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Sacred Space revisited: Agency, embodiment, performativity

Texts

Chorikios, Laudatio Marciani 1,20-23

20 ἐνετεύθην ἀνώντα σε διαδέχεται τόπος τέτρασι χώρας ἐξ ίσων μετρούμενος, κιόνων δὲ τοσούτον διεστρικότων τῶν τοίχων, ὡς μήτε ταῖς στοιχεῖς εἰς ἑλαττῶν συνάγειν τὸ εὖρος μήτε τὸ μέσον εἰς βραχὺ τι συστάλειν. τούτον κύκλω περιβεβλημένον οἱ παρὰ τάς εἰσόδους εὕρηται μᾶλλον ἀφίνει ὑποτεταγμένοι ἕων χώροι ἐπίζευγνύντων αὐτοῖς τὰ κόμκμα πλείονος εἰνεκά κάλλους. 21 αἱ μὲν οὖν τοῦ στέγους πλευράι κατὰ μέσον ἕκαστῃ κυλινδρῶν ὁραίζονται τμῆμα τῶν ἀνεμένων ταῖς αὐράς την ἄραν τοῦ ἐτους καὶ ἀλλὰς εὔχαριν οὐκαν ἢδον σοι προξένει.

22 παραδοσαμόντει δὲ τούτον ἐν δεξίᾳ πρὸς ἠλιόν ἀναχαροῦντα τὰ μὲν πρὸς μεσημβρίαν χωρίν ἐστὶ τῷ τῆς ιερατοῦ ἐντονί ἄνακας εἰς πρόσφορην ιδρυμένον ὁφειλόμενὴ—ἀλλὰ τὸ χρέας ἡμᾶς οὐ νόμος μᾶλλον συνήθις ἢ τῶν τρόπων αὐτοῦ τὸ χρηστόν ἀποδιδόνα προσέρχεται—, τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἄρκτον παραλαβοῦσα τοῦ τεμένους ἢ πρὸς ἔσπεραν εὐμηκὴς στοὰ μεστῶν εὐθυμίας ἐισάγει παγκάλης αὐράς ἐκ τοῦ πρὸς ἔξωντος πνεοῦσας προτεμενίσματος, πινεῖ γὰρ ἢδον τε καὶ ἀλυσίας καὶ τῶν ἰματίων ἐντὸς ὑποδὸς Ἱέρμα διαψάεται τῶν σώματα τῶν εὐθύτων αἰνοφανέων τῶν πνεύματος.

23 εἰςιὼν οὖν ἰλιγγαίης τῶν ποικίλω τῶν ὀρῳμένων καὶ πάντα φιλονεικῶν ἀθρόως ἰδεῖν οὐδὲν ἐναργῶς οἰχήση τεθειμένης περιφερομένης οὐ τίθεν κακεῖς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν οὐδὲν ἀορᾶτον καρτεροῦντα παραλυτεῖν· ὁ τι γὰρ ἄν παραδόμας, οἰησή το κάλλιστον ζημιοῦσθαι. καὶ πύθηται τες, ὅτι μᾶλλον τίθεται τῶν εἰργασμένων, διασκεψάμενος μὲν ἀπορηθείς, ἀπορηθεὶς δὲ πάλιν περισκοπῆς· αὐτὶ ἑχὼν δὲ κρίνεις ἀντεροτάς· σὺ δὲ τῖν μᾶλλον ἢδος τῶν ὀρῳμένων;

20 As you go up from here; you encounter a space delimited by four equal alleys, their columns being set at such a distance from the walls so as neither to reduce the width of the porticoes nor yet to diminish unduly the central area. Of these columns that run all around: the ones that stand next to the entrances and are particularly subjected to the arches have no wooden ties connecting their capitals.

21 Each side of the roof is adorned in the middle with a segment of a cylinder, while the circuit being open to the breezes makes the fair season even pleasant.

22 Passing by this [colonnade] on the right, the one turned toward the setting sun – you have, on the south, a place assigned to the salutation that is due to the legitimate bishop – an obligation we discharge all the more willingly because of his excellent character rather than because it is demanded by custom¹. The long stoa to the West leads one in full of contentment as a delightful breeze blows from the western atrium, for it blows pleasantly and not excessively? And penetrating inside your clothing it gently cools your body as the fabric is lifted up by its breath.

