

What the Middle Ages knew: Byzantine Art

Piero Scaruffi

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- **The principles of Christian art**
- **Foundations of Christian architecture**
- **Mosaics**
- **Illuminated manuscripts**
- **Decline of sculpture (glorification of God prevails over glorification of man)**
- **No scientific progress**

What the Middle Ages knew

- **Byzantine art**
 - **Umm Al Jimal (6th c AD)**



What the Middle Ages knew

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

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



Adoration of the Magi

What the Middle Ages knew

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

Moses adopted by a pharaoh's daughter



Photo Scala, Florence



**Mosaic floor
of Aquileia (4th c)**



**Mosaic of
Sta Maria Maggiore
(5th c)**



Door of Sta Sabina

What the Middle Ages knew

- **Mosaics**

Madaba:
map of Jerusalem (6th c AD)



Petra: Church mosaic (600 AD)



What the Middle Ages knew

- Mosaics
 - San Lorenzo fuori le mura 6th c
 - Sant'Agnese, 7th c
 - San Giovanni in Laterano 7th c



What the Middle Ages knew

- **Mosaics**
 - **S. Pietro in Vincoli, 7th c** →
 - **Latomos monastery, 6th c**



What the Middle Ages knew

- **Mosaics**
 - Thessaloniki, Hagios Demetrios, 7th c
 - Thessaloniki, Hagios Demetrios, 7th c



What the Middle Ages knew

- **Mosaics**
 - Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, 9th c
 - Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, 9th c



