

“CLEANSES THE SINS WITH THE WATER OF THE PURE-FLOWING FONT”: FOUNTAINS FOR ABLUTIONS IN THE BYZANTINE CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CONTEXT

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My intention in this paper is to use primary and other literary sources available and to compare them with coeval archaeological findings and remains and with iconographic sources (miniatures, engravings, frescoes) to propose comprehensive reflection on the fountain for ablutions or *phiales* and their shape in the Byzantine Constantinopolitan context from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the Ottoman conquest. A particular attention will be given to the *phiale*, which once stood in the *atrium* of St. Sophia.

**Key-words:** fountains, churches, archeological evidence.

The fountains for ablutions of Constantinople are primarily known to art historian, through descriptions in the text. The actual remains, are scant, though not, as we shall see, nonexistent as in the case of the fountain for ablution of St. Sophia. As for the text, they take many forms, from quotation in histories and chronicles to ekphrastic descriptions<sup>1</sup>.

Generally speaking, the *phiale* was the fountain placed in the open court or *atrium*, which used to precede a church. The term may also refer to the square, octagonal or polygonal canopy erected over the fountain.<sup>2</sup> Church *phiales* were originally intended for the ablution of participants in the liturgy but from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onward, they were also used for the blessing of the waters at the Epiphany. The practice of washing hands before entering a sacred space belongs to the Antiquity. The archaeological finding of basins for ablutions in front of Greek and Roman temples shows how the act of purification in itself before entering a sacred space was extensively established. One of the examples worthy of note for this paper is a marble *perirrhanterion*<sup>3</sup> dated back to the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, belonging to the peristyle of the Temple of Poseidon at Isthmia.<sup>4</sup> A large shallow

<sup>1</sup> I presented a preliminary study on this topic at the International Conference *Anthropology, Archaeology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia or The Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck (1878–1920)*, University of Wales, Gregynog, 6<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> May 2006, under the title of „Byzantine and Umayyad influences on the *mescits* and *şadırvans* in Ottoman caravanserais courtyards”.

<sup>2</sup> See A. ORLANDOS, *Monasteriake architetonike*, Athens, 1958, pp. 110–14.

<sup>3</sup> *Perirrhanterion*. pl. *Perirrhanteria*: ritual water basin, usually made of marble, found in Archaic and later sanctuaries.

<sup>4</sup> The Temple of Poseidon is located on the Isthmus of Corinth (Greece), about 10 miles east of the Ancient City.

bowl rests on a stand composed of four women standing on the backs of recumbent lions. Between the women, four rams' heads are attached to the supporting ring (as we will see later, lions and rams are often employed in the Byzantine decoration of the fountains).

Also the literary sources refer to the practice of ablutions. Hesiod points out in his *Works and Days*:

And do not even pour a libation of gleaming wine at dawn to Zeus or the other immortals with unwashed hands; for they do not listen, but spurn the prayer. [...] And do not cross on foot the fair-pouring water of ever-flowing rivers before you have prayed, looking into the beautiful stream, and washed your hands with lovely, clear water: whoever crosses a river, unwashed in evil and in his hands, against him the gods feel resentment, and they give him pain afterwards.<sup>5</sup>

And in a passage of his *De morbo sacro* Hippocrates calls again attention to this habit:

At least it is god godhead that purifies, sanctifies and cleanses us from the greatest and most impious of our sins; and we ourselves fix boundaries to the sanctuaries and precincts of the gods, so that nobody may cross them unless he is pure. And when we enter we sprinkle ourselves thereby, but to wash away any pollution we may have already contracted.<sup>6</sup>

Adopting pagan religious structures in the Christian context is not something unusual.<sup>7</sup> Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century, people used to wash their hands and sometimes

<sup>5</sup> HESIOD, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, vol. I, (edited and translated by Glenn W. Most), LOEB Classical Library, Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, London, England, 2006, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> HIPPOCRATES, *Hippocrates*, vol. II, (with an English translation by W.H.S. Jones), LOEB Classical Library, Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, William Heinemann LTD: London, 1956, pp. 149–50.

<sup>7</sup> Providing a sacred space with basin for rituals connected with water, was common also in the Old Testament. As we can read in a passage of the Books of Chronicles in the Bible about the Temple's furnishing and in particular about the description of the famous Sea of Salomon: "2 He made the Sea of cast metal, circular in shape, measuring ten cubits from rim to rim and five cubits high. It took a line of thirty cubits to measure around it. 3 Below the rim, figures of bulls encircled it-ten to a cubit. The bulls were cast in two rows in one piece with the Sea. 4 The Sea stood on twelve bulls, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. The Sea rested on top of them, and their hindquarters were toward the center. 5 It was a handbreadth in thickness, and its rim was like the rim of a cup, like a lily blossom. It held three thousand baths. 6 He then made ten basins for washing and placed five on the south side and five on the north. In them the things to be used for the burnt offerings were rinsed, but the Sea was to be used by the priests for washing. [...] 8 He made ten tables and placed them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north. He also made a hundred gold sprinkling bowls. 9 He made the courtyard of the priests, and the large court and the doors for the court, and overlaid the doors with bronze. 10 He placed the Sea on the south side, at the southeast

their feet before entering the Church. The most ancient churches had in their *atrium* a fountain called κρήνη, χέρνιθον and later φιάλη, λουτήρ or φρεάτιον.<sup>8</sup> The historian Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* gives us the first account of a church edifice, which Paulinus built in Tyre between AD 313 and 322. The *ekphrasis*<sup>9</sup> sat in Eusebius's panegyric on Paulinus's new church at Tyre stands at the beginning of the tradition of *ekphraseis* of church buildings.

Now he had not permitted him that passed inside the gates to tread forthwith with unhallowed and unwashed feet upon the holy places within; but hath left a space exceeding large between the temple and the first entrances, and adorned it all around with four transverse colonnades, fencing the place into a kind of quadrangular figure [the *atrium*], with pillars raised on every side, and filling the spaces between them with wooden barriers of lattice-work rising to a convenient height; and in the midst thereof he had left an open space where men can see the sky, thus providing it with air bright and open to the rays of light. And there he had placed symbols of sacred purifications, by erecting fountains [*krenas* in the Greek text], right opposite the temple, whose copious streams of flowing water supply cleansing to those who are advancing within the sacred precincts.<sup>10</sup>

corner.**11** He also made the pots and shovels and sprinkling bowls. So Hiram finished the work he had undertaken for King Solomon in the temple of God: **12** the two pillars; the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars; the two sets of network decorating the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars; **13** the four hundred pomegranates for the two sets of network (two rows of pomegranates for each network, decorating the bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars. **14** the stands with their basins;**15** the Sea and the twelve bulls under it; **16** the pots, shovels, meat forks and all related articles. All the objects that Hiram-Abi made for King Solomon for the temple of the LORD were of polished bronze. **17** The king had them cast in clay molds in the plain of the Jordan between Succoth and Zarethan". And also in the Exodus 30: 18–21: "Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand. for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the Lord by fire, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come." ; more references in Exodus 40:31: He placed the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing. and Moses and Aaron and his sons used it to wash their hands and feet. They washed whenever they entered the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar, as the LORD commanded Moses"; a further mention is to be found in Psalm 26:6: "I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O Lord".

