TWO CAPPADOCIAN PSEUDO-MOSAICS

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ABSTRACT

Attempts to simulate mosaic in paint are exceptionally rare in the monumental art of Byzantium and the countries within its cultural orbit. Two isolated examples, both produced by covering the wall surface with dots of paint, survive from medieval Cappadocia, one in the Sarnıç Kilise near Göreme (first half of the eleventh century) and the other in the Bezirana Kilisesi in the Ihlara Valley (late thirteenth century). In the Sarnıç Kilise, feigned tessellation is applied to the *Deēsis* in the sanctuary apse, while in the Bezirana Kilisesi, it graces the dedicatory inscription above the entrance. The present article seeks to recover the logic behind the creation of these two pseudo-mosaics and to reconstruct how they may have been perceived by medieval audiences. Far from being little more than feeble imitations, cheap substitutes for real mosaics, the pseudo-mosaics of the Sarnıç Kilise and the Bezirana Kilisesi bear witness to a profound confidence in the power of the paintbrush. The rupestrian environment of Cappadocia, with its hyperbolic, simulacral architecture carved from the living rock, encouraged illusionism, overt artificiality, and visual wit. It gave free rein to painters to exploit the full potential of their medium and transform the church space into a spectacle of fictive materials and art forms.

KEYWORDS

pseudo-mosaic, mosaic, Bezirana Kilisesi, Sarniç Kilise, Serbia, gold, simulacrum

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In nearly every medieval church decorated with frescoes, there are passages in which painting strives to be something beyond itself.[1] As though pushing against the limitations of the medium, pigments applied to the wall work to evoke other materials and other forms of surface decoration. The lines and patches of color may coalesce into semblances of variegated stones, proffering the illusion of a surface sheathed with slabs of precious, polychrome marbles (Fig. 1).[2] Alternatively, the wall may be dressed in a veneer of simulated ceramic tiles, often arranged in complex geometric patterns.[3] The mural surface may further exhibit illusionistically-rendered curtains, which, typically found in the dado zone, seem to dissolve the wall's hardness into supple, undulating folds.[4] Occasionally, painted frames and borders take on a sculptural quality by mimicking arches, colonettes, cornices, and relief slabs carved in stone.[5] Elsewhere, framed portraits of saints assume the guise of portable, panel-painted icons, complete with fictive suspension hooks and loops.[6] These and other similar illusionistic devices play a vital role in shaping the beholder's experience of the sacred space. Apart from lending the painted interior an air of opulence, they help create the impression of *poikilia* or variety—an aesthetic quality repeatedly singled out for praise in medieval *ekphraseis* of churches and their décor.[7] The fact that the variegated spectacle in this instance is a product of pictorial make-believe does little to diminish its capacity to elicit wonder and afford visual pleasure. For the appeal of faux marbles, simulated curtains, fictitious carvings, and the like resides not so much in their mimetic force but rather in their refusal to narrow the distance between representation and reality, a distance that, as Paul Ricoeur puts it, "opens up the space of fiction."[8] Indeed, there is a creative aspect to these *trompe l'oeil* motifs that cannot be ap-

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1 In the present essay, the term *fresco* is used loosely as a synonym for wall painting.

2 See Panagiōta Asēmakopoulou-Atzaka, *Ἡ τεχνικὴ opus sectile στὴν ἐντοίχια διακόσμηση* (Thessaloniki: Κέντρον Βυζαντινῶν Ἐρευνῶν, 1980), 154–57; Mariia A. Orlova, *Ornament v monumental'noĭ zhivopisi drevneĭ Rusi: konets XIII–nachalo XVI* v. (Moscow: Severnyĭ Palomnik, 2004), 10–16 et passim; Vladimir D. Sarab'ianov, "Mramorirovki v drevnerusskikh khramovykh rospisiakh XI–XII stoletiia," in *Putem ornamenta: Issledovaniia po iskusstvu vizantiĭskogo mira*, ed. Aleksandr L. Saminskiĭ (Moscow: MAKS Press, 2013), 174–91. See also Fabio Barry, *Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), passim.

3 See Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "Facing Architecture: Views on Ceramic Revetments and Paving Tiles in Byzantium, Anatolia, and the Medieval West," in *From Minor to Major: The Minor Arts in Medieval Art History*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art, 2012), 43–65, esp. 58–63; eadem, "Crossing Borders: The Ornamental Decoration of St. Nicholas at Phountoukli at Rhodes," *Travaux et mémoires* 20, no. 2 (2016): 155–69; Maria Parani, "On the Fringe: The Painted Ornament of the Holy Trinity Chapel at Koutsovendēs, Cyprus," *Zograf* 44 (2020): 59–78, at 67–72.

4 See Orlova, *Ornament v monumental'noĭ zhivopisi*, 16–33 et passim. See also John Osborne, "Textiles and Their Painted Imitations in Early Medieval Rome," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 60 (1992): 309–51; Thomas E. A. Dale, *Relics, Prayer, and Politics in Medieval Venetia: Romanesque Painting in the Crypt of Aquileia Cathedral* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 66–76.

5 See, e.g., Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, "The Proskynetaria of the Templon and Narthex: Form, Imagery, Spatial Connections, and Reception," in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2006), 107–32, at 113.

6 See Ivanka Akrabova, "Za 'okachenite portreti' v zhivopista na edna tsŭrkva ot XII vek," *Razkopki i prouchvaniia* 4 (1949): 5–16; Ivan M. Djordjević, "O fresko-ikonama kod Srba u srednjem veku," *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti Matice srpske* 14 (1978): 77–98, at 79–83.

7 See Elizabeth 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*, eds. Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 119–40, at 121–23; Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), esp. 139–43; Nadine Schibille, *Hagia Sophia and the Byzantine Aesthetic Experience* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), esp. 20–22, 97–98. See also Mary J. Carruthers, "*Varietas:* A Word of Many Colours," *Poetica: Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 41, nos. 1–2 (2009): 11–32; Adeline Grand-Clément, "Poikilia," in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, eds. Pierre Destrée and Penelope Murray (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 406–21.

8 Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983), 76.

FIG.1

Simulated marble revetment, 1294/95, Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, *Ohrid (photo: author).*

FIG.2

Sarnıç Kilise near Göreme, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).

preciated unless one shifts focus from what they lack as "counterfeits" to what they manage to accomplish as works of sheer imagination.

The present article is an attempt to bring this creative aspect into a sharper focus. The article considers an illusionistic device that, unlike those mentioned above, never enjoyed wide currency in the monumental art of Byzantium and the wider Byzantine world: namely, simulated mosaic. Two isolated examples of this peculiar form of decoration survive from medieval Cappadocia. One is a monumental apse composition, the other an inscription. In both instances, the semblance of a mosaic was achieved by covering the wall surface with dots of paint, each standing for a single tessera. As much as this technique may be simple, even prosaic, the result is quite remarkable and deserves serious consideration. What might be the logic behind the creation of these two pseudo-mosaics? To what extent was their interest conceptual rather than visual? What kinds of effects were they designed to produce? And how did they relate to and interact with their physical setting? By pursuing these questions, my immediate aim is to delineate the "space of fiction" generated by the dotted murals. But in so doing, I also wish to draw attention to the prominent place of illusionism and visual wit in Cappadocia's rupestrian painting—a phenomenon that has heretofore remained largely unexplored.

