. Thus Mount Athos was the centre of a group of autonomous monasteries, which united to form a federal theocracy under the rule of St. Basil, this *regula* being supplemented by the *typikon* of each house. Perched on rocky crags above the Aegean, the monastic buildings of Mount Athos surrounded an insignificant church in which the Divine Offices were continually recited. The monasteries on Mount Athos commenced with lonely hermits who lived in caves. Gifts from pious benefactors made collegiate life possible, but Mount Athos, and eastern Monasticism in general, never forgot its hermit origin, or adopted the missionary ideals of the Benedictines. The circumstances favourable to outstanding architectural efforts, therefore, were not present so far as Eastern Monasticism was concerned. In Byzantium, the organizing force was the Crown, not the Church, which was subordinated to the State in the Byzantine imperial system in a manner unknown in the West.

Justinian came to the throne in AD.527. He was not an inexperienced ruler. Justin, his predecessor, had been a man of small political genius. He had willingly allowed his nephew to take a larger share of control than is usually given to an heir-apparent. Justinian saw that the political situation in the East differed from that which earlier Roman Emperors had faced. In the fifth century the Germanic nations had been strong enough to encroach upon the Empire. In the sixth century Justinian felt that the Eastern Empire was strong enough to strike back. Britain, Gaul, and other lands in North-Western Europe were lost, but the Vandal Empire in Northern Africa was vulnerable. It might be that Rome itself could be regained for the Empire.

Justinian was not without resources. The Byzantine army was the best equipped and most reliable force in the Western World. The old Roman infantry system had been put aside. The generals of Justinian, Belisarius and Narses, won their victories with armies in which mail-clad horsemen were the most potent factor. By 533, Justinian felt that the political position in Constantinople itself was sufficiently stable. Belisarius, with 5,000 horsemen and 10,000 foot, sailed for Africa.

Carthage was taken. Two years later Belisarius captured Sicily, and, in A.D. 536, he entered Rome. Ravenna, whither the Ostrogothic king had retired, fell four years later. A Roman emperor

again ruled over a dominion comparable with that of Augustus, Trajan or Hadrian.

After the custom of great conquerors, Justinian celebrated his victories by a series of public buildings, among them Sancta Sophia, the Church of the Holy Wisdom. 'Hagia Sophia' was dedicated in AD.537 to the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. Architecturally, Sancta Sophia solved a problem which had been troubling Christendom since a religion of personal devotion superseded the earlier religion of communal thanksgiving. The earlier Greek and Roman temple had been a shrine. In the age of Justinian, a church was first and foremost a meeting place where the faithful could lift up their hearts in prayer and watch the performance of the sacred rites. A few priests and the privileged heads of certain clans had entered the shrines of the great gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome. The whole body of townsfolk might seek admission to the cathedral of Constantinople. In the sixth century after Christ the first essential in a church was large, unencumbered floor space; indeed, it was the general problem of Roman civic architecture applied to religious art. This problem of interior space was solved by Anthemius of Tralles, and Isidorus of Miletus. Unlike a Greek temple, the exterior was of small importance. The confusion of half domes and shelving roofs of Sancta Sophia had none of the austere beauty of a Doric temple or the beautiful grace of the Maison Carrée at Nimes, with its delicate Corinthian columns. But within, it had a beauty all its own. The central cupola is 107 feet in diameter and rises 180 feet from the ground, springing from a square connected by arches. Procopius (*De Aedificiis, II*) described the dome as floating in air and "suspended by a golden chain from Heaven". It dominates the building. Instinctively, the eye is led from the central altar in the apse to the side galleries and thence from arch to arch of the subsidiary domes to the central cupola. Whereas a low half-light was sufficient to display the meagre decorations of the *cella* of the Parthenon, the interior of Sancta Sophia is aflame with light. Salzenburg wrote, "A flood of light pours itself through the house of God. The East sends its first rays through the six large apse windows into the nave, and the evening sunshine, glowing through the large western window, bathes the vault in fire." And what a beauty of form and colour the light reveals ! The interior of Sancta Sophia is a glow of multi-tinted stones and brilliantly-coloured mosaics, the columns of marble, porphyry and *verd antique* rising in tiers to support the arches on which the great dome and half-domes rest. The central square of Sancta Sophia was the equivalent of the basilican floor space, while the ambulatory, with the surrounding colonnade, served the purposes of the aisles of a basilica. And above is the soaring cupola, together with the blaze of gold and colour, which together symbolise and express the mystery and might of God. "I have surpassed thee, O Solomon," cried Justinian.