As you go in, you will be made dizzy by the things seen and, striving to see everything together you will go away having seen nothing clearly as your eyes are carried here and there as you make efforts to leave nothing unseen. Whenever you overlook something, you will consider that you have been

¹ Up to this point, the translation is that of Mango with some small changes.
deprived of the most beautiful thing. And if someone asks which aspect of the works you prefer you will not know what to answer even after thinking it over and because you don’t know what to answer you will look around again and not being able to judge, you will ask in return “Which of the sights brings you the most pleasure”.

**Photos Hymn 10.3-5**

Εἴτε οὖν εἰς αὐτὸν ἴδων, οὐκ ἀνθρώπινης χειρός ἔργον, ἀλλὰ θείαν τινα καὶ ύπερ ἡμᾶς δύναμιν τὸ κάλλος αὐτῶν ἐπιμορφώθησαι. (30) Προσπίθεις μὲν γὰρ τῷ ναῷ περικαλλῆ διεκεκυσάται· καὶ @1(101) γὰρ μαρμάροι διαλεύκοι πλάκαι λαμπρὸν τι καὶ χάριν ἀποστίλθουσιν, ὅλην ἐναπολαβοῦσιν τὴν πρόσωπιν καὶ τὴν πρὸς ἀνήλιας θέσιν καὶ τὴν τῶν περιστών συνάφειαν τῶν ὁμοιῶν καὶ λείων καὶ τῷ προσημότητα λίπους ἀποκρύψασα εἰς ἔνδον λίθου συνέχειαν, γραμμαῖς εὐθείαις ὡσπερ ἐπιγεγραμμένου, θαύμα καὶνὸν ὀραθῆναι καὶ ἱώτον, τὴν τῶν (5) ὀρῶν τῶν φαντασίαν ὑπάγουσιν· ἐξ οὐτέρας τὰς ὀφεις συνέχουσι καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὰς ἐπιστρέφουσιν οὐκ έθελεν ποιοῦν τὸν θεατὴν μεταχωρήσαι πρὸς τὰ ἐνδότερα, ἀλλ' ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ προτεμένηματι τοῦ καλὸν θεάματος ὁ προσχωμένοις ἀλλήλας μεταπέπλαφθαι καὶ τοῖς ὀρόμμοις ἐχείδων τὰ ὁμοία, ὡσπερ τὰς ἐφικαλμένοις τὴν θαύματι ἑστίησιν. Ορφεῖ μὲν οἱ Ὑβρικει καθάραν κρούσιον, κινοῦντας τοὺς φθόγγος τὰς ἄψυχα· εἰ δὲ καὶ ἡμῖν ἐξήνεν εἰς μῦθους ἐπαίνειν καὶ φοβερὰς ποιεῖν τηλαληθεῖσαν, εἴπεν ἄν τοῖς προσοῦντες τῷ προτεμένηματι εἰς φυτῶν ἀποδενδρομένοις φύσιν τῷ θαυματί τεμπέλλεσθαι· ὀψακτοί ἰδιῶν δυσαποσπάστας κατέχεται. (15) 5 Ἐπειδὴς δὲ τις εἰκεῖθεν μόλις ἀποσκευασθεῖς εἰς αὐτὸ παρακώπησε τὸ τέμενος, ἡλίκης καὶ ὅπτων ἡμών ὁρᾶσ περιαράς τα ἁμα καὶ παραχάς καὶ διάμους εμπίπταται. Μείρ ύπον γὰρ τὸν οὐρανὸν μηρὸν ἐπιφυλαθοῦντος μηράμοδον εμβεβηκός καὶ τοὺς πολυμορφοῖς καὶ πανταχόθεν ὑποφαινομένοις κάλλεσιν ως ἀστροὺς περιλαμπόμενος ὄλος· (20) ἐπελημμένος γίνεται. Δοκεῖ δὲ λοιπὸν ἑνευνάδε τὰ τε ἀλλὰ ἐν ἑκάσται εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸ περιστρεφάσθαι τὸ τέμενος· ταῖς γὰρ οἰκείαις καὶ παντοδαπαίς περιστρεφάς καὶ συνεχεῖς κινήσεις, ἀ πάντως παθεῖν τὸν θεατὴν ἢ πανταχόθεν ποικilia διαίται τοῦ θεάματος, εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ ὀρόμμον τὸ οἰκεῖον φαντάζεται πάθημα.

