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SOME REMARKS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOLD BASED ON BYZANTINE EKPHRASEIS OF WORKS OF ART

Gold is considered one of the most characteristic elements of Byzantine culture. This view applies especially to art. Undoubtedly, this statement is quite right: it is best confirmed by the preserved works of painting and artistic craftsmanship, especially those of jewellery. In sum, Byzantine artists used to use gold on a large scale, showing great technical skill. It is therefore surprising that this issue has not received a separate and comprehensive study yet¹. Although researchers recognise the presence of gold, unfortunately, they rarely go beyond the general observations². Despite this, in the literature devoted to Byzantine art,

¹ In this context, it is worth emphasizing that researchers are paying more and more attention to Byzantine goldsmiths, i.a. *New Research on Late Byzantine Goldsmiths' Works (13th–15th Centuries)*. *Neue Forschungen zur spätbyzantinischen Goldschmiedekunst (13.–15. Jahrhundert)*, ed. A. BOSSELMANN-RUICKBIE, Mainz 2019 [= BOO, 13]; EADEM, *Byzantinischer Schmuck des 9. bis frühen 13. Untersuchungen zum metallenen dekorativen Körperschmuck der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit anhand datierter Funde*, Wiesbaden 2011 [= SFChB, 28]; *Intelligible Beauty. Recent Research on Byzantine Jewellery*, ed. C. ENTWISTLE, N. ADAMS, London 2010. Works related to gold in the context of Late Antique and Byzantine culture are noteworthy as well, e.g. M. GRÜNBAIT, *Zur Kulturgeschichte des Goldes*, [in:] *Gold und Blei. Byzantinische Kostbarkeiten aus dem Münsterland*, ed. IDEM, Wien 2012, p. 53–66; D. JANES, *God and Gold in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2010 (1st ed. Cambridge 1998); S. AWIERINCEW, *Złoto w systemie symboli kultury wczesnobizantyjskiej*, [in:] IDEM, *Na skrzyżowaniu tradycji. Szkice o literaturze i kulturze wczesnobizantyjskiej*, trans. et ed. D. ULICKA, Warszawa 1988, p. 175–201 (orig. ed. С.С. АВЕРИНЦЕВ, *Золото в системе символов ранневизантийской культуры*, [in:] *Византия, южные славяне и Древняя Русь. Западная Европа. Искусство и культура. Сборник статей в честь В.Н. Лазарева*, ed. В.Н. ГРАЩЕНКОВ, Москва 1973, p. 43–52).

² The striking lack of more accurate references to gold is particularly evident in studies on Byzantine aesthetics, in which the focus of their authors is mainly the role of the Neoplatonic thought, e.g. В.Н. ЛАЗАРЕВ, *История византийской живописи*, vol. I, Москва 1947, p. 23–33, 104; П.А. МИХЕЛНЗ, *Αισθητική θεώρηση της βυζαντινής τέχνης*, Αθήνα 2006, p. 106–111, 131, 156–157 (1st ed. Αθήνα 1946); P.A. MICHELIS, *Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Byzantine Art*, JAAC 11, 1952, p. 21–45; IDEM, *L'esthétique d'Hagia-Sophia*, Faenza 1963, p. 44–60 (1st ed. Αθήνα 1946); G. МАТНЕР, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, London 1963, p. 13–22, 144; В.В. БЫЧКОВ, *Византийская эстетика. Теоретические проблемы*, Москва 1977, *passim*; IDEM, *Малая история византийской эстетики*, Киев 1991, *passim*.

it is assumed that gold was used primarily because of its symbolic meanings³. As a result, the issues pertaining to aesthetics and aesthetic experiences are ignored⁴, although they are the main subject in Byzantine texts. In fact, reading these modern studies, we learn more about contemporary beliefs about Byzantine art than about it itself. The issue of the significance of gold in Byzantine art is unquestionably complex, and for this reason, this article may be only a preliminary outline of the most important questions related to the subject. Selected examples of Byzantine source texts in which their authors referred to gold in a strictly artistic context are the backbone for all considerations. The main thesis statement, which will be proved here, is as follows: gold, as a substantial medium of artistic expression, was used on a large scale primarily for aesthetic reasons. At the outset, it should also be highlighted that the primary sources testify that for over a thousand years of the existence of the Byzantine Empire views on gold did not undergo major shifts, hence these texts do not reflect the changes of Byzantine art. Therefore, it was decided to discuss the topic using the content criterion referring to the aesthetic values that were associated with gold in Byzantium. These values are above all: glow, colour, and splendour.

In the context of the issue of the significance of gold in Byzantine art, ekphra-seis (ἐκφράσεις) are the most useful type of texts⁵. They are usually part of larger texts, both poetic and prose ones. Ekphra-seis, present in Greek literature from its

³ It seems that Julius Lange was the first who directly indicated that gold backgrounds in medieval paintings can also be understood in symbolic categories. The research direction he outlined was developed and eventually became dominant – also in relation to Byzantine painting; J. LANGE, *Et blad af koloritens historie* (1893), [in:] *Udvalgte Skrifter af Julius Lange*, ed. G. BRANDES, P. KØBKE, København 1901, p. 136–156.

⁴ This is a general problem related to the study of mediaeval art, because – as Mary Carruthers points out – researchers are used to the question “what does it mean?”, and that is why they so easily overlook the problem of aesthetic pleasure of mediaeval people. Her observation can be equally well applied to the study of Byzantine art. However, as Carruthers reasonably indicates, to tackle this kind of topic, our understanding must be changed, because we should move away from nineteenth-century Romantic and twentieth-century Modern categories relevant to art and its perception; M. CARRUTHERS, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Oxford 2013, *passim*.

⁵ On ekphrasis and its association with art as well i.a. M. SQUIRE, *Ekphrasis. Visual and Verbal Interactions in Ancient Greek and Latin Literature*, [in:] *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935390.013.58> [12 V 2020]; R. WEBB, *Ekphra-seis of Buildings in Byzantium. Theory and Practice*, Bsl 69.3, 2011, p. 20–32; EADEM, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, Farnham 2009; M. SQUIRE, *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, Cambridge 2015 (1st ed. Cambridge 2009); S. BARTSCH, J. ELSNER, *Introduction. Eight Ways of Looking at an Ekphrasis*, CP 102.1, 2007, p. I–VI; S. GOLDHILL, *What Is Ekphrasis for?*, CP 102.1, 2007, p. 1–19; J. ELSNER, *Introduction. The Genres of Ekphrasis*, Ram 31.1–2, 2002, p. 1–18; R. WEBB, *Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern. The Invention of a Genre*, WI 15.1, 1999, p. 7–18; EADEM, *The Aesthetics of Sacred Space. Narrative, Metaphor, and Motion in “Ekphra-seis” of Church Buildings*, DOP 53, 1999, p. 59–74; L. JAMES, R. WEBB, “To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places”. *Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium*, ArH 14.1, 1991, p. 1–17.

very beginnings, became extremely popular in late antiquity because they allowed both the use of a variety of stylistic devices and the choice of attractive subjects⁶. Byzantine authors carried on taste for them. Nicholas of Myra (also known as Nicholas Rhetor, ca. 410 – ca. 490) defined the ekphrasis in his *Progymnasmata* (Προγυμνάσματα) as follows:

ἔκφρασις ἐστὶ λόγος ἀφηγηματικός, ὕπ' ὅσιν ἄγων ἐναργῶς τὸ δηλούμενον. πρόσκειται δὲ ἐναργῶς, ὅτι κατὰ τοῦτο μάλιστα τῆς διηγήσεως διαφέρει· ἢ μὲν γὰρ ψιλὴν ἔχει ἔκθεσιν πραγμάτων, ἢ δὲ πειρᾶται θεατὰς τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἐργάζεσθαι. ἐκφράζομεν δὲ τόπους, χρόνους, πρόσωπα, πανηγύρεις, πράγματα. [...] Δεῖ δὲ, ἤνικα ἂν ἐκφράζωμεν καὶ μάλιστα ἀγάλματα τυχόν ἢ εἰκόνας ἢ εἴ τι ἄλλο τοιοῦτον, πειρᾶσθαι λογισμὸν προστιθέναι τοῦ τοιοῦδε ἢ τοιοῦδε παρὰ τοῦ γραφέως ἢ πλάστου σχήματος, οἷον τυχόν ἢ ὅτι ὀργιζόμενον ἔγραψε διὰ τήνδε τὴν αἰτίαν ἢ ἡδόμενον, ἢ ἄλλο τι πάθος ἐροῦμεν συμβαῖνον τῇ περι τοῦ ἐκφραζόμενου ἱστορίᾳ· καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων δὲ ὁμοίως πλείστα οἱ λογισμοὶ συντελοῦσιν εἰς ἐνάργειαν⁷

[...] ecphrasis (*ekphrasis*) is descriptive speech, bringing what is described clearly (*enargós*) before the eyes. “Clearly” is added because in this way it most differs from narration; the latter gives a plain exposition of actions, the former tries to make the hearers into spectators. We compose ecphrases of places, times, persons, festivals, things done [...] Whenever we compose ecphrases, and especially descriptions of statues or pictures or anything of that sort, we should try to add an account of this or that impression made by the painter or by the molded form; for example, that he painted the figure as angry for this reason, or as pleased; or we shall mention some other emotion as occurring because of the history of what is being described. Similarly in other cases also, explanations contribute to vividness⁸.

Therefore, the key to a brilliant ekphrasis is to bring the described things – including works of art – or events clearly (ἐναργῶς; so also φανερώς, i.e.: plainly, openly, manifestly, evidently⁹) before the eyes of an audience (ὕπ' ὅσιν ἄγων ἐναργῶς τὸ δηλούμενον), since this is the only way that listeners can become spectators (ἢ δὲ πειρᾶται θεατὰς τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἐργάζεσθαι). The way to achieve this desirable feature was, in particular, a thoroughgoing description which was supposed to evoke images (φαντασίαι) in minds of listeners. In Byzantium, the creation of ekphraseis – as in antiquity – was a part of the elementary stage of

⁶ M. ROBERTS, *The Jeweled Style. Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*, Ithaca 1989, p. 39–65.

⁷ *Nicolai progymnasmata*, 68–69, ed. J. FELTEN, Leipzig 1913 [= RG, 11; BSGR].

⁸ *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, 68–69, trans., praef. G.A. KENNEDY, Atlanta 2003 [= WGRW, 10], p. 166–167.

⁹ *Iohannis Zonarae lexicon ex tribus codicibus manuscriptis*, 753.15, vol. I, ed. J.A.H. TITTMANN, Leipzig 1808. “Ἐνάργεια: ἢ τῶν λόγων λευκότης καὶ φανότης. Ἐνέργεια δὲ ἢ ἐν λόγοις, ἢ ἢ ἀθρόα προσβολή” (ε 1126 Adler); “Ἐναργής: φανερός” (ε 1127 Adler); “Μετ’ ἐναργείας: μετ’ ἀληθείας” (μ 761 Adler); *The Suda on Line*, <http://www.stoa.org/sol/> [25 V 2020]. Cf. *Etymologicum Gudianum*, ε 467, vol. I, ed. E.L. DE STEFANI, Leipzig 1909 [= BSGR]; *Etymologicum magnum*, 337, ed. T. GAISFORD, Oxford 1848; *Etymologicum Symeonis (Γ–Ε)*, ε 391, ed. D. BALDI, Turnhout 2013 [= CC.SG, 79]. On understanding the term “ἐνάργεια” in the Middle Byzantine period: S. PΑΡΑΙΟΑΝΝΟΥ, *Byzantine Enargeia and Theories of Representation*, Bsl 69, 2011, p. 48–60.

the rhetorical education during which the late antique textbooks with the preliminary exercises (i.e. προγυμνάσματα, praeexercitamina) were employed. These works, as well as other texts on the theory of rhetoric, were commented and summarized by Byzantine authors. Some of them, e.g. John Geometres (ca. 935 – ca. 1000)¹⁰, Nikephoros Basilakes (ca. 1115 – after 1182)¹¹, and George Pachymeres (1242 – ca. 1310)¹², prepared their own ones as well¹³.

Ekphraseis are often very significant sources for Byzantine art studies. Byzantine authors of such descriptions used to write not so much about the details of the appearance of a given image or building, but mainly about the reactions of the audience. In fact, the most crucial task was not to refer to a real, specific work of art, but to evoke in a listener – by referring to the collective cultural memory – the sense that such piece of art might exist. Thus, ekphraseis were, above all, a kind of intellectual play of a given author with his listeners. Hence, they may say a lot about the culture in which they were created. These texts may be helpful in comprehending Byzantine notions on art as well, because they indicate to us what Byzantines found significant. On their basis, therefore, it is possible to draw conclusions regarding the perception of works of art, as well as prized aesthetic values. Although in ekphraseis there are many well-known *topoi* (τόποι), it should be emphasized that they were not only ornaments indicating the author's erudition, but also elements carrying specific and legible content. The use of *topoi* that would no longer be understandable would interfere with communication, and as a result, an ekphrasis would not bring the subject described before the eyes with visual vividness¹⁴. The authors, however, had a wide range of rhetorical devices to

¹⁰ *The Progymnasmata of Ioannes Geometres*, ed. A.R. LITTLEWOOD, Amsterdam 1972.

¹¹ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progimnasmi e monodie*, ed. A. PIGNANI, Napoli 1983 [= BNN, 10], p. 71–232; *The Rhetorical Exercises of Nikephoros Basilakes. "Progymnasmata" from Twelfth-Century Byzantium*, ed., trans. J. BENEKER, C.A. GIBSON, Cambridge Mass.–London 2016 [= DOML, 43].

¹² *Rhetores Graeci*, 551–596, vol. I, ed. C. WALZ, Stuttgart 1832.

¹³ H. CICHOCKA, *Teoria retoryki bizantyńskiej*, Warszawa 1994, p. 86–125; R. BETANCOURT, *Sight, Touch, and Imagination in Byzantium*, Cambridge 2018, p. 203–222.

¹⁴ L. JAMES, R. WEBB, "To Understand...", p. 3, 9, 14. Cf. C. MANGO, *Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder*, DOP 17, 1963, p. 64–70; H. MAGUIRE, *Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art*, DOP 28, 1974, p. 113–140; J. ONIANS, *Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity*, ArH 3, 1980, p. 1–24; H. MAGUIRE, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton 1981, p. 22–52; L. BRUBAKER, *Perception and Conception. Art, Theory and Culture in Ninth-Century Byzantium*, WI 5, 1989, p. 19–32; A. EASTMOND, *An Intentional Error? Imperial Art and "Mis"-Interpretation under Andronikos I Komnenos*, ArtB 76, 1994, p. 502–510; H. MAGUIRE, *Originality in Byzantine Art*, [in:] *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music. A Collection of Essays*, ed. A.R. LITTLEWOOD, Oxford 1995 [= OMon, 50], p. 101–114; R.S. NELSON, *To Say and to See. Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium*, [in:] *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance. Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. IDEM, Cambridge 2000, p. 143–168; H. MAGUIRE, *Art and Text*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. E. JEFFREYS, J. HALDON, R. CORMACK, Oxford 2008, p. 721–730; IDEM, *The Realities of Ekphrasis*, Bsl 69.3, 2011, p. 7–19; N. ZARRAS, *A Gem of Artistic Ekphrasis. Nicholas Mesarites' Description of the Mosaics in the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople*, [in:] *Byzantium, 1180–1204. The Sad*

achieve this required effect in their texts. In the *Description of the all-praiseworthy St. Euphemia* (Ἐκφρασις εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν Εὐφημίαν τὴν πανεύφημον), Asterius the bishop of Amasea (ca. 350 – ca. 410) wrote about these media of expression, using a vivid metaphor: οὐδὲ γὰρ φαυλότερα πάντως τῶν ζωγράφων οἱ μουσῶν παῖδες ἔχομεν φάρμακα¹⁵ (*For we, men of letters, can use colors no worse than painters do*)¹⁶. Thus, Henry Maguire pertinently points out that:

A closer reading of the Byzantine rhetorical writers reveals that they were extremely sensitive to artistic styles and to their meanings, whether those styles were, in present-day terms, classicizing and naturalistic on the one hand, or unclassical and schematic on the other. The difference between Byzantine and modern art criticism lies not in perception but in language. The Byzantines were not blind, but they were using a language completely different from those of twentieth-century critics, and for this reason their statements have been misunderstood¹⁷.