Beautiful as was the decoration of Justinian's church, the true glory of Sancta Sophia was the work of its architects, Anthemius and Isidorus. The unifying effect of the central dome was increased by the succession of semi-domes on either side. As has been said, the central cupola rose from four arches, this being possible owing to the device of *pendentives*, spherical triangular constructions which were set between the arches of the dome and which also helped to support it. The square open space in the centre was thus enlarged by the space beneath the half-domes, which was increased still more by the space beneath the surrounding colonnade. What the Parthenon is in the architecture of the column and the lintel, Sancta Sophia is in the architecture of the column and the dome. The architectural beauty lies in the fact that it is a full and perfect expression of dome structure, inasmuch as all that does not belong to dome structure has been eliminated, as all that did not belong to lintel architecture was eliminated from the Parthenon. Throughout Anthemius and Isidorus had a clear, intellectual perception of the end they had in view and how it was to be attained. They knew that the dome, the semi-domes, the arches and the walls of Justinian's church would be enriched with coloured marbles and mosaics, "fresh green as the sea or emerald stone," or again, like "blue cornflowers in grass." But they so ordered their design that formal beauty gave character to the church, not the added decoration. This is the height of architectural achievement; when it is added to a rich originality, it sets the architects of Sancta Sophia high among the masters of their art.

This becomes plain when Sancta Sophia is compared with the church of San Marco, at Venice, where the dome principle is merely used to display the resources of mosaic as a building material. The art of gilding a vitreous cube with gold leaf, which is fixed by melting over it a transparent film of glass, was a Byzantine invention. Used with similar cubes of coloured glass, it was the basis of the wall-paintings in Sancta Sophia, and, centuries later, suggested the domed church of San Marco. As Mr. March Phillips has written in a brilliant page of his *Works of Man*, structural form tends to kill mosaic by making it appear thin and superficial, while mosaic tends to vitiate structural form by making it appear indecisive. A substance embedded in a cement ground-work does not lend itself to perfect smoothness of surface or perfect sharpness and regularity of edge. The decorators of San Marco sacrificed form to colour. Their ideal was a dark interior, built out of solid gold and studded with figures and groups in swarthy crimsons and blues. The lofty array of light and airy domes which made the fascination of Sancta Sophia was exchanged for a group of low, heavy domes of ponderous solidity. San Marco seemed rather "a cavern delved out of the earth." Whereas, in Sancta Sophia, the light was brilliant, in San Marco, it was deep twilight.

The beauty of San Marco is not due to structural form, but to the wealth of mosaics. The many vaults and domes, the chapels and the upper parts of the walls are all covered with richly-coloured scenes. This soft flush of prismatic light, together with the glow of the multi-coloured marbles which encase the pillars and lower walls of the church, are not to be forgotten. The colour in San Marco has been an inspiration to all who have used colour for 1000 years. No one who turns from the glow within San Marco to the glow on the canvases of the greater Venetian painters can fail to perceive the source of the rich suffusion of colour. The colour in San Marco has not only purity and brilliance. It has depth; it has light and shade. The makers of San Marco did their best. But those who realise the fundamentals of architecture most fully will know that the builders of Sancta Sophia did a greater thing when they combined colour and form and, at the same time, demonstrated the possibilities of the dome in Christian architecture.