<sup>8</sup> For a complete history about the ablutions custom in the Greek Orthodox Church, see: F. CABROL, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne*, tome premier, première partie, A-AMENDE, Paris: Librairie Letanzey et Aré, 1924, pp. 109–110.

<sup>9</sup> According to Henry Maguire, in general, the *ekphraseis* is not completely divorced from the works of art that they describe. Their descriptions are at least partly accurate and supportive of a literal reading. But it cannot be denied that at the same time, they are not simply objective description but constructions that reflected the cultures of their composers and audience. See, especially: L. JAMES and R. WEBB, "To Understand Ultimate Thing and Enter Secret Places': Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium", *Art History* 14 (1991), pp. 1–17.

<sup>10</sup> EUSEBIUS, *Ecclesiastical History*, books VI–X, translated by J. E. L. Oulton, LOEB Classical Library, pp. 422–23.

In the *Epitaph of Bishop Eugenius* (c. 330), we can read the following description about the Church of Laodicea Combusta<sup>11</sup> in Lycaonia:

...And having spent a short time in the city of the Laodiceans, I was made bishop by the will of Almighty God, and this bishopric I governed with much merit for a full twenty-five years, and I rebuilt the whole church from the foundations with all the adornments around it, namely the porticoes (*stoai*), the *tetrastoa*, the paintings, the mosaics (*kêntesis*), the water fountain, the porch (*propulon*), and all the works of the stone-masons.<sup>12</sup>

An additional example of a later period is the *ekphrasis* in the *Epistolae* written by Paulinus Nolanus, who describes the *cantharus* for the hand washing in the *atrium* of St. Felix<sup>13</sup> in the Cimitile complex (built ca. AD 402).<sup>14</sup> He also mentions the fountain in the *atrium*<sup>15</sup> in front and on the right hand of the old basilica of St. Peter. The fountain was a masterpiece of the time. The structure was composed of a square tabernacle supported by eight columns of red porphyry, with

<sup>11</sup> Nowadays Ladik, Konya Province, in the Asian Part of Turkey.

<sup>12</sup> In: C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453*, Toronto: Medieval Academy of America University Toronto Press, 1986, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> There are several similarities between Eusebius's and Paulinus's descriptions not only of the *atrium*, but also of the entrances and the interior of the churches. Moreover, it seems possible that Paulinus could have known Eusebius's account of the church of Tyre. See: A. VAN DEN HOEK, and J. J. HERRMANN, Jr., "Paulinus of Nola, Courtyards, and Cantari", *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), p. 185.

<sup>14</sup> CABROL, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne*, p. 105; P. A. UNDERWOOD, "The Fountain of Life in Manuscript of the Gospels", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 5 (1950), pp. 72–73; Paulinus Nolanus Episcopus, *Epistolae*, Migne, Patrologia Latina, Volumen 061: Col 0153–0420C, Epistola XXII (0215B):

...quave praetento nitens atrio, fusa vestibulo est; ubi cantharum ministra minibus et oribus nostris fluenta ructatem, fastigatus solido aere tholus ornate et inumbrat, non sine mystica specie quatuor columnis salientes aquas ambiens. Decet enim ingressum ecclesiae talis ornats, ut quod intus mysterio salutary geritur, spectabili pro foribus opere signetur. Nam et nostri corporis templum quardijugo stabilimento una Evangelii fides sustinet; et cum eo gratia, que renascimur, fluat; et in eo Christus, quo vivimus, reveletur; profecto nobis in quatuor vitae columnas ille *aquae salientis in vitam aeternam fons nascitur*; nosque ab interno rigat, et fervet in nobis: sit amen possimus dicere, vel sentire mereamur habere nos cor ardens in via, quod Christo nobiscum inambulante flammatur.

Idem, *Epistolae*, Epistola XXXII (0338A):

Sancta nitens famulis interluit atria lymphis  
Cantharus, intrantumque manus lavat amne ministro.

<sup>15</sup> Another contemporary of Paulinus displayed a possible relationship to him. A follower of Damasus, possibly Leo the Great, was the author of an epigram inscribed on the architrave of a structure in the *atrium* of Saint Paul's Outside the Walls, an epigram that spoke of a *cantharus* that "vomits out fluids with a full mouth". See: E. DIEHL, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae veteres*, 4 vols. Berlin: Weidmann, 1961–67, Vol 1, No. 1514.

a dome of gilt bronze. Peacocks<sup>16</sup> (originally cast for a decoration to the railing of the walk surrounding the Tomb of Hadrian), then dolphins, and flowers, also of gilt bronze, were placed on the four architraves, from which jets of water flowed into the basin below. The border of the basin was made of ancient marble bas-reliefs, representing panoplies, griffins, etc. On the top of the structure were semicircular bronze ornaments worked „à jour”, that is, in open relief, without background, and crowned by the monogram of Christ. In the centre of the tabernacle and under the dome stood a giant bronze pinecone taken from the Baths of Agrippa.<sup>17</sup> Pinecone, peacocks and porphyry columns still survive in the Vatican Museums. But even if scholars have long identified the bronze pinecone as the *cantharus* mentioned by Paulinus, Huelsen<sup>18</sup> and Krautheimer<sup>19</sup> have not accepted this identification. In fact even in the *Liber Pontificalis* is recorded that Pope Symmacus (498–514), decorated the *cantharus* and the *atrium* with marbles and mosaics, without any mention to the most striking features of the fountain, the pinecone. Also the eight columns appeared in connection with the renovation of the fountain under Stephen II (752–57), since Paulinus had not only spoken explicitly of four columns, but had also spun an allegory of the Four Gospel around them.<sup>20</sup> So the bronze pinecone once in the *atrium* of

<sup>16</sup> The peacock for the pagans was the symbol of eternal life. The Christians adopted the symbol of the peacock, but developed a deeper meaning. Because of Revelation, the obscurity of death was cancelled by the victory of Christ's resurrection. Therefore it became the symbol of the eternal life of the soul and it is often represented in association with the water as in the case of manuscript of the gospels' headpiece. In the *Kitáb fi ma'rifat al-hiyal al-handasiyya* (Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices) of *al-Jazari*, written in 1206, he described fifty mechanical devices along with instructions on how to construct them. Among them there was also a Peacock fountain with automated servants. Al-Jazari's "peacock fountain" was a more sophisticated device for handwashing featuring humanoid automata as servants, which offer soap and towels. Mark E. Rosheim describes it as follows: "Pulling a plug on the peacock's tail releases water out of the beak; as the dirty water from the basin fills the hollow base a float rises and actuates a linkage which makes a servant figure appear from behind a door under the peacock and offer soap. When more water is used, a second float at a higher level trips and causes the appearance of a second servant figure with a towel!" See: Mark E., ROSHEIM, *Robot Evolution: The Development of Anthropotics*, Wiley: IEEE, 1994, p. 9. The choice of recurrent decorative patterns, both in architecture and paintings, such as the peacock for instance, is extremely interesting because of the cross culture peculiar to the Mediterranean context. Peacocks are to be found in Rome, as bronze decoration of the *phiale* of St. Peter, then in many Byzantine manuscripts in connection with water as a headpiece of Gospels or other sacred texts. They are also employed as *automata* both in Byzantine and Islamic context and always connected with water as we examined before. Peacocks are to be found also as bronze *acquamaniles* or spouting system (for fountains), from Islamic Spain and dated back to 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century. For these three masterpieces of Islamic Art see the catalogue of the exhibition at the Istitute du Monde Arabe in Paris : *Les Andalousies de Damas à Cordue* (28 November 2000 – 15 April 2001), pp. 111–113.

