



Elena Ene D-Vasilescu

## Pseudo-Dionysius and the concept of Beauty

### Abstract

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite compares the experience which constitutes the object of his treatise *The Mystical Theology*, that of spiritually and intellectually gaining access to the knowledge of ‘mysterious things’, with the process of carving a statue (ἀγαλμα). Evidently connecting his thoughts with Plotinus’s ideas in the *First Ennead*, the Syrian fathoms that if what is unnecessary – i.e. the outcome of human ‘affections’ – is removed from our souls and minds, we attain the ‘true vision’ about reality. Such a proceeding leads us to an encounter with the Divine; in fact, by



Prof. Dr. Elena Ene D-Vasilescu, Church History and Doctrine, OUCED/Wolfson College, University of Oxford, United Kingdom

subjecting ourselves to such an activity we connect to their authentic source both our reason and perceptions.

Books have been published about the way in which some pieces of Western architecture and visual arts have been inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius's concepts<sup>1</sup>, and that influence is no longer significantly controversial. More recently texts have come out about the way in which the same – and also music – sourced themselves within the Dionysian theology in the Eastern Christendom. The question is how justified these assumptions are. My article attempts to evaluate this.

Keywords

Pseudo-Dionysius, Beauty, Byzantium, Proclus, Plotinus

## 1 Introduction

Pseudo-Dionysius compares the experience which constitutes the object of his treatise *The Mystical Theology* – that of gaining spiritual access to and knowledge of 'mysterious things' – with the process of carving a statue (ἄγαλμα). Evidently connecting his thoughts with those of Proclus and Plotinus, the Syrian fathers that if what is unnecessary – i.e. the outcome of human 'affections' – is removed from our souls and minds, we attain the 'true vision' about reality. Such a proceeding leads us to an

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<sup>1</sup> The most known are those by P. E. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Text and an Introduction to their influence*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 16: from here Rorem 1993, as well as by J. Favier, J. James, and Y. Flamand, *The World of Chartres* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), pp. 168–173.

encounter with the Divine; by subjecting ourselves to this activity we connect to the authentic source both what we gather through perception and what we contemplate through reason. Books have been published about the way in which some pieces of Western visual arts, music, and architecture have been inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius's concepts, and that influence is no longer significantly controversial. With regard to the effect of his ideas on the same arts within Byzantium and the 'Byzantine Commonwealth'<sup>2</sup>, more is to be said than has been so far. My chapter attempts to evaluate how justified are the assumptions some researchers formulate about the links between the Dionysiac Corpus and the arts they examine.

## 2 Pseudo-Dionysius and the concept of Beauty

The idea of the sculptor who represents 'an image of an image'<sup>3</sup> and reveals beauty by carving away the surplus material which encases a statue in marble or stone has a long history; famously Michelangelo described his work technique in terms usually employed when such a process is explained<sup>4</sup>. Pseudo-Dionysius,

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<sup>2</sup> D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971); (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Work", in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, edited and translated by Stephen MacKenna, revised by B. S. Page, Preface by E. R. Dodds, Introduction by Paul Henry S. J. (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 1; Plotinus, *The Enneads*, pp. 21-29.

<sup>4</sup> Michelangelo Buonarroti, "I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free", in Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Life, Letters and Poetry*, edited and translated by George Bull and Peter Porter, *World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); A. Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, trans. Charles Holroyd (London: Pallas Athene, 2007);

following Proclus (412-485 AD)<sup>5</sup>, and Plotinus (204-270 AD)<sup>6</sup>, speaks about this course of action in order to illustrate the fact that the essence of things becomes known only when the outcome of the activity of perception – epitomised by him in the sense of sight – is considered an excess vis-à-vis what is really important for a human being and, in consequence, is removed from minds and souls. In the darkness that thus occurs<sup>7</sup> true knowledge about reality is achieved – because that is where an encounter with the Divine, who is neither perceptible nor conceptual, takes place (DN 592CD,<sup>8</sup> 708D<sup>9</sup>). This is what the Syri-

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G. Vasari, 'Michelangelo', *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 415–488; C. Vaughan, *Michelangelo's Notebooks: The Poetry, Letters and Art of the Great Master* (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers Inc./Blackwell's Oxford, 2016), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, edited by E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1963, 1992<sup>2</sup>, reprinted 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, esp. pp. 21-29.

