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## Book Review—Maria Cristina Carile, *The Vision of the Palace of the Byzantine Emperors as a Heavenly Jerusalem*

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## Book Review—Maria Cristina Carile, *The Vision of the Palace of the Byzantine Emperors as a Heavenly Jerusalem*

### **Abstract**

In this inspiring book, *The Vision of the Palace of the Byzantine Emperors as a Heavenly Jerusalem*, which is based on her doctoral dissertation (joint doctorate Università degli Studi di Bologna and the University of Birmingham, 2007), art historian Maria Cristina Carile provides an interdisciplinary study about the relationship between the Imperial Palace and the Heavenly Jerusalem.

### **Disciplines**

Architectural History and Criticism | Architecture | Near Eastern Languages and Societies

### **Comments**

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## II. ABTEILUNG

Maria Cristina CARILE, *The Vision of the Palace of the Byzantine Emperors as a Heavenly Jerusalem*. Spoleto, Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2012. xiii, 226 p. 34 color and 50 b/w figures and drawings presented as a graphic insert of 42 tables with 84 illustrations. ISBN 978–88–7988–566–9.

In this inspiring book, *The Vision of the Palace of the Byzantine Emperors as a Heavenly Jerusalem*, which is based on her doctoral dissertation (joint doctorate Università degli Studi di Bologna and the University of Birmingham, 2007), art historian Maria Cristina CARILE provides an interdisciplinary study about the relationship between the Imperial Palace and the Heavenly Jerusalem. CARILE's aim is "to unravel the process in which the real earthly palace became associated with, and the model for the heavenly residence (p. xi)." In particular, she examines palaces within Late Antique and Early Byzantine periods, with a focus on the Christian realm. To those skeptical about the somewhat contradictory book title, which implies that the *secular palace* was envisioned as the *heavenly city*, CARILE convincingly explains that the Emperor, seen as the Earthly representative of God, and his imperial palace court were metaphorically and metaleptically ascribed unto the heavenly court, i. e. Heavenly Jerusalem (p. ix). Scholars, such as Ravegnani, Maguire, and Featherstone, have already suggested that this type of concept existed in the Middle Byzantine period.<sup>1</sup> In her book, CARILE pushes its date back to either the fifth century based on evidence stemming from images or the fourth century based on textual evidence. Because none of the Late Antique and Early Byzantine imperial palaces have been preserved to provide conclusive knowledge about their architecture and because the Heavenly Jerusalem is tied to the intellectual and religious thought, CARILE rightly undertakes her thought-provoking study about the heavenly and imperial courts as visual and textual constructs, complemented whenever possible by scarce archaeological evidence. She examines an impressive number of texts, images, and buildings that provide epistemological means for comprehension of the Heavenly Jerusalem as envisioned, represented, and perceived in Byzantine culture. By building on primary and secondary sources in numerous languages and combing

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<sup>1</sup> G. RAVEGNANI, *La corte di Bisanzio*, Ravenna 1984; H. MAGUIRE, *The heavenly court*, in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine court culture from 829 to 1204*. Washington D.C. 1997, 247–258; J. FEATHERSTONE, *Emperor and court*, in E. Jeffreys / J. Haldon / R. Cormack (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*. Oxford 2008, 505–517.

across the vast geographic territories of Roman-Byzantine Empire, CARILE's valuable synthesis promotes delicate understanding of the meaning and form of palatial architecture in Early Christianity.

The book is divided into six topical chapters, each followed by a conclusion: "The Imperial Palace in Late Antiquity: From a Constellation of Palaces to a Unique Indescribable Palace" (pp. 1–26); "Literary Palaces. On the Way to the Heavenly Jerusalem" (pp. 27–48); "Palaces in the Mosaics of the Rotunda at Thessaloniki?" (pp. 49–100); "The Apse Mosaic of Santa Pudenziana: Palace and City" (pp. 101–128); "The Palatium in the Mosaics of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo: The Palace and Its Representation" (pp. 129–156); and "The Great Palace of Constantinople: A Heavenly Jerusalem on Earth" (pp. 157–178). The Epilogue (pp. 179–180) summarizes the major conclusions of CARILE's research.