Hence, despite some conventionality and a specific language, ekphrasis may be substantial primary sources, also when it comes to the issue of the significance of gold in Byzantine art.

According to Byzantine texts, beauty was the main idea with which gold was associated. Plotinus (ca. 204 – ca. 270) was the first who constituted the theoretical fundament for thinking about beauty (τὸ καλόν) as the idea (τὸ εἶδος). This philosopher pointed out that beauty is the idea manifested in different ways. Then, the presence of the idea is vital¹⁸. In this way, therefore, widespread observations

Quarter of a Century?, ed. A. SIMPSON, Athens 2015, p. 261–282; P.Ł. GROTHOWSKI, *O sztuce cytolwania – chresis jako źródło w badaniach nad recepcją idei obrazu w Bizancjum*, [in:] *Hypomnemata Byzantina. Prace ofiarowane Maciejowi Salamoniowi*, ed. J. BONAREK, S. TURLEJ, Piotrków Trybunalski 2017, p. 56–57; H. MAGUIRE, *The Asymmetry of Text and Image in Byzantium*, PM.RELLMA 38, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4000/peme.12218> [12 V 2020]; M. SMORAĞ RÓŻYCKA, *Miejsce ekfrazy w bizantynistycznej historiografii artystycznej*, VP 70, 2018, p. 471–484.

¹⁵ *Euphémie de Chalcedoine. Légendes byzantines*, 1.14–15, ed. F. HALKIN, Bruxelles 1965 [= SHa, 41].

¹⁶ C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 2013 [= Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, 16], p. 38 (1st ed. Englewood Cliffs 1972).

¹⁷ H. MAGUIRE, *Originality...*, p. 102.

¹⁸ *Plotini opera*, vol. I, *Porphyrus vita Plotini et enneades I–III*, e.g. 1.6.1.1–3; 1.6.1.17–36; 1.6.2.1–6; 1.6.2.11–28, ed. P. HENRY, H.-R. SCHWYZER, Leiden 1951 [= ML.SPh, 33]. In this context, it is also worth pointing to Michael Psellos' short commentary:

Περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ δὲ ἐἰ μὴ ἐκεῖνο· φησὶν ἦν τὸ ὑπέρκαλλον κάλλι ἀμυγχανῶ, τί ἂν τούτου τοῦ ὀρωμένου ἦν κάλλιον; οἱ δὲ μεμφομένοι τούτου οὐκ ἐξ ὄλων ὀρωσι μερῶν, ἀλλ' οἷον μέρος ζῶου ἀπολαμβάνοντες, τρίχα ἢ ὄνυχα ἢ χολὴν καὶ φλέγμα, καὶ οὐδὲ τούτου πρὸς ὃ παρῆκται σκοπήσαντες, ὅπερ τοῦ μέρους δυσχεραίνουσι ἀποπτύουσι κατὰ τοῦ παντός. εἰ δὲ τις ὁμοῦ <πάντα> λάβῃ τε καὶ συλλάβῃ καὶ γνοίῃ τὰς τε οὐσίας αὐτῶν καὶ δυνάμεις καὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας καὶ τὰς πρὸς ἄλλο κράσεις καὶ μίξεις καὶ σχέσεις καὶ ἔτι τὸ πᾶν ἐννοήσῃεν, ἀπατηθεῖν ἂν ἴσως ἐντεῦθεν, ὅτι αὐτὸ τούτου τὸ πρῶτως καλόν, δι' ὃ καὶ τὸ εἶναι ποθεινόν ἐστὶν αὐτῷ, ὅτι ὁμοίωμα τοῦ καλοῦ. καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτως καλόν, ἵνα δὴ πάλιν εἰπωμεν ἀναλύσαντες, ὁ πρῶτος νοῦς καὶ τὰ ἐκείνου πρῶτα νοήματα, ἅπερ αὐτὸς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν, ἅπερ ἔχει μὲν παρὰ τὰγαθοῦ, ὡσπερ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκεῖθεν ὑφέστηκεν, ἐκφαίνει δὲ πρῶτος. τὸ δὲ

– Plotinus, after all, did not have to order people to recognize light, gold, or stars as beautiful – gained a weighty philosophical foundation. As for the late antique and Byzantine plastic arts themselves, it is difficult to talk about the direct impact of the Plotinus’ thoughts on their shape¹⁹. His aesthetic considerations, however, played an important role in Byzantine culture, because they were accepted by the Church Fathers thanks to whom the Plotinus’ understanding of the perceptible beauty was consolidated²⁰.

For Byzantine authors, the beauty of gold essentially meant its glow – so it was directly related to light – as well its colour. Both attributes were positively perceived in antiquity, but it seems that they were particularly appreciated in late antiquity, and on this account, it can be said that at that time there was formed an aesthetic thought in which variegation (ποικιλία) was the most important value.

ἐνταῦθα κάλλος ἐπακτὸν καὶ εἶδωλον τοῦ καλοῦ, ἵνα καὶ καλὸν φαίνηται. ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ καλὴ μὲν τὴν φύσιν, καλλίων δὲ ὅταν ἐκεῖ βλέπῃ· εἰ γὰρ αὐτόθεν καλή, ἦν ἂν πᾶσα καλή. ὁ δὲ νοῦς αὐτὸ τοῦτο κάλλος καὶ τὰ μετ’ ἐκείνων καλὰ ἢ εὐθὺς μετ’ ἐκείνων ἢ πολλοστά. τὰ μὲν οὖν μετ’ ἐκείνων πρῶτως ἀστράπτει, τὰ δὲ διὰ μέσων μεταλαμβάνονται τοῦ ἐκεῖ κάλλους, ὅσῳ πορρῶτερον, τοσοῦτῳ καὶ ἀμυδρότερον τὸ κάλλος ἴσχουσιν,

Τοῦ αὐτοῦ· *περὶ νοητοῦ κάλλους*, [in:] *Michaelis Pselli philosophica minora*, vol. II, ed. D.J. O’MEARA, Leipzig 1989 [= BSGR], p. 117.

¹⁹ Cf. e.g.: A. GRABAR, *Plotin et les origines de l’esthétique médiévale*, [in:] IDEM, *Les origines de l’esthétique médiévale*, ed. G. DAGRON, Paris 1992, p. 29–87 (orig. ed. CAR 1, 1945, p. 15–34); P.A. MICHELIS, *Neo-Platonic Philosophy...*, p. 21–45; H.P. L’ORANGE, *Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire*, Princeton 1965, p. 19–33 (1st ed. Oslo 1958); G. MATHEW, *Byzantine...*, p. 2–22; G.M. GURTNER, *Plotinus and Byzantine Aesthetics*, MSch 66.4, 1989, p. 275–284. See as well: S. MARIEV, *Introduction. Byzantine Aesthetics*, [in:] *Aesthetics and Theurgy in Byzantium*, ed. S. MARIEV, W.-M. STOCK, Berlin–Boston 2013 [= BArchiv, 25], p. 2–11; J. HALDANE, *Medieval Aesthetics*, [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. B. GAUT, D. MCIVER LOPES, London 2013 [= RPhC], p. 26–28 (1st ed. London 2000).

²⁰ E.g.:

Εἰ δὲ τὸ ἐν σώματι καλὸν ἐκ τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα τῶν μερῶν συμμετρίας, καὶ τῆς ἐπιφανομένης εὐχροίας, τὸ εἶναι ἔχει, πῶς ἐπὶ τοῦ φωτὸς ἀπλοῦ τὴν φύσιν ὄντος καὶ ὁμοιομεροῦς, ὁ τοῦ καλοῦ διασώζεται λόγος; Ἡ ὅτι τῷ φωτὶ τὸ σύμμετρον οὐκ ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις αὐτοῦ μέρεσιν, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῷ πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν ἀλύπῳ καὶ προσηνεῖ μαρτυρεῖται; Οὕτω γὰρ καὶ χρυσὸς καλὸς, οὐκ ἐκ τῆς τῶν μερῶν συμμετρίας, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῆς εὐχροίας μόνης, τὸ ἐπαγωγὸν πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν καὶ τὸ τερπνὸν κεκτημένος. Καὶ ἔσπερος ἀστέρων κάλλιστος, οὐ διὰ τὸ ἀναλογουῖντα ἔχειν τὰ μέρη ἐξ ὧν συνέστηκεν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ ἀλυπὸν τινα καὶ ἡδεῖαν τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ αὐγὴν ἐμπίπτειν τοῖς ὀμμασιν. Ἐπειτα νῦν ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ κρίσις περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ, οὐ πάντως πρὸς τὸ ἐν ὄψει τερπνὸν ἀποβλέποντος, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὴν εἰς ὕστερον ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ ὠφέλειαν προορωμένου γεγέννηται. Ὀφθαλμοὶ γὰρ οὕτω ἦσαν κριτικοὶ τοῦ ἐν φωτὶ κάλλους. [...] Ἐπεὶ καὶ χεῖρ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν, καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς ἰδίᾳ, καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν τοῦ ἀνδριάντος μελῶν διηρημένως κείμενα, οὐκ ἂν φανεῖν καλὰ τῷ τυχόντι· πρὸς δὲ τὴν οἰκείαν τάξιν ἀποτεθέντα, τὸ ἐκ τῆς ἀναλογίας, ἐμφανὲς μόλις ποτὲ, καὶ τῷ ἰδιώτη παρέχεται γνῶριμον. Ὁ μὲντοι τεχνίτης καὶ πρὸ τῆς συνθέσεως οἶδε τὸ ἐκάστου καλὸν, καὶ ἐπαινεῖ τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστον, πρὸς τὸ τέλος αὐτῶν ἐπαναφέρων τὴν ἔννοιαν. Τοιοῦτος οὖν δὴ τις καὶ νῦν ἔντεχνος ἐπαινέτης τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἔργων ὁ Θεὸς ἀναγέγραπται· μέλλει δὲ τὸν προσήκοντα ἔπαινον καὶ παντὶ ὁμοῦ τῷ κόσμῳ ἀπαρτισθέντι πληροῦν,

BASILE DE CÉSARÉE, *Homélies sur l’hexaéméron*, 2.7.39–55; 3.10.8–18, ed. S. GIET, Paris 1968 [= SC, 26 bis].

It was related to colours and visual effects on shimmering surfaces of various materials, such as gold, precious stones, marbles, and fabrics. This kind of aesthetic inclinations was then adopted in Byzantium where they did not lose its relevance until the end of the empire's existence, as evidenced by numerous texts and works of art.

In the context of the late antique aesthetics, Michael Roberts coined the evocative term “jeweled style” to illustrate concisely a change in taste in the contemporary poetry, whereby he refers chiefly to the Latin literature. According to Roberts, the classical poetics was then rejected in favour of a new one, in which instead of the simplicity and unity of composition, the variety (*varietas*, *variatio*) was particularly delighted and due to it even a simple topic could become interesting and decorative (*ornatus*). Therefore, repetition was avoided, and authors used to use synonyms and circumlocutions to prevent monotony. The literature created in this way was supposed to be like a shimmering gem (*gemma*) that attracts attention with its glitter (*lumen*) and colour (*color*)²¹. Although it is difficult to agree with all the detailed considerations of the researcher, who sometimes compares literature with painting too easily, his term “jeweled style”, in the context of art understood simply as a predilection for sophisticated, multi-coloured and shiny materials, quite aptly describes the late-antique and Byzantine aesthetics²².

Referring directly to Byzantine primary sources, it should be stressed that gold in ekphraseis, full of admiration for visible beauty, appears as one of the quintessential precious materials, and this is the most characteristic feature: gold does not have a unique, special position among them, since marbles, precious stones, and expensive fabrics are not perceived as less valued. Let's study some specific examples. Describing the church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, Paulus Silentiarius (died ca. 575–580) wrote:

²¹ M. ROBERTS, *The Jeweled...*, p. 39–65.

²² Cf.: P. COX MILLER, “*The Little Blue Flower Is Red*”. *Relics and the Poetizing of the Body*, JECS 8.2, 2000, p. 213–236; T.K. THOMAS, *The Medium Matters. Reading the Remains of a Late Antique Textile*, [in:] *Reading Medieval Images. The Art Historian and the Object*, ed. E. SEARS, T.K. THOMAS, Ann Arbor 2002, p. 39–49; L. JAMES, *Color and Meaning in Byzantium*, JECS 11.2, 2003, p. 223–233; E.S. BOLMAN, *Late Antique Aesthetics, Chromophobia and the Red Monastery, Sohag, Egypt*, ECA 3, 2006, p. 18–22; J. ELSNER, *Late Antique Art. The Problem of the Concept and the Cumulative Aesthetic*, [in:] *Approaching Late Antiquity. The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, ed. S. SWAIN, M. EDWARDS, Oxford 2006, p. 271–309; P. COX MILLER, *The Corporeal Imagination. Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity*, Philadelphia 2009, p. 17, 18, 43–44; E.S. BOLMAN, *Painted Skins. The Illusions and Realities of Architectural Polychromy, Sinai and Egypt*, [in:] *Approaching the Holy Mountain. Art and Liturgy at St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, ed. S.E.J. GERSTEL, R.S. NELSON, Turnhout 2010 [= CMu, 11], p. 119–140; B.V. PENTCHEVA, *The Sensual Icon. Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, University Park 2010, p. 139–149; N. SCHIBILLE, *Hagia Sophia and the Byzantine Aesthetic Experience*, Farnham 2014, p. 97–99, 108; B.V. PENTCHEVA, *Hagia Sophia, Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium*, University Park 2017, p. 121–149; V. IVANOVICI, *Divine Light through Earthly Colours. Mediating Perception in Late Antique Churches*, [in:] *Colour and Light in Ancient and Medieval Art*, ed. C.N. DUCKWORTH, A.E. SASSIN, New York–London 2018, p. 81–91.

χρυσεοκολλήτους δὲ τέγος ψηφίδας ἐέργει,
ὦν ἄπο μαρμαίρουσα χύδην χρυσόρρυτος ἀκτίς
ἀνδρομέοις ἄτλητος ἐπεσκίρτησε προσώποις.
φαίη τις φαέθοντα μεσημβρινὸν εἶαρος ὥρη
εἰσοράαν, ὅτε πᾶσαν ἐπεχρύσωσεν ἐρίπτην²³

The roof is compacted of gilded tesserae from which a glittering stream of golden rays pours abundantly and strikes men's eyes with irresistible force. It is as if one were gazing at the mid-day sun in spring, when he gilds each mountain top²⁴.

Here, the poet drew attention not only to the golden mosaic cubes (χρυσεοκολλήτους ψηφίδας) covering the vaulted parts but also emphasized that the rays of light (ἄπο μαρμαίρουσα χύδην χρυσόρρυτος ἀκτίς) reflecting from their surface are so intense that it is even difficult to look at them (ἀνδρομέοις ἄτλητος ἐπεσκίρτησε προσώποις). The brilliance of the tesserae hurts eyes like the spring sun illuminating the mountain peaks at noon (φαέθοντα μεσημβρινὸν εἶαρος ὥρη). It should be noted that the colour of the sun's rays, both in the church and outside, is described as golden (χρυσόρρυτος; ἐπεχρύσωσεν).