<sup>7</sup> B. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism. Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroads, 1994); D. Turner, *The Darkness of God. Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *Corpus Dionysiacum I: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De divinis nominibus/The Divine Names* edited by Beate Regina Suchla (Patristische Texte und Studien 33, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1990, reprint 2013), pp. 114-115, from here: Pseudo-Dionysius/Suchla, CD I. Within the article I shall operate, as most scholars do, with abbreviations of the titles of Pseudo-Dionysius treatises, thus: DN for *The Divine Names*, MT for *The Mystical Theology*; CH regarding *The Celestial Hierarchy*, and respectively EH for the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Nevertheless, when the flow and the elegance of a statement requires, I shall use the full title of Pseudo-Dionysius's writings.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

an<sup>10</sup> upholds in the treatise *The Mystical Theology* – and his thoughts expressed within this text complement some in *The Divine Names*:

I pray we could come to this darkness so far above light! If only we lacked sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge. For this would be really to see and to know: to praise the Transcendent One in a transcending way, namely through the denial of all beings. We would be like sculptors who set out to carve a statue. They remove every obstacle to the pure view of the hidden image, and simply by this act of clearing aside they show up the beauty which is hidden (MT, 1025AB<sup>11</sup>).

This paper discusses the manner in which Pseudo-Dionysius articulates his views about the mystical experience, i.e., the act that leads the faithful to attain glimpses of the divine reality. He

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<sup>10</sup> At the international workshop ‘Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum: Ancient and Modern Readers’, held in Oxford in July 2017, where the most known specialists in Pseudo-Dionysius’s work were present, the agreement was that the origins of this author were in Syria; therefore he can be called ‘the Syrian’. Such an opinion is strengthened by the fact that the rite of baptism described by him in EH, according to some authors, belongs to “‘West Syriac’ liturgical family”; on this see, for instance, *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, edited by Th. L. Campbell (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), pp. xiii-xiv; A. Di Berardino, *Patrology* (Cambridge, UK: J. Clarke, 2006), p. 45, and P. L. Gavriluk, ‘Did Pseudo-Dionysius Live in Constantinople?’, in *Vigilinae Christianae* 62, 2008, p. 506.

<sup>11</sup> *Dionysius the Areopagite, Corpus Dionysiacum II: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita De coelesti hierarchia, De ecclesiastica hierarchia, De mystica theologia, Epistulae*, edited by Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter (*Patristische Texte und Studien* 36, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 1991, reprint 2014), p. 145, from here: Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite/Heil and Ritter, CD II.

sees it as being comparable in particular with the activity of sculpting, which reveals a statue out of the initial material by removing in phases what is superfluous. The text also points out instances of works pertaining to Byzantine art that some researchers consider to have been either directly or indirectly inspired by the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. By bringing these into the foreground, we advance a discussion about them because, while Pseudo-Dionysius's influence on particular artistic achievements in the West has been already established,<sup>12</sup> more can be said about it concerning accomplishments in Eastern Christendom.

### **3 The notion of Beauty as understood by Pseudo- Dionysius**

It is important to remark that 'the Beautiful' and 'Beauty' (ὡς καλὸν καὶ ὡς κάλλος, as mentioned by Pseudo- Dionysius for instance in DN 701C-D<sup>13</sup> and DN 630BC,<sup>14</sup> are names he uses for

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, edited and translated by Colm Luibhéid and Paul Rorem: from here: Pseudo-Dionysius/Luibhéid, Rorem; René Roques, Jaroslav Pelikan, Jean Leclercq, and Karlfried Froehlich (introductions) (London: SPCK and New York, and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 27-28; Rorem 1993, p. 16; J. Bony, 'What Possible Sources for the Chevet of Saint-Denis?' in Paula Lieber Gerson (ed.), *Abbot Suger and Saint-Denis*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, distributed by Yale University Press, 1986, pp. 131-143; E. S. Mainoldi, 'L'abate Sugerio e i suoi orizzonti mimetici: san Dionigi (non l'Areopagita) tra Saint-Denis e Hagia Sophia sullo sfondo della rottura tra Oriente e Occidente cristiano', *Studi Medievali, Serie Terza, Anno LVIII - Fasc. I*, 2017, pp. 23-45, from here: Mainoldi, 2017 (a).