The earlier of the two Cappadocian pseudo-mosaics is preserved in the so-called Sarnıç Kilise at Avcılar near Göreme (Fig. 2). This rock-cut shrine owes its name ("Cistern Church") to the fact that, until recently, the locals used it as a water reservoir.[9] As a consequence, the lowest zone of the murals, up to about 2 m from the ground, has been obliterated. The church—a vaulted, single-aisled structure with a deep sanctuary apse to the east and an entrance to the west—received its fresco decoration probably in the first half of the eleventh century. The painter (or painters) responsible for this undertaking most likely worked at two other rock-cut churches in the area: the Karabulut Kilisesi and the Meryemana Kilisesi.[10] Well-adapted to its architectural setting and eminently legible, the pictorial program of the Sarnıç Kilise presents a familiar combination of narrative and iconic images. A cycle of Christological scenes, from the Annunciation to the Pentecost, occupies the vault with its two tympana, as well as the two blind arches on the lateral walls close to the apse. The zone below is populated by portraits of saints, while the summit of the vault exhibits a string of medallions with prophets. Two monumental fresco-icons of Christ and the Virgin and Child flank the entrance to the sanctuary. Nestled within the conch of the apse, a pseudo-mosaic of the *Deēsis* completes the pictorial program and furnishes it with an arresting visual focus (Fig. 3).

A multivalent image, simultaneously a vision of Christ's majesty and a paradigmatic representation of prayer and intercession, the *Deēsis* was an enormously popular subject for apse decoration in Cappadocia.[11] The example at the Sarnıç Kilise follows the standard iconography: Christ presides at the center of the composition, frontally seated on a bejeweled lyre-back throne. The Virgin and St. John

9 On the Sarnıç Kilise, see Nicole Thierry, "Un atelier cappadocien du XIe siècle à Maçan-Göreme," *Cahiers archéologiques* 44 (1996): 117–40; Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce: Le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1991), 80–82; Robert G. Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community: Art, Material Culture, and Settlement in Byzantine Cappadocia* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017), 188.

10 Thierry, "Un atelier cappadocien," 132–36; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 188, 226–27.

11 Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines*, esp. 336. On the image of the *Deēsis* in the Byzantine tradition, see Tania Velmans, "L'image de la Déisis dans les églises de Géorgie et dans celles d'autres régions du monde byzantin," *Cahiers archéologiques* 29 (1980–81): 47–102; Anthony Cutler, "Under the Sign of the Deēsis: On the Question of Representativeness in Medieval Art and Literature," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 145–54; Maria I. Kazamia-Tsernou, *Ιστορώντας τη "Δέηση" στις βυζαντινές εκκλησίες της Ελλάδος* (Thessaloniki: Πουρναράς, 2003).

FIG.3

Deēsis, *first half of the eleventh century, Sarnıç Kilise near Göreme, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).*

FIG.4

Christ, detail of the Deēsis, *first half of the eleventh century, Sarnıç Kilise near Göreme, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).*

the Baptist approach him on either side, their hands extended in a gesture of supplication, while the archangels Michael and Gabriel stand guard at the foot of the throne, clad in imperial attire. Although the greater part of the composition has been destroyed—of the figure of Michael, only a few specks survive—one can still appreciate its original visual effect. Unlike the other images in the church, which all feature bluish-grey backgrounds, the *Deēsis* is set against an expanse of light purple. This shift in color reinforces the hierarchy of space within the church, drawing the beholder's attention to its ritual core—the sanctuary with the now-missing altar table. The addition of feigned tessellation further contributes to the distinct look of the *Deēsis.* Tightly spaced dots of paint applied to select elements of the composition give this imposing tableau of divine glory and judgment the appearance of a mosaic. The greatest concentration of these pictorial marks resembling tesserae is to be seen in Christ's cruciform nimbus (Fig. 4). Each arm of the cross emanating from the Lord's visage is divided lengthwise into two fields, one filled with black dots and the other with white. (The latter are indistinguishable from the pearls adorning Christ's throne and a range of other objects depicted in the murals.) The border of Christ's nimbus, moreover, consists of two concentric circles of black dots. The other holy figures portrayed in the *Deēsis* also sport mosaicked nimbi, but they are far less elaborate, with only a string of black dots defining their perimeter. The only exception is the Virgin, whose privileged place in the celestial hierarchy is signaled not only by her position on the right-hand side of her Son, a traditional sign of honor, but also by the double string of black dots running around her nimbus. The letters of the identifying inscriptions have received a similar treatment. Each is composed of black dots strung together into individual letter strokes. Finally, it appears that the entire background of the *Deēsis* was originally mosaicked. Barely visible vestiges of what look like white dots may be discerned at various spots across the field of light purple, for instance, in the area between Christ's throne and the figure of the Baptist (Fig. 5). These tantalizing remains suggest that the background was once covered with white, pearl-like "tesserae."

Nothing is known about who founded the Sarnıç Kilise and what specific functions this shrine was meant to serve. The lack of contextual information makes it difficult to establish what precisely motivated the highly unusual decision to adorn the sanctuary apse of the church with a pseudo-mosaic. One basic

explanation readily presents itself. Mosaic, to state the obvious, enjoyed enormous prestige throughout the Middle Ages.[12] No other pictorial medium could rival its opulence and visual splendor or claim to entail the same level of technical expertise. Durable and infinitely reparable, mosaic intimated a sense of both history and timelessness. It was a quintessential ancient art form and, more specifically, the preeminent visual expression of the golden age of the Christian *imperium*.[13] The pseudo-mosaic gracing the interior of the Sarnıç Kilise was clearly designed to evoke the magnificence and time-honored authority of real mosaics.

It is safe to assume that many, if not most, visitors to this rock-cut church would have been familiar with the mosaic medium. Cappadocia, to be sure, is poor in archaeologically attested mural mosaics. The sole testimony of their existence comes from the church of a small settlement to the north of the Çanlı Kilise, datable to the sixth or seventh century, where large quantities of tesserae were discovered in the 1990s.[14] There is little doubt, however, that quite a few churches in the region were decorated with mosaics. Textual sources reveal that over the course of the fourth century, numerous *martyria* were erected in and around Caesarea (modern Kayseri), the region's capital. These shrines dedicated to local saints such as Mamas, Julitta, Gordios, and Eupsychios, or to the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia, were important pilgrimage destinations and, as such, must have been appointed in a suitably opulent fashion, which in the Late Antique period normally meant decorated with

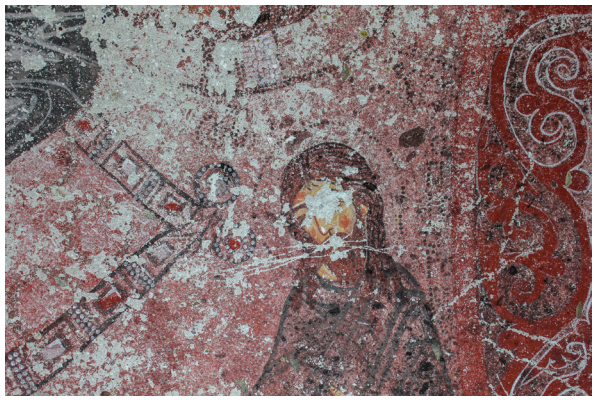

FIG.5

St. John the Baptist, detail of the Deēsis, *first half of the eleventh century, Sarnıç Kilise near Göreme, Cappadocia (photo: author)*

mosaics.[15] The same was probably true of other major churches in Cappadocia, including, most notably, the cathedrals of the metropolitan sees of Caesarea, Tyana (modern Kemerhisar), and Mokissos (modern Viranşehir).[16] Needless to say, the better-traveled among the locals would have known many other lavishly embellished places of worship beyond Cappadocia.

