

Ruth Webb

## Sacred Space revisited: Agency, embodiment, performativity

### Texts

#### Chorikios, *Laudatio Marciani* 1,20-23

20 ἐντεῦθεν ἀνιόντα σε διαδέχεται τόπος τέτρασι χώραις ἐξ ἴσου μετρούμενος, κίωνων δὲ τοσοῦτον διεστηκότων τῶν τοίχων, ὥς μήτε ταῖς στοαῖς εἰς ἔλαττον συνάγειν τὸ εὖρος μήτε τὸ μέσον εἰς βραχὺ τι συστέλλειν. τούτων κύκλω περιθεόντων οἱ παρὰ τὰς εἰσόδους εὗρηται μᾶλλον ἀψίσιν ὑποτεταγμένοι ξύλων χωρὶς ἐπιζευγνύντων αὐτοῖς τὰ κιόκрана πλείονος εἶνεκα κάλλους. 21 αἱ μὲν οὖν τοῦ στέγους πλευραὶ κατὰ μέσον ἐκάστη κυλίνδρων ὠραῖζονται τμήμασιν, ὁ δὲ κύκλος ἀνειμένος ταῖς αὐραῖς τὴν ὥραν τοῦ ἔτους καὶ ἄλλως εὐχαριν οὔσαν ἡδίω σοι προξενεῖ.

22 παραδραμόντι δὲ τοῦτον ἐν δεξιᾷ πρὸς ἥλιον ἀναχωροῦντα τὰ μὲν πρὸς μεσημβρίαν χωρίον ἐστὶ τῶ τὴν ἱερωσύνην λαχόντι δικαίως εἰς πρόσρησιν ἰδρυμένον ὀφειλομένην—ἀλλὰ τὸ χρέος ἡμᾶς οὐ νόμος μᾶλλον συνήθης ἢ τῶν τρόπων αὐτοῦ τὸ χρηστὸν ἀποδιδόναι προτρέπει—, τὰ δὲ πρὸς ἄρκτον παραλαβοῦσα τοῦ τεμένου ἢ πρὸς ἐσπέραν εὐμήκης στοὰ μεστὸν εὐθυμίας εἰσάγει παγκάλῃς αὐρας ἐκ τοῦ πρὸς ζέφυρον πνεύσης προτεμενίσματος, πνεῖ γὰρ ἡδύς τε καὶ ἄλυπος καὶ τῶν ἱματίων ἐντὸς ὑποδὺς ἡρέμα διαψύχει τὰ σώματα τῶν ἐσθήτων αἰωρουμένων τῶ πνεύματι.

23 εἰσιῶν οὖν ἰλιγγιάσεις τῶ ποικίλῳ τῶν ὀρωμένων καὶ πάντα φιλονεικῶν ἀθρόως ἰδεῖν οὐδὲν ἐναργῶς οἰκίση τεθεαμένος περιφερομένων σοι τῆδε κάκεισε τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν οὐδὲν ἀόρατον καρτεροῦντι παραλιπεῖν· ὅ τι γὰρ ἂν παραδράμῃς, οἴησιν τὸ κάλλιστον ζημιουῖσθαι. κἂν πύθηται τις, ὅτῳ μᾶλλον τίθεσαι τῶν εἰργασμένων, διασκεψάμενος μὲν ἀπορήσεις, ἀπορήσας δὲ πάλιν περισκοπήσεις· οὐκ ἔχων δὲ κρίνειν ἀντερωτᾶς· σὺ δὲ τίτι μᾶλλον ἦσθης τῶν ὀρωμένων;

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 pleasanter.

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 custom<sup>1</sup>. 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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".