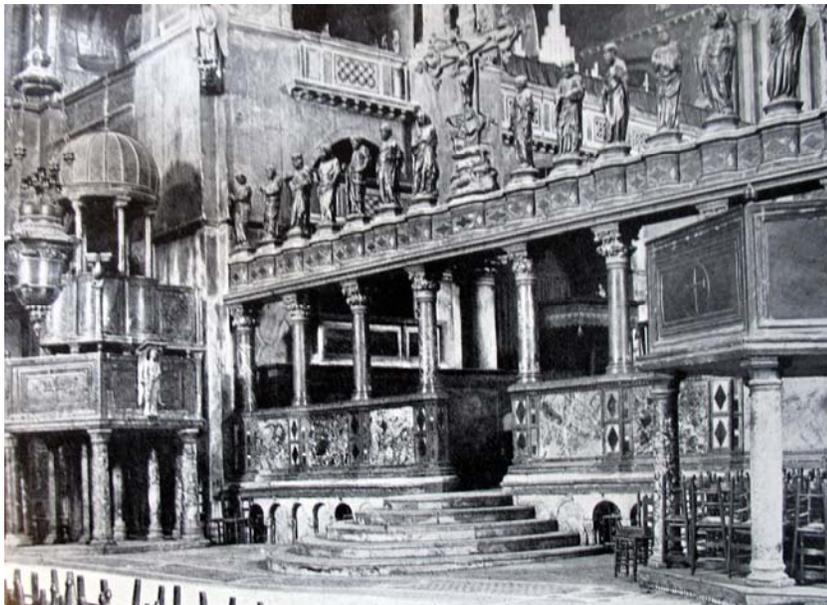


Sancta Sophia, Constantinople

Apart from Constantinople, the most characteristic churches in the Byzantine style are to be found at Salonica in Greece, and Ravenna in the Northern Adriatic. The Ravenna churches have a special interest, influences derived from the Latin West being mingled with characteristics derived from Eastern Christendom. Like Venice, Ravenna lies in a great lagoon at the mouth of the Po, and the houses are built on piles in the Venetian manner. During the Germanic incursions such a place afforded a better chance of safety than a walled city in a plain. In A.D. 396, the Emperor fled to Ravenna from Rome, and Theodoric, the Ostrogothic King, between 493 and 525, made Ravenna his capital. The basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, originally dedicated by the Arian Goths to St. Martin, recalls Theodoric's efforts as church builder. The basilica was designed in the Roman manner. As Theodoric said, "We owe everything to Roman artists." Very characteristic, too, is the church of Sant' Apollinare in Classe, a basilica of brick designed under Theodoric, but finished about 550, after Ravenna had passed to the Byzantines. The nave is large, being almost 50 feet wide, the side aisles making the church almost 100 feet across. The chancel is raised and is reached by a flight of steps, the space below being a burial place for saints, approached by a narrow passage following the semi-circular apse, so that pilgrims might view the shrine. In 563, the Council of Braga gave permission for burial in churchyards "in case of necessity," though the Council forbade burial within the walls of a church. Later, a Council at Mayence decided that "no one should be buried in a church except bishops, abbots, worthy priests and faithful laymen." In the end the habit of burying saints or prominent Churchmen near the altar led to the increase in size of the crypts until the chancel was raised several feet above the level of the nave, as at San Miniato, Florence, or San Zeno, Verona. A later development was the chantry chapel of late medieval times.



S Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna



San Marco, Venice

The domed church of San Vitale at Ravenna was also planned in the time of Theodoric. The King's intention was to put up a personal mausoleum, but the church was completed by Justinian after the capture of Ravenna by Belisarius. San Vitale is a beautifully-planned octagonal building with an apse and a vestibule, arched and vaulted throughout, but the central dome makes it appear more Byzantine than Sant' Apollinare in Classe. The architects at Ravenna, however, were not particularly interested in the dome as an architectural *motif*, and none of them experimented in the mingling of domes and halfdomes, which gives the plan of Sancta Sophia its unique interest. In general, the designers of the Ravenna churches relied upon the horizontal lines of the Roman basilica. The decoration of the Ravenna churches, however, was Eastern in character. The long-naved Roman basilicas had been decorated with columns or pilasters and ceilings of gilded wood,

the mosaic decorations being fashioned from coloured marbles. The decorators of the Ravenna churches, however, followed the Byzantine example and used cubes of coloured glass. In the Ravenna churches, the things of supreme worth are the brilliant glass mosaics, seen by the diffused light which filters through the clerestory windows. The mosaics are very different from the sculpture with which the Greeks and Romans decorated their temples. Whereas the Greco-Roman decorator was a naturalist, the Byzantine was content to treat the human form as a symbol. In representing a man or woman, he flattened the figures, made little use of light and shade, and eliminated the impression of three-dimensional space. The suitability of the strongly-drawn Byzantine figures to the severe lines of a basilica, however, is self-evident. Standing out in dark outline from backgrounds of blue or gold, these mosaics fill the rectangular spaces afforded by the basilican plan in the happiest manner, and are no less successful in filling the semi-domed space above the altar in the apse.

The famous groups of Justinian and the Empress Theodora, with their suites, on either side of the sanctuary of San Vitale, are examples of Byzantine mosaic work at its best. The composition is necessarily cold and unemotional, but the colouring of the glass cubes is so glowing and harmonious that the eye forgets that the medium is the uncompromising mosaic. In the portrait of the Emperor, the sensitive lips are in character with the ascetic scholar - hard, narrow, but determined - known to the world as Justinian. Over and above these charms of colour and draughtsmanship, the mosaics are in a high degree 'decorative,' and have a fitting place among the severe lines of a basilica. Regarded from the standpoint of suitability to a House of God, however, these mosaics suggest an imperial rather than a religious origin, in the sense that they were set there because a powerful ruler had associated himself with Christianity and linked political ambition with religious architecture. Much was gained from this association in rich material and abounding craftsmanship, but something was lost. Inasmuch as the Emperor chose to make Christian doctrine and ritual a secondary consideration, a scene of courtly pageantry was naturally set upon the walls of San Vitale, Ravenna, rather than a representation of the Virgin Mother of Galilee or the sacrificed Jesus of Golgotha. When the First Person of the Trinity was represented, it was God as judge rather than the kindly Father of man.



Mosaic of the Emperor Justinian, San Vitale, Ravenna

Elsewhere, as in the old cathedral of Ravenna, which was unfortunately destroyed, non-representational methods of decoration were adopted. The nave walls were ornamented with hunting and fishing scenes and the apse was decorated with a symbolic landscape, doubtless the Christian equivalent of the Paradise pictures of Persia, described by Strzygowski. In many respects this non-representational decoration was more characteristic of the Christian outlook during the first six or eight hundred years of Christendom than such designs as the Justinian or Theodora groups. The insistence upon human themes represented the triumph of the Greco-Roman West over the Jewish, Syrian and Persian East.

So far as the early Fathers of the Church were concerned, there is no doubt as to their purpose in authorising wall pictures, and making them a feature of the Christian House of God. St. Basil, who lived about 379, said in a sermon, "Rise up now, I pray you, you famous painters of the good deeds of this army. Make glorious by your art the mutilated images of our leader. With colours laid on by your cunning, make illustrious the crowned martyr, by me too feebly painted. I retire vanquished before you in your painting of the excellences of the martyr." The purpose of the painted symbol was to reinforce the written or spoken word of the gospel message. Pope Gregory I. (*Ep.* VII. 3) wrote : " Painting is used in churches that they who are ignorant of letters may, at least, read on the walls by seeing what they cannot read in books."