The extent of mosaic decoration in a church could vary considerably. While fully adorned interiors were far from uncommon, in most instances, only certain symbolically and ritually significant areas—entrances, domes, and above all, apses—received a cladding of glass and stone tesserae. Indeed, the sanctuary apse was by far the most common locus of mosaic decoration in Byzantium and the wider Mediterranean world. From Sinai and Cyprus to Rome,

12 See Liz James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World: From Late Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. 120–44.

13 James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World*, 465. Cf. Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 97–107, 123–33.

14 Robert G. Ousterhout, *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2011), 136–37.

15 Pierre Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orien: Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 371–72; Vasiliki M. Limberis, *Architects of Piety: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), passim. See also Gregory of Nyssa's famous letter 25 to Amphilochios of Ikonion, in which he gives a detailed description of the *martyrium* he was in the process of constructing: Pierre Maraval, ed., *Grégoire de Nysse. Lettres* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 288–301.

16 See Friedrich Hild and Marcell Restle, *Kappadokien (Kappadokia, Charsianon, Sebasteia und Lykandos)*, Tabula Imperii Byzantini 2 (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 193–96, 238–39, 298–99.

numerous churches greeted their visitors with resplendent apse mosaics.[17] The apse, to borrow Beat Brenk's words, serves "a deictic and auratic function."[18] Thanks to its stage-like character, it has the ability to focus attention and dignify that which it frames and contains. The use of the mosaic medium only amplified this effect by creating a dramatic contrast between the sanctuary and the rest of the church.

The Sarnıç Kilise, then, reiterated a well-established decorative format. Its interior presented the beholder with a familiar combination: a frescoed nave terminating in a mosaicked sanctuary. It bears emphasizing in this connection that the apse mosaic was not only an artistic commonplace; as one of the defining features of the Early Christian basilica, it was also a distinctly ancient visual form. One wonders to what extent this particular connotation was instrumental at the Sarnıç Kilise. Indeed, was the pseudo-mosaic of the *Deēsis* meant to enhance the prestige and sanctity of this shrine by making it look old? This is certainly a possibility. Byzantines tended to regard old age with esteem, especially in religious matters.[19] As Basil of Caesarea's oft-cited dictum goes, "everything that distinguishes itself on account of its antiquity deserves respect" (πᾶν τὸ ἀρχαιότητι διαφέρον αἰδέσιμον).[20] The fresco decoration of the Sarnıç Kilise evinces a certain retrospective, if not antiquarian, impulse. It is telling, for example, that in the depiction of Christ's first bath in the scene of the Nativity, one of the midwives pours water into the basin using—quite remarkably—a rhyton in the shape of an ox's or a calf's head, rather than the usual amphora (Fig. 6).[21] Libation and drinking vessels with animal protomes had been widely used in the ancient world, but they did not belong to the standard repertoire of contemporary household utensils.[22] By introducing an erudite reference to the material culture of a bygone era, the startling detail of the rhyton imbues the scene with an air of the antique.

The choice of light purple for the background of the *Deēsis* might be another manifestation of the same retrospective impulse. In Byzantine painting, figures and scenes are rarely placed against fields of red and its cognates.[23] The unusual background of the pseudo-mosaic likely reflects an awareness of purple's rich symbolism. This color was a familiar marker of imperial power, and hence, its use in the *Deēsis* may be interpreted as an allusion to the universal domin-

17 See esp. Erik Thunø, *The Apse Mosaic in Early Medieval Rome: Time, Network, and Repetition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World*, passim. See also Beat Brenk, *The Apse, the Image and the Icon: An Historical Perspective of the Apse as a Space for Images* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2010).

18 Brenk, *The Apse, the Image and the Icon*, 36.

19 See Johannes Koder, "Zur Unterscheidung von alter und neuer Zeit aus byzantinischer Sicht," in *Polidoro: Studi offerti ad Antonio Carile*, ed. Giorgio Vespignani, 2 vols. (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2013), 2:507–21.

20 Basil of Caesarea, *De jejunio* I, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1857–66), 31:165C–D.

21 Thierry, "Un atelier cappadocien," 125–28. For the iconography of Christ's first bath, see Per Jonas Nordhagen, "The Origin of the Washing of the Child in the Nativity Scene," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 54 (1961): 333–37; Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, 2 vols. (Brussels: s.n., 1964–65), 1:esp. 94–98; Vincent Juhel, "Le Bain de l'Enfant-Jésus: des origines à la fin du douzième siècle," *Cahiers archéologiques* 39 (1991): 111–32.

22 On rhyta in the ancient world, see Susanne Ebbinghaus, "Between Greece and Persia: Rhyta in Thrace from the Late 5th to the Early 3rd Centuries B.C.," in *Ancient Greeks West & East*, ed. Gocha R. Tsetskhladze (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 385–425; eadem, ed., *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Art Museums, 2018).

23 See Doula Mouriki, "Thirteenth-Century Icon Painting in Cyprus," in *Studies in Late Byzantine Painting* (London: Pindar Press, 1995), 341–409, at 357–58; Svetlana Tomeković, "Évolution d'un procédé décoratif (fonds et nimbes de couleurs différentes) à Chypre, en Macédoine et dans le Péloponnèse (XIIe s.)," in *Βυζαντινή Μακεδονία, 324–1430 μ.Χ.*, ed. Hetaireia Makedonikōn Spoudōn (Thessalonike: Ἑταιρεία Μακεδονικῶν Σπουδῶν, 1995), 321–44.

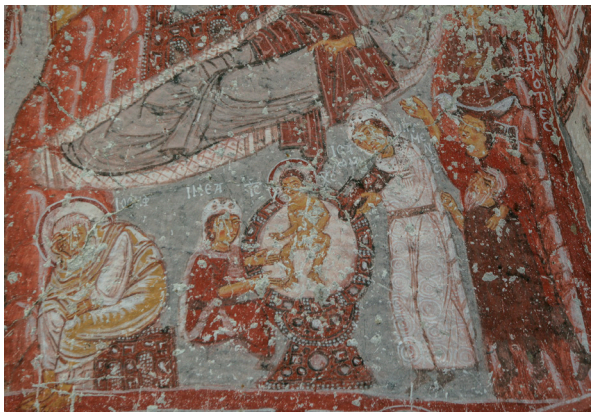

FIG.6

Christ's first bath, detail of the Nativity, first half of the eleventh century, Sarnıç Kilise near Göreme, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).

ion of Christ, the Heavenly Emperor.[24] Alternatively, the color may be said to visualize the blaze of divine light emanating from Christ or to evoke, thanks to its resemblance to red wine, the Eucharistic sacrifice, a mystery once regularly enacted below this very image.[25] But it is equally possible that the background of the *Deēsis* was also meant to operate intervisually by establishing a dialogue with other fresco ensembles in the region.[26] Red grounds and backgrounds appear with some frequency in Cappadocian painting of the ninth and tenth centuries. The most notable example is the church of the Hermitage of Niketas the Stylite at Kızıl Çukur, with its expansive surfaces of luminous, intensely-saturated red ocher (Fig. 7).[27] In the Ağaçaltı Kilise at Belisırma and St. Stephen at Cemil, red fields are employed more selectively to highlight certain compositions and passages of non-figural decoration,[28] while in the church at Topuz Dağı, a burst of red fills an impressive mandorla enveloping the figure of Christ in majesty in the conch of the sanctuary apse.[29] The image of the *Deēsis* in the Sarnıç Kilise seems to gesture to this pictorial tradition. The color of its background, just like its feigned tessellation, brings to mind older monuments, thus creating the impression that the image itself and the church that contains it might be old.

