What the Middle Ages knew: Byzantine Art

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- The principles of Christian art
- Foundations of Christian architecture
- Mosaics
- Illuminated manuscripts
- Decline of sculpture (glorification of God prevails over glorification of man)
- No scientific progress
What the Middle Ages knew

• Byzantine art
  – Umm Al Jimal (6th c AD)
What the Middle Ages knew

Mosaic of Santa Maria Maggiore, 4th c (oldest surviving cycle of evangelical pictures)

Triumphal arch: life of Jesus (Annunciation, Epiphany, Slaughter of Innocents, Jerusalem, Presentation in the Temple, Flight into Egypt, The Magi before Herod, Bethlehem)
Left side of the nave, above the architrave: 36 scenes from the life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Jesus

Adoration of the Magi
What the Middle Ages knew

Mosaic of Santa Maria Maggiore, 4th c (oldest surviving cycle of evangelical pictures)

Moses adopted by a pharaoh’s daughter
What the Middle Ages knew

Mosaic floor of Aquileia (4th c)

Door of Sta Sabina

Mosaic of Sta Maria Maggiore (5th c)

Mosaic of Sta Maria Maggiore (5th c)

Door of Sta Sabina
What the Middle Ages knew

- Mosaics

Madaba:
map of Jerusalem (6th c AD)

Petra:
Church mosaic (600 AD)
What the Middle Ages knew

- Mosaics
  - San Lorenzo fuori le mura 6th c
  - Sant'Agnese, 7th c
  - San Giovanni in Laterano 7th c
What the Middle Ages knew

- Mosaics
  - S. Pietro in Vincoli, 7th c
  - Latomos monastery, 6th c
What the Middle Ages knew

• Mosaics
  – Thessaloniki, Hagios Demetrios, 7th c
  – Thessaloniki, Hagios Demetrios, 7th c
What the Middle Ages knew

- Mosaics
  - Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, 9th c
  - Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, 9th c
What the Middle Ages knew

- Mosaics
  - Nicaea, 9th c
  - Nicaea, 9th c
  - Thessaloniki, Aya Sofia, 9th c
What the Middle Ages knew

- Frescoes
  - Cheap substitute for the mosaic

San Lorenzo, Cappella Aquilino, Milano (390)
What the Middle Ages knew

- Frescoes

Rotunda (Agios Giorgos), Thessaloniki (390)
What the Middle Ages knew

- Reliefs of sarcophagi (peaks in 3rd c AD)

Sarcophagus of Adelphia
Museo Archeologico, Siracusa

Sarcophagus of Stilicho
Sant’Ambrogio, Milano
What the Middle Ages knew

- Reliefs of sarcophagi (peaks in 3rd c AD)

Sarcophagus of Costantina (340)
Museo Vaticano, Roma
What the Middle Ages knew

• Christian Art
  – Christian monuments (churches, sanctuaries, statues) recapitulate Christianity: their location is the location of an event (e.g., martyrdom)
  – Christian worship as the driving force for every cultural activity (painting, architecture, literature, music…)
  – Aesthetic of imitation
    • Second Council of Nicaea (787): the visual artist to work for the Church, faithful to the letter of the Bible (only the Church is allowed to interpret the scriptures)
What the Middle Ages knew

• Christian Art
  – Reversal of Greek Art
    • Spirituality and immanence instead of realism and movement
    • Size of objects/people determined by importance, not by proportions (no perspective)
    • Motionless, frontal, geometric figures
    • Repetition like in Egyptian and Mesopotamian art
    • Greek Art: the body (mortal, feelings)
    • Christian Art: the soul (immortal, immune to emotions)
What the Middle Ages knew

- Christian Art
  - Reversal of Greek Art
  - Rediscovery of Egyptian and Middle-eastern simplicity via Byzantium
    - The Christian dogma was shaped in the East (Egypt, Asia Minor, Syria)
    - The Western empire was falling to the Barbarians while the Eastern empire was flourishing
What the Middle Ages knew