<sup>17</sup> R. LANCIANI, *Pagan and Christian Rome*, Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1893.

<sup>18</sup> C. HUELSEN, "Der Cantharus von Alt-St. Peter und die antiken Pignen-Brunnen", *Römische Mitteilungen* 19 (1904), pp. 87–116.

<sup>19</sup> R. KRAUTHEIMER, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae*, vol. 5, Città del Vaticano, Roma, 1977.

<sup>20</sup> A. VAN DEN HOEK, and J. J. HERRMANN, Jr., "Paulinus of Nola, Courtyards, and Cantari", p. 198.

St. Peter (until 1608), should be eliminated from the fourth-century situation recorded by Paulinus, and the word *cantharus* employed in order to indicate something having the shape of a vase as in the case of the large marble *cantharos* of St. Cæcilia in Rome.

Even Ioannes Chrysostomos intervened in favor of the practice of ritual ablution, which undoubtedly comes from the paganism (a custom later adopted also in the Muslim world)<sup>21</sup> with these words:

Ut in atriis domini in quibus oratur sint fonts constitutum est, ut qui orare volunt, prius abluant manus et tunc demum eas ad preces attollant” (Hom. in II Cor., IV, 13, P.G., t. LI, col 300).

A particular passage of the *De Oratione* written by Tertullianus and entitled *De Lavatione Manuum* focuses on the topic of the uselessness of the ablution if it is interpreted just as a mere act of washing hands without purifying the soul:

XIII. 1. Ceterum quae ratio est minibus quidem ablutis, spiritu uero sordente oratione obire? Quando et ipsis minibus spiritalis munditiae sint necessariae, ut a falso, a caede, a saeuitia, a neficiis, ab idolatria ceterisque maculis, quae spiritu conceptae manuum opera transiguntur, purae alleuentur? || Haec sunt uerae munditiae, non quas plerique superstitiose currant ad omnem orationem, etiam cum a lauacro totius corporis ueniunt, aquam sumentes. 2. Id cum scrupolosis percontarer et rationem requirerem, comperi commemorationem | esse Pilati: <eum> manus abluisse in Domini deditio. Nos Dominus adoramus, non dedimus, immo et aduersari debemus deditoris exemplo nec propterea manus abluere, nisi ob aliquod conuersationis humanae inquinamentum conscientiae

<sup>21</sup> In the Quran there are several verses which focus on the subject of purification and personal cleanliness like the following: “It is He who sends down water upon you from the sky with which to purify you” (*Sura of Booty* 8,11). Ablutions are a duty to be performed accurately before ritual prayers in order to reach a state of purity. The Quran describes in detail the procedure to be followed when performing them. “Believers, when you prepare for prayer wash your face and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads and wash your feet up to the ankles” (*Sura of the Table* 5.6). As it is possible to read from a Sahih Al-Bukhari’s *hadith* (Vol. 1, n. 161): Narrated Humran: (the slave of ‘Uthman) I saw ‘Uthman bin Affan asking for a tumbler of water (and when it was brought) he poured water over his hands and washed them thrice and then put his right hand in the water container and rinsed his mouth, washed his nose by putting water in it and then blowing it out. Then he washed his face and forearms up to the elbows thrice, passed his wet hands over his head and washed his feet up to the ankles thrice. Then he said, “Allah Apostle said ‘If anyone performs ablution like that of mine and offers a two rak’at prayer during which he does not think of anything else (not related to the present prayer) then his past sins will be forgiven”. After performing the ablution ‘Uthman said, “I am going to tell you a Hadith which I would not have told you, Had I not been compelled by a certain Holy Verse (the sub narrator ‘Urwa said: This verse is: ‘Verily, those who conceal the clear signs and guidance which we have sent down...’) (2.159). I heard the Prophet saying, ‘If a man performs ablution perfectly and then offers the compulsory congregational prayer, Allah will forgive his sins committed between that (prayer) till he offers it’.

causa. Ceterum satis mundae sunt manus, quas cum toto corpore in Christo semel lauimos.<sup>22</sup>

From the archaeological evidence it seems that in the Constantinopolitan context this habit lasted to the following centuries as we can see in the Church of St. John the Baptist, the Saray Basilica and Justinian's St. Sophia. The date of the basilica dedicated to St. John the Baptist near the Golden Gate is securely dated to 463 AD when, according to Theophanes, the senator Studios built the church and accommodated the *akoimetoï* monks there. Theodore the Studite, in the *Descriptio constitutionis monasterii Studii*, mentions a fountain in connection with the church (called *louter*), and its most likely location could have been in the middle of the *atrium*.<sup>23</sup> In 1937 Aziz Ogan, the director of the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, discovered the remains of a fifth century basilica in the second courtyard of the Saray, a couple of meters below the present garden.<sup>24</sup> A fountain was located in the southern portion of the courtyard, in front of the *nartex*. So it seems that the feature of an *atrium* with a fountain was almost standard in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century churches planning in Constantinople.

Even though there are no physical remains of St. Sophia's fountain,<sup>25</sup> Byzantine literature provides several descriptions such as the pseudo-Homeric poem by Paulus Silentiarius, the *Diegesis* or *Narratio de St. Sophia* (a legendary account of the construction of St. Sophia dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>26</sup> and the *ekphrasis* by Michael of Thessalonica (12<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>27</sup>. Strangely enough, in the *De aedificiis*, Procopius does not give any description of the fountain while, Paulus Silentiarius says that in the centre of the *atrium* there was a large fountain (called both *phiale* and *louter*), which was made by Iassian red marble and where water gushed from a bronze pipe (*strobilion*).<sup>28</sup> According to this source, the *phiale* of St. Sophia was

<sup>22</sup> QUINTUS SEPTIMIUS FLORENS TERTULLIANUS, "De Oratione", *Tertulliani Opera, Pars I*, Corpus Christianorum, Serie Latina, Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, MCMLIV, pp. 264–65.

<sup>23</sup> T. F. MATHEWS, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, pp. 33–37.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, nothing remains of the *phiale* of St. Sophia. According to the archaeological works carried out by Schneider (A. M. SCHNEIDER, *Die Grabung im Westhof der Sophienkirche zu Istanbul*, Berlin, 1941) in the *atrium* of St. Sophia, in the place where the fountain should have been located, there were a few remains of an Ottoman brick cover with a dumping hole in the West-East channel, which converged at the centre of the *atrium*. See G. BONFIGLIOLI, *S. Sofia di Costantinopoli: l'Architettura*, Bologna: Pàtron Editore, 1974, pp. 77–78.