It is worth adding that Silentarius in some very poetic lines contained quite specific content because authors frequently used to stop on more general statements. For example, Procopius of Caesarea (ca. 500 – ca. 565) wrote on the same church: “χρυσῶ μὲν ἀκιβδήλω καταλήλειπται ἡ ὄροφή πᾶσα, κεραννῦσα τὸν κόμπον τῷ κάλλει, νικᾷ μέντοι ἢ ἐκ τῶν λίθων αὐγῇ ἀνταστράπτουσα τῷ χρυσῶ²⁵ (*The whole ceiling is overlaid with pure gold, which adds glory to the beauty, yet the light reflected from the stones prevails, shining out in rivalry with the gold*)²⁶. Thus he did not specify that the vaults were decorated with gold tesserae but he admitted that this part of the building is beautiful and resplendent. Notwithstanding this opinion, Procopius found that the glow of marbles (ἢ ἐκ τῶν λίθων αὐγῇ ἀνταστράπτουσα) is stronger than that of gold (νικᾷ μέντοι τῷ χρυσῶ). His view may seem somewhat surprising, but a little further we read as well: “ὁ δὲ χαλκὸς οὗτος τὸ μὲν χρωῶμα ἐστὶ χρυσοῦ ἀκιβδήλου πραότερος, τὴν δὲ ἀξίαν οὐ παρὰ πολὺ ἀποδέων ἰσοστάσιος ἀργύρω εἶναι²⁷ (*This brass, in its colour, is softer than pure gold, and its value is not much less than that of an equal weight of silver*)²⁸. It is

²³ PAULUS SILENTIARIUS, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae*, 668–672, [in:] PAULUS SILENTIARIUS, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae, Descriptio Ambonis*, ed. C. DE STEFANI, Berlin–New York 2010 [= BSGR] (cetera: PAULUS SILENTIARIUS).

²⁴ C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 86.

²⁵ *Procopii Caesarensis opera omnia. De aedificiis*, I, 1, 54, vol. IV, ed. J. HAURY, rec. G. WIRTH, Leipzig 1964 [= BSGR] (cetera: PROCOPIUS).

²⁶ PROCOPIUS, *On Buildings*, I, 1, 54, trans. H.B. DEWING, G. DOWNEY, Cambridge Mass.–London 1954 [= LCL, 343].

²⁷ PROCOPIUS, I, 2, 4.

²⁸ PROCOPIUS, *On Buildings...*, I, 2, 4.

interesting that both Procopius and Silentarius noticed some weaknesses of gold, especially since their feelings are opposite – although they both described the same dome – because for the first author gold glitters less than marbles, and its colour is less delicate than that of copper, and for the second one, the glow of golden mosaic cubes is too dazzling.

Other writers also used to point to the special visual effects associated with golden surfaces, both earlier such as Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260 – ca. 339)²⁹ and later ones. Of the latter, it is especially worth paying attention to the text from around the mid-twelfth century whose author is Michael *protecdicus* (πρωτέκδικος)³⁰ of the church of Thessalonica and later deacon of the church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. His composition is on folios 123r–124v of the Escorial codex Y–II–10 (Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial) and it is the ekphrasis of the Holy Wisdom church written for the annual celebration of the inauguration of the church. This text consists of 232 lines – unfortunately, it is incomplete now – and refers to the architectural form of the church and its symbolic interpretation as well³¹. What is more, the author remarked on the building's decoration, and, at the very beginning, he emphasized that the beauty of the church is related to gold (ὅς καὶ πυρράζει τὴν ὄψιν ὡς ὑγρότης πάντη χρυσόν)³². Regarding the narthex, we read:

καὶ ἡ τοῦ χρυσοῦ στιλπνότης ἐγγὺς εἶναι τοῦ καταστάζειν ποεὶ νομίζεσθαι τὸν χρυσόν. τοὺς γὰρ ὑγροὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῇ ἀνταυγείᾳ ὡσπερ κυμαίνουσα, τὰς ἐκείνων νοτίδας εἰς τὸν χρυσόν ἐφάντασε τὸν ὀρώμενον, καὶ δοκεῖ ῥευσεῖσθαι τηκόμενος. λίθος δὲ ἀλλὰ ποδαπή περιπέπηγε τῇ οἰκοδομῇ, τῷ πολυχρόφῳ καὶ λείῳ διαμιλλωμένη πρὸς τὸν χρυσόν, ἐκ μὲν λειότητος στίλβουσα, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ἄνθους ὄντος ποικίλου πλέον τι ἔχουσα καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸν μονόχρουν χρυσόν

[...] and the brightness of the gold almost makes the gold appear to drip down; for by its refulgence making waves to arise, as it were, in eyes that are moist, it causes their moisture to appear in the gold which is seen, and it seems to be flowing in a molten stream. But what

²⁹ E.g. his description of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople:

αὐτὸς δὲ νεῶν ἅπαντα εἰς ὕψος ἄφατον ἐπάρας, λίθων ποικιλίας παντοίων ἐξαστράπτοντα ἐποίει, εἰς αὐτὸν ὄροφον ἐξ ἐδάφους πλακώσας, διαλαβὼν δὲ λεπτοῖς φατνώμασι τὴν στέγην χρυσῷ τὴν πᾶσαν ἐκάλυπτεν. ἄνω δὲ ὑπὲρ ταύτην πρὸς αὐτῷ δώματι χαλκὸς μὲν ἀντὶ κεράμου φυλακὴν τῷ ἔργῳ πρὸς ὑετῶν ἀσφάλειαν παρεῖχε· καὶ τοῦτον δὲ πολὺς περιέλαμπε χρυσός, ὡς μαρμαρυγὰς τοῖς πόρρωθεν ἀφορώσι ταῖς ἡλίου αὐγαῖς ἀντανακλωμένας ἐκπέμπειν. δικτυωτὰ δὲ περίξ ἐκύκλου τὸ δωμάτιον ἀνάγλυφα χαλκῷ καὶ χρυσῷ κατεργασμένα,

Eusebius Werke, vol. I.1, *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*, 4.58–4.59, ed. F. WINKELMANN, Berlin 1975 [= GCS].

³⁰ *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae latinitatis*, vol. VI, ed. C. DU FRESNE DU CANGE, Niort 1883–1887, 541a (s.v. *Protecdicus*).

³¹ C. MANGO, J. PARKER, *A Twelfth-Century Description of St. Sophia*, DOP 14, 1960, p. 233–235.

³² This text was edited and translated by Cyril Mango and John Parker. They also provided it with an introduction and commentary; C. MANGO, J. PARKER, *A Twelfth-Century...*, 1.12–13, p. 235.

manner of stonework is this that fastened around the building, striving with its variegated coloring and smoothness against gold, shining because of its smoothness and, because of its diversified bloom having something that surpasses even the gold, which is of one color?³³.

To Michael, gold – because of its intense gloss – seems to be flowing down the walls (καὶ ἡ τοῦ χρυσοῦ στιλπνότης ἐγγὺς εἶναι τοῦ καταστάζειν ποεῖ νομίζεσθαι τὸν χρυσόν). The shimmer of gold is glaring and it results in watery eyes (τοὺς γὰρ ὑγροὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆ ἀνταυγείᾳ ὥσπερ κυμαίνουσα, τὰς ἐκείνων νοτίδας εἰς τὸν χρυσόν ἐφάντασε τὸν ὀρώμενον, καὶ δοκεῖ βρυσσεῖσθαι τηρόμενος), and the stones, due to their variegation of colours, resemble flowers in bloom (ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ἄνθους ὄντος ποικίλου)³⁴. Interestingly, the author is inclined to consider the multi-coloured revetments as more beautiful than gold which is, after all, of one colour (μονόχροος)³⁵. A monochromaticity seems to be less valued than colourfulness (πολύχροος), although there were exceptions to this rule, as evidenced by the description of the floor in one of the homilies of Leo VI the Wise (886–912)³⁶.

³³ C. MANGO, J. PARKER, *A Twelfth-Century...*, 3.67–79, p. 237 (There are the Greek text and the English translation).

³⁴ This kind of comparison of multi-coloured stones to blooming flowers is quite common in Byzantine literature, and its general prototype can be found in *The Hall* (*Περὶ τοῦ οἴκου*) of Lucian of Samosata. However, he compared frescoes, not marbles, to a flourishing meadow; LUCIAN, *The Hall*, 9, [in:] LUCIAN, *Phalaris. Hippas or The Bath. Dionysus. Heracles. Amber or The Swans. The Fly. Nigrinus. Demonax. The Hall. My Native Land. Octogenarians. A True Story. Slander. The Consonants at Law. The Carousal (Symposium) or The Lapiths*, vol. I, ed. A.M. HARMON, Cambridge Mass. 1913 [= LCL, 14]. This motif, as it seems, has been referred to marble revetments and floors since the 6th century; H. MAGUIRE, *Nectar & Illusion. Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature*, Oxford 2016 [= OSHC], p. 121–122 (1st ed. Oxford 2012). In this early period, we find it, among others, in Procopius (PROCOPIUS, 1.1.59–60), as well as in the carved inscription of the church of St. Polyeuctus in Constantinople (*Anthologia Graeca*, 1.10.60–69, vol. I, ed. H. BECKBY, München 1965). This comparison turned out to be extremely enduring, because it was often used for the next centuries, until the end of Byzantium, since the beauty of various stones decorating interiors was constantly emphasized and glorified. See as well: GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De sancto Theodoro*, [in:] PG, vol. XLVI, col. 737.48–740.6; *Choricii Gazaei opera*, 2.2.40, ed. R. FOERSTER, E. RICHTSTEIG, Leipzig 1929 [= BSGR] (cetera: CHORICIUS).

³⁵ Reading Byzantine primary sources, one could often find that the most wonderful visual effects are associated not with gold but with multi-coloured stones, both marbles, and gems, to which the former ones are regularly compared. In the context of stone revetments, the example of the poetic ekphrasis of the Constantinopolitan church of the Holy Wisdom of Sientiaris is significant. His description of the church's marbles is extensive and very detailed, because it does not boil down to the general highlighting of their diverse colours and extraordinary gloss. Therefore, almost all the stones mentioned in the poem can be accurately recognized and assigned to individual places of the church; N. SCHIBILLE, *Hagia Sophia...*, p. 97–109, 241–243. It should be clearly emphasized that the Sientiaris' ekphrasis is a unique combination of elaborate poetry with a large dose of specific information, which was quoted in a very erudite form; PAULUS SILENTIARIUS, 617–646, 664–667.

³⁶ Μαρμάρου γὰρ λευκῆς ἐκ πλακῶν ὑπέστρωται, τὸ συνεχὲς τῆς διαφανείας μηδενὸς ἄλλου διατειχίζοντος χρώματος, προτετιμηκότος τοῦ τεχνίτου τὸ ἀμιγῆς τῆς ἀγλαΐας τοῦ ἐκ τῆς ποικίλης κατασκευῆς ἄνθους, οἶα πολλὰ ἐν ταῖς τῶν ἐδαφῶν κατασκευαῖς ὄραται. Πλὴν ὥσπερ τινα ὄρια

The author underlined there that the pavement made of white slabs is beautiful because of its one colour, and it is a pure splendour for him. In general, the combination of materials of different colours providing stunning visual effects was valued more than simplicity praised by Leo.

In the context of extraordinary impressions, the *X Homily* of Photius I of Constantinople (858–867, 877–886) immediately comes to mind. The patriarch prepared it on the occasion of the inauguration of the church of the Virgin of the Pharos at the Great Palace of Constantinople. This event took place in 864 during the reign of Michael III (842–867)³⁷:

Ὡς εἰς αὐτὸν γὰρ τὸν οὐρανὸν μηδενὸς ἐπιπροσθούντος μηδαμόθεν ἐμβεβηκῶς καὶ τοῖς πολυμῶρφοις καὶ πανταχόθεν ὑποφαινομένοις κάλλεσιν ὡς ἄστροις περιλαμπόμενος ὅλος ἐκπεπληγμένος γίνεται. Δοκεῖ δὲ λοιπὸν ἐντεῦθεν τὰ τε ἄλλα ἐν ἐκστάσει εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸ περιδιεῖσθαι τὸ τέμενος· ταῖς γὰρ οἰκειαῖς 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. Ἀλλὰ γὰρ χρυσὸς τε καὶ ἄργυρος τὰ πλεῖστα τοῦ ναοῦ διειλήφασιν, ὁ μὲν ψηφίσις ἐπαλειφόμενος, ὁ δὲ εἰς πλάκας ἀποξεόμενος τε καὶ τυπούμενος, ἄλλος ἄλλοις ἐπιπασσόμενος μέρεσιν· ἐνταῦθα ἐπιπλεκόμενος χρυσός, ἢ χρυσοῦ τι θαυμασιώτερον, ἢ θεία τράπεζα, σύνθημα. Ἄργυρος δὲ περὶ τὰς πυλίδας καὶ στυλίδας τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου σὺν τοῖς περιστάσι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ κωνοειδὴς καὶ τῇ θείᾳ τραπέζῃ ἐπικείμενος σὺν τοῖς ὑπερείδουσι στυλίσκοις ὑπώροφοις ὄροφος. Καὶ μαρμάρων δὲ πολυχρῶμων ὅσα μὴ χρυσὸς ἐπέδραμεν ἢ ἄργυρος περιέλαβεν, ἀμῆχανόν τι καὶ τερπνὸν φιλοτέχνημα τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τοῦ ναοῦ διεκόσμησεν³⁸

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 around. 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 own is transferred to the object. Gold and silver cover the greater part of the church, the one smeared on tesserae, the other cut out and fashioned into plaques, or otherwise applied to other parts. Over here are capitals adorned *with gold*, over there are golden cornices. Elsewhere gold is twined into chains, but more wonderful than gold is the composition of the holy table. The little doors and columns of the sanctuary together with the peristyle are covered with silver; so also is the conical roof set over the holy table with the

ἔξωθεν περιθέοντα τῆς λευκῆς ἐπιφανείας ἐκ πλακῶς ἑτεροχρόου, τῇ βραχεῖα παραμείψει τῆς θεάς, τερπνὴν οὖσαν τὴν τοῦ λευκοῦ διαφάνειαν, τερπνοτέραν ὅμως ποιεῖ,

Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini Homiliae, 31.54–61, ed. T. ΑΝΤΩΝΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Turnhout 2008 [= CC.SG 63] (cetera: LEO VI).

³⁷ R.J.H. JENKINS, C. MANGO, *The Date and Significance of the Tenth Homily of Photius*, DOP 9/10, 1956, p. 125–140; A. RÓŻYCKA BRYZEK, *Fojusz, patriarcha Konstantynopola, „Homilia X”*, Z 466.3, 1994, p. 57.

³⁸ *Τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀγιωτάτου Φωτίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ὁμιλία, ῥηθεῖσα ὡς ἐν ἐκφράσει τοῦ ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις περιωνύμου ναοῦ*, 10, [in:] *Φωτίου Ὁμιλία*, ed. B. ΛΑΟΥΡΔΑΣ, Θεσσαλονίκη 1959 [= ΕΠΙΣΕΜΣΠ, 12] (cetera: PHOTIUS), p. 101.18–31 – 102.1–5.

little pillars and canopy that support it. The rest of the church, as much of it as gold has not overspread or silver covered, is adorned with many-hued marble, a surpassingly fair work³⁹.