Seeing it, you would say that it is not the work of human hand but that some power that is divine and beyond us had shaped its beauty. The atrium of the church is splendidly fashioned: for slabs of white marble, gleaming bright and cheerful, occupy the whole façade and by their evenness and smoothness and close fitting they conceal the setting of one to another and the juncture of their edges, so that they suggest to the beholder’s imagination the continuousness of a single [piece of] stone with, as it were, straight lines ruled on it – a new miracle and a joy to see. Wherefore, arresting and turning towards themselves the spectator’s gaze, they make him unwilling to move further in; but taking his fill of the fait spectacle in the very atrium, and fixing his eyes on the sight before him, the visitor stands as if rooted [to the ground] with wonder. Legends proclaim the lyre of Thracian Orpheus, whose notes stirred inanimate things. If it were our privilege also to erect truth into legends and make it awe-inspiring, one might say that visitors to the atrium were turned with wonder into the form of trees, so firmly is one held having but seen it once.

5 But when with difficulty one has torn oneself away from there and looked into the church itself, with what joy and trepidation and astonishment is one filled! It is as if one had entered heaven itself with no one else following the way from any side, and was illuminated by the beauty in all forms shining all around like so many stars, so is one utterly amazed. Thenceforth it seems that everything is in ecstatic motion, and the church itself is circling round. For the spectator, through his whirling about in all directions and being constantly astir, which he is forced to experience by the variegated spectacle on all sides, imagines that his personal condition is transferred to what he sees.

(Tr. MANGO)
Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia*, II. 354-375

Τρισοδα μὲν ἄντολικῶν ἀναπέπτταται ἑνδὶα κύκλων ἕμιτόμων· ύψοι δὲ μὲτ’ ὀρθίον αὐχένα τοίχων σφαίρης τετρατόμῳ λάχος τὸ τέταρτον ἄνέρπει, οἷον ὑπὲρ τριλόφῳ καρῆτας, ύψωθι νῶτων, σχῆμα πολυγλήνοις ταῖς πτερύγεσσιν ἑγείρι· κόγχας ταῦτα κάρηνα σοφοὶ τεχνήμονεν μὺθωι ἄνερες ήδεξαντο· τὸ δ’ ἀτρεκές, εἰτ’ ἀπὸ κόγχου εἰναλίου καλέουσι δαήμονες εἰτ’ ἀπὸ τεχνής, αὐτοὶ ποὺ δεδάσσεν. μέσῃ δ’ ἐξώσατο θέκους μυστιπόλους καὶ βάθρα περίδρομα. καὶ τὸ μὲν αὐτῶν ὑστατίων ὑπὸ τέξαν ἀλλάζουσα συνέλκει ἐγγύτερον περὶ κέντρον ἐπὶ χθονός· ὅσα δ’ ἄνισχε θύεθεν, εὑρόνουσι διάστασιν ἀχρὶ θωκόν ἄργυρέων κατὰ βαίον, ἀξευμένους δὲ κύκλοις αἱ ἐπεμβαίνουσαν ἐπειλίσσουσι κεραίνην.

Τὴν δὲ μετεκδέχεται κρατεροῖς ἀφανία θεμείλοις ἐς βάσιν εὐθύγραμμος ὑπερθεὶς δὲ κύκλος ἄντυς, σχῆμαν οὐ σφαίρης ἑναλίγκισι, ἀλλὰ κυλίνδρου ἄνδυχα τεμνομένου. δῦω δ’ εὐκίονας ἀλλὰς κόγχας ἀμφοτέρῳ προβάλλεται ἐς δύσιν ἔρπειν, οἰάπερ ἐκτανύουσα περιγναμφθέντας ἀγοστοῦς, λαὸν ὅπως πολύμυνον ἑοῖς ἀγκάσσεται οἴκους.

To the east there open the triple spaces of circles cut in half, and above, upon the upright collar of the walls springs up the fourth part of a sphere: even so, above his triple-crested head and back does a peacock raise his many-eyed feathers. Men of craft in their technical language call these crowning parts ‘conches’. In truth, only they know whether the experts borrowed this name from the shell or whether it comes from their art. The middle one envelopes the priestly seats and steps ranged in a circle: drawing together their lowest row it brings it closer to the centre, near the ground. The rows as they rise up, broaden the space little by little until they reach the stalls of silver, with widening circles they wheel around the curved wall above them.

An arch follows this conch, fitted to solid foundations, rectangular in plan and curved at the top, in form not like a sphere but like a cylinder cut in two. It sends out two other columned conches, one on each side to extend to the west, as if stretching out its curved arms in order to embrace in its halls the people of singers.