What the Middle Ages knew

- **Mosaics**

- Nicaea, 9th c →
- Nicaea, 9th c
- Thessaloniki, Aya Sofia, 9th c ↓



What the Middle Ages knew

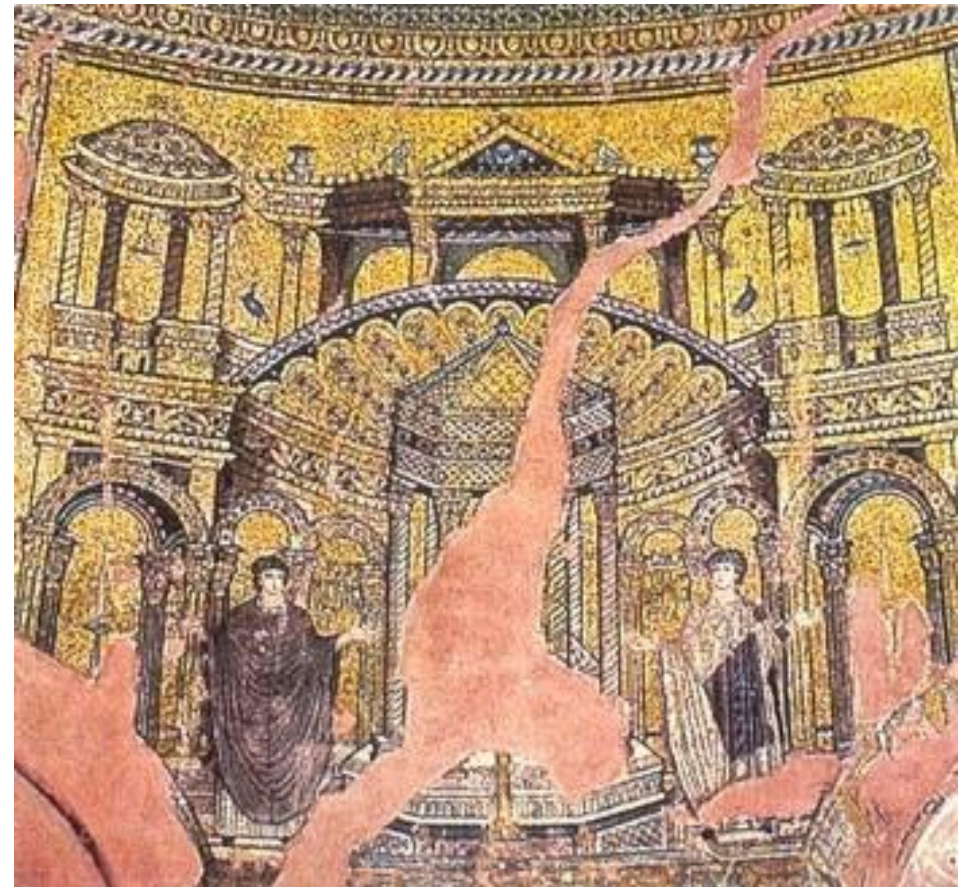
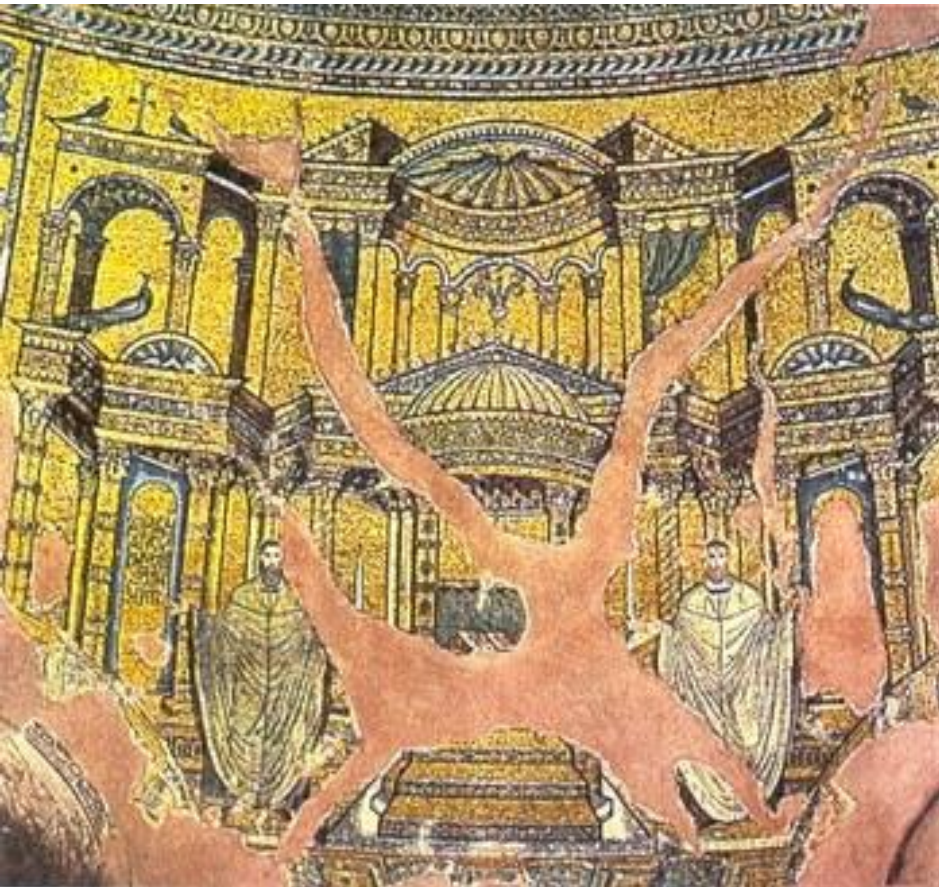
- **Frescoes**
 - Cheap substitute for the mosaic



San Lorenzo, Cappella Aquilino, Milano (390)

What the Middle Ages knew

- Frescoes



Rotunda (Agios Giorgos), Thessaloniki (390)