In his solemn speech, Photius used well-known and much earlier developed schemes for describing the church's interior, and his *ekphrasis* is, in fact, rather general, thus it could be applied easily as a description of another church. As for gold, he mentioned that it is in the mosaic cubes (ὁ μὲν ψηφίσιν ἐπαλειφόμενος) and that capitals, cornices, and chains are gilded (ἐνταῦθα ἐπικοσμούμενα κιονόκρανα, ἐνταῦθα δὲ διὰ χρυσοῦ περιζώματα· ἀλλαχόθι δὲ ταῖς ἀλύσεσιν ἐπιπλεκόμενος χρυσός). The author, however, emphasized that the altar with the silver ciborium is more beautiful than gold (ἢ χρυσοῦ τι θαυμασιώτερον, ἢ θεία τράπεζα, σύνθημα). It seems that in this way Photius rather indicates that the sanctuary is the most important part of the church than comments on aesthetics. The patriarch certainly succeeded in creating the vision of the splendour of the new foundation: completely covered with gold and silver (Ἀλλὰ γὰρ χρυσός τε καὶ ἄργυρος τὰ πλεῖστα τοῦ ναοῦ διελήφασιν) and also with multi-coloured marbles (μαρμάρων δὲ πολυχρώμων). It is worth adding that the homily was given *in situ*, which also allowed for less scrupulous explanations. Anyway, the Photius himself justified his approach with rhetorical emphasis:

Χαίρω δ' οὖν ἔγωγε οὐδὲν ἦττον, εἰ καὶ τὸ ἔλαττον ὁ λόγος ἀπηνέγκατο, ἢ εἰ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ μέτρον τῆς ἱκανῶς ἐχούσης ἀφίκετο διηγήσεως· οὐ γὰρ τῆς ἐν λόγῳ δυνάμεως ἐπίδειξιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ κάλλιστόν τε εἶναι τὸν ναὸν καὶ ὠραιότατον καὶ νικῶντα νόμους ἐκφράσεως παραστήσαι προήρημαι⁴⁰

Yet, even if my speech has fallen below the mark, I am not any the less content than if it had risen to the level of an adequate description. For my purpose was not to make an exhibition of eloquence but to show that the church is most excellent and beautiful and that it defeats the canons of an *ekphrasis*⁴¹.

³⁹ *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, 10.5, trans., praef. C. MANGO, Cambridge Mass. 1958 [= DOS, 3], p. 186–187.

⁴⁰ ΡΗΟΤΙΟΥ, 10, p. 103.23–27. In *Homily XVII*, Photius also emphasized the power of sight – a sense that surpasses hearing (ΡΗΟΤΙΟΥ, 17, p. 170.28–33):

εἰ γὰρ καὶ δι' ἀλλήλων ἐκάτερον συνεισάγεται, ἀλλὰ πολὺ προέχειν ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν ἐπιδεικνύεται τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀκοὴν εἰσδυομένης μαθήσεως ἢ διὰ τῆς ὄψεως ἐγγινομένη κατάληψις. Ἐκκλινέ τις τὸ οὐς εἰς διήγημα; εἴλκυσε φανταζομένη τὸ ἀκουσθὲν ἢ διάνοια; νηφούση μελέτη τὸ κριθὲν τῇ μνήμῃ ἐναπέθετο. Οὐδὲν τούτων ἔλαττον, εἰ μὴ καὶ πολὺ μᾶλλον, κρατεῖ τὰ τῆς ὄψεως.

Cf. Καὶ τί ἄν τις ἐν οὕτῳ βραχεῖ καιρῷ τὰ τοῦ περιωνύμου τεμένους λόγῳ πειράται περιέρχεσθαι θαύματα; ὅπου γε οὐδ' αὐτὴ ἢ ὄψις οὐδ' ἐπὶ συχνὸν χρόνον, καίτοι τὰς ἄλλας αἰσθήσεις τῷ τάχει κατόπιν ἄγουσα, ἀντιλαβέσθαι τούτων οὐδαμῶς ἐλέγχεται κατισχύουσα,

ΡΗΟΤΙΟΥ, 10, p. 103.19–23. On the theory of perception of Photius: R. BETANCOURT, *Sight...*, p. 109–195.

⁴¹ *The Homilies of Photius...*, 10.7, p. 189.

The *X Homily* of Photius, which passages were cited above, was formerly considered a speech for the inauguration of the so-called New Church (Νέα Ἐκκλησία) funded by Basil I the Macedonian (867–886). Cyril Mango proves, however, that the text refers to the church of the Virgin of the Pharos⁴². The description of the New Church is found in the panegyric *Vita Basilii* (Ἱστορικὴ διήγησις τοῦ βίου καὶ τῶν πράξεων Βασιλείου τοῦ αἰοδίδιμου βασιλέως), which is the only extant secular biography in Byzantine literature. The emperor was presented there not only as a brave warrior, but also as a generous founder, who raised many churches from ruin and also built numerous new ones⁴³.

ὄν ὡς νύμφην ὠραϊσμένην καὶ περικεκοσμημένην μαργάροις τε καὶ χρυσῷ καὶ ἀργύρου λαμπρότησιν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ μαρμάρων πολυχρῶν ποικιλίας καὶ ψηφίδων συνθέσεσιν καὶ σηρικῶν ὑφασμάτων καταστολαῖς τῷ ἀθανάτῳ προσήγαγεν νυμφίῳ Χριστῷ. Ὅ τε γὰρ ὄροφος ἐκ πέντε συμπληρούμενος ἡμισφαιρίων στίλβει χρυσῷ καὶ εἰκόνων ὡς ἀστέρων ἐξαστράπτει κά(λ)λεσιν, ἔξωθεν μετάλλοις ἐμφοροῦς χρυσίῳ χαλκοῦ καλλυνόμενος, οἷ τε παρ' ἐκάτερα τοῖχοι τῷ πολυτελεῖ καὶ πολυχρῷ τῶν μαρμάρων καταποικίλλονται, || καὶ τὰ ἄδυστα τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ χρυσῷ καὶ ἀργύρῳ καὶ (λίθοις) τιμίοις καὶ μαργάροις καταπεποικίλται καὶ καταπεπλούτισται. καὶ αἱ τῶν ἐκτὸς διείργουσαι τὰ θυσιαστήρια κιγκλίδες καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐταῖς περιστυλα καὶ τὰ ἄνωθεν οἶον ὑπέρθυρα κρηματίζοντα οἷ τε ἐντὸς θάκοι καὶ αἱ πρὸ τούτων βαθμίδες καὶ αὐταὶ αἱ ἱεραὶ τράπεζαι, ἐξ ἀργύρου πάντα(οθεν) περικεχυμένον ἔχοντος τὸν χρυσὸν καὶ λίθοις τιμίοις ἐκ μαργαριτῶν ἡμφιεσμένοις πολυτελῶν τὴν σύμπηξιν καὶ σύστασιν ἔχουσιν. αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ ἔδαφος σηρικῶν ὑφασμάτων ἢ Σιδονίων ἔργων ἐφηπλωμένων δόξει τυγχάνειν ἀνάπλεων· οὕτω πᾶν ἐξωραΐσται καὶ καταπεποικίλται τῷ πολυχρῷ τῶν ὑποκειμένων ἐκ μαρμάρων πλακῶν καὶ ταῖς πολυειδέσι τῶν ταύτας περικλειουσῶν ψηφίδων ζώναις καὶ τῷ τῆς ἀρμογῆς ἀκριβεῖ καὶ τῷ περιττῷ τῆς περιθεούσης ἐν ἅπασι χάριτος

The emperor offered this church to Christ, the immortal Bridegroom, as a bride decked out and adorned with pearls and gold and gleaming silver and, moreover, with a variety of many-colored marbles, mosaic compositions and silken robes. The ceilings of that five-domed church glitter with gold and flash forth (their) beautiful representations like (as many) stars; on the outside, the roof is embellished with brass work resembling gold; the shrine's (interior) walls on either side are varied with costly and many-colored marbles and its sanctuary is variously decked out with a wealth of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls. The chancel barrier that separates the outside area from the altar space; the colonnade set into this barrier and the (parts) above, functioning as lintels, as it were; the seats within (the sanctuary); the steps leading to them; and the altars themselves are all given massivity and substance by

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 177–183.

⁴³ Ὁ δὲ φιλόχριστος βασιλεὺς Βασιλεῖος μεταξὺ τῶν πολεμικῶν ἀγώνων, οὓς διὰ τῶν ὑπὸ χεῖρα πολλακίας ὡσπερ ἀγωνοθετῶν πρὸς τὸ δέον κατηύθυνε, πολλοὺς τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ θείων ναῶν ἐκ τῶν προγεγονότων διαρραγέντας σεισμῶν καὶ ἢ καταβληθέντας παντελῶς ἢ πτώσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ῥηγμάτων σύντομον ὑπομεῖναι δηλοῦντας, ἐπιμελεῖα τε διηνεκεῖ καὶ τῶν πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν | ἐπιτηδείων ἀφθόνῳ χορηγία καὶ παροχή τοὺς μὲν τοῦ πτώματος ἡγείρεν, τῇ ἀσφαλείᾳ καὶ κάλλος προσθεῖς, τῶν δὲ τὸ ἀσθενὲς ἐνισχύσας διὰ τῆς τῶν δεόντων ἐπιβολῆς καὶ ἐπανορθώσεως, τοῦ μὴ καταρρηῆναι, ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἀκμὴν αὐθις ἐπανελθεῖν καὶ νεότητα ἐγένετο αἴτιος. δηλωτέον δὲ καὶ (τὰ) καθ' ἕκαστα”

Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Liber quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris amplectitur, 78, ed. I. ŠEVČENKO, Berlin–Boston 2011 [= CFHB.SBe, 42] (cetera: *Vita Basilii*).

silver that is gilded all over and (adorned) with precious stones in settings made [?] from costly pearls. As for the pavement, it first will appear to be spread with (rugs) woven of silk or with Sidonian fabrics, so beautifully has all of it been inlaid and varied by marble panels of many hues set into the ground; by the variegated mosaic bands that enclose these panels; by the precision with which everything has been joined together; and by the superabundant elegance spreading throughout⁴⁴.

The quoted ekphrasis although quite extensive, does not contain many details – like that of Photius. This is another evocation of a dazzling imperial foundation which is composed primarily by the discussing of wonderful and expensive materials exploited in the church embellishment, namely: gold, silver, tesserae, fabrics, and various many-hued stones. In this instance, like in previous ones, the beauty is grounded on variegation (οὕτω ποικίλαι ταύτας τοῦ τεχνίτου θελήσαντος, ὡς ἐκ τοῦ πολυμόρφου θηρῶντος τὸ εὐπρεπὲς καὶ ἐράσμιον)⁴⁵. Besides, the lavish decoration of the shrine is compared to the fine attire of a bride (ὄν ὡς νύμφην ὠραϊσμένην καὶ περικεκοσμημένην). This comparison also indicates that the Church is married to Christ, the immortal Bridegroom (τῷ ἀθανάτῳ προσήγαγεν νυμφίῳ Χριστῷ). Thereupon each church building also in terms of external appearance must be appropriate for such a great Groom. On this account, the adorned “garment” of the New Church consists of marble cladding, mosaics, silk fabrics, pearls, gold, and silver. All these elements are costly and shiny, and they differ in colours as well.

Gold, probably in the form of tesserae, also covered the interiors of the five domes (πέντε συμπληρούμενος ἡμισφαιρίων στίλβει χρυσῷ καὶ εἰκόνων ὡς ἀστέρων ἐξαστράπτει κά(λ)λεσιν), shimmering like stars. Moreover, all parts of the templon and the altars were made of silver and thereafter gilded (ἐξ ἀργύρου πάντα(οθεν) περικεχυμένον ἔχοντος τὸν χρυσόν). Very similar elements of a description are also found in the somewhat earlier poetic ekphrasis of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. It was written by Constantine of Rhodes (ca. 870 – after 931) who dedicated his work to Constantine VII

⁴⁴ *Vita Basilii*, 83.15–19, 84.1–18 (There are the Greek text and the English translation). Liutprand of Cremona (ca. 920 – ca. 972) mentioned this church in the *Retributio* (*Ανταπόδοσις*), where he described his first diplomatic mission at the court of Constantinople, during the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959):

Fabricavit autem precioso et mirabili opere iuxta palatium orientem versus ecclesiam in honorem summi et caelestis militiae principis, archangeli Michaelis, qui Grece archistrátigos, hoc est militiae princeps, appellatur. Ecclesiam autem ipsam Nean, hoc est novam, alii vocant, alii vero Ennean, quod nostra lingua novennalem sonat, appellant, eo quod ibidem ecclesiasticarum horarum machina novem pulsata ictibus sonet,

LIUDPRAND DE CRÉMONE, *Antapodosis*, 3.34.555–560, [in:] LIUDPRAND DE CRÉMONE, *Œuvres*, ed. F. BOUGARD, Paris 2015 [= *SHM*, 41].

⁴⁵ *Vita Basilii*, 89.15–17.

Porphyrogenitus (913–959)⁴⁶. The poet mentioned there the names of the architects Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus, known most of all from the design of the church of the Holy Wisdom, and stressed that due to their theoretical knowledge it was possible to erect such a magnificent building. The church of the Holy Apostles, however, was ravishing not only because of the engineering concepts but also because of the stunning decoration. The latter is compared to a bride with golden ornaments (ὅποια νύμφην κροσσωτοῖσι χρυσεῖς) – this motive was used, as we have seen, also in reference to the New Church – and to a wedding chamber glistening with gold (παστάδα χρύσαυγον ὠραϊσμένην). The extraordinary glow of the church interior is associated with gold, as well as with multi-coloured marbles (μαρμάρων πολυχρῶν), precious stones, and pearls giving fiery reflections (ταῖς ἐκ λίθων τε μαργάρων φρυκτωρίας) and coming from different parts of the whole world (τῶν ἐξ ὅλης σχεδόν γε τῆς οἰκουμένης / καὶ μέχρις Ἰνδῶν Λιβύης τε κ' Εὐρώπης / τῆς Ἀσίας τε πανταχοῦ θρυλλουμένων). A little further, Constantine of Rhodes also pointed to golden tesserae⁴⁷, against which – as can be

⁴⁶ Τοίαις μὲν οὔτος καὶ τόσαις τεχνουργίαις
καὶ σχηματισμοῖς γραμμικῆς θεωρίας
ὄλον διαμπὰξ συγκατήρτισε<ν> δόμον
τὸν ἀστρολαμπή τῶν σοφῶν Ἀποστόλων,
εἴτ' Ἀνθέμιος, εἴτ' Ἰσίδωρος νέος,
ὔλαις ἀπείροις μαρμάρων πολυχρῶν
καὶ λαμπρότησι τῶν μετάλλων τῶν ξένων
ἐπενδύσας τε καὶ καλῶς συναρμόσας,
ὅποια νύμφην κροσσωτοῖσι χρυσεῖς
ἢ παστάδα χρύσαυγον ὠραϊσμένην
ταῖς ἐκ λίθων τε μαργάρων φρυκτωρίας
τῶν ἐξ ὅλης σχεδόν γε τῆς οἰκουμένης
καὶ μέχρις Ἰνδῶν Λιβύης τε κ' Εὐρώπης
τῆς Ἀσίας τε πανταχοῦ θρυλλουμένων,

CONSTANTINE OF RHODES, *On Constantinople and the Church of the Holy Apostles*, 636–649, ed. L. JAMES, I. VASSIS, trans. V. DIMITROPOULOU, L. JAMES, R. JORDAN, Farnham 2012 (cetera: CONSTANTINE OF RHODES). Then follows the description of the used marbles. They, as we read, cover the building like a chiton (ἄς ὡς χιτῶνας ἐνδύσας τοὺς ὀρθίους τοίχους) and create in the interior the impression of a meadow full of blooming flowers with colours reminiscent of precious stones (CONSTANTINE OF RHODES, 650–674; 686–695). It is worth comparing this part of the ekphrasis to the some passages from the Silentiary's poem on the church of the Holy Wisdom, vide PAULUS SILENTIARIUS, 617–646.