More than two centuries after the Sarnıç Kilise was decorated with frescoes, pseudo-mosaic makes another appearance in Cappadocia, this time in the form of a dedicatory inscription. This mosaicked text is preserved in the Bezirana Kilisesi, one of the numerous rock-cut shrines dotting the Ihlara Valley (Fig. 8).[30] The church dates from the late thirteenth century, that is, from the period when Cappadocia

24 Michael McCormick, Alexander Kazhdan, and Anthony Cutler, "Purple," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3:1759–60; Chryssa Ranoutsaki, *Purpur in Byzanz: Privileg und Würdeformel* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2022). For the use of red backgrounds in the portraits of Byzantine and Serbian rulers in the later Middle Ages, see Dragan Vojvodić, "O živopisu Bele crkve karanske i suvremenom slikarstvu Raške," *Zograf* 31 (2006–2007): 135–52, at 142–43; Saška Bogevska-Capuano, *Les églises rupestres de la région des lacs d'Ohrid et de Prespa, milieu du XIIIe—milieu du XVIe siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 208–11.

25 Cf. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon*, 110–11.

26 For the notion of intervisuality in Byzantine monumental art, see Robert S. Nelson, "The Chora and the Great Church: Intervisuality in Fourteenth-Century Constantinople," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 23 (1999): 67–101.

27 Günter Paulus Schiemenz, "Die Kapelle des Styliten Niketas in den Weinbergen von Ortahisar," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen , Byzantinistik* 18 (1969): 239–58; Nicole Thierry, *Haut Moyen-Âge en Cappadoce: Les églises de la région de Çavuşin*, 2 vols. (Paris: Geuthner, 1983–94), 2:255–81; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 202.

28 For the Ağaçaltı Kilise, see Nicole Thierry and Michel Thierry, *Nouvelles églises rupestres de Cappadoce: Région du Hasan Dağı* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1963), 73–87. For St. Stephen, see Guillaume de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin: Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, 2 vols., 3 fols. (Paris: Geuthner, 1925–42), 2:146–55; Thierry, *Haut Moyen-Âge*, 1:1–33.

29 Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, "Le canon 82 du Concile quinisexte et l'image de l'Agneau: à propos d'une église inédite de Cappadoce," *Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας* 17 (1993–94): 45–52. For rare occurrences of red mandorlas in later Cappadocian painting, see ibid., 45, n. 5; Ousterhout, *A Byzantine Settlement*, 65–66; Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, "Bezirana kilisesi (Cappadoce). Un exceptionnel décor paléologue en terres de Rūm. Nouveau témoignage sur les relations entre Byzance et le sultanat," *Zograf* 41 (2017): 107–42, at 112.

30 On the Bezirana Kilisesi, see Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Une église inédite de la fin du XIIe siècle en Cappadoce: La Bezirana Kilisesi dans la vallée de Belisırma," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 61 (1968): 291–301; Jolivet-Lévy, "Bezirana kilisesi;" Tolga B. Uyar, "Carving, Painting, and Inscribing Sacred Space in Late Byzantium: Bezirana Kilisesi Rediscovered (Peristrema–Cappadocia)," in *Architecture and Visual Culture in the Late Antique and Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in Honor of Robert G. Ousterhout*, eds. Vasileios Marinis, Amy Papalexandrou, and Jordan Pickett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 209–24.

FIG.7

Church of the Hermitage of Niketas the Stylite, Kızıl Çukur, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).

FIG.8

Bezirana Kilisesi near Belisırma, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).

was part of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rūm. Originally dedicated to the Virgin, the Bezirana Kilisesi is a single-aisled structure with a flat ceiling, a sanctuary apse to the east, and an entrance, now blocked, to the west. Attached to the southern side of the nave are two annexes, while its northeastern corner opens onto a tiny, barrel-vaulted funerary chamber. The church was clearly designed to serve as a place of burial and commemoration, but who founded it remains unknown. Judging by the sheer quality of its carved and painted décor, this must have been an individual of high social standing, perhaps a Christian official of the Sultanate residing in the nearby city of Aksaray.[31]

A series of carefully articulated arches resting on pilasters and corbels wraps around the nave, adding plasticity and dynamism to the otherwise rather simple interior. Enclosed within this architectural setting is an exceptionally sophisticated and erudite pictorial program. The painter who executed the murals—and whose hand has been identified in the decoration of two other Cappadocian monuments, the churches at Yüksekli—was fully conversant with the latest developments in the art of Palaiologan Byzantium but also with a range of visual sources from across Anatolia.[32] The ceiling of the church, divided by raised cornices into four rectangular compartments, originally featured an abbreviated cycle of four Christological scenes, of which only two, in the compartments adjacent to the sanctuary, survive: the Baptist and the Transfiguration. The walls of the nave exhibit portraits of saints, with pride of place being given to holy warriors whose figures, either standing or on horseback, occupy the carved arches on the western and northern walls. The conch of the sanctuary apse displays an image of the *Deēsis*, as in the Sarnıç Kilise, while below it is an elaborate rendition of the *Melismos*—a subject rarely encountered in Cappadocia—complete with the dove of the Holy Spirit descending upon the Eucharistic gifts.[33] The decoration of the small funerary chamber to the north of the sanctuary centers on an image of the Virgin and Child enthroned, surrounded by select intercessors.

The pseudo-mosaic dedicatory inscription is set above the original entrance to the church, within the central arch of the western wall (Figs. 9 & 10). The tympanum that surmounts it contains an image of the Three Hebrew Youths in the Fiery Furnace, a scene celebrating the efficacy of prayer and the salvific work of God, whose presence and prominence undoubtedly reflect the funerary function of the space.[34] Disfigured by a large lacuna, the inscription reads: + Ἐκαληεργή[θη] ὁ πάνσεπτος ναὸ[ς τῆς ὑπ]ερα γίας Θ[εοτόκου ---] ("This all-sacred church of the most holy Mother of God was decorated …"). The concluding section of the text probably contained either a date or, less likely, the name of the patron.[35] To transform this painted pronouncement into a semblance of mosaic, the artist adopted a strategy similar to the one employed at the Sarnıç Kilise. The words of the inscription, introduced by a sign of the cross and

31 See Jolivet-Lévy, "Bezirana kilisesi," 135–36.

32 For the churches at Yüksekli, see Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, "Nouvelles découvertes en Cappadoce: les églises de Yüksekli," *Cahiers archéologiques* 35 (1987): 113–41. On the knowledge of contemporary Byzantine art among painters active in the Sultanate of Rūm, see Tolga B. Uyar, "Thirteenth Century 'Byzantine' Art in Cappadocia and the Question of Greek Painters at the Seljuq Court," in *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia*, eds. Andrew C. S. Peacock, Bruno De Nicola, and Sara Nur Yıldız (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 215–31, esp. 218–19. For the broader issue of the local Christians' connections with Byzantium, see Sophie Métivier, "Byzantium in Question in 13th-Century Seljuk Anatolia," in *Liquid & Multiple: Individuals & Identities in the Thirteenth-Century Aegean*, eds. Guillaume Saint-Guillain and Dionysios Stathakopoulos (Paris: ACHCByz, 2012), 235–57.