<sup>26</sup> For the French translation of the Greek text, see: G. DAGRON, *Constantinople imaginaire (études sur le recueil des "Paria")*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984, pp. 191–264.

<sup>27</sup> C. MANGO and J. PARKER, "A Twelfth – Century Description of St. Sophia", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 14 (1960), p. 241.

<sup>28</sup> Translation from the original Greek text in M. L. FOBELLI, *Un tempio per Giustiniano: Santa Sofia di Costantinopoli e la Descrizione di Paolo Silenziario*, Roma: Viella, 2005, pp. 70–71:

used for the Epiphany blessing of the waters since the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Is it possible that between 537 (date of the first inauguration of St. Sophia) and 562 (date of the second inauguration of the church after the earthquakes and the collapse of a portion of the dome), the *atrium* changed? The fact that Procopius doesn't mention the fountain (if there were a fountain of course) is singular but not extraordinary since in the *De aedificiis* he never mentions that typology of building when he writes about churches' *atrium*. By the way, in the mosaics of St. Vitale (Ravenna, 547 AD c.), is represented a fountain in the shape of a white marble basin on a tall pedestal. The outer body of the basin is carved with the flutes pattern<sup>29</sup> as well as the bottom part of a porphyry *cantharos* dated back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century and found out in the excavation of the Topkapı Saray area and nowadays preserved in the Byzantine section of the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul. The shape of this porphyry *cantharos*, even if of different sizes, is basically the same as the one standing in the court of S. Cæcilia, and that one in front of St. Cosimato in Trastevere at Rome; and such was the famous *calix marmoreus*, which formerly stood near the church of SS. Apostoli, mentioned in the Bull of John III (570 AD), by which the boundary line of that parish was determined.<sup>30</sup> This *cantharos* typology is often represented in the headpiece of the manuscripts of the Gospels, and in particular in the Athonite context. In the mosaic fountain of St. Vitale two streams of water fall into the marble basin in two arcs thanks to a simple cylindrical *strobilion* (pipe). A very similar representation of this combination appears in the fol. 8v of the Canon Tables from the Codex 4. Gospel Book (13<sup>th</sup> century) belonging to the library of the Athonite Monastery of Dionysiou; here the *cantharos* surmounted a pedestal made by an acanthus capital as well as the one in the mosaic of St. Vitale.

But let's focus again on the fountain in the *atrium* of St. Sophia. In the *Diegesis* or *Narratio*, the fountain had twelve niches (called *στούας φρετίας*) where the water was spouted out from the mouth of twelve stone lions:

All'estremità occidentale del tempio immortale

Vedrai un atrio circondato da quattro portici:

uno solo di essi è congiunto al narcece, mentre gli altri

sono aperti ed accessibili da molteplici vie. Nel prezioso centro del lungo atrio si trova

una fontana molto ampia, scavata dalla cima di Iaso,

da cui un flusso sonoro zampilla e lancia nell'aria

un getto che balza con forza dalla bronzea cannella,

un getto che scaccia tutte le sofferenze, quando il popolo,

nel mese delle vesti dorate, per la mistica festa di Dio,

attinge di notte coi vasi l'acqua pura,

un getto che proclama la potenza di Dio: la putredine

mai attacco quelle acque che non marciscono

anche se dopo lungo volgere di anni restano in casa

serbate nella cavità di una brocca, lontano dalla sorgente.

<sup>29</sup> The same decoration is to be found in the basin of the *phiale* of St. George in Thessalonica as it is showed below in the text.

<sup>30</sup> LANCIANI, *Pagan and Christian Rome*, p. 39.



In the *atrium* (*phialê*) he made twelve conduits and stone lions that spouted water for the ablutions of the common people.<sup>31</sup>

This anonymous description dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century, finds an extremely strong correspondence with the fountain situated in the Court of the Lions in the Alhambra palace at Granada. In fact, in the center of the court is the celebrated Fountain of Lions, a magnificent alabaster basin supported by the figures of twelve lions in white marble, each one of them spouting water from the mouth through a metal conduit. Even if this fountain is chronologically and geographically faraway from the *Diegesis* it's impossible not to notice the resemblance between the literary description and the material evidence of the Fountain of the Lions.<sup>32</sup>

The other source, the *ekphrasis* of Michael of Thessalonica, is also not very helpful for the reconstruction of the fountain in the *atrium* of St. Sophia because it is not completely clear whether he uses the term *louter* to denote the *atrium* as a whole, or merely its fountain<sup>33</sup>:

And likewise the *louter* to the west, this is four sided and beautiful and it is encompassed by a border in the form of narrow way, which goes around the *louter* on all sides, so that one may see, alongside the straight and transverse

<sup>31</sup> MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453*, p. 101.

<sup>32</sup> The Fountain of the Lions in the Alhambra Palace had a model in the Fountain of the Temple of Solomon, described in the Books of Chronicles of the Old Testament. The parallels are explicit in a poem of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, a Hispano-Hebrew philosopher and poet (1021–1058), is a tissue of quotes and parallels of the Hebrew Bible:

There is a pond, like the Sea of Solomon  
 It doesn't rest over bulls  
 but over lions arranged in circles:  
 They seem to roar to their prey.  
 Water flows from their mouth without end,  
 it springs like the torrents of a stream.  
 It runs to their feet through channels  
 arranged like open drainpipes under the Sun  
 to irrigate the bloomed parterres.  
 Their limpid streams flood the grass  
 They want to refresh the Garden of the Myrtles!  
 They elevate themselves over clouds just up to the top of the trees  
 and they scatter balsamic perfumes  
 smelling just like the scent of the myrtles and the incense.  
 The birds chirp on the branches,  
 looking beneath the date palm trees.  
 The flowers form lusty private open rooms  
 of rose, narcissus and camphor tree scents.  
 Their varieties are countless!

See: SOLOMON IBN GABIROL, *The Fountain of Life (Fons Vitae)* (excerpt), tr. by Harry E. Wedeck, 1962. The text is available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/fons/fons.txt>.

<sup>33</sup> MANGO-PARKER, "A Twelfth – Century Description of St. Sophia", p. 242; see also: DAGRON, *Constantinople imaginaire*, p. 207.

*lines* of that which surrounds it, its own *sides* too are smaller, in as much as the whole of what is included is wont to be less than the whole of that which circumscribes it. [...] From this passage on may enter the narrow way which is in the middle, and from this one may reach the open courtyard of the *louter*, and thence go into the holy *protemenisma*...<sup>34</sup>

The only literary sources that mentions a canopied structure is the late fifteenth century Persian version of the *Diegesis*: according to this source the fountain was made by a single piece of red stone (as well as in Paulus Silentiarius, who mentions the “Iassian red marble”) surmounted by a dome containing the images of Christ and the twelve Apostles and the emperors from Constantine to Justinian. This description has a strong resemblance with the *phiale* in the post-Byzantine Athonite context.<sup>35</sup> In the Athos in fact the *phiale* has usually a round plan, with an octagonal peristyle,<sup>36</sup> surmounted by a domed canopy. In the centre of the peristyle, there is a stone basin with one or more water jets.<sup>37</sup> As in the case

<sup>34</sup> MANGO-PARKER, “A Twelfth – Century Description of St. Sophia”, p. 236.