<sup>13</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius/Suchla, CD I, pp. 150-151.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

God in parallel with love, beloved (701 D)<sup>15</sup>, 'life', 'light', 'God', 'the truth' (DN 596B)<sup>16</sup>, 'the Good', the 'Life-Giving', 'Wisdom', and other similar ones; these are expressions of Christian attributes. In DN 956B Pseudo-Dionysius explains that his teachers "gave the name 'beauty itself' to the 'outpouring of what produces beauty'"<sup>17</sup>, i.e., to 'the Beautiful'.

Here we shall discuss especially the title 'Light'<sup>18</sup> as it contrasts with 'darkness' in the writings of the Syrian, who considers the latter the very 'place' where the Intellect can meet 'the One'. The role of light is to facilitate the contemplation of this 'meeting'. Both Byzantine and post-Byzantine artists (i.e., those whose work relies on techniques of Byzantine tradition), espe-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, in Pseudo-Dionysius/Suchla, CD I, p. 118.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 223.

<sup>18</sup> For the importance of light within churches in the West see, Sugerius/S. Dionysii, "Scriptum consecrationis ecclesiae Sancti Dionysii", in Suger, Oeuvres, I, *Écrit sur la consécration de Saint-Denis*, L'oeuvre administrative, *Histoire de Louis VII*, edited and translated by F. Gasparri (Paris, 1996), pp. 8-10; Abbot Suger, *On the Abbey Church of St-Denis and its art treasures*, edited, translated, and annotated by Erwin Panofsky, second edition by Gerda Panofsky-Soergel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), *Abt Suger von Saint-Denis ausgewählte Schriften: Ordinatio, De consecratione, De administratione*, edited and translated by Andreas Speer and Günther Binding (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005, 2008); for instance, Mainoldi, 2017 (a), esp. pp. 24-28, 30; S. McKnight Crosby, "Abbot Suger, the Abbey of Saint-Denis, and the New Gothic Style", in by S. McKnight Crosby, Ch. Hayward, T. Little, and W. D. Wixom (eds.), *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis in the Time of Abbot Suger (1122-1151)*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981, pp. 13-23; W. W. Clark, "Suger's Church at Saint-Denis: The State of Research", in *Abbot Suger and Saint-Denis: A Symposium*, edited by P. L. Gerson (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), pp. 105-130.

cially in icons and frescoes representing the Transfiguration and the Resurrection tried and are still trying to suggest the interplay between the light and the darkness in the realities these scenes signify. The works referring to the two major Christian events evoke simplicity, and the artists endeavour to capture this via the intimations present in the Dionysiac Corpus; for its ancient author, to reach the state of existence characterised by simplicity was the climax of any spiritual exercise.

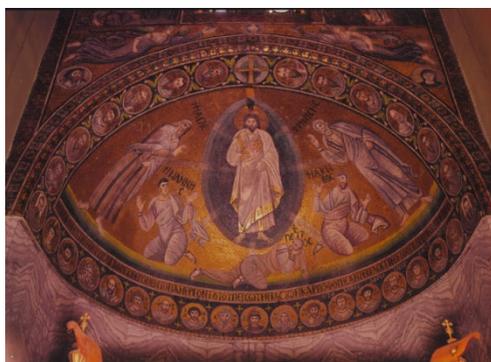


Figure 1. The Sinai Peninsula, Monastery of St. Catherine, Jesus Christ. Mosaic of the Transfiguration; middle of the sixth century, ceramic and glass tesserae with gold. Published through the Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount.