33 Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines*, 315–17, 341. For the presence of the dove of the Holy Spirit in the *Melismos*, see Chara Konstantinidi, *Ὁ Μελισμός: Οἱ συλλειτουργοῦντες ἱεράρχες καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι-διάκονοι μπροστὰ στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα μὲ τὰ τίμια δῶρα ἢ τὸν εὐχαριστιακὸ Χριστό* (Thessaloniki: Κέντρον Βυζαντινῶν Ἐρευνῶν, 2008), 66–67

34 See Klaus Wessel, "Jünglinge im Feuerofen," in *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. Klaus Wessel (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1972), 3:668–76.

35 Georges Kiourtzian has proposed a different ending: καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας ("and ever virgin Maria"). See Jolivet-Lévy, "Bezirana kilisesi," 114..

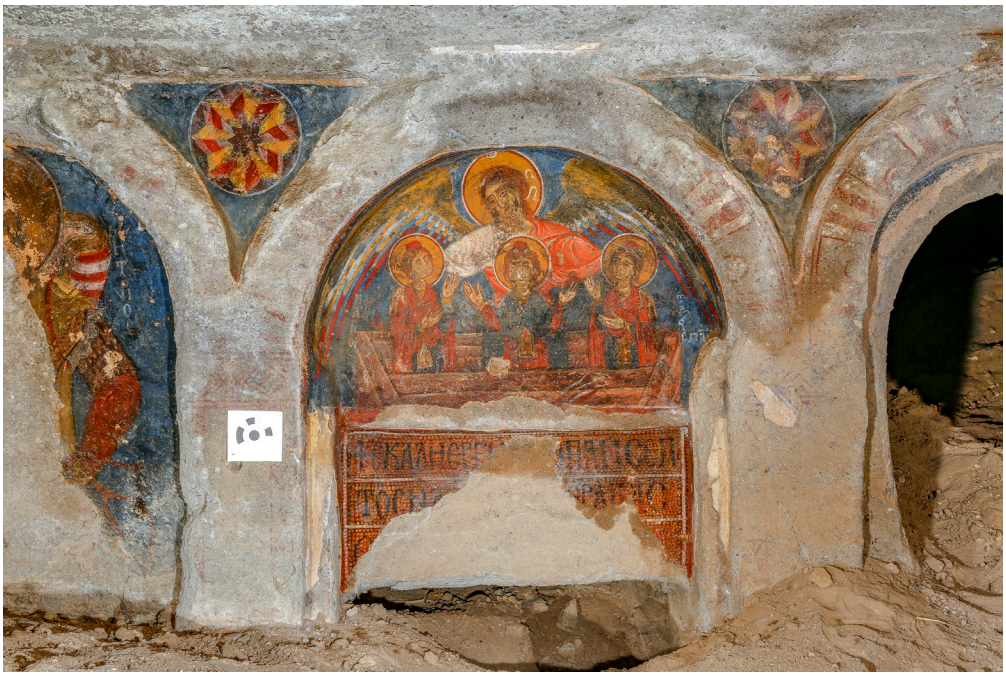

FIG.9

View of the western wall with the original entrance, Bezirana Kilisesi near Belisırma, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).

FIG.10

Dedicatory inscription, late thirteenth century, Bezirana Kilisesi near Belisırma, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).

divided into three lines, occupy a rectangular field densely covered with dots of paint simulating tesserae. The inscription, in fact, takes on the guise of gold mosaic. The pattern of yellow dots on a red ground evidently evokes the standard procedure of setting gold tesserae into a bed of red-painted plaster, the latter serving to impart a warm tone to the metal.[36] The use of black for the writing itself reinforces the fiction of mosaic work, for inscriptions embedded in real gold mosaics are normally delineated with black tesserae.[37] In contrast to the identifying labels in the *Deēsis* in the Sarnıç Kilise, however, the letters in this instance have not been mosaicked but consist of continuous strokes. This makes the train of large, accented uncials with pronounced serifs stand out sharply against the sea of yellow dots. Further contributing to the legibility of the inscription are thin white borders, themselves composed of fictive tesserae, which frame each of the three lines of the text.

While the verb καλλιεργέω ("to decorate" or "to beautify"), with which the inscription opens, is by no means uncommon in dedicatory texts,[38] the emphasis on *kalliergia*—the work of beautification—seems uniquely appropriate for the Bezirana Kilisesi. This small rock-cut shrine is a veritable jewel box. Its interior exhibits an unusual abundance of non-figural decoration, welding together ornamental motifs drawn from a wide array of sources.[39] What is particularly notable is that the church's decorative apparatus to a large extent consists of pictorial fictions, the pseudo-mosaic inscription being but one example. The front side of the low-templon screen is, for instance, painted in such a way as to produce the impression that this permanent, unwieldy barrier carved from the living rock is in fact composed of two large stone slabs with relief decoration (Fig. 11). The pattern of interconnected rectangular panels, each with a rosette at the center, reiterates a motif frequently encountered in Byzantine stone sculpture, especially on closure slabs inserted in templon screens (Fig. 12).[40] The two pilasters rising on top of this fictive parapet and framing the sanctuary arch extend the illusion of relief stonework. They are crowned by capitals painted to simulate volutes of crisply carved, stylized foliage. The visible remains of the dado zone along the northern wall of the nave present the fiction of a surface revetted in *opus sectile*. Combining several varieties of colored marble—light blue, red, white, and yellow ocher—the simulated inlaid plaques create a geometric pattern organized around a series of disks with concentric circles. Elsewhere, the wall surface appears to be draped. The prothesis niche cut into the wall of the sanctuary

36 See James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World*, 61–62.

37 See James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World*, passim.

38 Chronologically proximate Cappadocian comparanda include the inscriptions in the church of the Archangel at Cemil and St. George at Belisırma. See Georges Kiourtzian, "Une nouvelle inscription de Cappadoce du règne de Théodore Ier Laskaris," *Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας* 28 (2008): 131–38; Thierry and Thierry, *Nouvelles églises rupestres*, 202–206.

39 For detailed analyses, see Jolivet-Lévy, "Bezirana kilisesi," 121–28; Uyar, "Carving, Painting, and Inscribing Sacred Space," 211–15.