<sup>35</sup> The Ottoman Turks first appeared on the Athos at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It became part of the Ottoman Empire in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The monks managed to secure their privileges, their administrative autonomy, and their lands from Sultan Murad II and his successors, but they were obliged to pay an annual poll tax (*haraci*), as well as very high extra taxes. What is extremely interesting is the stylistic resemblance between the Athonite *phiales* and its coeval Ottoman fountain for ablutions or *şadırvan*. For this comparison see: F.A. BROILO, “Le *mesçit* dei caravanserragli urbani ottomani di Bursa, Edirne e Cipro: una nuova interpretazione”, *Annali di Ca' Foscari: rivista della Facoltà di Lingue e letteratura straniere*, Serie orientale, 36 (2005) Editoriale Programma, pp. 81–96; and also. F.A. BROILO, “Ottoman Fountains: A Comparative study on the *şadırvan* fountains inside the courtyard of Istanbul Royal Mosques (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries)”, *Ipek Yolu, Konya Kitabı, Prof. Dr. Rüçan Arık ve Prof. Dr. M. Oluş Arık'a armagan*, Özel Sayı, Konya, 2007, pp. 191–198.

<sup>36</sup> It has been known for some time that the prevalent octagonal form in the baptisteries and fountain had definite symbolic meaning. In the Christian Church the number eight is somehow associated with the resurrection of Christ and the awakening of the dead. In the first four distichs inscribed around the font of St. Ambrose's baptistry of St. Thecla at Milan and preserved in the *Sylloge Laureshamensis* (Cod. Vat. Palat. 833, 9<sup>th</sup> century) there are reported these words:

Octachorum s[an]c[t]os templum surrexit in usus,  
 octagonus fons est munere dignus eo.  
 Hoc numero decuit sacri baptismatis aulam  
 suregere, quo populis vera salus rediit  
 luce resurgentis Chr[ist]i, qui claustra resolvit  
 mortis et e tumulis suscitavit exanimes  
 confessosq[ue] roes maculoso crimine solvens  
 fontis puriflui diluit inriguo.

For the English translation and the interpretation of these distichs see: UNDERWOOD, “The Fountain of Life in manuscript of the Gospels”, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> See: A. ALPAGO NOVELLO and G. DIMITROKALLIS, *L'arte Bizantina in Grecia*, Milano: Federico Motta Editore, 1995; and F. W. HASLUCK, *Athos and its Monasteries*, London: Kegan Paul, 1924.

of St. Sophia at Constantinople, the frescos inside the dome are related with the rite of the baptism. Most of the Athonite monasteries have one *phiale*. Generally speaking it is situated between the *katholikón* and the *trápeza* (the refectory). Nevertheless, in the Athonite fountains of the Athos, the water spouts only during the days at the time of the blessing ceremony of the waters. This ceremony, called during the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries *ἀγιασμός τῶν ἁγίων Θεοφανίων* and later *μέγας ἀγιασμός*, celebrates the Epiphany's Eve, before the Vespers and the Holy Mass.<sup>38</sup> One of the best example is nowadays located in the Monastery of Chilandari, dedicated to the memory of the Presentation of the Mother of God. North of the *katholikón* and almost in the centre of the courtyard of the monastery stands the *phiale* for the blessing of the waters, circular in form and covered with a dome supported on eight columns. Erected in the year 1784 and decorated, as the inscription confirms, in May of the year 1847 "by the hand of the priest monk Macarius Galatsianos and his assistants", this fountain follows the Byzantine models. The dome is decorated in the inside with scenes from the blessing of the waters, figures of angels and prophets, and depictions of the Baptism, the Zoodochos Pege (The Life-giving Source), and other subjects.<sup>39</sup> In the Athonite context, as far as it should have been in Constantinople, the representation of the blessing of the waters and the Baptism is very frequent within the dome of the fountain: the oldest paintings dates back to 1635 and are situated in the *phiale* of the Great Lavra.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless,

<sup>38</sup> G. MILLET, "Recherches au Mont-Athos, III. *Phiale* et Simandre à Lavra". *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, Vol. 29 (1905), pp. 105–123; CH. WALTER *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church*, London, 1982; J. J. NORWICH, R. SITWELL and A. COSTA, *Mount Athos*, London: Hutchinson of London, 1966; A. BRYER and M. CUNNINGHAM (ed.), *Mount Athos & Byzantine Monasticism*, Aldershot: Variorum, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1996.

<sup>39</sup> AA. VV., *The treasures of Mounth Athos, Illuminated Manuscripts*, Vol. I, Athens: Ekdotike Athenons S.A, 1973, p. 260. Many other monasteries are provided with the *phiale*. For instance, in the Monastery of Esphigmenou, dedicated to the Ascension of our Lord, south of the *katholikón* and opposite the great (south) gate of the monastery stands the *phiale* for the blessing of the waters. It is covered by a dome supported on eight columns between which are set marble plaque with sculpted decorations. It was erected in 1815 by the abbot Euthimius, on the site of the old *phiale*, which dated to the time of Emperor John V Palaeologus (1341–1391); another example is situated in the Monastery of Xeropotamou dedicated to the Forty Martyrs; in fact, within the monastery walls, to the right of the *katholikón*, is a red marble *phiale*, transported and placed here, according to its inscription, by Caesarios Dapontes around 1790. Its colonnade, the gift of the hieromonach Seraphim of Kephellenia, was constructed in 1783. Inside the hemispheric dome there are contemporary representations of baptism and the blessing of the waters, while on one of the closures of the colonnade can be seen a representation of the monastery in relief.

<sup>40</sup> The *phiale* of the Great Lavra is the oldest and the largest among the Athonite examples. It seems it was founded by Athanasios the Athonite during the years of the Emperors Romanos the Second and Nikephoros Phocas. This *phiale*, resulting from a reconstruction attributed to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, is composed by eight columns with *muqarnas* capitals, which are surmounted by a dome with frescos showing the baptism of Christ and the blessing of the waters. The columns are joined together by arched carved marble slabs, probably reused from the old *iconostasis* of the *katholikón*. In the centre of the peristyle, there is a large flat porphyry basin with a bronze *strobilion*. See: CAPUANI-PAPAROZZI, *Athos: le fondazioni monastiche. Un millennio di spiritualità e*

the Athonite examples are important because they clearly show the continuity of a Byzantine model in post-Byzantine architecture. To go back to the canopy feature of the *phiale* of St. Sophia it should be useful to take into consideration some coeval representations. As far as we know, Cyriacus of Ancona brought a reasonably accurate drawing to the West about the time of the fall of Constantinople. Copied by Giuliano da Sangallo toward the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, we know it through Giuliano's copies. The canopy on columns in front of the façade must be the fountain, which was known to have been in the *atrium*, shows a strong similarity with the Athonite examples.<sup>41</sup> In fact in the Codex 139m. Proskynetarion dated back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and preserved in the Athonite Monastery of Gregoriou, in the fol. 8r, which represents "The sanctuary of the church at Jerusalem" on the left of the church (which means in front of the church itself) there is a small canopied building which has a strong resemblance with the canopy drawn by Sangallo (two arches, a simple entablature and a dome). If Giuliano's drawing were reliable or not, I can't say but there is another element that should be helpful in that way: he drawn the nearby cypress trees admired by the pilgrims spout from the upper cornice of the façade.<sup>42</sup> The detail of the cypress trees in Giuliano's drawing is very interesting because between 1424 and 1453 an anonymous Russian traveler, who wrote a report on the relics of Constantinople, gives us the description of a fountain for the blessing of the water nearby St. Sophia mentioning exactly the cypress trees:

In front of the door situated behind the sanctuary of St. Sophia, there is the place where the water is blessed; there is a basin made by green slate [...]; this basin is covered by a lead roof [...]; four cypress trees and two palms grow up in this place.<sup>43</sup>

Nowadays, situated in front of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum's entrance and catalogued with the inventory number 5843, is a basin made by a kind of greenish stone provided lateral hole for the water. The rim is delineated with an extremely simple carved line. I can't say for sure if this basin, probably an antique piece has been reused as a *phiale* or, even more fascinating, if is it somehow related with the one described by the Russian traveler in the XV century. A third representation of a canopy of this type is drawn in the Codex 27. Homilies of

*arte ortodossa*, p. 113; and MILLET, "Recherches au Mount-Athos, III, *Phiale* et Simandre à Lavra", pp. 106–108.

<sup>41</sup> Another reasonable representation of the canopy of St. Sophia's *phiale* is a drawing made by Zacharias Wehme (1550–1606) in 1582. In that drawing in fact behind the walls, which surrounds the mosque, is visible a columned canopy and two cypress trees.

<sup>42</sup> C. SMITH, "Cyriacus of Ancona's Seven Drawings of Hagia Sophia", *Art Bulletin*, Vol. LXIX(1987), p. 19; see also S. BORSI, *Giuliano da Sangallo: i disegni di architettura e dell'antico*. Roma: Officina Edizioni, 1985.

<sup>43</sup> B. DE KHITROWO, *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, Genève. 1889, p. 229; and: G. P. MAJESKA, "St. Sophia in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: the Russian Travelers and the Relics". *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 27 (1973), 69–88.

Gregory the Theologian (dated back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century) and preserved in the Athonite Monastery of Iveron. In the fol. 428v is pictured the scene of “The healing of the man borne blind”: the blind man is seen bending over a pool (made of red stone?), which has a quatrefoil shape and is sheltered by a canopy, where he bathes his eyes. Another important representation of a canopy is to be found in a miniature belonging to the Codex 463. Barlaam and Joasaph, dated back to the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century, and preserved in the same library. In fact, in the fol. 100r “Joasaph beholds Paradise in a dream”<sup>44</sup> he is depicted standing in front of a building in prayer, the follows the portrayal of the young prince asleep on the ground. Following the thread of the story, Joasaph is next seen in paradise, which is represented by foliage and trees. Joasaph stands between two angels. To their left is pictured a fountain covered by a canopy. A square shaped parapet with a high pedestal above which there is a round basin. From the centre of the basin starts a long *strobilion* decorated with a pinecone superimposed by an imperial eagle with open wings.<sup>45</sup> The frontal slab of the parapet is provided with a lion’s head from which the water flows out into the garden as a small river. It is really interesting even if not surprising, that the miniaturist choose a fountain to represent the Paradise (it may not be mere coincidence that, from the 7<sup>th</sup> century at least, the *atrium* with the fountain of St. Peter in Rome was called *paradisus*).<sup>46</sup> In this composition we find the columned canopy, the high *strobilion* for the multiple jets of water and the lion, so to say that the main features are the same as the ones described in the late fifteenth century Persian version of the *Diegesis*. A *strobilion* like the one represented in the Codex 463. Barlaam and Joasaph, is to be found in the *phiale* of the Athonite Monastery of Great Lavra: this *strobilion* was identified by Millet as the one consacred in 1060, according to a dedicatory inscription and is surmounted by an eagle with open wings as well as the one in the in the fol. 100r “Joasaph beholds Paradise in a dream”, showing that the miniature was probably inspired by real models existent at that time. The representation of a tall *strobilion* characterized on the top by a pinecone from which the water spouts onto the underlying basin, finds out its materialization in a twelfth century fountain located in the southwestern corner of the cloister of the Norman cathedral at Monreale. A round marble basin into which water flows in several streams from a spherical element (resembling the pinecone), located at the head of a chevron-carved shaft

<sup>44</sup> In deep prayer Joasaph falls asleep and has a vision in which he is transported to paradise and afterwards to hell.

<sup>45</sup> An earlier and similar representation is to be found in the carved decoration of the so called sarcophagus of “the Bishop Theodore”, preserved in the Church of St. Apollinare in Classe (Ravenna); in one of the sarcophagus’ short sides is carved a *cantharos* with a flutes decoration on the base (such as the porphyry one in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul), but rather than the usual *strobilion* there is a croix surmounted by an upturned bird (probably the dove representing the Holy Spirit as it is represented in the *Porta Regia* of St. Sophia at Constantinople) with opened wings. Each side of the *cantharos* is flanked by two doves (in the funerary context the dove represents the peace and happiness of the soul). A. RIEGL, *Arte tardoromana*, Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1959, p. 154–55, Fig. 54.

<sup>46</sup> H.L. KESSLER, *Old St. Peter’s and Church Decoration in Medieval Italy*, Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 2002, p. 9.

(in the place of a metal *strobilion*) through which the water rises. A further representation of a tall *strobilion* belongs to a fresco (dated back to 1366) in the southwest chapel of the Brontochion of Mistra,<sup>47</sup> where is depicted Gregorius Nazianzos. The *strobilion* in the centre of the exagonal<sup>48</sup> parapet ends in a vase (decorated with some kind of fish scales which could resemble the pinecone pattern). The vase is surrounded by a number of snakes from which several streams of water fall down into the parapet. The frontal slab of the parapet is provided with a head (maybe a lion?) spouting out water in a small rectangular basin attached to the parapet. It is interesting to notice that a similar portrait of Gregorius Nazianzos (related with water and its conduits) is to be found in the fol. 4v of the Codex 399 preserved in the Monastery of St. Catherine on the Mount Sinai ad dated back to the second quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>49</sup> More comparable examples of tall *strobilion* crowned by the pinecone element are often to be found in the Athonite context of the miniature paintings. See for example the Codex 14 Gospel Lectionary (12<sup>th</sup> century), from the library of the Monastery of Dionysiou: *Headpiece*, fol. 80r, two birds flanking a squared basin from which emerged a tall *strobilion* which ends with a pinecone from which the water spouts out in several streams; *headpiece*, fol. 214r, two birds (peacocks?) flanking an elaborated *catharos* from which departs a tall *strobilion* spouting out water in several streams. An additional example is preserved in the Unnumbered Codex. Gospel Lectionary, (11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century), from the library of the Monastery of Iveron: *headpiece*, initial letter E fol. 1r: in the centre of the upper side two peacocks are seen on either side of a fountain.<sup>50</sup> The fountain, in the shape of a *phiale* (round basin maybe made of a green stone supported on a pedestal) is flanked on its rim by two beasts (maybe lions or tigers?) in the shape of handles; the *phiale* is provided with a tall pinecone *strobilion*. A basin exactly like this is nowadays preserved in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum but is originally from Italy. It is drilled for a

<sup>47</sup> G. MILLET, *Monuments Byzantins de Mistra*, Paris, 1910, Pl. 103/2: See also: L. BOURAS, "Dragon Representations on Byzantine Phialae and Their Conduits", *Gesta* (International Center of Medieval Art), Vol. 16 (1977), No. 2, p. 65.