Chapters one and two provide a systematic analysis of the meaning of imperial palace in Late Antique and Early Byzantine periods. Rather than utilizing a chronological approach, CARILE divides her analysis into two segments that emphasize the notion of a palace as being sacred and indescribable and how this notion, common in the ancient Mediterranean world, was then enriched with the meaning of the Heavenly Jerusalem within the Judeo-Christian context. Thus, in chapter one, CARILE studies the imperial palace in Late Antiquity through texts and buildings. She demonstrates, for example, how historian Cassiodorus (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c), rhetorician Libanius (4<sup>th</sup> c), and court historian Procopius (6<sup>th</sup> c) used the term *palatium* and its cognates *regia* and *τὰ βασιλεια* to designate exclusively imperial residence. Despite different myths of origin for the term *palace* in their writings, the pervasive understanding was that the imperial palace was also sacred. Yet, because of its perceived impenetrable and indescribable sacredness, the imperial palace was also impossible to fully describe either in text or in image. According to CARILE, the lack of verifiable historical or archaeological evidence for imperial palaces leaves scholars two possibilities: either to follow Dyggve's semiotic understanding of meaning and form of palace, or to abandon research on the topic following Duval's archaeological studies that showed the devastating deficiency of palpable evidence for Late Antique and Early Byzantine palaces (p. 8). Fully aware of these critical issues, CARILE enthusiastically embarks on her demanding study and brings forward valuable conclusions, for instance, indentifying that the imperial palace was not understood as a singular site or building but rather as a set of multiple palaces across the Empire that marked the presence of the Emperor (pp. 2–3, 6). She underlines the recurrent *topos* in texts, partially confirmed by archaeological evidence, that as beacons of imperial presence, the palaces were prominent structures set on visible locations, marking the imperial and geographic topographies (p. 9). Her analysis of the meaning and form of the palace's gates and enclosing walls as metonyms

for the city's gates and walls, complemented by insistence on the large size of the palace and its multiple urban functions (mint, library, religious buildings, baths) convincingly demonstrates that the palace was a "city within the city." (p. 18). In my opinion, these notions about palace as a miniature city tie nicely with her starting premise that the imperial palace was understood by the contemporaries as a sacred city, including an overarching notion of the Heavenly Jerusalem. As CARILE illustrates in her book, by the fourth century both John Chrysostom, the priest of Antioch and later archbishop of Constantinople, and Peter Chrysologus, bishop of Ravenna, described the heavenly court by using references to the imperial court – including its impressive architecture and luxurious furnishing closely intertwined with the understanding of court as inseparable from the literal and sacred presence of the Emperor (pp. 24–25).

Chapter two examines numerous literary sources about palaces in greater detail. CARILE thoroughly analyzes the descriptions of palaces in many historical sources, such as the *Dionisiaca* by Nonnus of Panopolis (5<sup>th</sup> c), Suetonius' *Nero* (2<sup>nd</sup> c), Apuleius' *De Mundo* (2<sup>nd</sup> c), Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (3<sup>rd</sup> c BCE), and various early Christian sources (ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries) including *Vision of Kosmas the Monk*, *Life of St. Basil the Younger*, *Vision of Dorotheos*, *Life of Appa Matthaheus the Poor*, *Passio Perpetue et Felicitatis*, or the *Life of St. Salvius*, to name but a few. Her research might be strengthened had she also presented these sources chronologically. Additionally, her typological discussion of centrally and oblong planned palaces is seemingly too broad to justify better understanding of Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine palaces, though it does confirm a lack of uniformity in palace descriptions. However, CARILE's excellent command of primary ancient Greek and Latin sources in various genres including historical accounts, poetry, biblical references, philosophical and theological writings, and hagiographies, demonstrates her focus on vivid *ekphratic* descriptions of palaces that reveal vision as an imagined and felt experience that precludes archaeological reconstruction of the described palaces. Thus, she clarifies that her book is not an architectural guide through ancient palaces. Nevertheless, repetitive insistence on architectural particularities, such as vivid descriptions of bright roof tiles, doors, columns, porticoes, gardens, art works and mosaics, demonstrates the important role of contemporary architecture in the connection between the palace of the Roman Emperor and the visionary palaces as described in analyzed texts. Elements such as columns, brightness of the structure, and the elevated location of the palace, most often used as *topoi*, attribute the role of architecture in descriptions of heavenly palaces – Christian and non-Christian alike. CARILE convincingly demonstrates that "the notion of the palace mingled with that of the temple and the city" (p. 47) provides the basis for her study on the concept of "palace-city-temple" as one entity (p. 48).