What the Middle Ages knew

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



Sarcophagus of Adelfhia
Museo Archeologico, Siracusa



Sarcophagus of Stilicho
Sant'Ambrogio, Milano

What the Middle Ages knew

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



Sarcophagus of Costantina (340)
Museo Vaticano, Roma

What the Middle Ages knew

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

What the Middle Ages knew

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

What the Middle Ages knew

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

What the Middle Ages knew

- **Christian Art**
 - **Liturgy dictated architecture**
 - **Christian Roma**
 - **Avoiding the vaulted architecture typical of pagan structures (e.g., Caracalla's baths, Pantheon, etc)**
 - **The basilica more appropriate for the monastic nature of the western church**
 - **Constantinople**
 - **Vaulted architecture**
 - **Central dome more appropriate for the hierarchical nature of the eastern church**

What the Middle Ages knew

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

What the Middle Ages knew

- **Paleochristian architecture**
 - **All built according to Trajan's Basilica**
 - **Constantine turns Jerusalem into the holy city of Christianity, the only city in the world that is completely Christian: churches, hospitals, monasteries, caravansaray...**

What the Middle Ages knew

- **None of the Constantinian churches survive (Jerusalem destroyed by Persians in 614 and conquered by Arabs in 637)**
- **Ditto for Antioch and Alexandria**

What the Middle Ages knew

- **Empress Eudocia (wife of Theodosius II) moves to Jerusalem in 438 and builds palaces, churches, etc**
- **Justinian**
 - **Restores churches in Jerusalem**
 - **Builds Hagia Sofia, Hagia Irene, Holy Apostles in Constantinople**
 - **John the Evangelist in Ephesus (pantheon of Byzantine emperors until 1028)**

What the Middle Ages knew

S. Pietro, Roma

S. Giovanni in Laterano, Roma

S. Maria Maggiore, Roma

Nativity, Bethlehem

Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

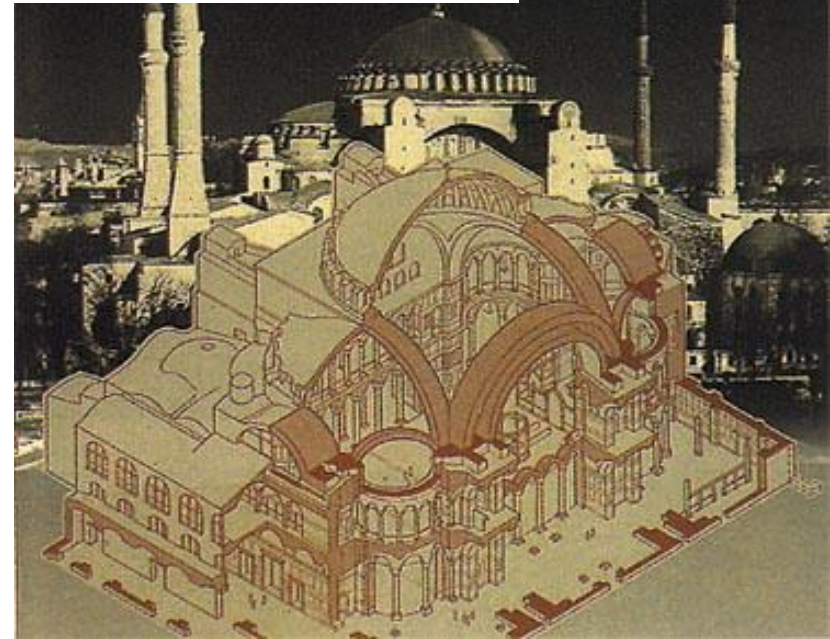


What the Middle Ages knew

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



(Rowland Mainstone)