<sup>48</sup> Idem, "Dragon Representations on Byzantine Phialae and Their Conduits" p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> See: M. L. DOLEZAL and M. MAVROUDI "Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the Garden of St. Anna and the Ekphrasis of Gardens", *Byzantine Garden Culture* (edited by Antony Littlewood, Henry Maguire, and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn), Dumbarton Oaks Trustees for Harvard University: Washington, D.C., 2000, pp. 21, 24, Fig. 18.

<sup>50</sup> But several examples of these representations are very frequent also outside the Athonite context. For instance in the Canon Table of the Garrett Gospels (Princeton. Univ. Lib. Cod. Garrett 2, fol. 35v) originally belonged to Callistratos, a priest-monk in Constantinople; here two peacocks flanks an elaborated *cantharos*, provided with a pinecone *strobilion*. On the rim of the *cantharos* there are two birds drinking the water from the fountain. See: G. VIKAN (edited by), *Illuminated Greek Manuscripts from American Collections, an exhibition in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 176–178, Fig. 91.

water supply and is carved of purple and white „pavonazetto” marble from Phrygia and has feline handles. Another one has recently been excavated in a church at Petra, Jordan, where it had been reused in the nave, probably for ritual ablution even if not provided for water supply and in the shape of a classical *cantharos*. They both date back to 170–210 AD. The main difference between the athonite representation and the two basins is in the choice of the beasts depicted. In fact, it seems that in the case of the two carved basins the animals represented are panthers.<sup>51</sup> Even if the association between felines and water representation is not so frequent as the one depicting birds and water, we can find several examples of that kind. For instance in one of the headpieces of the Codex No. 179, preserved in the Monastery of Mount Sinai, two leopard are represented flanking a porphyry basin provided with a pinecone *strobilion*.<sup>52</sup>

Byzantine sources give several indications of other *phiales*. Constantinus Porphyrogenitus used the word *louter* to indicate the *atrium* with the *phiale*, which stood before the entrances of the Church of the Apostles, the Church of the Virgin of the Pege and the Church of St. Mocius as well as in front of St. Sophia. A comprehensive description of this kind is to be found in the *Vita Basilii* by Constantine VII, where it is described the Mesokepion in the Great Palace precinct near the Nea Ekklesia built during the reign of Basil I (867–886). The two fountains of the *atrium* of the Nea are described as follows:

On the western side, in the very *atrium*, stand two fountains, the one to the south, the other to the north.... The southern one is made of Egyptian stone, which we are wont to call Roman [porphyry], and is encircled by serpents excellently carved. In the middle of it raises a perforated pinecone supported by hollow white colonnettes disposed in circular dance formation, and these are crowned by an entablature that extends all round. From all of these [elements] water spouted forth and inundated the underlying surface of the trough. The fountain to the north is made of so-called Sagarian stone (which resembles the stone called Ostrites) and it, too, has a perforated pine-cone of white stone projecting from the center of its base, while all round the upper rim of the fountain the artist has fashioned cocks, goats and rams of bronze, and these, by means of pipes, vomit forth jets of water into the underlying floor. Also to be seen there are cups, next to which wine used to spout up from below to quench the thirst of passers by.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Sec: A. VAN DEN HOEK and J. J. HERRMANN, Jr., “Paulinus of Nola, Courtyards, and Cantari”, p. 196, 213, Figs. 13–14.

<sup>52</sup> A. PALIOURAS, *Sacro monastero di Santa Caterina*. Sacro Monastero del Sinai Edizioni, 1985, Fig. 154.

<sup>53</sup> MANGO. *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453*, pp. 194–95.

The description of the fountain to the north<sup>54</sup>, decorated with bronze animals (cocks, goats and rams) is even more interesting if compared with a miniature belonging to the Gospel Book, now in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma. The folio 5r correspond to Christ in Majesty, but on the upper part of the folio, above the Christ, there is the representation of a canopied fountain with a high *strobilion* in the centre and a cocks and a peacock one on the left and on the right part of the upper rim.<sup>55</sup> On both sides of the fountain is flanked by a hart. This kind of composition with harts or deers and several types of birds is very frequent in the representation of the Fountain of Life.<sup>56</sup> Underwood found out three examples of this representation related with the mosaics in the baptistery of Salona, Stobi and Butrinto.<sup>57</sup> At Heraclea Lynkestys (Bitola) in the floor mosaic of the narthex of the Large Basilica there is another representation of two deers or harts flanking a *cantharos*.<sup>58</sup> A similar mosaic composition is nowadays in the British Museum and belongs to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century Cartage. Here two harts are depicted flanking a squared parapet with a classical *cantharos* in the centre characterized by a cylindrical spout from which two streams of water fall into the pool in two graceful arcs.

Basically from the same period of the fountains of the Nea, but in the Islamic context, is the so-called *pharaoh's tray* from the Great Mosque of Samarra (completed in 852 AD), which nowadays has been moved to the Khan Mirjan in Baghdad. According to al-Muqaddasi, an Arabic traveler born in Jerusalem but of Persian origin who visited Samarra in 895, the fountain was a jet with non-ending water made of a large piece of stone.<sup>59</sup> The upper rim of the basin is marked by a

<sup>54</sup> This fountain is comparable to the one described in the Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the Garden of St. Anna: "At one point there was as a landmark a fountain that could both reserve water and gush it forth, occupying the place of the centre, as if setting up to view evenly all the lines flowing from the centre toward the periphery and again rebounding toward the centre". According to Hyrtakenos the artist had created an assemblage of bounding lions, leaping leopards and swaying bear that were so lifelike they could frighten an onlooker; in addition, carved birds were perched on the rim of the basin, drinking from the water. For the English translation of Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the Garden of St. Anna, see: DOLEZAL-MAVROUDI "Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the Garden of St. Anna and the Ekphrasis of Gardens", pp. 105–158.

<sup>55</sup> J. LOWDEN, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, London: Phaidon Press, 2001, p. 295, Fig. 171.

<sup>56</sup> The Fountain of Life as it is called, appears quite often as part of the Canon Tables in certain manuscripts of the Four Gospels. It is characterized by three elements: the *piscina*, the eight columns and the dome. The Fountain of Life appears, just to mention some of the most representative examples of that kind, in the Rabula Gospels, which is preserved in Florence (Bibl. Laurenziana, Plut. I. 56, fol. 2r) and also in the Gospel of Saint-Médard de Soisson (Paris; Bibl. Nat., cod. Lat. 8850) in the Godescalc Gospel Lectionary (Paris; Bibl. Nat., nouv. acq. lat. 1203), in the Gospel of Saint Emeram (Munich; Staatsbibl., Clm. 1400, cim. 55).