### Photios *Homily* 10.3-5

Εἴποις ἂν εἰς αὐτὸν ἰδὼν, οὐκ ἀνθρωπίνης χειρὸς ἔργον, ἀλλὰ θεῖαν τινὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς δύναμιν τὸ κάλλος αὐτῶ ἐπιμορφώσασθαι. (30)<sup>4</sup> Προπύλαια μὲν γὰρ τῶ ναῶ περικαλλῆ διεσκεύασται· καὶ @1(101.) γὰρ μαρμάρων διαλεύκαν πλάκες λαμπρόν τι καὶ χάριεν ἀποστίλβουσαι, ὅλην ἐναπολαβοῦσαι τὴν πρόσοψιν καὶ τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλας θέσιν καὶ τὴν τῶν περάτων συνάφειαν τῶ ὁμαλῶ καὶ λείῳ καὶ τῶ προσηρμόσθαι λίαν ἀποκρύψασαι εἰς ἑνὸς λίθου συνέχειαν, γραμμαῖς εὐθείαις ὥσπερ ἐπιγεγραμμένους, θαῦμα καινὸν ὄραθῆναι καὶ ἥδιστον, τὴν τῶν (5) ὁρώντων φαντασίαν ὑπάγουσιν· ἐξ οὐπερ τὰς ὄψεις συνέχουσαι καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὰς ἐπιστρέφουσαι οὐκ ἐθέλουν ποιοῦσι τὸν θεατὴν μεταχωρῆσαι πρὸς τὰ ἐνδότερα, ἀλλ' ἐν αὐτῶ τῶ προτεμενίσματι τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος ὁ προσίων ἐμπιπλάμενος καὶ τοῖς ὀρωμένοις ἐρείδων τὰ ὄμματα, ὥσπερ τις ἐρριζωμένος τῶ θαύματι ἔστηκεν. Ὀρφεῖ μὲν οἱ (10) μῦθοι τῶ Θρακί κιθάραν κρούουσι, κινουσαν τοῖς φθόγγοις τὰ ἄψυχα· εἰ δὲ καὶ ἡμῖν ἐξῆν εἰς μύθους ἐπαίρειν καὶ φοβεράν ποιεῖν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, εἶπεν ἂν τις τοὺς προσιόντας τῶ προτεμενίσματι εἰς φυτῶν ἀποδενδρουμένους φύσιν τῶ θαύματι μεταβάλλεσθαι· οὕτως ἅπαξ τις ἰδὼν δυσάποσπαστως κατέχεται. (15) <sup>5</sup> Ἐπειδὴν δὲ τις ἐκεῖθεν μόλις ἀποσπασθεὶς εἰς αὐτὸ παρακύψῃ τὸ τέμενος, ἡλικῆς καὶ ὄσης οὗτος χαρᾶς τε ἅμα καὶ ταραχῆς καὶ θάμβους ἐμπίπεται. Ὡς εἰς αὐτὸν γὰρ τὸν οὐρανὸν μηδενὸς ἐπιπροσθοῦντος μηδαμόθεν ἐμβεβηκῶς καὶ τοῖς πολυμόρφοις καὶ πανταχόθεν ὑποφαινομένοις κάλλεσιν ὡς ἄστροις περιλαμπόμενος ὅλος ἐκ- (20) πεπληγμένος γίνεται. Δοκεῖ δὲ λοιπὸν ἐντεῦθεν τὰ τε ἄλλα ἐν ἐκστάσει εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸ περιδινεῖσθαι τὸ τέμενος· ταῖς γὰρ οἰκείαις καὶ παντοδαπαῖς περιστροφαῖς καὶ συνεχέσι κινήσεσιν, ἃ πάντως παθεῖν τὸν θεατὴν ἢ πανταχόθεν ποικιλία βιάζεται τοῦ θεάματος, εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ ὀρώμενον 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 barring 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 Silentary, Ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia, ll. 354-375**

Τρισσὰ μὲν ἀντολικῶν ἀναπέπταται ἔνδια κύκλων  
ἡμιτόμων· ὑψοῦ δὲ μετ' ὄρθιον ἀυχένα τοίχων 355  
σφαίρης τετρατόμοιο λάχος τὸ τέταρτον ἀνέρπει,  
οἶον ὑπὲρ τριλόφοιο καρήατος, ὑψόθι νώτων,  
σχῆμα πολυγλήνοισι ταῶς πτερύγεσσι ἐγείρει.  
κόγχας ταῦτα κάρηνα σοφοὶ τεχνήμονι μύθωι  
ἀνέρες ἠυδάξαντο· τὸ δ' ἀτρεκές, εἴτ' ἀπὸ κόγχου 360  
εἰναλίου καλέουσι δαήμονες εἴτ' ἀπὸ τέχνης,  
αὐτοὶ που δεδάασι. μέση δ' ἐζώσατο θώκους  
μυστιπόλους καὶ βάθρα περιδρομα. καὶ τὸ μὲν αὐτῶν  
ὑστατὴν ὑπὸ πέζαν ἀολλίζουσα συνέλκει  
ἐγγύτερον περι κέντρον ἐπὶ χθονός· ὅσσα δ' ἀνίσχει 365  
ὑψόθεν, εὐρύνουσι διάστασιν ἄχρι θοώκων  
ἀργυρέων κατὰ βαιόν, ἀεξομένοισι δὲ κύκλοις  
αἰὲν ἐπεμβαίνουσιν ἐπειλίσσουσι κεραίην.

Τὴν δὲ μετεκδέχεται κρατεροῖς ἀραρυῖα θεμείλοις  
ἐς βάσιν εὐθύγραμμος ὑπερθε δὲ κύκλιος ἄντυξ, 370  
σχήμασιν οὐ σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιος, ἀλλὰ κυλίνδρου  
ἄνδιχα τεμνομένοιο. δύω δ' εὐκίονας ἄλλας  
κόγχας ἀμφοτέρωθι προβάλλεται ἐς δύσιν ἔρπειν,  
οἷάπερ ἐκτανύουσα περιγναμφθέντας ἀγοστούς,  
λαὸν ὅπως πολύμνον ἑοῖς ἀγκάσσεται οἴκοις. 375

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 envelops 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.