⁴⁷ Χρυσῶ δὲ μίγδην ὑέλῳ πεφυκότι
ἅπαν κατεχύρωσε τοῦνδοθεν μέρος,
ὅσον τ' ἐν ὕψει σφαιροσυνθέτου στέγης
χ' ὅσον λαγόνιν ἀψίδων ὑπερφέρει,
καὶ μέχρις αὐτῶν μαρμάρων πολυχρῶν
καὶ μέχρις αὐτῶν κοσμητῶν τῶν δευτέρων

concluded from the description – scenes from the life of Christ were depicted⁴⁸. It is noteworthy that the author had regard to technical detail, namely, that the golden mosaic cubes were made of glass and gold (Χρυσῶ δὲ μίγδην ὑέλω πεφουκότι).

The golden glow was also associated with shiny fabrics, as evidenced, for example, by Silentiarius's ekphrasis of one of the silk purple fabrics⁴⁹ prepared for the church of the Holy Wisdom:

τοῦτο δὲ καλλιπόνοιο φυτεύσατο χεῖρεσι τέχνης
οὐ γλυφίς, οὐ ραφίδων τις ἐλαυνομένης διὰ πέπλων, ἀλλὰ μεταλλάσσουσα
πολύχροα νήματα πήνη,
νήματα ποικιλόμορφα, τὰ βάρβαρος ἤροσε μύρμηξ.
χρυσοφαεὶς δ' ἀμάρυγμα βολαῖς ῥοδοπήχεος ἠοῦς
ἀπλοῖς ἀντήστραψε θεοκράντων ἐπὶ γυίων,
καὶ Τυρίη πόρφυρε χιτῶν ἀλιανθεί κόχλω,
δεξιὸν εὐτύκτοις ὑπὸ νήμασιν ὤμον ἐρέπτων·
κεῖθι γὰρ ἀμπεχόνης μὲν ἀπωλίσθησε καλύπτρη,
καλὰ δ' ἀνερπύζουσα διὰ πλευρῆς ὑπὲρ ὤμου
ἀγκέχυται λαιοῖο· γεγύμνωται δὲ καλύπτρης
πῆχυς καὶ θέναρ ἄκρον. ἔοικε δὲ δάκτυλα τείνειν
δεξιτερῆς, ἄτε μῦθον ἀειζῶντα πιφαύσκων,

γράφας ἀέθλους καὶ σεβασμίους τύπους
τοὺς τὴν κένωσιν ἐκδιδάσκοντας Λόγου
καὶ τὴν πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς βροτοὺς παρουσίαν,

CONSTANTINE OF RHODES, 742–750.

⁴⁸ This is a quite long description, CONSTANTINE OF RHODES, 751–980. The church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople was demolished in 1453, therefore a form of this church is reconstructed primarily on the basis of written sources, which include, first of all, the ekphraseis created by Procopius of Caesarea, Constantine of Rhodes, and Nicholas Mesarites. The earliest of them discussed only the architectural form, and the other two also depicted scenes. Perhaps these mosaic pictures were made during the reign of Basil I; L. JAMES, *Constantine of Rhodes's Poem and Art History*, [in:] CONSTANTINE OF RHODES, *On Constantinople...*, p. 181–217. On the place where the church was built: *Constantinople. Archaeology of a Byzantine Megapolis. Final Report on the Istanbul Rescue Archaeology Project 1998–2004*, ed. K. DARK, F. ÖZGÜMÜŞ, Oxford–Oakville 2013, p. 83–96. It is worth noting that there was a “Dumbarton Oaks Symposium” dedicated to this church (24–26 April 2015); M. MULLETT, R. OUSERHOUT, *The Holy Apostles. Dumbarton Oaks Symposium, 24–26 April 2015*, DOP 70, 2016, p. 325–326; a collection of essays related to this conference has been recently published: *The Holy Apostles – A Lost Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past*, ed. M. MULLETT, R.G. OUSTERHOUT, Washington D.C. 2020 [= DOBSC].

⁴⁹ On various aspects of silk, as well as purple in Byzantium, i.a.: A. MUTHESIUS, *Byzantine Silk Weaving AD 400 to AD 1200*, Vienna 1997; EADEM, *Essential Processes, Looms, and Technical Aspects of the Production of Silk Textiles*, [in:] *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. I, ed. A.E. LAIOU, Washington 2002, p. 147–168; A. MUTHESIUS, *Studies in Silk in Byzantium*, London 2004; D. JACOBY, *Silk Production*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine...*, p. 421–428. Procopius of Caesarea described the history of silkworm smuggling, which was to be done by Byzantine monks: *Procopii Caesarensis opera omnia. De bellis libri*, 8.17.1–8, vol. II, ed. J. HAURY, rec. G. WIRTH, Leipzig 1963 [= BSGR].

λαῖη βίβλον ἔχων ζαθέων ἐπίστορα μύθων,
 βίβλον ἀπαγγέλλουσαν, ὅσα χραισμῆτορι βουλή
 αὐτὸς ἀναξ ἐτέλεσεν ἐπὶ χθονὶ ταρσὸν ἐρείδων.
 πᾶσα δ' ἀπαστράπτει χρυσεὴ στολὶς· ἐν γὰρ ἐκείνῃ
 τρητὸς λεπταλέος περὶ νήματα χρυσὸς ἐλιχθεὶς,
 σχήμασιν ἢ σωλήνος ὁμοῖος ἢ τινος αὐλοῦ,
 δέσμιος ἱμερόεντος ἐρείδεται ὑψόθι πέπλου,
 ὀξυτέραις ῥαφίδεσσι δεθεὶς καὶ νήμασι Σηρῶν⁵⁰

This has been fashioned not by artists' skilful hands plying the knife, nor by the needle driven through cloth, but by the web, the produce of the foreign worm, changing its colored threads of many shades. Upon the divine legs is a garment reflecting a golden glow under the rays of rosy-fingered Dawn, and a chiton, dyed purple by the Tyrian seashell, covers the right shoulder beneath its well-woven fabric; for at that point the upper garment has slipped down while, pulled up across the side, it envelops the left shoulder. The forearm and hand are thus laid bare. He seems to be stretching out the fingers of the right hand, as if preaching His immortal words, while in His left He holds the book of divine message – the book that tells what He, the Lord, accomplished with provident mind when His foot trod the earth. The whole robe shines with gold: for on it gold leaf has been wrapped round thread after the manner of a pipe or a reed, and so it projects above the lovely cloth, firmly bound with silken thread by sharp needles⁵¹.

The poet described the liturgical fabric that was laid on the altar. It was made of silk dyed with the Tyrian purple, and the figure of Christ Pantocrator was embroidered with gold thread. According to Silentarius, this cloth glistened wonderfully in the morning sun, spreading the golden glare all-round. In the following lines, the author also referred to other scenes and persons, including Peter and Paul who are next to Christ⁵². They are standing under golden arcades (νηὸς ἐκολπῶθη χρύσεος; τέτρασι χρυσεῖοις ἐπὶ κίοσι). The both saints, having a rank lower than Christ, were embroidered with silver threads (ἄμφω δὲ στολίδεσσι ὑπ' ἀργυφέησι

⁵⁰ PAULUS SILENTIARIUS, 765–785.

⁵¹ C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 88–89.

⁵² ἄμφω δὲ στολίδεσσι ὑπ' ἀργυφέησι πυκάζει
 πῆνη ποικιλόεργος· ἐπ' ἀμβροσίων δὲ καρῆνων
 νηὸς ἐκολπῶθη χρύσεος, τριέλικτον ἐγείρων
 ἀγλαίην ἀψίδος· ἐφεδρήσσει δὲ βεβηκῶς
 τέτρασι χρυσεῖοις ἐπὶ κίοσι. χεῖλεσι δ' ἄκροις
 χρυσοδέτου πέπλοιο κατέγραφεν ἄσπετα τέχνη
 ἔργα πολισσοῦχων ἐριούνια παμβασιλῆων·
 πῆ μὲν νουσαλέων τις ἀκέστορας ὄψεται οἴκους,
 πῆ δὲ δόμους ἱερούς· ἐτέρωθι δὲ θαύματα λάμπει
 οὐρανίου Χριστοῖο· χάρις δ' ἐπιλείβεται ἔργοις
 ἐν δ' ἐτέροις πέπλοισι συναπτομένους βασιλῆας
 ἄλλοθι μὲν παλάμαις Μαρίας θεοκύμονος εὔροις,
 ἄλλοθι δὲ Χριστοῖο θεοῦ χερί· πάντα δὲ πῆνης
 νήμασι χρυσοπόρων τε μίτων ποικίλλεται αἴγλη,

PAULUS SILENTIARIUS, 792–805.

πυκάζει / πήγη ποικιλόεργος). This kind of composition and its major colours can bring to mind the fantastic architecture, which is depicted in the mosaics in the dome of the Rotunda in Thessalonica⁵³. This architecture was depicted primarily of gold mosaic cubes, and it also frames the figures of standing saints or courtiers. In the case of the described fabric, buildings funded by emperors as well as the scenes of Christ's miracles were embroidered with gold thread⁵⁴. As a result, the cloth is beautiful because of the content shown and the craftsmanship, and it is lighted by the golden glow of the threads.

It should be noted that examples of this kind of fabric's ekphraseis are quite numerous, especially in the late antique Latin literature⁵⁵. At that time, imperial and consular robes were widely described. This theme was popular because it gave the opportunity – as in the case of architecture – to present splendid objects made of expensive, multi-coloured, and shiny materials⁵⁶. In the context of this so-called “jeweled aesthetics”, it is worth citing some passages from the semi-legendary *Narration on the Hagia Sophia* (Διήγησις περι τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας). Its chapters

⁵³ On the Rotunda cf.: C. BAKIRTZIS, P. MASTORA, *Are the Mosaics in the Rotunda into Thessaloniki Linked to its Conversion to a Christian Church?*, HB 9, 2011, p. 33–46; C. BAKIRTZIS, *Rotunda*, [in:] *Mosaics of Thessaloniki 4th–14th*, ed. IDEM, trans. A. DOUMAS, Athens 2012, p. 51–117; H. TORP, *La rotonde palatine à Thessalonique. Architecture et mosaïques*, vol. I, Athènes 2018, p. 17–18, 445–466; IDEM, *Considerations on the Chronology of the Rotunda Mosaics*, [in:] *The Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited. Papers from the 2014 Symposium at the Courtauld Institute of Art*, ed. A. EASTMOND, M. HATZAKI, Athens 2017, p. 35–47; L. JAMES, *Mosaics in the Medieval World. From Late Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge 2017, p. 174–179.

⁵⁴ Cyril Mango indicates that the linen fabric with the scene of the *Daniel in the Lions' Den* which is in the collection of the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin (*Fragment eines Behanges mit Daniel in der Löwengrube*, <http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collectio&objectId=1965177&viewType=detailView> [16 V 2020]) corresponds to the description of Silentiarius. Churches and the miracles of Christ are depicted on the linen fabric's hems; C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 89, n. 165; J. STRZYGOWSKI, *Orient oder Rom. Beitrag zur Geschichte der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst*, Leipzig 1901, p. 91–98 (il. IV, 41–42).

⁵⁵ M. ROBERTS, *The Jeweled...*, p. 111–116.

⁵⁶ E.g.: CLAUDIAN, *Panegyric on Probinus and Olybrius*, 190–207, [in:] CLAUDIAN, *Panegyric on Probinus and Olybrius. Against Rufinus 1 and 2. War against Gildo. Against Eutropius 1 and 2. Fescennine Verses on the Marriage of Honorius. Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria. Panegyrics on the Third and Fourth Consulships of Honorius. Panegyric on the Consulship of Manlius. On Stilicho's Consulship 1*, vol. I, ed. M. PLATNAUER, Cambridge Mass. 1922 [= LCL, 135]; CLAUDIAN, *Panegyric on the Fourth Consulships of Honorius*, 585–609, [in:] CLAUDIAN, *Panegyric on Probinus and Olybrius. Against Rufinus...*; CLAUDIAN, *On Stilicho's Consulship 2–3*, 2.339–389, [in:] CLAUDIAN, *On Stilicho's Consulship 2–3. Panegyric on the Sixth Consulship of Honorius. The Gothic War. Shorter Poems. Rape of Proserpina*, vol. II, ed. M. PLATNAUER, Cambridge Mass. 1922 [= LCL, 136]; CLAUDIAN, *Rape of Proserpina*, 1.245–287, [in:] CLAUDIAN, *On Stilicho's Consulship 2–3. Panegyric...*; CLAUDIAN, *Panegyric on the Sixth Consulship of Honorius*, 177–192, [in:] CLAUDIAN, *On Stilicho's Consulship 2–3. Panegyric...*; SIDONIUS, *Poems and Letters*, 15.126–195, vol. I, ed. W.B. ANDERSON, Cambridge Mass. 1936 [= LCL, 296]; FLAVIUS CRESCONIUS CORIPPUS, *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris. Libri IV*, 1.275–290, ed. AV. CAMERON, London 1976.

15–19, 21–24, and 26 relate mainly to costly materials used in the church. In most cases, there are not many detailed descriptive parts among them: only two of them are quite extensive ekphraseis. The first one refers to the altar commissioned by Justinian I (527–565):

Ἐποίησε δὲ μηχανὴν τοιαύτην· βουλόμενος γὰρ κρείττονα τὴν ἁγίαν τράπεζαν καὶ πολυτελεστέραν ποιῆσαι ὑπὲρ χρυσοῦ προσεκαλέσατο ἐπιστήμονας πολλοὺς εἰρηκῶς αὐτοῖς τοῦτο. Οἱ δὲ ἔφησαν αὐτῷ· ‘εἰς χωνευτήριον ἐμβάλωμεν χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, λίθους τιμίους καὶ παντοίους καὶ μαργαρίτας καὶ ζάμβυκας, χαλκόν, ἤλεκτρον, μόλιβδον, σίδηρον, κασσίτερον, ὕελον καὶ λοιπὴν πᾶσαν μεταλλικὴν ὕλην.’ καὶ τρίψαντες ἀμφοτέρω αὐτῶν εἰς ὀλμους καὶ δῆσαντες, ἐπὶ τῷ χωνευτήριον ἔχυσαν. Καὶ ἀναμαζάμενον τὸ πῦρ, ἀνέλαβον ταῦτα οἱ τεχνῖται ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ ἔχυσαν εἰς τύπον· καὶ ἐγένετο χυτὴ πάμμικτος ἡ ἁγία τράπεζα ἀτίμητος· καὶ εἶθ’ οὕτως ἔστησεν αὐτήν· ὑποκάτω δὲ αὐτῆς ἔστησε κίονας καὶ αὐτοὺς ὀλοχρῦσους μετὰ λίθων πολυτελῶν καὶ χυμεύσεων, καὶ τὴν περὶ κλίμακα, ἐν ἣ ἴστανται οἱ ἱερεῖς εἰς τὸ ἀσπάσασθαι τὴν ἁγίαν τράπεζαν, καὶ αὐτὴν ὀλοάργυρον. Τὴν δὲ θάλασσαν τῆς ἁγίας τραπέζης ἐξ ἀτιμῶν λίθων πεποίηκε καὶ κατεχρῶσεν αὐτήν. Τίς γὰρ θεάσεται τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἁγίας τραπέζης καὶ οὐκ ἐκπλαγείη; ἢ τίς δυνήσεται κατανοῆσαι ταύτην διὰ τὸ πολλὰς χροιάς καὶ στιλπνότητος ἐναλλάσσειν, ὡς ὄρασθαι τὸ ταύτης εἶδος ποτε μὲν χρυσοῖον, ἐν ἄλλῳ δὲ τόπῳ ἀργυροῖον, εἰς ἄλλο σαμφοειροῖον, ἐξαστράπττον καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν ἀποστέλλον οὐβ’ χροιάς κατὰ τὰς φύσεις τῶν τε λίθων καὶ μαργαρίτων καὶ πάντων τῶν μετᾶλλων;⁵⁷

He also make the following contrivance. Wishing to make the holy altar table better and more precious than gold, he consulted many wise men and told them so. They said to him. “Let us throw gold, silver, various precious stones, pearls and mother of pearl, bronze, electrum, lead, iron, tin, glass and every other metallic material into melting furnace.” Having crushed and bound all of these in mortars, they poured them into the melting furnace. And when the fire had kneaded these together, the craftsman took them out of the fire and poured them into a casting mold. And so the altar table was cast, made up of all materials and priceless. And then he set it up in this manner, and placed columns of pure gold under it with precious stones and enamels; and he made the surrounding stairs, on which the priests stand when they kiss the holy altar table, also of pure silver. He made the liturgical basin (*thalassa*) of the altar table of priceless stones and gilded it. So who can behold the beauty of the holy altar table and not be amazed? Or who can comprehend it as its many colors and brilliances change, so that it appears sometimes as gold, in other places as silver, elsewhere gleaming with sapphire – radiating and, in a word, sending out seventy-two colors according to the nature of the stones, pearls and all the metals?⁵⁸

In this description, where gold is a synonym of the most valuable substance, Justinian, however, managed to find a way to obtain a material even more wonderful and expensive (κρείττονα τὴν ἁγίαν τράπεζαν καὶ πολυτελεστέραν ποιῆσαι ὑπὲρ χρυσοῦ), since he ordered to melt all possible precious materials – apart

⁵⁷ Διήγησις περὶ τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας, 17, [in:] *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum*, vol. I, ed. T. PREGGER, Leipzig 1901 (cetera: Narration).