Researchers have referred to the connection between Pseudo-Dionysius's notions – especially those concerned with the Liturgy – and the architecture of Hagia Sophia (and in general of the domed Byzantine churches)<sup>19</sup> as well as of that peculiar to

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, J. Meyendorff, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Byzantine Religious Thought" (Dumbarton Oaks Papers, XLVII, 1993), p. 77; E. S. Mainoldi, "La bellezza sofanica: Hagia Sophia e le sue eikphraseis, lo ps.-Dionigi Areopagita e i presupposti del pensiero eikonico bizantino", in R. de Filippis, G. Gambale (eds.), *L'estetica nel pensio-*

the imperial palace in Constantinople<sup>20</sup>. In this context they elaborated on the role of light in enhancing the religious and aesthetic experience and, as known, the Syrian himself paid great attention to the anagogical significance of light; he spoke about its capacity to move the mind from the material to the divine realm (for instance, in DN 697D)<sup>21</sup>. We shall discuss further about this topic as presented by his writings, and also about the manner in which Patristic scholars as well as art historians have understood the view of the ancient thinker concerning this divine name. For the moment we indicate that in addition to the specialists mentioned above, especially Paul E. Rorem<sup>22</sup>, William Riordan<sup>23</sup>, Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi<sup>24</sup>, Andrew Louth<sup>25</sup>, and István Perczel<sup>26</sup> have been preoccupied with the way in which Pseudo-Dionysius treated this subject.

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ero tardo-antico, medievale e umanistico, *The Proceedings of the Colloquium L'Estetica medievale* (Universita degli studi di Salerno, 17-19 Dicembre 2012); also F. Dell'Acqua, 'L'auctoritas dello pseudo-Dionigi e Sugerio di Saint-Denis', *Studi Medievali*, 2014, Serie Terza, Anno iV, Fasc. I, pp. 189-215, for the historical milieu that influenced the architecture under discussion here.

<sup>20</sup> M. C. Carile, *Il Sacrum Palatium risplendente di luce: immagine e realtà del palazzo imperiale di Costantinopoli*, in Polidoro. Studi offerti ad Antonio Carile, edited by G. Vespignani, (Spoleto, 2013), pp. 305-327.

<sup>21</sup> For this especially Mainoldi, 2017a; W. Riordan, *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite*, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008; I. Perczel, "Une théologie de la lumière: Denys l'Aréopagite et Evagre le Pontique", *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, 1999, 45(1), pp. 79-120, and P. E. Rorem, "Iamblichus and the Anagogical Method in Pseudo-Dionysius' Liturgical Theology", *Studia Patristica* 18 (1979), pp. 453-460.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> W. Riordan, *Divine Light*, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Mainoldi, 2017a

<sup>25</sup> A. Louth, 'Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus of Palamas', in Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (eds.), *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 55-71.

I believe the new scholarly trend that considers the works of art influenced by (pseudo)-Dionysiac concepts from the perspective of the dialectic light-darkness is productive, and the chapter will demonstrate that this is the case. For instance, we can prove this fact through the artistic representation of Elijah and Moses. When the two prophets reached the mystical state and had their revelations, they were surrounded by a darkness like that which the Syrian spoke about; the iconographers who painted between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries in Sinai represented this reality in pieces dedicated to them; they managed to obtain the effect they intended very well by using the contrast between dark and light; fig. 2 illustrates this with regard to Elijah's depiction.



Figure. 2. The Sinai Peninsula, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Prophet Elijah Fed by a Raven; ca. 1050-1100; tempera and gold on wood. Published through the Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai.

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<sup>26</sup> I. Perczel, "Une théologie de la lumière: Denys l'Aréopagite et Evagre le Pontique", pp. 79-120.

In an unusual and perhaps unexpected association of ideas, Origen parallels Christ's incarnation, i.e. his becoming an "express image' of God's substance", with the activity of carving statues, which "taken from the region of material things [...] are to be allowed for no other purpose but to show that the Son, though brought within the very narrow compass of a human body, yet gave indications in the likeness of his power and works to these of God the Father, of the immense and invisible greatness that was in him"<sup>27</sup>. While the metaphor itself might have its source in Plotinus's *Enneads*, its strong Christian meaning could have come from Origen's work. In terms of reception, by providing concrete instances of excerpts from Pseudo-Dionysius's texts and Adamantius's *Peri Archôn*, Perczel attempts to demonstrate the link between them. He believes that some fragments within his treatises were re-written by the Syrian making use of words and expressions synonymous with those in the text of the Alexandrian (presumably on occasion he slightly changed their meaning)<sup>28</sup>. While I am confident that Pseudo-Dionysius knew Origen's oeuvre, I am not convinced