40 See, e.g., André Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines du Moyen Âge II (XIe–XIVe siècle)* (Paris: Picard, 1976), 102–103, 105–106, 143, pls. LXXIV, LXXVIIIa, CXXd; Maria Sklavou-Mavroeidi, *Γλυπτά του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Αθηνών* (Athens: Ταμείο Αρχαιολογικών Πόρων και Απαλλοτριώσεω, 1999), 160; Sema Alpaslan-Doğan, "La sculpture byzantine en Lycie et à Antalya: sa place dans l'évolution de l'art byzantin," in *La sculpture byzantine, VIIe–XIIe siècles*, eds. Charalambos Pennas and Catherine Vanderheyde (Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2008), 123–38, at 128–29, figs. 12–13; Paschalis Androudis, "Γύρω από κάποια μεσοβυζαντινά τέμπλα του Αγίου Όρους," in *La sculpture byzantine*, eds. Charalambos Pennas and Catherine Vanderheyde, 263–83, at 265–66, figs. 8–10; Charalambos Bouras, "Διάτρητα μαρμάρινα μεσοβυζαντινά γλυπτά στην Ελλάδα," in *La sculpture byzantine*, eds. Charalambos Pennas and Catherine Vanderheyde, 469–85, at 470–71, figs. 1–3.

FIG.11

Simulated closure slab with relief decoration, detail of the templon screen, late thirteenth century, Bezirana Kilisesi near Belisırma, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).

FIG.12

Closure slab (partly restored), twelfth century, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens, BCM 4165 (photo: Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Byzantine and Christian Museum).

FIG.13

Simulated curtain under the prothesis niche, late thirteenth century, Bezirana Kilisesi near Belisırma, Cappadocia (photo: Tolga Uyar).

apse, to the north of the now-destroyed altar table, is adorned with a fictive curtain (Fig. 13). Illusionistically rendered, the curtain "hangs" from the niche's lower edge, marking this ritually charged spot and simultaneously furnishing the bust-length portrait of Christ Emmanuel inside the niche with a sort of apron.

It is curious that the dedicatory inscription is the only element of the church's interior décor to be tessellated. Was this perhaps a borrowing from—and hence, an allusion to—another, now lost, shrine with a splendid mosaic inscription above its entrance? No immediate parallels for such an arrangement come to mind, except for the distant example of the fifth-century basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome.[41] Whatever the specific source, if there was one, the applied tessellation had an important role to play: it gave the inscribed text a striking visual form and, in so doing, enhanced its verbal message.[42] Specifically, the simulated tesserae may be said to have invested the painted words with a sense of authority stemming from mosaic's long-standing association with power and antiquity. They made the inscription look venerable, if not outright old. It is worth pointing out in this connection that the architectural design of the Bezirana Kilisesi shows certain archaizing traits. Two elements, in particular, the flat ceiling and the horseshoe-shaped arch of the sanctuary apse, hark back to much earlier Cappadocian monuments;[43] they are not characteristic of thirteenth-century rock-cut church architecture in the region. These retrospective features would have resonated with the mosaicked text above the entrance, throwing into sharper relief the ancient pedigree of its purported medium. Just like the *Deēsis* in the Sarnıç Kilise, the dedicatory inscription in the Bezirana Kilisesi pointed the beholder, if only indirectly, to a distant past.

Whether the painter of the Bezirana Kilisesi was familiar with the decoration of the Sarnıç Kilise cannot be established with certainty. The fact that in both churches mosaic cubes are rendered as dots of paint hardly suffices to prove a direct link. The painter may have come up with this particular solution independently or adopted it from another source. Be that as it may, the pseudo-mosaics of these two shrines remain artistic *unica* , and not only in Cappadocia. Indeed, one searches in vain for comparable attempts to simulate mosaics elsewhere in the monumental art of Byzantium and the countries within its cultural orbit. The only exception is the medieval kingdom of Serbia. Here, under the patronage of the ruling Nemanjić dynasty, wall painting repeatedly appeared in the guise of its more exalted and more costly sister art.[44] The corpus of Serbian pseudo-mosaics comprises murals preserved in a group of monastic churches founded by the Nemanjićs to serve as dynastic mausolea. These include the churches at Studenica (1208/9), Mileševa (shortly before 1227), Sopoćani (ca. 1265), Gradac (ca. 1280), and Banjska (ca. 1317–21). The pseudo-mosaics adorning these monuments differ from the two Cappadocian examples insofar as their "mosaic cubes" do not take the form of dots of paint. Instead, the feigned tessellation was executed by means of gilding. The artists working for the royal patrons covered the murals' backgrounds with precious-metal leaves and then

41 Erik Thunø, "Looking at Letters: 'Living Writing' in S. Sabina in Rome," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 34 (2007): 19–41.

42 On inscriptions as visual artifacts, see Ivan Drpić, "Inscriptions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature*, ed. Stratis Papaioannou (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 381–406, at 383–89, with further bibliography.

43 See Nicole Lemaigre Demesnil, *Architecture rupestre et décor sculpté en Cappadoce (Ve–IXe siècle)* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), passim; Ousterhout, Visualizing Community, 23–175 passim.

44 Ivan Drpić, "The Fictive Mosaics of Medieval Serbia," *Gesta* 61, no. 2 (2022): 195–222. See also Vojislav J. Djurić, "La peinture murale serbe au XIIIe siècle," in *L'art byzantin du XIIIe siècle: Symposium de Sopoćani 1965*, ed. Vojislav J. Djurić (Belgrade: Faculté de philosophie, Département de l'histoire de l'art, 1967), 145–67, esp. 151–53; Svetozar Radojčić, "Zlato u srpskoj umetnosti XIII veka," *Zograf* 7 (1977): 28–35; Vojislav J. Djurić, "Srpski mozaici iz XIII veka," in *Danica: Srpski narodni ilustrovani calendar za godinu 1999*, eds. Miodrag Maticki and Nada Milošević-Djordjević (Belgrade: Vukova zadužbina, 1998), 66–78; Branislav Todić, "Banjsko zlato: poslednji ostaci fresaka u crkvi Svetog Stefana u Banjskoj," in *Manastir Banjska i doba kralja Milutina*, ed. Dragiša Bojović (Niš: Centar za crkvene studije, 2007), 163–74.

patterned the gilded surface to make it resemble a field of gold tesserae. The painted figures, architectural coulisses, and elements of the landscape remained without tessellation. The original effect is difficult to appreciate today. Owing to a combination of factors—destruction, neglect, and, not least, the fragility of mural gilding—the Serbian pseudo-mosaics have for the most part lost their metallic film. Its disintegration has left the plaster ground to which the gilding had been applied exposed. Typically yellow ocher in color, this underlayer in most instances still preserves traces of a mosaic pattern, as seen, for instance, in the detail of the scene of the Hospitality of Abraham at Sopoćani, reproduced here (Fig. 14). Spread out across the background above the angel is a multitude of small squares and rectangles, neatly arranged in staggered rows. These simulated tesserae are vestiges of the mosaic pattern once executed on the surface layer of gold.