⁵⁸ *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople. The Patria*, 17, trans. A. BERGER, Cambridge Mass.–London 2013 (cetera: *Patria*), p. 257, 259 [= DOML, 24].

from gold also silver, electrum, bronze, pearls, and precious stones – along with more common metals – i.e. lead, iron, tin, and with glass – in one crucible. Consequently, a priceless mixture (πάμμυγος ἀτίμητος) was created. As we read, it was characterized by a multitude of colours and it shimmered in different ways, like the materials of which it was made. It can be assumed that the author, explaining how the altar was built, above all tried to emphasize the emperor's involvement and generosity, as he cumulated the most expensive materials for the most vital part of the church's furnishings. Therefore, this description should not be taken literally⁵⁹. In turn, the seventy-two colours probably allude to the number of disciples sent by Christ to preach the Gospel⁶⁰. Importantly, an anonymous author of the *Narration* clearly stressed a brilliance and colourfulness of the costly materials. In the second ekphrasis – regarding the floor and symbolic interpretation of the four stripes on it⁶¹ – he directly stated that: “Θαῦμα δὲ ἦν ιδέσθαι ἐν τῷ κάλλει καὶ τῇ ποικιλίᾳ τοῦ ναοῦ· ὅτι πάντοθεν ἔκ τε χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου ἐξήστραπτεν”⁶² (*It was wonderful to see the beauty and variety of the church, for it shone all around with gold and silver*)⁶³. Thus, the most prized aesthetic value is still the variegation (ποικιλία, πολυποικιλία). Evidences of this preference can be found throughout the text, since it glitters with precious and shiny materials such as, among others: golden mosaic cubes (ὑέλινος χρυσός), niello (ἀργυροέγκαυστος), sardonyx (σαρδόνυξ), crystal (κρύος), jasper (ιάσπιον), sapphire (σάπφειρος), ruby (λυχνιτάριον) and emerald (σμάραγδος). They are all so wonderful and dazzling that the author rhetorically asks: “Τὴν δὲ ὠραιότητα καὶ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ κάλλους τοῦ κεχρυσωμένου καὶ διηργυρωμένου ναοῦ ἀπὸ ὀρόφους ἕως ἐδάφους τίς διηγήσεται;”⁶⁴ (*Who can relate the loveliness and the excessive beauty of this church, gilded and sheathed with silver from ceiling to floor?*)⁶⁵.

From the texts discussed so far, it follows that gold was valued primarily for its extraordinary glow – sometimes even too blinding – with which light was

⁵⁹ Cf. L. BRUBAKER, *Talking about the Great Church. Ekphrasis and the “Narration on Hagia Sophia”*, Bsl 69.3, 2011, p. 82.

⁶⁰ Cf. Lc 10, 1.

⁶¹ The author interpreted these stripes as the Paradise rivers. At the end of chapter 28, where he discussed the reconstruction of the church after the collapse of the dome on the 7th of May 558, the author pointed out that the pavement was almost entirely made of the Proconesian marble, only the strips were of a green stone. He did not provide information about the place of its origin, but it is known to be the Thessalian marble (*verde antico*). “Εἰς δὲ τὸν πάτον οὐκ ἠδύνατο εὔρεϊν τοιαῦτα πολυποίκιλα καὶ μέγιστα ἀβάκια, καὶ ἀποστείλας Μανασσῆ πατρίκιον καὶ πραιπόσιτον ἐν Προκωννήσῳ ἔπρισεν ἐκεῖ τὰ μάρμαρα εἰς ὁμοιότητα τῆς γῆς, τὰ δὲ πράσινα εἰς ὁμοιότητα τῶν ποταμῶν τῶν ἐμβαινόντων ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ”, *Narration*, 28.37–42.

⁶² *Narration*, 26.23–25.

⁶³ *Patria*, 26, p. 265.

⁶⁴ *Narration*, 26.3–5.

⁶⁵ *Patria*, 26, p. 267.

inevitably related. The authors, as could be seen, regularly point out that rays falling on golden surfaces are reflected from them, scattering golden reflections all-round. Thus, the aforementioned “jeweled aesthetics” do not exist without light, because it “triggers” these, described with pleasure and highly praised, characteristic visual effects. Hence, gold needs a light source to fully show its beauty. In turn, the light can take dazzling colour of gold. It is not surprising, then, that Sergey Averintsev termed gold the “absolute metaphor of light”⁶⁶.

In the accounts of Byzantine writers, gold is also a colour, although this issue was considered less often because in terms of colours marbles and precious stones were much more praised. They were, as already mentioned, compared to meadows in full bloom. All the more, it is worth quoting a passage from the already cited homily of Leo VI, where he explains the reason for using golden mosaic cubes in the church:

Ἐφεξῆς δὲ τοῦ ὄλου τοῦ ναοῦ κύτους καὶ τῶν αἰς ἀνέχεται ἀψίδων ὁ ὄροφος, τῶν ἄλλων οἰκειῶν ἀνεστήλωνται θεραπόντων εἰκόνες, πᾶσαι ψηφίδος χρυσοῦ ἀλειφομένης πεποιημένα, ἐνταῦθα τὸ χρήσιμον τοῦ χρυσοῦ κατιδόντος τοῦ τεχνίτου καὶ ἀφθόνως χρησαμένου. Ἐβουλήθη γὰρ ταῖς εἰκόσι τῆ τοῦ χρυσοῦ μίξει τοιοῦτον ἐνθεῖναι κάλλος, οἷον εἰκὸς ἀμφιένυσθαι τοὺς βασιλέως πλησίον, ἄλλως τε δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὸ γράψαι τοῖς μέλεσιν ἀρετῆς χρῶμα τὴν ἐκ τοῦ χρυσοῦ κατενόησεν χρησιμεύουσαν ὠχρότητα⁶⁷

The rest of the church’s hollow and the arches on which the roof is supported have images of [God’s] own servants, all of them made of mosaic smeared with gold. The craftsman has made abundant use of gold whose utility he perceived: for, by its admixture, he intended to endow the pictures with such beauty as appears in the apparel of the emperor’s entourage. Furthermore, he realized that the pallor of gold was an appropriate color to express the virtue of [Christ’s] member⁶⁸.

The emperor points out there that the pale hue of gold (ὠχρότητα) reminds the costumes of the imperial court (εἰκὸς ἀμφιένυσθαι τοὺς βασιλέως πλησίον), and that it is suitable for the images of saints because it emphasises their sainthood (πρὸς τὸ γράψαι τοῖς μέλεσιν ἀρετῆς χρῶμα τὴν ἐκ τοῦ χρυσοῦ κατενόησεν χρησιμεύουσαν ὠχρότητα). In this context, it is also worth paying attention to the short poem of Eugenius of Palermo (ca. 1130–1202) dedicated to the image of Saint John Chrysostom:

Καὶ χρῶμα χρυσοῦν, πάμμακαρ, σοὶ καὶ στόμα·
τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐκχέον χρυσοῦς λόγους
τὴν κλήσιν ἀπήνεγκεν ἐκ τῶν πραγμάτων,

⁶⁶ S. AWIERINCEW, *Złoto...*, p. 184.

⁶⁷ LEO VI, 31.70–78.

⁶⁸ C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 203.

τουδι τὸ σεμνὸν ὠχρότης διαγράφει·
σὴν σάρκα καὶ γὰρ πυρπολῶν ἀσιτίαις
ἔχρωσας αὐτὴν χλωρότητι χρυσοῦ⁶⁹

All blessed one, both your color and your voice are golden.
For the one [your voice], pouring out to us golden words,
took its name from your deeds,
while pallor delineates the holiness of your color.
For consuming your flesh by the fire of fasting,
you have tinged it with the pallor of gold⁷⁰.

In this case, the poet specified that the golden colour – due to its pallor (ὠχρότης, χλωρότης) – was very suitable for the representation of the ascetic saint whose body, experienced by fasting, lost its more vivid colours.

The beauty of gold was also associated with splendour. This question was also raised, e.g., by Choricus of Gaza (491–518) in the ekphrasis of the church of St. Stephen at Gaza:

εἰ δὲ περίεργος θεατὴς πάντα διερευνήσεται μαρμάρων ἢ χρυσοῦ γυμνὸν τι ζητῶν, οὐδὲν ἐνταῦθα τοιοῦτον εὐρήσει. εἴ τινες οὖν ἀπορία χρυσοῦ καὶ πλακῶν ἐπὶ λίθους καὶ λίθων συνθήκη καταφεύγουσι, τούτοις ἔστιν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐξωθεν ὄψεως ταῦτα περιεργάζεσθαι⁷¹

The curious observer may look high and low in search of a spot bare of either marble or gold: he will not find one here. Those who are embarrassed by [so much] gold and marble, and seek relief in stones and masonry, will be able to study the latter on the outside⁷².

The effulgent embellishment of the church consists of gold and marble revetment. They contrast with the outside stone walls which can provide a respite from the richness of the interior. Recognizing that this type of decoration could be too overwhelming to spectators, the author also hurried to explain that the building has a very good style that would only be appreciated by true art experts. Of course, there is a trap here: those who perceive a building negatively have no knowledge of art⁷³. Choricus, though sure of the incomparable beauty of the church, made

⁶⁹ EUGENIUS PANORMITANUS, *In imaginem Chrysostomi*, 11, [in:] *Versus Iambici*, ed. M. GIGANTE, Palermo 1964 [= TMon, 10].

⁷⁰ H. MAGUIRE, *Nectar...*, p. 130.

⁷¹ CHORICIUS, 2.2.49.

⁷² C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 71–72.

⁷³ [...] συνελθέτωσαν ἄνδρες πολλῶν ἱστορήσαντες πόλεων ἱερά, ἄλλος ἄλλο τι δοκιμάζειν ἔργον εἰδῶς, καὶ πρὸς τοὺς πανταχοῦ βεβοημένους νεῶς κρινέσθω καθάπερ ἐν δικαστηρίῳ τὸ τέμενος ἐκ τοιούτων συνεστηκότι κριτῶν. οἷον ὁ μὲν γραφῆς ἔστω φιλοθεάμων, οὐ τῆς ἐν χρώμασι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἐν ψηφίδι μιμουμένης ἐκείνην· ὁ δὲ μαρμάρων δοκιμαστής, ὧν τὰ μὲν ἐξ ὧν μεταλλεύεται προσαγορεύουσι τόπων, τοῖς δὲ τὰ χρώματα δίδωσιν ὀνόματα. ἄλλω κίωνων μελέτω τὰς κεφαλίδας

it clear that the right proportions must be respected in the use of gold, because both an excess and a shortness is wrong. Just from this one example, it can be seen that the attitude to gold was to some extent marked by suspiciousness. The authors often felt obliged to clarify that the decorations of gold did not exceed the appropriate measure (ἀμετρία): gold is beautiful, but it is necessary to use it purposefully and decorously.

Against a backdrop of the moderation in a use of gold, the description of the church of Saint George in the Mangana quarter⁷⁴ written by Michael Psellos (ca. 1017–1078?) is an interesting example. He characterised the church rebuilt by Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055) as a combination of beauty and luxury:

καὶ τεχνικώτερα πάντα· καὶ χρυσὸς ὑπαλείφων τὸν ὄροφον· τῶν δὲ λίθων ὅποσα χλοάζουσιν, αἱ μὲν κατεστρώνουντο· αἱ δὲ τοῖς τοίχοις ἠρμόζοντο· καὶ ἄλλη τις ἐφ' ἑτέρα ἐπήνθει, ἢ ἐφ' ὁμοίῳ τῷ χρώματι· ἐναλλάξ παραλλάττουσαι. ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς, ἀπὸ τῶν δημοσίων ταμιείων ὡσπερ ἐξ ἀφθόνων πηγῶν καχλάζοντι ἐπέρρει τῷ ρεύματι. [...] Ὁ μὲν γὰρ ναὸς, ὡσπερ τις οὐρανὸς χρυσοῖς ἀστράσι πάντοθεν ἐπεποίκιλτο. μᾶλλον δὲ τὸ μὲν αἰθέριον σῶμα ἐκ διαστημάτων κατακεχρύσεται· ἐκείνῳ δὲ ὁ χρυσὸς, ὡσπερ ἐκ κέντρου ῥυεῖς, ἀφθόνῳ τῷ ρεύματι πᾶσαν ἀδιαστάτως ἐπέδραμεν ἐπιφάνειαν⁷⁵

Everything was made more artful, the ceiling was covered with gold, slabs of a verdant color were laid in the pavement and affixed to the walls, and each kind of marble bloomed next to another which was either of the same or of contrasting hue. And gold flowed in a torrential stream from the public treasury as from an inexhaustible source. [...] Indeed, the church was

<σκοπεῖν>. χρυσὸν ἕτερος μέτρα πολυπραγμονεῖτω σαφῶς, εἴ πού τι γέγονεν ἐνδεὲς ἢ περιττόν· ἐκάτερον γὰρ ἀμετρία. ἄλλος κατανοεῖτω τὸν ὄροφον ἀκριβῶς, ἂν ἄρα μὴ πρὸς τὸ ὕψος ἀπειρηξύλα γὰρ ἐνταῦθα πολυτελεῖ καλαθίσκοις κεκαλυμμένα τοῦ τε πρὸς ἰσχὺν ἄμα καὶ πρὸς κάλλος εὐῆχειν· συνιόντων οὖν τῶν δικαστῶν καὶ τοῦτο κρίνειν ἐκάστου λαχόντος ὅπερ ἂν ἄμεινον τῶν ἄλλων τύχοι γινώσκων, πάσαις ἡμῖν ὁ νεὸς νικήσει ταῖς ψήφοις,

CHORICIUS, 2.2.52–54.