Paulinus Nolanus explained his reason for covering the church of St. Felix at Nola with pictures even more fully in a letter (*Poema de S. Felice natal*, IX., p. 541

"You ask my object for adorning the walls with animated figures. This is the reason. The gatherings which the fame of St. Felix brings together are known to all, the crowd is great. Here

are rustic minds, not wanting in faith, but unskilled in letters and long accustomed to profane rites. These, coming as strangers, are brought home to Christ through the merits of the saints. They have left their far-away homes, regardless of the frosty weather, for their warm faith keeps out the cold. Now in throngs they fill the hours of the wakeful night with joyfulness, dispelling sleep by mirth, and by candles the shades of darkness. But pity it is that, in all their joy, they fail to keep the bounds of temperance, and quaff the wine-cup within the holy places. To a sober gladness one would wish to set no limit. Nevertheless, I pardon the mistake of their untrained spirits. Unconscious of error, they fall through their warmth of enthusiasm, thinking in their blindness that the saints rejoice when their tombs are reeking with the odour of wine. Wherefore, it seemed to us good to deck the house of Felix with sacred pictures, that haply their forms and colours might seize upon the astonished imaginations of the country folk. Above the designs are placed their titles, so that the written word amplifies what the hand has drawn. Thus, while the crowd point out the pictures one to another, they are less quick than before to turn to feasting; they feed with their eyes instead of with their lips. Wondering at the paintings, they forget their hunger and a better habit lays gradual hold upon them. As they read the sacred stories they learn from pious examples how honourable are holy deeds and how satisfying is sobriety. So comes forgetfulness of wine. The cups grow fewer as the day passes in contemplation, and the time devoted to these sights of wonder leaves but few hours to be spent at table."

Lastly, the Synod of Nicaea, sitting in A.D. 787, made this declaration regarding the stone and bronze statues :

" Venerable and holy images should be set up in the same manner as the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross - the images, to wit, of our Lord and God the Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the one undefiled Lady, the holy Mother of God, and of the honourable angels and all saints and holy men, for the honour of the image passes on to the original, and he who reverences the image reverences it in the person of Him who is therein depicted."

After the times of Justinian there was a declension from the high standard of craftsmanship and architectural propriety shown in the Ravenna mosaics. A stiff Byzantine figure in its stiff robes, repeated again and again along a church wall, lacks the charming variety which Hellenic art had taught the world to look for. In the end the Byzantines devised a series of symbolical figures to represent the principal personalities in the Bible story. So long as the painted figures could be recognised, all was well. To this day the Greek Church insists upon the production of formal designs, which have been repeated with little or no change for centuries. When M. Didron discovered the 'Painter's Guide,' at Mount Athos, the explanation of Byzantine formalism was apparent. The guide enumerates the *motifs* of hundreds of themes from Old and New Testament story and hagiology. Here is a passage from the instructions regarding the method of depicting the "Holy Patriarchs according to the Genealogy."

"The First Father, Adam; an old man, long hair, white beard. The righteous Abel, son of Adam; young, beardless. The righteous Seth, son of Adam; an old man, brown beard. The righteous Enosh, son of Seth; an old man, beard bifurcated. The righteous Mahalalel, son of Cainan; an old man, bald. The righteous Jared, son of Mahalalel; an old man, beard tri-furcated."

When it is remembered that such inventions were repeated during 1000 years, the question must arise : What was there in this denaturalised art which made it acceptable to the Byzantine people? The answer carries one into the deeps of Byzantine life - social, political, philosophical and spiritual. It is an historical, not an aesthetic problem. Certainly, the formalism of the Byzantine style was not due to faulty technique. A denaturalised and schematic method was judged to be best suited to convey the ideas inherent in Eastern Roman Christianity.