<sup>57</sup> UNDERWOOD "The Fountain of Life in manuscript of the Gospels", pp. 52–53.

<sup>58</sup> At Heraclea Lynkestys, in the floor of the baptistery, is a mosaic depicting two peacocks flanking a beautiful *cantharos* (carved with fluted decoration).

<sup>59</sup> See: Y. TABBAA "Toward an interpretation of the use of water in Islamic courtyards and courtyard gardens", *Journal of Garden History*, Vol. VII/3 (1987), p. 199; and: R. HILLENBRAND, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994, pp. 74, 363–64.



simple carved line. When functioning, this large fountain (over 3 m in diameter) would have sent a single jet of water straight up in the air to fall back in a flat basin as in the Byzantine *phiale* (Geat Lavra, St. Demetrius).<sup>60</sup>

But lets go back to Constantinople and more particularly to the twelfth century *typicon* of the Church of the Pantocrator, that cites a couple of fountains (*phiale* in the Greek text), which were supposed to be in the *atrium* of the churches built by Joannes Comnenus II before 1136.<sup>61</sup>

A further description, written by Nicetas Choniata, refers to a great *phiale* of red stone, which was removed by emperor Andronicos Comnenos (1182–1185) from the palace gardens to the Church of the Forty Martyrs in the center of the capital:

...and he moved from the garden of the Great Palace into the courtyard of the church that enormous porphyry basin whose rim is encircled by the coils of two monstrous serpents, a marvelous sight.<sup>62</sup>

According to the description, the rim of this *phiale* was surrounded by two terrifying snakes, which formed spirals. This description may refer to a magnificent *phiale* of reddish stone, which survived in Constantinople, exhibited in the exonarthex of the church of St. Sophia (and very often misinterpreted as a baptism font such as another porphyry octagonal basin preserved at Magdeburg lately employed as a baptism font). The basin of this *phiale* is 1.62 m wide. Its outer surface, which is encircled by two impressive serpents, ends in a simple cavetto molding. The twisting bodies of the serpents form spirals, while their heads project over the rim of the *phiale*.<sup>63</sup> A strong torus molding separates the basin from its almost cylindrical base; a circular sinking in the middle of this concavity is flanked by two tubular openings which most probably acted as water channels, indicating that the *phiale* was furnished with some water spout system.

The Russian Anonymous describes a canopied fountain in the *atrium* of the church of St. Basil near the Mangana Palace:

In front of the church there is a large copper basin covered with sheet lead and supported on stone columns. The columns are joined together with cut stone slabs carved with the four evangelists".<sup>64</sup>

It is interesting to notice here the use of metal basin instead of a stone (marble, porphyry) one; this might be the only reference to a metal basin in the

<sup>60</sup> Al-Muqaddasi's description of the fountain of Samarra is very close to the description of St. Sophia's *phiale* belonging to Paulus Silentarius and to the late fifteenth century Persian version of the *Diegesis*.

<sup>61</sup> MILLET, "Recherches au Mont-Athos, III, *Phiale* et Simandre à Lavra", p. 108; C. MANGO, *Architettura Bizantina*, Milano: Electa, 2001, p. 128.

<sup>62</sup> MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453*, p. 234.

<sup>63</sup> BOURAS, "Dragon Representations on Byzantine Phialae and Their Conduits", p. 65.

<sup>64</sup> DE KHITROWO, *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, p. 230.

context of the *atrium* of the Byzantine churches. By the way, excluding the material of the basin the architectural type reminds clearly to the Athonite *phiales*. Another interesting example of water architecture within the *atrium* is located in the Church of St. George of the Mangana. According to Clavijo, who visited Constantinople in 1403:

On the outside, before the church door, is a bathing font, very big and beautiful, and above it is a cupola supported on eight pillars of white marble carved with many figures.

According to Prof. Mango<sup>65</sup> the structure in the *atrium* of St. George is a fountain but because of its dimension (almost 10 m wide) and the particular shape of the font I'm incline to think that this was a baptism font rather than a *phiale*.<sup>66</sup>

An interesting example of Byzantine *phiale* outside Constantinople belongs to the Church of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica. Between 1430 and 1493 the vaulted peristyle with eight reused columns was built, only 3 m from the west façade of the basilica, to contain the marble early Christian *phiale* that used to be filled with holy water coming from the exuding *myron* inside the church. In my opinion the peristyle photographed by Fred Boissonnas in 1913 seems to be an Ottoman addition. The columned peristyle is also mentioned by Tafraли in 1913:

Dans la cour, à l'ouest, s'élève encore aujourd'hui la *phiale*, entourée de plusieurs colonnes simples. Autour d'elle, il y avait pendant la période Byzantine un jardin planté d'arbres, au milieu desquels jaillissaient des sources, ce qui donnait aux lieux un aspect des plus pittoresques.<sup>67</sup>

The marble basin is very large and flat, not really deep, and it is probably a classical piece reused in the Christian context: carved flutes characterize the whole outer body while the rim is embellished with the *ovum* pattern. The flat basin is also characteristic of the oldest Athonite *phiale* (Great Lavra and Iveron). Another example of still standing *phiale* is located in the garden of the Rotunda or Church of St. George in Thessalonica. But it is not the fountain situated in front of the church. In fact, the fountain in front of the church has been erroneously misinterpreted as the Byzantine *phiale*. The peristyle with eight reused columns covered an octagonal tall *şadırvan* has been added to the building as the minaret when the church was turned into a mosque after 1491. Tafraли in his *Topographie de Tessalonique*, writes that in front of the church there is the *phiale*, surrounded by several columns made by green marble from Thessaly.<sup>68</sup> He shows also a beautiful engrave of the Rotunda with the minaret and the *şadırvan* on the right as they should appeared in 1831, when it was still used as a mosque.<sup>69</sup> For its shape this

<sup>65</sup> MANGO, *Architettura Bizantina*, p. 126.

<sup>66</sup> See R. DEMANGEL and E. MAMBOURY, *Le Quartier des Manges et la première région de Constantinople*, Paris: E. De Boccard, 1939

<sup>67</sup> O. TAFRALI, *Topographie de Tessalonique*, Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1913, p. 169.

<sup>68</sup> Idem, *Topographie de Tessalonique*, p. 158.

<sup>69</sup> Idem, *Topographie de Tessalonique*, Fig. 14.

couldn't be the Byzantine *phiale*, but on the southern side of the Rotunda there is a simple stone basin, slightly smaller than the one in front of St. Demetrius and undecorated, which could have been employed for this purpose.

In conclusion, our knowledge on Byzantine *phiales* is still fragmentary. There is not a catalogue or a list of the still standing *phiales*, and furthermore, we don't have specific studies toward the *phiales* outside Constantinople and in particular in South-eastern Europe and in Anatolia. The architectural tradition of the fountain is inextricably interwoven with the profound significance of water. If the *phiale* of the Byzantine context, with its own profound liturgical value, influenced the formation of the fountain for ritual ablutions in the Early Islamic and later in the Ottoman context, little doubt remains about the unavoidable analogies between the traditional signification of the type and its new function.

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