Chapters three to six are case studies central to the book and focus on the visualization of the palace as a Heavenly Jerusalem within a Christian realm. The first three case studies are closely intertwined examinations of the preserved mosaics that show palatial architecture in three peculiar churches: the Rotunda in Thessaloniki, Santa Pudenziana in Rome, and Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. The final case study is on the now lost Great Palace of Constantinople. All these objects are widely studied and highly contested and CARILE should be commended for undertaking such a demanding task to analyze them together. CARILE provides admirable, thorough, and up to date historiographic research about each site in Thessaloniki, Rome, Ravenna, and Constantinople (modern Istanbul). She brings forward tenable and untenable features of numerous and often contrasting scholarly hypotheses about the meaning, date, and historical background of these sites. At times, this extensive analysis of previous scholarship seemingly overburdens CARILE's own voice on the topic. However, her excellent knowledge of mosaic as an artistic mean and a technique (including her careful examinations of the original and reconstructed layers of mosaics based on scientific analysis where available), her trained eye as an art historian, and her solid command of formal visual analysis, instigate further thoughts not only about the image of the palace in early Christian times, but also on their localized historical contexts.

CARILE concurs with the scholars who recognized the mosaics of the palatine architecture in the dome of the Rotunda in Thessaloniki as representation of the *parusiatic* vision of “the kingdom of God at the end of time” (p. 93). She also proposes that this mosaic could be re-dated to the fifth century and its program attributed to Galla Placidia (r. 423–437), Valentinian III (r. 423–425; 425–455) and Licinia Eudoxia (422–462) as possible donors (p. 99).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, CARILE concludes that even if earthly cities and palaces served as iconographical models for the architecture of the heavenly kingdom – as seen in Santa Pudenziana originally created under Innocent I (402–417) (p. 104) – the pervasive concept of “palace-city-temple” would enable believers to connect this generic but memo-

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<sup>2</sup> CARILE's suggestion to date the mosaics to the 430s may be strengthened with the analysis from C-14 dating of the undercoat mortar used in the Rotunda's mosaics, which concluded a date sometime between 428 and 594 (95,4%): M. KOROZE / G. PHAKORELLES / G. MANIATES, Μελέτη και χρονολόγηση με Άνθρακα-14 ασβεστοκονιαμάτων εντοιχίων ψηφιδωτών, in: J. Basiakos / E. Aloupe / G. Phakorelles (eds.), Αρχαιομετρικές μελέτες για την ελληνική προϊστορία και αρχαιότητα. Athens 2001, 317–326. B. FOURLAS, Die Mosaiken der Acheiropoietos-Basilika in Thessaloniki. Berlin 2012, 178–179, 228, further narrowed the date to a period between 428 and 500 based on his own comparative analysis with mosaics from the Acheiropoietos basilica and other Early Christian and Byzantine churches in Thessaloniki.