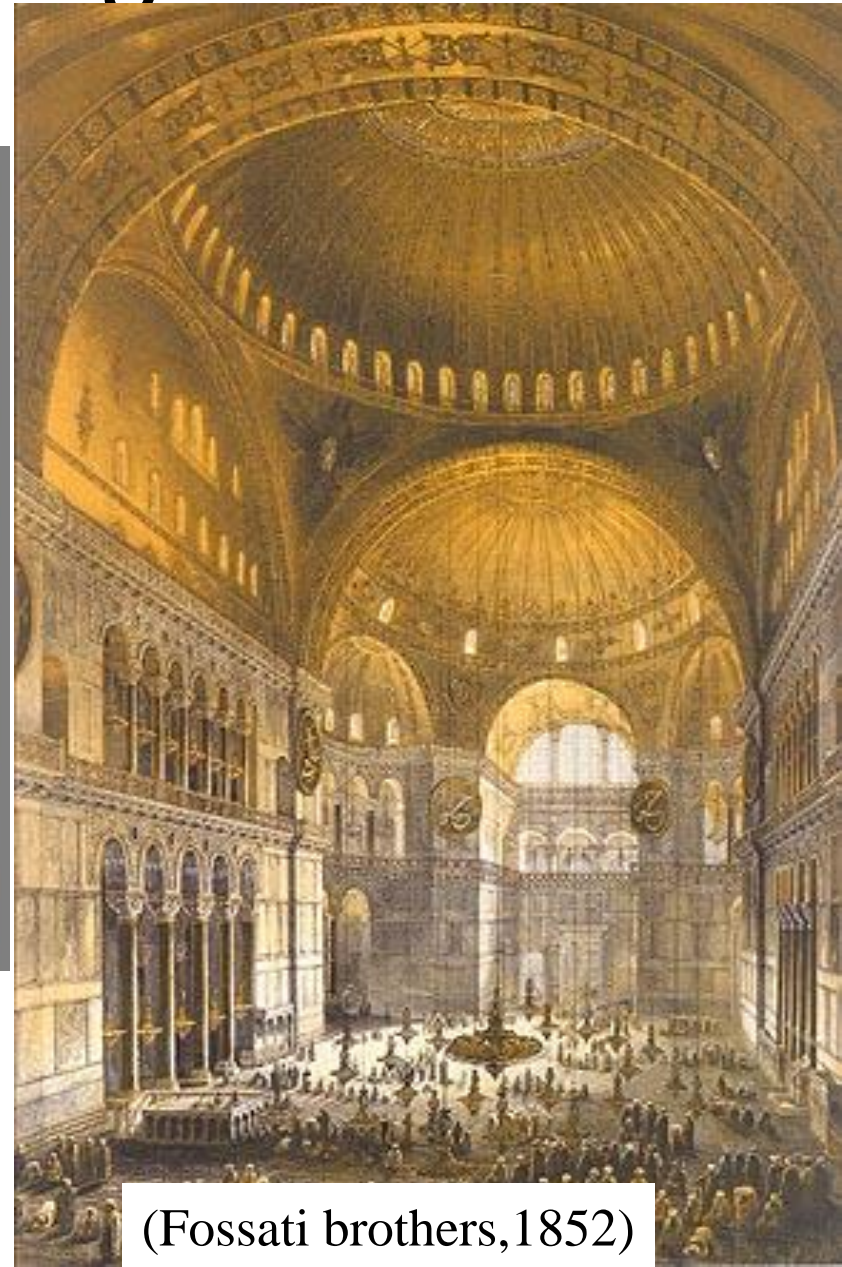


What the Middle Ages knew

- Hagia Sophia, Constantinople



(Paula Mochel)



(Fossati brothers, 1852)

What the Middle Ages knew

- **Paleochristian architecture in Italy**
 - **S. Paolo fuori le mura, Roma (386-480)**
 - **S. Costanza, Roma (IV)**
 - **S. Lorenzo, Milano (370)**
 - **S. Sabina, Roma (425)**
 - **S. Stefano Rotondo, Roma (V)**
 - **S. Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna (430)**
 - **Galla Placida's Mausoleum, Ravenna (V)**

What the Middle Ages knew

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

What the Middle Ages knew

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

What the Middle Ages knew

- **St Simeon/Qalat Siman, Syria (470)**



S. Vitale, Ravenna (547)
S. Apollinare, Ravenna (549)



What the Middle Ages knew

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



What the Middle Ages knew

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