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<sup>27</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, translation and notes by G. W. Butterworth; Introduction to the TORCH edition Henri de Lubac (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith Publishers, 1973), p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> I. Perczel, "Le pseudo-Denys, lecteur d'Origène", in W. A. Bienert, U. Kühneweg (eds.), *Origeniana septima: Origenes in den auseinandersetzen des 4 jahrhunderts* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), pp. 673-710; idem, "Theodoret of Cyrrihus: the main source of Pseudo-Dionysius' Christology", paper at the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies, August 2015; idem, "The earliest Syriac reception of Dionysius", in Sarah Coakley, Charles M. Stang (eds.), *Re-thinking Dionysius* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 27-42; idem, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Platonic theology", in *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne: actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13 - 16 mai 1998) en l'Honneur de H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press ; Paris : Belles lettres, 2000), pp. 491-532.

that all examples provided by Perczel have their provenance within it.

With respect to the simile of the statue, regardless as to whether or not this was an appropriation by Pseudo-Dionysius, in his writings the real meaning of perceptible symbols (used for reasons of “secrecy and accommodation”<sup>29</sup>, EH 377A) is noticeable, especially when one follows the way the Syrian employed the apophatic method, which makes possible for those mental representations to be expressed through concepts. Then the ‘mystical experience’ thus attained (through apophatic means) goes even further than this – it reaches to the unknowing which, as suggested, is pregnant with meanings<sup>30</sup>. The Syrian believed that if the sacred mysteries are contemplated exclusively via perceptible symbols (those ‘hidden’ in images, musical incantations, etc.) we cannot “see”, i. e. experience, them “in their naked purity” (Ep. 9, 1104B)<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, despite that conviction, throughout his work, Pseudo-Dionysius also addressed the positive role of “perceptible symbols in uplifting the interpreter to their conceptual meaning and beyond”<sup>32</sup>, and underlined that “our first leaders” (i.e., the priests) “using images derived from the senses spoke of the transcendent [...]. They put material on

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<sup>29</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite/Heil and Ritter, CD II, pp. 66-67. Rorem comments on this subject in, among other places: Rorem, 1993, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> P. L. Gavriilyuk, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’, in Paul L. Gavriilyuk, Sarah Coakley (eds.), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 86-104. Pseudo-Dionysius only used the term ‘experience’ once in DN 648B, as Coakley draws the reader’s attention in her Introduction: Sarah Coakley, Charles M. Stang (eds.), *Re-thinking Dionysius*, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, “Epistula 9”, 1. 1104B, in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite/Heil and Ritter, CD II, p. 193.

<sup>32</sup> Rorem, 1993, p. 94.

what was immaterial. In their written and unwritten initiations, they brought the transcendent down to our level" (EH, 376D)<sup>33</sup>. Both statements above are consistent with Pseudo-Dionysius's understanding of reality as being the result of the dynamic between the ascending and descending movements of the human mind and soul. Therefore, it is not surprising that the oeuvre written by him has become the subject of preoccupation both to scholars interested in metaphysical issues and to those who focus on art. Despite the fact that the works of this author "are not concerned with creative practices and accomplishments", as stated, the medieval and contemporaneous-to-us reception of his texts claimed that they inspired masterpieces in visual arts and even in architecture, because "artistic and architectural metaphors are present" in them<sup>34</sup>. Michelangelo himself might have read Pseudo-Dionysius's treatises because he frequented the Neoplatonic circles at the court of Lorenzo de' Medici, and according to Carolyn Vaughan, "absorbed their philosophy and would have been inspired by [it]"<sup>35</sup>.

Among the subjects on which the Syrian elaborated at length – and were considered as having been instrumental in the achievement of various later material creations – that of the angels (whom he considers henads, ἐνάδων, i.e. 'units' of power that participate in the monad that God is) was dominant. (Plato introduces this concept in the dialogues *Philebus* and *Timaeus*; for him a henad is a monad that participates in the transcendent-

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<sup>33</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite/Heil and Ritter, CD II, p. 67.

<sup>34</sup> J. Bogdanovic, 'Rethinking the Dionysian Legacy in Medieval Architecture: East and West', in Filip Ivanović (ed.), *Dionysius the Areopagite between Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 12, 2011, p. 132.