rable image with that of *Heavenly Jerusalem* as the city-temple from the vision of Ezekiel and the city-palace in the Revelation of John (p. 125). The hotly debated mosaic on the southern wall in the nave of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna provides the only surviving image of known palatine architecture, attributed to its preserved inscription *PALATIUM*. Here, CARILE embraces a “synthetic approach” which she uses to recognize the idealized image of the palace originally built for the Ostrogothic King Theodoric (r. 471–526), that “glorifies the city [of Ravenna] and raises its status to that of an imperial city” (p. 154); its divine character emphasized through the use of golden *tesserae* and thus resplendent in light “as a mirror of the heavenly kingdom on earth” (p. 155). The intertwining of political and religious ideologies in the imperial palace is exceptionally and thoughtfully emphasized in the final chapter about the Great Palace of Constantinople, the capital city of the Byzantine Empire mentioned in sources as New Rome and New, Second (future) Jerusalem. Constantinopolitan palace, also known as the “Sacred Palace,” was the primary residence of Byzantine emperors (330–1081) and *the* political and administrative center of the empire par excellence. It remains known only from fragmentary textual and archaeological evidence. CARILE rightly underscores that “Constantinople’s importance relied not merely on its political value as the imperial capital, but on the deep religious connotations of being the capital of an empire legitimated in the name of God” (p. 171). By extension, prominently set within the cityscape, the palace and its gilded roofs shining in the sunlight was deliberately created as the palpable image of the Heavenly Jerusalem on Earth (p. 178). Thus, CARILE successfully closes her investigation on how, over several centuries, “the real earthly palace became associated with, and the model for the heavenly residence” (p. xi).

In the conclusion, CARILE effectively summarizes critical socio-political and sacred meanings that stem from the imagery of imperial palace in Early Christian and Byzantine times. She rightly calls attention to the inseparable religious and secular realms as evidenced in mosaic representations of palatial architectural forms (porticoes, gardens, peristyles, and occasionally domes). Her study is extremely important as it highlights that sacred space is not exclusively related to churches. The concept of “palace-city-temple” reveals the multilayered homology between the imperial palace and the Heavenly Jerusalem deeply related to the Roman-Byzantine imperial ideology. At the same time, the ambiguous images of the Heavenly Jerusalem indebted to elements of real and most impressive palatial architecture also reveal how tangible and much desired the ultimate kingdom of God was to believers. Finally, CARILE’s invaluable book and the questions it raises offer numerous possibilities for further investigations and comparative

studies of the historical and conceptual afterlife of this Late Antique idea about imperial palace in other cultural contexts.

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Martin HINTERBERGER, *Phthonos: Mißgunst, Neid und Eifersucht in der byzantinischen Literatur*. Wiesbaden, Reichert 2013. *Serta Graeca*, 29. v, 520 S. ISBN 978-3-89500-914-3.

A study of envy in Byzantine literature requires above all two qualities: exhaustive coverage and a theoretical and analytical framework that can both organize the mass of material and make sense of it in the context of Byzantine culture. In both these respects, Martin HINTERBERGER's study succeeds masterfully. To begin with, there is a clear appreciation of the social construction of the emotions, and the differences between Byzantine *phthonos* and modern envy ("Worin sich Phthonos von modernem 'Neid' unterscheidet und was seine kulturspezifischen Merkmale sind, wird im Laufe der Untersuchung dargelegt werden," p. 5).

In the first chapter, HINTERBERGER contrasts the vocabulary for envy (broadly speaking) in modern German and ancient Greek; thus, he observes that, in late capitalist society, envy is associated with the resentment of the poorer classes ("In der spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaft ist heute der Neid ganzer Schichten von Besitzlosen gegen die Besitzenden," p. 14), whereas in Christian doctrine it takes its place as one of the seven capital sins, and is thus independent of class roles and distinctions. Interestingly, as HINTERBERGER notes, it is the only sin that provides no corresponding increment of pleasure (Lustgewinn). So too, jealousy (Eifersucht) has distinct characteristics in the two epochs; as HINTERBERGER notes, we cannot expect an exact overlap between the ancient and the modern terms: "Ebenso unwahrscheinlich ist es, daß begriffliche Unterscheidungen wie sie im Deutschen zwischen Neid, Eifersucht und Mißgunst getroffen werden, im Griechischen ebenfalls oder auf dieselbe Art und Weise vorgenommen wurden" (p. 20). HINTERBERGER subjects the Greek terms *baskania* (with its roots in notions of magic), *phthonos*, and *zēlos* to a meticulous analysis, and observes that *phthonos*, in particular, is not, like its modern counterpart, regarded as an inner feeling. Indeed, the emotions in general were conceived of, in antiquity as well as in the Middle Ages, as a response to an external stimulus (the basic sense of *pathos* as "experience"), most often in the form of the behav-