This is no place to survey all the complexities of the Serbian pseudo-mosaics; suffice it to highlight several features that distinguish them from their Cappadocian counterparts. Perhaps the most obvious concerns the sheer scale of the work undertaken. The great burial churches of the Nemanjićs housed extensive cycles of pseudo-mosaic decoration. At Mileševa, Sopoćani, and Gradac, and this was almost certainly also the case with Banjska, frescoes with gilded and tessellated backgrounds covered most of the wall surfaces in the interior.[45] The creation of these monumental images was not only technically difficult, requiring as it did considerable expertise in the handling of adhesives and precious-metal leaves; it was also prohibitively expensive. Recently conducted physico-chemical analyses have revealed that in all

FIG.14

Angel, detail of the Hospitality of Abraham, ca. 1265, Church of the Holy Trinity, Monastery of Sopoćani (photo: Djordje Djoković).

but one instance, the painters used leaves of what is known as "part gold"—a laminate produced by beating two sheets of gold and silver together.[46] This material, a costlier alternative to gold-tin laminate, was rarely employed to gild images on the wall and never on such a massive scale. It has been estimated that about 18.5 kg of gold and 100.8 kg of silver were needed for the leaves of part gold applied to the murals at Sopoćani, the best preserved among the pseudo-mosaic ensembles sponsored by the Serbian royalty.[47] Aside from being a conspicuous manifestation of the patrons' piety, this kind of lavish expenditure was also a compelling political statement that gave tangible form to the power and ambition of the Neman-

45 At Studenica, pseudo-mosaic decoration appears to have been limited to the central area of the nave, under the dome. See Drpić, "The Fictive Mosaics," 199–20.

46 Aleksa Jelikić and Dragan Stanojević, "O zlatu na sopoćanskim zidnim slikama," *Saopštenja. Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture* 49 (2017): 57–74; Ivan Drpić and Aleksa Jelikić, "On Large-Scale Gilding and Mosaic Simulation in Medieval Serbian Wall Painting," *Archaeometry* 63, no. 4 (2021): 779–93.

47 Jelikić and Stanojević, "O zlatu," 59, 69.

jićs. Indeed, the dynasty's sustained interest and investment in fictive gold mosaics leave no doubt that this art form was recognized and self-consciously promoted as a characteristic visual expression of the Serbian monarchy.

In the Byzantine tradition of church decoration, gilding, to be sure, was occasionally used to embellish and enhance wall paintings,[48] but we have no parallels for the solution adopted in the Serbian royal shrines. Archaeological excavations on the site of the cathedral of the Holy Apostles at Belgorodka near Kyiv, a church founded by the grand prince Riurik Rostislavich in the closing years of the twelfth century, have brought to light fragments of frescoes with traces of gilding in the background.[49] The fragments show that, as in the Serbian examples, gold leaf was laid over a yellow-ocher underpainting. There is no indication, however, that the gilding was patterned in imitation of tesserae. We know that in the early thirteenth century, John Apokaukos, metropolitan of Naupaktos, had his cathedral, the church of the Virgin *Panhymnētos*, embellished with the use of the precious metal. In one of his letters, Apokaukos mentions that he "made the church shine with gold" (χρυσῷ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καταστιλπνώσας),[50] but the nature and extent of this gilding are far from clear. In the absence of comparanda, it seems reasonable to assume that the practice of patterning gilded wall surfaces to mimic mosaic cubes was a Serbian invention.

Medieval audiences valued mosaics for their opulence, venerable dignity, and the expertise needed for their manufacture, but the feature that invariably received the highest praise was their reflective brilliance.[51] Ekphrastic texts never tire of evoking the vibrant, scintillating spectacle of gold tesserae, which, as one author puts it, "dazzle the eyes as with brilliant fire" and "send forth a kind of enchanting glow."[52] The interest and appeal of the Serbian pseudo-mosaics derived in no small part from the fact that these idiosyncratic images recreated the light-bringing quality of real mosaics.[53] Their coat of gold supplied the effect of gleam and glitter that paint alone was unable to produce. This essential deficiency of the medium of painting may well be the main reason why mosaic simulation remained an anomalous enterprise, a type of pictorial fiction exceptionally rarely pursued by fresco painters.

It is worth considering at this point why the only two extant examples of pseudo-mosaic decoration beyond the Serbian kingdom are to be found in Cappadocia. Was there anything about this region's artistic

48 Olga Katsibiri, "Investigation of the Technique and Materials Used for Mordant Gilding on Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Icons and Wall Paintings" (PhD diss., Northumbria University, 2002). See also Oskar Emmenegger, "Metallauflagen und Applikationen an Wandmalereien, Teil 1," *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung* 3 (1989): 149–64; Mauro Matteini and Arcangelo Moles, "Le tecniche di doratura nella pittura murale," in *Le pitture murali: tecniche, problemi, conservazione*, eds. Cristina Danti, Mauri Matteini, and Arcangelo Moles (Florence: Centro Di, 1990), 121–26; Jilleen M. Nadolny, "The Techniques and Use of Gilded Relief Decoration by Northern European Painters, c. 1200–1500," 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of London, 2000), passim; Aurélie Mounier, "Aurum, argentum et aliae res innumerabiles: Les dorures dans les peintures murales médiévales du Sud-Ouest de la France" (PhD diss., L'Université Bordeaux Montaigne, 2010).

49 N. D. Polonskaia, "Arkheologicheskiia raskopki V. V. Khvoĭko 1909–1910 godov v miest. Bielgorodkie," in *Trudy Moskovskago predvaritel'nago komiteta po ustroĭstvu XV arkheologicheskago s'iezda*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Lissner i Sobko, 1911), 1:47–66, at 59.

50 John Apokaukos, Letter 27, ed. N. A. Bees, "Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropoliten von Naupaktos (in Aetolien)," *Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher* 21 (1971–74): 57–243, at 86.

51 See James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World*, esp. 124–25; Barbara Schellewald, "Gold, Licht und das Potenzial des Mosaiks," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 79, no. 4 (2016): 461–80.

52 Theodore Metochites, Poem 1, ed. Ioannis Polemis, *Theodori Metochitae Carmina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 40.1001–1008; trans. J. Michael Featherstone, "Metochites's Poems and the Chora," in *The Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, eds. Holger A. Klein, Robert G. Ousterhout, and Brigitte Pitarakis (Istanbul: Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2011), 187–237, at 223–24, with a minor modification.

53 Medieval sources yield few references to the murals with gilded and tessellated backgrounds, but tellingly, those that exist place great emphasis on their luminosity. See Vladimir Ćorović, "Siluan i Danilo II, srpski pisci XIV–XV veka," *Glas Srpske kraljevske akademije* 136 (1929): 13–103, at 64–65, 67, 81.