<sup>35</sup> C. Vaughan, *Michelangelo's Notebooks: The Poetry, Letters and Art of the Great Master* (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers Inc./Blackwell's Oxford, 2016), p. 13.

ent One). In his treatise *The Divine Names* (DN 589D) Pseudo-Dionysius not only refers to the fact that God is presented in the Scriptures *inter alia* as “a monad or henad” (for him these are identical, as they are in Origen’s *On the First Principles*)<sup>36</sup>, but he also mentions the fact that the divine Power protects the immortality of the “angelic henads” (DN 892D).

Pseudo-Dionysius imparted in the understanding that concerns the nature of henads with Syrianus (Proclus’s teacher) and followed Proclus’s triad” according to which the Intellect and the Soul undergo a threefold movement of remaining, procession, and return (*mone*, *proodos*, *epistrophe*) towards ‘the One’, the Creator<sup>37</sup>. This is what Pseudo-Dionysius had in mind when he explained the manner in which the mentioned triadisation ‘operates’ in the intelligible world. While believing that all things – henades included – are part of a single continuous emanation of power from the One, he also considers that they are hierarchically organised.

Inglis Patrick Sheldon-Williams comments on the connection angels – henads as it appears in Dionysius’s writings; he seems to suggest that the Syrian intimates that the angels have a similar nature to that of the henads. This scholar convincingly argues that Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius held the same view on the issue of henads and that both were inspired by Syrianus’s notions, which they adapted to their own ‘systems’. He also

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<sup>36</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite/Suchla, CD I, p. 112. Throughout his corpus Pseudo-Dionysius deploys descriptions similar to those used when he refer to henads in order to distinguish ‘the Divine Unity’ from the Trinity. But we have to mention that he does not use the term *henad* more than I indicated above; he refer to it through suggestive descriptions.

<sup>37</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, edited by E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1963, 1992<sup>2</sup>, reprinted 2014). Since Proclus systematized and further developed Plotinus’s triadization, see also Plotinus, *The Enneads*.

maintained that the three thinkers adjusted what they learnt about henads to their own ideas about celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies; this is especially clear in the case of Proclus, who says that henads are lesser gods who constitute ‘radiations’ from the supreme Divinity<sup>38</sup>. Sheldon-Williams goes on to explain why such a view has its problems<sup>39</sup>, but what is significant for our chapter is that both Syrianus and Pseudo-Dionysius saw God as the universal Cause. They also similarly conceived henads as being related to the ‘intelligibles’<sup>40</sup>, and managed to avoid confusing “the three Hypostases within the Tetrarchy with the procession of powers which, symbolised by the Divine Names, confer being in all its degrees upon His creatures’<sup>41</sup>, hence also on the angels.

Among the rich literature commenting on henads in Pseudo-Dionysius’s texts Perczel and Henri Dominique Saffrey’s works are to be remarked<sup>42</sup>, and concerning the hierarchies, those of Andrew Louth<sup>43</sup> and Roland F. Hathaway<sup>44</sup> are the most known.

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<sup>38</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*; I. P. Sheldon-Williams, ‘Henads and Angels: Proclus and the ps.-Dionysius’, *Studia Patristica* 11, (1972), p. 66.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 66–71. Elaborations on some of the debates around this and connected themes are, for instance, in M. J. Edwards, *Image, Word and God in the Early Christian Centuries* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), especially pp. 117–134.

<sup>40</sup> I. P. Sheldon-Williams, ‘Henads and Angels’, p. 69.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> Especially I. Perczel, “God as Monad and Henad: Dionysius the Areopagite and the *Peri Archon*”, in L. Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana octava: Origen and the Alexandrian tradition/Origene e la tradizione alessandrina papers of the 8th International Origen Congress, Pisa, 27-31 August 2001* (Leuven: Leuven University Press; 2003), pp. 1193–1209.

<sup>43</sup> A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Continuum 2001); *idem*, ‘Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas’, in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (eds.) (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 55–71; *idem*, ‘Cappa-

Perczel explained that the above-mentioned simplicity in the treatises and the letters of the Syriac leads to the idea of an indivisible union of everything that exists. He avers: “this indivisibility is a <unifying power> that makes us one and <gathers us together> into a monad and union – that is, again, something like a henad – which is God-like and God-imitating”<sup>45</sup>. This is, in fact, the original state of creation. Saffrey gives an account concerning the historical development of the concept ‘henad’ in which he states that Pseudo-Dionysius’s ideas it were inspired by Proclus’s texts<sup>46</sup>.