• Christian Art
  – Liturgy dictated architecture
• Christian Roma
  – Avoiding the vaulted architecture typical of pagan structures (e.g., Caracalla’s baths, Pantheon, etc)
  – The basilica more appropriate for the monastic nature of the western church
• Constantinople
  – Vaulted architecture
  – Central dome more appropriate for the hierarchical nature of the eastern church
What the Middle Ages knew

• Paleochristian architecture
  – Constantine’s churches (326-337):
    • S. Peter, Roma (326)
    • S. John in Laterano, Roma (originally Cathedral of the Saviour, 324)
    • S. Maria Maggiore, Roma
    • Several in Constantinople
    • Nativity, Bethlehem
    • Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem
    • Golden Church/ Domus Aurea, Antioch
    • Church of Harmony, Antioch
What the Middle Ages knew

• Paleo-Christian architecture
  – All built according to Trajan’s Basilica
  • Constantine turns Jerusalem into the holy city of Christianity, the only city in the world that is completely Christian: churches, hospitals, monasteries, caravansaray…
What the Middle Ages knew

• None of the Constantinian churches survive (Jerusalem destroyed by Persians in 614 and conquered by Arabs in 637)
• Ditto for Antioch and Alexandria
What the Middle Ages knew

• Empress Eudocia (wife of Theodosius II) moves to Jerusalem in 438 and builds palaces, churches, etc.

• Justinian
  – Restores churches in Jerusalem
  – Builds Hagia Sofia, Hagia Irene, Holy Apostles in Constantinople
  – John the Evangelist in Ephesus (pantheon of Byzantine emperors until 1028)
What the Middle Ages knew

S. Pietro, Roma
S. Giovanni in Laterano, Roma
S. Maria Maggiore, Roma
Nativity, Bethlehem
Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

Old St Peter reconstruction
What the Middle Ages knew

- Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (537)
  - Dome on four piers and four arches
  - Hemicycles crowned by semidomes, each semidome flanked by two semicircular exedras carrying smaller semidomes

(Rowland Mainstone)
What the Middle Ages knew

- Hagia Sophia, Constantinople

(Paula Mochel)

(Fossati brothers, 1852)
What the Middle Ages knew

• Paleo-Christian architecture in Italy
  – S. Paolo fuori le mura, Roma (386-480)
  – S. Costanza, Roma (IV)
  – S. Lorenzo, Milano (370)
  – S. Sabina, Roma (425)
  – S. Stefano Rotondo, Roma (V)
  – S. Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna (430)
  – Galla Placida’s Mausoleum, Ravenna (V)
What the Middle Ages knew

• Paleochristian Art in the Eastern Roman empire
  – Perfecting the Roman dome: building circular domes over square spaces
  – The dome on a square enables the cluster of domes
  – Decorating domes and vaults: the Roman mosaic (but for ceilings instead of floors)
What the Middle Ages knew

• Paleochristian Art in the Eastern Roman empire
  – St Simeon/Qalat Siman, Syria (470)
  – St John of Studion, Constantinople (463)
  – St Demetrius, Salonika (490)
  – Justinian architecture (527-565)
    • Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (532)
    • SS. Sergius and Bacchus, Constantinople (530)
    • S. Vitale, Ravenna (547)
    • S. Apollinare, Ravenna (549)
    • St John, Ephesus (565)
    • Holy Apostles, Constantinople (destroyed)
  – Prominent domes leave behind the example of the Trajan basilica
What the Middle Ages knew

• St Simeon/Qalat Siman, Syria (470)
S. Vitale, Ravenna (547)
S. Apollinare, Ravenna (549)
What the Middle Ages knew

• Late Byzantine architecture
  – Zwartnots, Armenia (VII)
  – Cathedral of Ani, Armenia (X)
  – Mt Athos monastery, Greece
  – Hagia Sophia, Kiev (XI)
  – Cathedral of the Transfiguration, Chernigov
  – Vladimir cathedral, Novgorod (XI)
  – Nezeri, Yugoslavia (XII)
  – Gracanica, Serbia (XIV)
  – Hodeghetria, Mistra (XIV)
  – Cathedral of the Dormition, Moskow (XV)
  – St Basil, Moskow (1553)