FIG.15

Church of the Hallaç Manastırı near Ortahisar, Cappadocia (photo: Robert Ousterhout).

environment that made mosaic simulation a worthwhile endeavor? The answer, I believe, is positive and has to do with the nature of the Cappadocian rock-cut church. Architectural spaces carved from the living rock are especially conducive to illusionism, hyperbole, and fiction. The reason is because such spaces are products of a creative process in which the material and structural limitations faced by masonry architecture essentially play no role. Carving, quite simply, allows for a much greater degree of flexibility and inventiveness than building. In Cappadocia, this kind of freedom was exploited with tremendous effect, giving rise to church designs that often purposefully exaggerate architectural forms borrowed from stone and brick constructions or combine them in ways that defy structural logic.[54] The church of the Hallaç Manastırı near Ortahisar is an excellent example (Fig. 15).[55] Carved probably in the eleventh century as part of the complex of an élite secular residence, the church presents a variant of the ubiquitous cross-in-square type in rock-cut form. What makes it noteworthy is the complexity of its detailing, structural articulation, and system of vaults that surpass anything seen in the "real" architecture of the region. All wall surfaces in the church are richly articulated with pilasters and blind arches that give emphatic visual expression to the spatial organization of the interior. The central dome rises above elaborately carved piers furnished—extraordinarily—with two sets of capitals, one at the level of the springing of the corner vaults and the other at the level of the springing of the high vaults. Surrounding the central dome are four minor domes, each crowning a crossarm, while of the four corner bays, two have barrel vaults and two groin vaults complete with triangular ribs and bosses. None of these elements has a practical func-

54 The phenomenon is masterfully explored in Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, esp. 157–75, 483–89. In what follows, I draw heavily on Ousterhout's penetrating analysis.

55 On this church and the complex to which it belongs, see Lyn Rodley, "Hallaç Manastir: A Cave Monastery in Byzantine Cappadocia," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32, no. 5 (1982): 425–34; Thomas F. Mathews and Annie-Christine Daskalakis Mathews, "Islamic-Style Mansions in Byzantine Cappadocia and the Development of the Inverted T-Plan," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56, no. 3 (1997): 294–315; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 105–106, 279–80.

tion; their purpose is solely to look like architecture. Unimpeded by the law of gravity, the carvers were at liberty to create forms that from the structural point of view make no sense. The four minor domes, for instance, spring completely illogically from flat ceilings, without any transitional elements such as pendentives or squinches that one would expect to see in a dome construction.[56] The carvers' main concern, however, was not structural logic but verisimilitude. The fact that these four carefully shaped circular cavities were recognizable as domes was enough.

In the rock-cut architecture of Cappadocia, the piling-up of redundant, structurally unnecessary details works to create the impression of a properly constructed space. The carved interior is in a sense an image of masonry architecture. In many instances, however, the church of the Hallaç Manastırı being but one example, this image does more than simply replicate masonry prototypes. Rather, the carved architectural forms combine to produce something more elaborate and often resolutely novel. I would argue that these imaginatively fabricated spaces are best understood as simulacra. In modern theoretical discourse, one recalls, the term *simulacrum* is used to designate a copy without an original. It refers to a type of representation that, by virtue of having no model in reality, substitutes for and even supersedes the real.[57] Cappadocian rock-cut churches exhibit an array of recognizable elements that unmistakably evoke masonry structures, and yet, these elements and their combinations often lack exact counterparts made of brick or stone. The carved interior may bear a distinct resemblance to "real" architecture, without, however, being a mere replica of it. The result is, in a word, a simulacrum.

The fresco ensembles gracing the rock-cut shrines evince a similar tendency. As Robert Ousterhout has astutely observed, "there is a sort of *horror vacui* to the painted Cappadocian interior, with decoration far more intense, far more concentrated than we would find in most contemporary masonry churches."[58] The studied profusion of figures and ornaments, shapes and colors, and various illusionistic devices was a natural response to the hyperbolic character of rupestrian architecture. The simulacrum of the masonry church invited the creation of other kinds of simulacra, giving free rein to the painters to exploit the full potential of their medium and transform the church space into a spectacle of diverse materials, decorative techniques, and art forms. Needless to say, pseudo-mosaic was perfectly at home in this environment.

Like most visual simulacra encountered in Cappadocian painting, the pseudo-mosaics of the Sarnıç Kilise and the Bezirana Kilisesi were hardly intended to deceive the beholder. Their visual trickery is too transparent to fool anyone. This is especially true of the tessellated rendition of the *Deēsis*. With its clusters of black and white dots on a light purple background, this image looks nothing like a real mosaic. Its color scheme and the shape of its "tesserae" are decidedly idiosyncratic. There is something inherently ludic about the way in which the two dotted murals pretend to be something else, while simultaneously flaunting their fictitiousness. In both instances, the goal was merely to produce a mosaic effect—a painterly approximation rather than a facsimile of mosaic. But the play of pretense could in and of itself be a source of visual interest and pleasure. It invited the beholder to suspend disbelief and willingly surrender to the artful fiction of a venerable, richly appointed interior.[59]

56 Such anomalous domes are fairly common in Cappadocia. See Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 158–68.

57 See Gilles Deleuze, "Simulacre et philosophie antique," in *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 292–324; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981). See also Michael Camille, "Simulacrum," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 31–44.

58 Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 488.

59 On the aesthetics of play, with focus on the medieval West, see Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16–44.

The Cappadocian pseudo-mosaics bear witness to a profound confidence in the power of the paintbrush. Granted, fresco painting may not have been the most exalted and materially opulent medium of church decoration, but its capacity to generate simulacra knew no bounds. In the hands of a skillful practitioner, pigments applied to the wall could turn into anything—a slab of veined marble, an embroidered curtain, a crisply carved relief, and even a mosaic. Most medieval churches decorated with frescoes attest to this remarkable versatility to a greater or lesser degree. What makes the rock-cut churches of Cappadocia distinct is the fact that here pictorial make-believe was part of a larger machinery of illusion that also included the murals' architectural setting. The rupestrian environment forced a sustained reflection on the questions of mimesis, artifice, and deception, giving rise to a range of novel and highly imaginative solutions that have yet to receive the scrutiny they deserve.

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ÖZET

Bizans anıtsal sanatında ve kültürel yörüngesindeki bölgelerde, mozaiğin resim olarak canlandırıldığı nadiren görülür. Biri Göreme yakınlarındaki Sarnıç Kilise (on birinci yüzyılın ilk yarısı), diğeri ise Ihlara Vadisi'ndeki Bezirana Kilisesi (on üçüncü yüzyıl sonu) olmak üzere Ortaçağ Kapadokyası'ndan duvar yüzeyinin boya benekleriyle kaplandığı iki münferit örnek vardır. Mozaik taklidi bezemeler Sarnıç Kilise'de Deesis sahnesine uygulanmışken, Bezirana Kilisesi'nde girişin üstündeki ithaf yazıtını süsler. Bu çalışma, söz konusu iki pseudo-mozaiğin yapılmasının ardında yatan mantığı açığa çıkarmak ve bunların Ortaçağ izleyicileri üzerinde yaratmış olabileceği algıyı yeniden inşa etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Sarnıç Kilise ve Bezirana Kilisesi'nin pseudo-mozaikleri, gerçek mozaiklerin kötü taklitleri veya niteliksiz ikameleri değildir; aksine fırçanın gücüne duyulan büyük bir güvenin ifadesidir. Kayalara oyulan hiperbolik, simülakral mimarisiyle Kapadokya'nın kayalık arazisi, illüzyonizme, sınırları belirgin bir yapaylığa ve görsel zekaya ilham kaynağı olmuştur. Ressamlara ellerindeki araçları tüm yönleriyle kullanma ve kilise mekânını kurgusal malzemeler ve sanat biçimlerinden oluşan bir tabloya dönüştürme imkânı vermiştir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER

pseudo-mozaik, mozaik, Bezirana Kilisesi, Sarnıç Kilise, Sırbistan, altın, simülakrum