The presence of an Emperor ruling at Constantinople was deemed necessary if the Eastern possessions of the Roman Empire were to be held. This brought certain consequences in its train. The later Byzantine emperors chose to dispense with the energetic deputies of earlier Roman history. A strong body of bureaucrats, each member of which relied on a superior, replaced the military administrators who had served earlier Roman Emperors. The official hierarchy was headed by four Praetorian Prefects, the symbols of their office being a silver inkstand, a lofty chariot and a great pencease of gold. A silver inkstand and a gold pencease! And among the subservient bureaucrats were the Patriarchs of the Byzantine Church! The characteristics of the Byzantine Empire were those of a soulless machine rather than a living organism, but on the whole the system served well. While Italy, France, Germany and Spain were in the throes of political strife, the Byzantine polity maintained itself. Nevertheless, in Byzantium, bureaucracy and departmentalism assumed a peculiarly vicious form owing to the fact that so many offices were hereditary, and there were thus two reasons for keeping in a fixed groove - the parental as well as the official. Bureaucratic methods led to mechanical and unemotional methods of thought, in marked contrast to the human methods which had characterised Greek and Roman life, and were later to vitalise Gothic architecture. In the centuries following Justinian, moreover, the international situation forced Byzantium to emphasise rather than relax its chosen political and religious system. After repulsing Persia, early in the seventh century, Byzantium was faced with an even more dreaded foe, the Arab followers of Mahomet. The Prophet himself had not considered the possibility of conquests outside Western Arabia. His follower, Abu Bekr, however, was more hopeful. In A.D. 633, the Arabs marched to the Euphrates, and Damascus in Syria capitulated in 635. In the following year Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, took the fragments of the True Cross from Jerusalem, the city falling to the Arabs in 639. Egypt was lost in 641. True, Byzantium stayed the onward rush of the Arab power, but only at the cost of most of the Greek and Roman elements in life and thought. The philosophical Schools at Athens were closed; the Consulate was abolished; a bastard Greek replaced Latin in official documents. In short, the Eastern Roman Empire of Constantine and Justinian gave way to Byzantium, and Greco-Roman art became Byzantine.

There is no more illuminating chapter in art history than the Iconoclastic movement which followed the conflict between the Saracens and the Byzantine kings of the eighth century. Although the Saracens failed to capture Constantinople they had such success in Northern Africa and Syria that the Byzantine rule was threatened with destruction. The Saracens besieged Constantinople in A.D. 717, and the capital was only saved by the military and administrative genius of Leo the Isaurian, who became Emperor in 717. He was a man of low birth, a native of the Taurus, a wild, wooded district, whence were recruited the fierce soldiery who made up the bodyguard of a Byzantine Emperor. Leo defeated the Saracens but failed to conquer the Lombards in Italy, who took Ravenna from the Byzantine Empire and threatened Rome. The failure to hold Ravenna persuaded the Eastern Emperor to emphasise the pre-eminently Byzantine qualities in the Eastern Empire. In 725, Leo put himself at the head of the movement for the destruction of all religious pictures, the movement being really directed against his enemies, the monks, who were the principal manufacturers of sacred pictures. The Emperor ordered that all pictures and images should be removed from the Churches and the painted walls covered with plaster. Many Byzantine artists moved to Italy and other places under the control of the Pope. The Iconoclastic disturbances did not end for 150 years. The Iconoclastic party was finally defeated in A.D. 842, in the reign of the Empress Theodora, when painted figures were once more permitted in the decoration of churches, though the ban upon statues continued.

Mosaic decorations, based on the Byzantine manner, were common throughout mediaeval Christendom, particularly in Italy, where it was easy to import expert mosaic workers, especially after the Iconoclastic troubles in Constantinople. Characteristic examples of this schematic art can be seen in the Baptistery built by Constantine in connection with St. John Lateran, and recall the close connection between the eastern and western branches of Christian art. The Byzantine Empire, and the rich and ingenious, but de-humanised, art which it encouraged, lasted on for many centuries, influencing the Latin West continually. In times of disorder in the West, and they

were frequent, Byzantium was the only stable polity in Christendom, so the influence of craftsmen trained in Byzantine methods must never be forgotten.