⁷⁴ In the *History* of Niketas Choniates, we read that Isaac II Angelos (1185–1195) destroyed this church with the adjacent palace, and the building materials obtained during this demolition were then used for other edifices:

σὺν πολλοῖς δὲ καὶ τὸν περικλυτὸν οἶκον τῶν Μαγγάνων κατέβαλε, μήτε τὸ τοῦ ἔργου κάλλος καὶ τὸ μέγεθος αἰδεσθεῖς, μήτε τὸν τροπαιοφόρον μάρτυρα πτοηθεῖς, ᾧ ἀνέκειτο οὕτοσί. Ἐπισκενάσαι δὲ βουλευθεῖς καὶ τὸν ἐν τῷ ἀνάπλω νεῶν τοῦ ἀρχιστρατήγου τῶν ἄνω τάξεων Μιχαήλ, εἴ τις ἐν πλαξὶ τοῖς βασιλείοις δόμοις ὑπέστρωτο καὶ περιήμπισχε τοὺς τοίχους καλλίστη τε τῇ στιλπνότητι καὶ ρανίσιν ἐστιγμένη ποικιλοχρόοις, ἐκέισε μετακεκόμικεν. ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ τοῦ ἀρχαγγέλου διὰ χρωμάτων καὶ ψηφίδων τυπώματα, ὅποσα ἢ πόλις ἔστεγεν ἢ κώμαι καὶ χώραι ἀνέκειντο φυλακτήρια, χειρὸς ἀρχαίας ἔργα καὶ θαυμασίας, κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ συνήθροισε τέμενος,

Nicetae Choniatae historia, pars prior, Isaac2, pt3, ed. J. VAN DIETEN, Berlin 1975 [= *CFHB.SBe*, 11.1], p. 442.18–27.

⁷⁵ *Michaelis Pselli Chronographia*, 6.185.13–18; 6.186.10–14, ed. D.R. REINSCH, Berlin–Boston 2014 [= *Mil.S*, 51] (cetera: PSELLOS).

like the sky adorned on all sides with golden stars; to be more exact, the heavens are gilded only at intervals, while here the gold, flowing as it were, from the center in a copious stream, has covered the entire surface without interruption⁷⁶.

Although Psellos admired this church, he also recognized it as a crowning example of the exaggeration of the emperor who wanted to surpass all other churches:

ὁ δέ γε λόγος τὰς ὑπερβολὰς ἐκείνου κατατιώμενος, ἐπ' αὐτὸ δὴ χωρεῖ τὸ κεφάλαιον, φημί δὴ ὃν ἐκεῖνος ναὸν τῷ μάρτυρι Γεωργίῳ καθίδρυσεν. οὐ δὴ πάντα συνέτριψε καὶ ἠφάνικε· καὶ τέλος, καὶ αὐτὸν ἐκείνον τοῖς συντριβεῖσι προσέθετο. [...] εἶτα δὴ χρόνον διεληθόντος τινός, ἔρωτές τινες αὐτὸν ὑπεξέκαιον, ὥστε πρὸς πάσας τὰς πώποτε γεγυυίας ἀμιλληθῆναι οἰκοδομάς· καὶ ταῦτας ὑπερβαλέσθαι μακρῶ⁷⁷

My indictment of his [Constantine IX's] excesses now comes to its principal point, namely the church he founded in honor of the martyr George, which he then entirely destroyed and wiped out, and [after rebuilding it] reduced it once again to ruin. [...] Later on, however, he became consumed by the passion of rivalling all the buildings of the past and even surpassing them by far⁷⁸.

Therefore, Psellos heavily criticised exaggerated aspirations of the emperor, and the ruler's intention was decisive for considering the church too luxurious. However the funding of various edifices was a quite significant task of emperors, sometimes they were reprehended for the activity of this sort. It could also be a way of showing general disapproval of the policy pursued by a given emperor, just to mention the particularly symptomatic case of Procopius of Caesarea⁷⁹.

In the case of art, splendour of gold could be very desirable, as evidenced by epigrams devoted to icons made of precious materials or, at least, clad with them⁸⁰. And to give an example, Nicholas Kallikles (ca. 1080 – ca. 1150) prepared a poem for an icon of Christ, which John II Komnenos (1118–1143) commissioned for the Pantokrator Monastery in Constantinople:

⁷⁶ C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 219.

⁷⁷ PSELLOS, 6.185.1–5; 6.185.8–11.

⁷⁸ C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 218.

⁷⁹ Cf. PROCOPIUS, 1.1.11–12, 1.1.17–19; *Procopii Caesarensis opera omnia. Historia quae dicitur arcana*, 8.7–9; 11.3–4; 19.6; 26.23–24, vol. III, ed. J. HAURY, rec. G. WIRTH, Leipzig 1963 [= BSGR].

⁸⁰ On precious-metal icon revetments i.a.: A. GRABAR, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du Moyen Âge*, Venice 1975; N. PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, *Vita Icons and "Decorated" Icons of the Komnenian Period*, [in:] *Four Icons in the Menil Collection*, ed. B. DAVEZAC, Houston 1992, p. 57–69; T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, *The Display of Accumulated Wealth in Luxury Icons. Gift-Giving from the Byzantine Aristocracy to God in the Twelfth Century*, [in:] *Βυζαντινές εικόνες. Τέχνη, τεχνική και τεχνολογία. Διεθνές Συμπόσιο, Γεννάδειος Βιβλιοθήκη, Αμερικανική Σχολή Κλασικών Σπουδών, 20–21 Φεβρουαρίου 1998*, ed. M. ΒΑΣΙΛΑΚΗ, Ηράκλειο 2002, p. 35–49; J. DURAND, *Precious-Metal Icon Revetments*, [in:] *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, ed. H.C. EVANS, New York–New Haven 2004, p. 243–251.

Ἄν ώραϊζω χρυσίω τὴν εἰκόνα,
 τῷ παμβασιλεῖ βασιλεὺς φόρους νέμω·
 ἂν λαμπρυνῶ δὲ τοῖς πανεντίμοις λίθοις,
 ‘προσκομματός’ σε ‘λίθον’⁸¹ οὐκ ἔχειν θέλω·
 ὡς συνδέτην τιμῶ δε τοῖν ἄκροιν λίθον,
 ὡς ἔμπορος κτῶμαί σε κοσμῶν μαργάρους,
 τὸν τίμιόν τε καὶ καλὸν μαργαρίτην,
 ἀφ’ οὗ τὸ πᾶν ἐφεῦρον εἰς εὐκκληρίαν,
 χρῆσμα θρόνου καὶ σκῆπτρα καὶ κλεινὸν στέφος.
 Ἄν Περσικός τις ἐξυλακτοίη κύων,
 ἂν Σκυθικὴ πάρδαλις, ἂν Γέτης λύκος,
 ἂν Πάιονες βοῶσιν, ἂν θροῆ Δάκης,
 θραῦσον, δυνατέ, θλάσον αὐτοῦ τὰς γνάθους·
 τὰ τέκνα τήρει, κλῆμα βοτρυηφόρον,
 λειμώνος ἄνθη, λευκὰ ‘κοιλιάδων κρίνα’⁸²·
 ζωὴν μακρὰν δός· ἐν δὲ τῇ κρίσει τότε
 συζυγίαν κραθεῖσαν εἰς ψυχὴν μίαν,
 ἦν θάνατος διεῖλεν εἰς μέρη δύο,
 ἡμίτομον λιπὼν με καὶ νεκρὸν πλέον.
 ἔνωσον αὐτὸς αὐθις, οἷς οἶδας τρόποις,
 δοὺς τὴν Ἑδὲμ σχοίνισμα καὶ κληρουχίαν.
 Ἰωάννης σοι ταῦτα Κομνηνός, Λόγε,
 ὁ πορφυροβλάστητος Αὐσόνων ἄναξ⁸³

When I beautify your icon with gold,
 I, the king, pay tribute to the king of all.
 When I [make it] glitter with precious stones,
 I do not want you [to be] an “obstructing stone”,
 for I honour you as [the] cornerstone that unites all extremities.
 And thus, like a merchant I attain you and adorn you with pearls,
 you, the worthy and beautiful pearl,
 from whom I have won all my good fortune:
 an anointed throne, and sceptre, and glorious crown.
 Should some Persian dog,
 Scythian leopard, or Hungarian wolf howl,
 should Panonians clamour and Dacians mount [their chargers],
 strike them, O powerful one, smash their jaws.
 Protect my offspring, the vine’s fruit,
 the flowers of the meadow, the white “lilies of the valley” –
 give [them] long life. And in that future judgement
 let me be united with my consort in a single soul
 that death divided in twain,
 leaving me half and already dead.
 Unite that man immediately, as you know how,

⁸¹ Cf. Rom 9, 33.

⁸² Cf. Ct 2, 1.

⁸³ NICOLA CALLICLE, *Carmi*, 2.12–34, ed. R. ROMANO, Napoli 1980 [= BNN, 8].

bestowing the garden of Eden as [his] lot.
So these things I, John Komnenos, [address] to you, O Word,
I, the king of the Ausonites, sprung from the purple⁸⁴.

This emperor also funded another icon of Christ, which is associated with an epigram (Εἰς εἰκόνα τοῦ ὑπεραγάθου σωτήρος Χριστοῦ, ὡς ἀπὸ βασιλέως κυροῦ Ἰωάννου) written by Theodore Prodromos (ca. 1100 – ca. 1165):

Σὺ μὲν καθιστᾶς γῆς με πάσης δεσπότην,
ὁ παμβασιλεὺς ὑπεράγαθος Λόγος,
καί μοι πρὸς ταρσῶν πᾶν τὸ βάρβαρον κλίνεις,
ὡς καὶ φόρους μοι δουλικῶς συνεισφέρειν·
καὶ προσκύνησιν οὐκ ἔμοι μόνον νέμει,
ἀλλ' εἴ τις ἡμῶν εἰκονισθῆ καὶ τύπος·
ἐγὼ δὲ τῷ πλάσαντι καὶ στέψαντί με
καὶ ταῦτα πάντα δόντι †καὶ στέψαντί με†
τὴν δουλικὴν εὐνοίαν εἰσφέρω πάλιν
καὶ ζωγραφῶν σε προσκυνῶ σου τὸν τύπον
καὶ τὴν ἀπ' ἀργύρου τε καὶ χρυσοῦ χάριν
καθὼς περ ἄλλους εἰσκομίζω σοι φόρους·
ἔμοι γὰρ ἕκ σου καὶ βίου πρώτη πλάσις
καὶ σκῆπτρα καὶ πάτριος ἀρχικὸς θρόνος
καὶ μυρίων πέλαγος ἀριστευμάτων,
ὦν ἥλιος μὲν μάρτυς ἀψευδῆς ἄνω,
κάτω δὲ τῆς γῆς καὶ θαλάττης τὰ πλάτη·
ἀλλ' ὧ κραταιῆ πανσθενὲς παντοκράτωρ,
καὶ τοὺς προλοίπους δάμασόν μοι βαρβάρους
καὶ τοῖς ἔμοις φύλαττε τὴν πόλιν πόνοις
καὶ ψυχικὴν δὸς ἐν τέλει σωτηρίαν.
Ἰωάννης σοι ταῦτα πιστὸς οἰκέτης
πορφυρόβλαστος Κομνηνὸς αὐτοκράτωρ
τῷ βασιλεῖ μου καὶ θεῷ καὶ δεσπότη⁸⁵

You who made me lord of all the world,
You the King of All and abundantly good Logos
who makes all barbarians bow at my feet,
and pay servile tribute to me.
It is not to my person alone that they bow down
but wherever else the image of our features is depicted.
I, to Him that made and crowned me,
once again pay the homage of a slave,
and painting you I venerate your form;
adorning you with gold and silver
is my way of paying you tribute.
To you I owe both life's existence

⁸⁴ T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, *The Display...*, p. 37–38.

⁸⁵ THEODOROS PRODROMOS, *Historische Gedichte*, 21, ed. W. HÖRANDNER, Wien 1974 [= WBS, 11].

and my royal sceptre,
 and the throne inherited from my father,
 and a sea of myriad trophies
 of which above the sun is unimpeachable witness
 and below, the breadth of sea and earth.
 But, O sovereign and all-powerful Pantokrator,
 rein in for me the remaining barbarians,
 and preserve my city through my own pains,
 and at the end give my soul salvation.
 The emperor Komnenos sprung from the purple,
 to my king and God and Lord⁸⁶.

In the both poems, the emperor decided to commission an icon decorated with expensive materials – in the first case they are gold, pearls, and precious stones, in the second one – silver and gold. The descriptions are quite general, but it can be assumed that these materials formed revetments: it is especially likely in the last epigram, where both the painting layer and adornment are distinguished (καὶ ζωγραφῶν σε προσκυνῶ σου τὸν τύπον / καὶ τὴν ἀπ’ ἀργύρου τε καὶ χρυσοῦ χάριν / καθὼς περ ἄλλους εἰσκομίζω σοι φόρους). John II Komnenos chooses these gifts to thank for all the favours he has received so far and to ask God for further support in both state and personal matters. The emperor presents himself as the greatest earthly ruler who addresses the supreme king, therefore the gift must be worthy of both of them. In the context of material goods, precious metals and stones are the most valuable. Hence, Komnenos intended them to deck the images of Christ. There are more Byzantine poems composed around the problem of icons with precious-metal revetments, which proves the popularity of the motif and this type of votive gifts as well⁸⁷.

Costly and shiny materials creating a dazzling decoration were suitable not only for churches but also for the imperial court. In ekphraseis of imperial residences, the richness of the materials used – as well as the way they are characterised – virtually does not differ from that employed for descriptions of religious architecture. In this context, it is worth quoting the ekphrasis of the palace of Digenis Akritis. His residence is an example of unreal architecture, created for the purpose of the poem, therefore it is more magnificent than any real palace:

Μέσον αὐτοῦ τοῦ θαυμαστοῦ καὶ τερπνοῦ παραδείσου
 οἶκον τερπνὸν ἀνήγειρεν ὁ γενναῖος Ἀκρίτης
 εὐμεγέθη, τετράγωνον ἐκ λίθων πεπρισμένων,
 ἄνωθεν δὲ μετὰ σεμνῶν κίωνων καὶ θυρίδων.
 Τοὺς ὀρόφους ἐκόσμησε πάντα μετὰ μουσείου
 ἐκ μαρμάρων πολυτελῶν τῆ αἴγλη ἀστραπτόντων·
 τὸ ἔδαφος ἐφαίδρυνεν, ἐψήφωσεν ἐν λίθοις,

⁸⁶ T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, *The Display...*, p. 38.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39–47.

ἔσωθεν δὲ τριώροφα ποιήσας ὑπερῶα,
 ἔχοντα ὕψος ἰκανόν, ὀρόφους παμποικίλους,
 ἀνδρώνας <τε> σταυροειδεῖς, πεντακούβουκλα ξένα
 μετὰ μαρμάρων φαεινῶν λίαν ἀστραπηβόλων.
 Τοσοῦτον δὲ ἐκάλλυνε τὸ ἔργον ὁ τεχνίτης,
 ὥστε νομίζειν ὑφαντὰ τὰ ὀρώμενα εἶναι
 ἔκ τε τῶν λίθων τῆς φαιδράς καὶ πολυμόρφου θεάς·
 τὸ ἔδαφος κατέστρωσεν ἐκ λίθων ὄνυχίτων
 ἠκονημένων ἰσχυρῶς, ὡς δοκεῖν τοὺς ὀρώντας
 ὕδωρ ὑπάρχειν πεπηγὸς εἰς κρυστάλλινον φύσιν.
 Ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἴδρυσε τῶν μερῶν ἐκ πλαγίου
 χαμοτρικλίνους θαυμαστούς, εὐμήκεις, χρυσορόφους,
 ἐν οἷς πάντων τὰ τρόπαια τῶν πάλοι ἐν ἀνδρεία
 λαμπάντων ἀνιστόρησε χρυσόμουσα, ὠραῖα⁸⁸

In the midst of this wonderfully pleasant garden the noble Akrites erected a big square house of cut stone having stately columns and windows up above. He adorned all the ceilings with mosaic, he decorated the pavement with precious gleaming marbles and tesserae of stone. Inside he made upper chambers on three floors having sufficient height and decorated ceilings; [he also made] cruciform halls, strange *pentacubacula*, containing shining marbles reflecting shafts of light. So beautiful was the artist's work that the gay, many-figured aspect of the stones made one think of woven tapestry. He paved the floor with onyx so smoothly polished that those who saw it mistook it for water congealed to ice. On either side he set up long, wondrous reclining-rooms having golden ceilings upon which he represented in mosaic the victories of all those men of yore who shone in valor⁸⁹.

In the description of the residence of Akritis, sparkling marbles (ἐκ μαρμάρων τῆ αἴγλη ἀστραπτόντων; μετὰ μαρμάρων φαεινῶν λίαν ἀστραπηβόλων), mosaics (ἐφαιδρυνεν, ἐψήφωσεν ἐν λίθοις, χρυσόμουσα), and gilded ceilings (χρυσορόφους) are specified: their glow is clearly emphasized. As for colours, they are actually not particularised. This imagined palace is described in accordance with the established convention, and – due to the epic character of the poem – all the features are exaggerated and idealised. As the Akritis' residence is an example of fantastic architecture, so its opposite is the palace Muchrutas, which brief ekphrasis was composed by Nicholas Mesarites (ca. 1163 – after 1216). It is a very interesting text because in this case, the author had to face the necessity of crossing the formulaic patterns since the building was erected in a style referring to Muslim architecture:

ὁ δὲ Μουχροῦτας ἔστι τι δῶμα τεράστιον, τοῦ Χρυσοτρικλίνου ἀπτόμενον, ὡς πρὸς δυσμὴν διακειμένον. [...] τὸ οἶκημα χειρὸς ἔργον οὐ Ῥωμαῖδος, οὐ Σικελικῆς, οὐ Κελτίβηρος, οὐ Συβαριτικῆς, οὐ Κυπρίου, οὐ Κίλικος· Περσικῆς μὲν οὖν, ὅτι καὶ ιδέας φέρει Περσῶν

⁸⁸ DIGENIS AKRITIS, *The Grottaferrata and Escorial versions*, 7.13–41, ed. E. JEFFREYS, Cambridge 1998 [= CMC, 7].

⁸⁹ C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 215–216.

παραλλαγάς τε στολῶν. αἱ τοῦ ὀρόφου σκηναὶ παντοδαπαὶ καὶ ποικίλαι, ἐξ ἡμισφαιρίων τῶ οὐρανοειδεῖ ὀρόφῳ προσηλωμένα, πυκναὶ αἱ τῶν γωνιῶν εἰσοχαί τε καὶ ἐξοχαί, κάλλος τῶν γλυφίδων ἀμήχανον, τῶν κοιλωμάτων θέαμα πάντερπνον, ἴριν φαντάζον πολυχρωμοτέραν τῆς ἐν τοῖς νέφεσι, χρυσοῦ τούτῳ ὑπεστρωμένου. οὐκ ἐς βάθος, κατ' ἐπιφάνειαν ἀκόρεστος τερπωλή, οὐ τοῖς ἄρτι πρῶτως τὴν ὄρατικὴν πέμπουσιν εἰς αὐτά, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς συχνὰ παραβάλλουσι θάμβος καὶ ἔκπληξις. τερπνότερος ὁ Περσικὸς οὗτος δόμος τῶν Λακωνικῶν ἐκείνων τῶν τοῦ Μενέλεω⁹⁰

The Mouchroutas is an enormous building adjacent to the Chrysotriklinos, lying as it does on the west side of the latter. [...] This building is the work not of a Roman, nor a Sicilian, nor a Celt-Iberian, nor a Sybaritic, nor a Cypriot, nor a Cilician hand, but of a Persian hand, by virtue of which it contains images of Persians in their different costumes. The canopy of the roof, consisting of hemispheres joined to the heaven-like ceiling, offers a variegated spectacle; closely packed angles project inward and outward; the beauty of the carving is extraordinary, and wonderful is the appearance of the cavities which, overlaid with gold, produce the effect of rainbow more colourful than the one in the clouds. There is insatiable enjoyment here – not hidden, but on the surface. Not only those who direct their gaze to these things for the first time, but those who have often done so are struck with wonder and astonishment. Indeed, this Persian building is more delightful than the Laconian ones of Menelaus⁹¹.

It is assumed that this palace was built around the mid-twelfth century⁹². Its most characteristic element was – as can be deduced from the text – a muqarnas vault. The author, using a heavily rhetorical style, describes its complex form. He employs the common comparison of the vault with the heaven (τῶ οὐρανοειδεῖ ὀρόφῳ) and highlights the delightful – surpassing the rainbow – glow of gold reflections (τῶν κοιλωμάτων θέαμα πάντερπνον, ἴριν φαντάζον πολυχρωμοτέραν τῆς ἐν τοῖς νέφεσι, χρυσοῦ τούτῳ ὑπεστρωμένου). He concludes the whole with a statement of the extraordinary beauty of the building, even more magnificent than the Menelaus' palace. In this way, Mesarites pointed to the Poet and his scheme of ekphrasis of dazzling residence of the mighty ruler⁹³.

⁹⁰ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΜΕΣΑΡΙΤΗΣ, *Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos*, ed. A. HEISENBERG, Würzburg 1907 [= PKAGW], p. 44.27, 27–29, 34–36, p. 45.27, 1–9.

⁹¹ C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine...*, p. 228–229.

⁹² E.g. A. WALKER, *Middle Byzantine Aesthetics of Power and the Incomparability of Islamic Art. The Architectural Ekphrasis of Nikolaos Mesarites*, *Muq* 27, 2010, p. 79–84; N. ASUTAY-EFFENBERGER, “Mouchrutas”. *Der seldschukische Schaupavillion im Grossen Palast von Konstantinopel*, B 74, 2004, p. 313–324.

⁹³ [...] οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες

θαύμαζον κατὰ δῶμα διοτρεφέος βασιλῆος·
ὥς τε γὰρ ἡελίου αἴγλη πέλεν ἠὲ σελήνης
δῶμα καθ' ὑπερεφές Μενελάου κυδαλίμοιο.
[...] δὴ τότε Τηλέμαχος προσεφώνεε Νέστορος υἱόν,
ἄγχι σχῶν κεφαλὴν, ἵνα μὴ πευθοῖαθ' οἱ ἄλλοι·
“φράζεο, Νεστορίδη, τῶ ἐμῶ κεχαρισμένε θυμῶ,
χαλκοῦ τε στεροπὴν κατὰ δώματα ἠχήμενα

To summarize the remarks on the significance of gold in Byzantine ekphraseis, and at the same time indicate how long-lasting – reaching even beyond the fall of Constantinople – the inclination for gleaming and costly materials, including gold, was, it is proper to cite the passage on the Pammakaristos Church from the *History of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from 1454 to 1578* (Πατριαρχική Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ιστορία από τοῦ ,αυνδ' ἔως τοῦ ,αφοη' ἔτους Χριστοῦ) which was written by Manuel Malaxos (died ca. 1580):

ἔχει γὰρ ὁ οὐρανός, καθὼς τὸν ἐβλέπομεν, ἥλιον φεγγάρη ἄστρη καὶ τὰ ἄλλα. ἔχει δὲ αὐτὸς ὁ ναὸς τῆς παμμακαρίστου ἀντὶ τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ ἡλίου τὸ ὠραιότατον καὶ λαμπρότατον χρυσὸν τέμπλον, ἀπάνω μετὰ τοῦ ζωοποιοῦ χρυσοῦ σταυροῦ, ὅπου ἔναι εἰς αὐτὸν ἑσταυρωμένος ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ σωτὴρ παντὸς τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους, καὶ αἱ εἰκόνα τῶν δώδεκα δεσποτικῶν ἑορτῶν, καὶ κάτωθεν τοῦ τέμπλου ἡ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, μεγάλη καὶ λαμπροτάτη, καὶ ἐν τῷ δεξιῷ μέρει ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς ὑπεραγίας θεοτόκου, τῆς παμμακαρίστου, ὠραιότατη καὶ λαμπρῆ, ἔχοντες πολῦτιμες ποδαῖς χρυσαῖς. καὶ βημόθυρον μέγα ἐκλεκτόν, πολλῆς τιμῆς· καὶ αἱ πόρται τοῦ ἁγίου βήματος πάνχρυσαις, μετὸν θεῖον εὐαγγελικὸν ἀσπασμὸν τῆς πανυπεράγνου θεοτόκου. καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ φωτὸς τῆς σελήνης καὶ τῶν ἀστέρων ἔχει τὰς ἀργυρᾶς κανδήλας καὶ τὴν λαμπρότητα τῶν θείων εἰκόνων

χρυσοῦ τ' ἠλέκτρον τε καὶ ἀργύρου ἠδ' ἐλέφαντος.
Ζηνός που τοιήδε γ' Ὀλυμπίου ἔνδοθεν αὐλή,
ὅσσα τὰδ' ἄσπετα πολλά· σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα,

Homeri Odyssea, 4.43–46, 4.69–75, ed. P. VON DER MÜHLL, Basel 1962 (cetera: HOMER);

[...] αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
Ἄλκινόου πρὸς δώματ' ἔειπεν κλυτὰ· πολλὰ δὲ οἱ κῆρ
ᾠρμαιν' ἴσταμένω, πρὶν χάλκεον οὐδὸν ἰκέσθαι.
ὥς τε γὰρ ἡελίου αἴγλη πέλεν ἠὲ σελήνης
δώμα καθ' ὑπερεφές μεγαλήτορος Ἄλκινόοιο.
χάλκειο μὲν γὰρ τοῖχοι ἐληλέδατ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,
ἔς μυχὸν ἐξ οὐδοῦ, περὶ δὲ θριγκὸς κυάνοιο·
χρῦσαι δὲ θύραι πυκινὸν δόμον ἐντὸς ἔεργον·
ἀργύρειο δὲ σταθμοὶ ἐν χαλκῷ ἕστασαν οὐδῶ,
ἀργύρεον δ' ἔφ' ὑπερθύριον, χρυσεὴ δὲ κορώνη.
χρῦσαι δ' ἐκάτερθε καὶ ἀργύρειο κύνες ἦσαν,
οὐκ ἠφαιστος ἔτευξεν ἰδυίησι πραπίδεσσι
δώμα φυλασσέμεναι μεγαλήτορος Ἄλκινόοιο,
ἀθανάτους ὄντας καὶ ἀγήρωσ ἤματα πάντα.
ἐν δὲ θρόνοι περὶ τοῖχον ἐρηρέδατ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα
ἔς μυχὸν ἐξ οὐδοῖο διαμπερές, ἔνθ' ἐνὶ πέπλοι
λεπτοὶ εὐννητοὶ βεβλήατο, ἔργα γυναικῶν.
ἔνθα δὲ Φαιήκων ἠγήτορες ἐδριόωντο
πίνοντες καὶ ἔδοντες· ἐπιητανὸν γὰρ ἔχεσκον.
χρῦσαι δ' ἄρα κοῦροι ἐϋδμήτων ἐπὶ βωμῶν
ἕστασαν αἰθομένας δαΐδας μετὰ χερσὶν ἔχοντες,
φαίνοντες νύκτας κατὰ δώματα δαιτυμόνεσσι,
HOMER, 7.81–102.

καὶ ὅλην τὴν εὐπρέπειαν τοῦ ναοῦ [...] ἔναι δὲ καὶ λέγεται αὐτὸς ὁ ναὸς τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας τῆς παμμακαρίστου ἐπίγειος οὐρανός, νέα Σιών⁹⁴

The sky – when we look at it – has the sun, moon, stars and other [celestial bodies]. In turn, this church of the All-Blessed instead of the light of the sun has the most beautiful and brightest golden templon with a life-giving and golden cross on the top, where the crucified Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour of all mankind, is set, as well as the representation of the Twelve Great Feasts, and below the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, great and brightest, and on the right, the image of the All-Blessed Virgin Mary, the most beautiful and bright: both have extremely valuable golden podeai. [There are] also gates to the sanctuary, really excellent and of great value; the door wings of the holy sanctuary [are] all gold and with the evangelical salutation of the Holy Mother of God. Instead of moonlight and stars, it has silver candlesticks and the splendour of sacred images, and all the glory of the shrine. [...] And this church is called the great church of the All-Blessed and is the heaven on earth, the new Zion.

Gold in Byzantine texts appears primarily as one of the most beautiful materials available to artists. Its beauty lies in its glow and colour, although despite the dazzling appearance, some authors stated that multi-coloured marbles are more wonderful. Above all, the variegation (ποικιλία, πολυποικιλία) was valued the most. It was the main feature of the “jeweled aesthetics” developed in late antiquity and carried on by Byzantines. Byzantine writers relatively rarely referred to symbolic issues. For instance, in an ekphrasis of an icon of Virgin and Christ written by John Eugenikos (ca. 1400 – ca. 1453), we read that a gold colour of Christ’s cloak indicates his divine nature⁹⁵. A similar interpretation of the significance of gold we find in an epigram associated with Manuel Philes (ca. 1275–1345). He explains there that a silver gilded revetment of an icon designates spiritual features of the depicted Virgin⁹⁶. The same motive is in an epigram on a bronze gilded statue of the charioteer Porphyrios: gold is referred to the merits of the famous athlete⁹⁷. What is more important, for Byzantine authors, wonderful aesthetic properties of gold could also have a symbolic meaning. Nonetheless, they more frequently used to discuss aesthetic questions. Then, it seems that these matters need more attention of researchers because now they are rather neglected. In closing, it should also be added that highly appreciated visual effects created

⁹⁴ MANUEL MALAXUS, *Historia politica Constantinopoleos (a 1454 usque ad 1578 annum Christi)*, 7–22, 7–9, [in:] *Historia Politica et Patriarchica Constantinopoleos*, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonn 1849 [= CSHB, 32], p. 203–204.

⁹⁵ See *Anecdota nova*, ed. J.F. BOISSONADE, Paris 1844, p. 335–340. See as well G. GALAVARIS, *The Stars of the Virgin. An Ekphrasis of an Icon of the Mother of God*, ECR 1, 1966, p. 364–369 (reprinted in: G. GALAVARIS, *Colours, Symbols, Worship. The Mission of the Byzantine Artist*, London 2012).

⁹⁶ See *Manuelis Philae carmina inedita*, 35, ed. A. MARTINI, Napoli 1900. See as well H. MAGUIRE, *Originality...*, p. 110.

⁹⁷ See *The Greek Anthology*, vol. V, *Book 13: Epigrams in Various Metres. Book 14: Arithmetical Problems, Riddles, Oracles. Book 15: Miscellanea. Book 16: Epigrams of the Planudean Anthology Not in the Palatine Manuscript*, 15.46, ed. W.R. PATON, London–New York 1918 [= LCL, 86]. See as well A. CAMERON, *Porphyrios the Charioteer*, Oxford 1973, p. 96–116.

on gold surfaces are not only associated with diverse conceptual meanings but also with technical aspects which pertain to, among others, various methods of gilding and polishing. It is very important problem due to its direct impact on a final shape of works of art. This issue, however, is the subject for a different paper.

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Abstract. The abundance of gilding is considered to be a particularly characteristic feature of Byzantine art. This attribute can be confirmed by even a cursory analysis of works of art. In short, Byzantine artists used gold on a large scale, showing great technical skill. It is therefore quite surprising that this issue has not yet received a separate, comprehensive study. Admittedly, researchers recognize the presence of gold but unfortunately, they almost do not go beyond general observations. On the one hand, they emphasize the primary role of the symbolic meanings of gold, and, on the other, they indicate the high material value of this precious metal. These comments are usually very general and their authors rarely refer to specific primary sources. Their observations, however, speak more about present-day ideas about Byzantine culture than about it itself. The indicated problem is an important and extensive task to be done, hence this paper is only an outline of the most important questions, each of which requires a separate and in-depth study. Therefore, this synthetic article introduces the most basic points associated with the understanding of gold in Byzantium. For this purpose, selected examples of Byzantine texts in which their authors referred to gold in a strictly artistic context are analysed. Thus, the main thesis is as follows: in Byzantine painting, gold, one of the most important devices of artistic expression, was used on a large scale primarily for aesthetic reasons.

Keywords: Byzantine aesthetics, ekphrasis, gilding, mosaic, marble

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