Regarding the hierarchies, Hathaway develops a metaphysics that concerns this notion as it exists within the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. He speaks about three kinds of definitions of the hierarchical order: one based on law, one on Logos, and one on Eros. He convincingly demonstrates that “Ps.-Dionysius follows Pro-

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docian Fathers and Dionysius in Iconoclasm’, in Jostein Børtnes and Tomas Hägg (eds.), *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2006), pp. 271–278.

<sup>44</sup> R. F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius. A study in the form and meaning of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970), p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> I. Perczel, “God as Monad and Henad: Dionysius the Areopagite and the *Peri Archon*”, p. 1198.

<sup>46</sup> H. D. Saffrey, *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne: actes du Colloque international de Louvain, 13-16 mai 1998: en l’honneur de H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink* (Leuven: Leuven University Press; Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2000); idem, ‘New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus’, in D. J. O’Meara (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1982, pp. 65–74; reprinted in French as “Nouveaux liens objectifs entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus”, in H. D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur le néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1990, p. 247; idem, L. G. Westerink, *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne. Livre III. Introduction*, ch. 1. *La doctrine des hénades divines chez Proclus: origine et signification*, IX-LXXVII (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1978).

clus"<sup>47</sup> and adapts his ideas to his argumentative needs. Hathaway also explains how the types of definitions above can be recognized in the work of Syrianus's pupil and affirms that the communication among the levels of the hierarchies happens by means of "extensive" (έκστατιχός) Eros. Louth agrees with the idea just mentioned above concerning the role of love in the stratified organization of the world, but what he finds important to underline – and justifiable so in my opinion – is the fact that hierarchies do not imply a rigid structure that requires pressure in order to function; to do so they need the flux of love to circulate among their levels<sup>48</sup>.

The description which Pseudo-Dionysius offers in the second part of *The Celestial Hierarchy* with respect to the ordering of heavenly beings shows that the angels, beginning with those closest to God, are grouped into nine categories. These are organized in three triads, each divided into three), thus: 1. seraphim cherubim, thrones; 2. dominions, powers, authorities; and 3. archangels, angels and principalities. The Syrian designates all types of angels through the word "winds" because they are supposed to move swiftly:

They [the angels] are also named 'winds' as a sign of the virtually instant speed with which they operate everywhere, their coming and going from above to below and again from below to above as they raise up their subordinates to the highest peak

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<sup>47</sup> R. F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>48</sup> A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite. Elaborations on such a stand are in C. M. Stang, Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); idem, 'Negative Theology from Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the Areopagite', in Julia Lamm (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 161–176; E. D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: SUNY, 2008).*

and as they prevail upon their own superiors to proceed down into fellowship with and concern for those beneath them (CE 333D)<sup>49</sup>.

There are many visual representations of angels in Byzantium and the “Byzantine Commonwealth” that are apt to illustrate these. For instance, the following image (fig. 3) is significant from the perspective of the ideas expressed in the above fragment.



Figure 3. The Sinai Peninsula, Monastery of St. Catherine; Archangel Gabriel; wood panel, date unknown. Published through the Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai.

The fastness of the angels’ exploits is the reason why in iconography these otherworldly beings are represented as having wings.

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<sup>49</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite/Heil and Ritter, CD II, p. 55. See also Pseudo-Dionysius/Luibhéid, Rorem, p. 187.

Emil Ivanov ascertains that among the numerous examples of iconography that he considers to be inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius's treatises<sup>50</sup> some refer to these heavenly powers. He ascribes a wide range to their alleged artistic renderings: from the four apocalyptic creatures depicted (under the form of angels) within the mosaic inside the mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, decorated in 430-450, (fig. 4), to the angel inside the main church at Gračanica Monastery, within the former medieval Serbian kingdom (1321)<sup>51</sup>; he refers to one angel, but actually there are many beautifully painted such heavenly beings within the Church of the Assumption, Gračanica Monastery.



Figure 4. The four apocalyptic beasts/angels; Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, 430-450 AD.

Source: <https://www.revolvy.com/topic/Mausoleum%20of%20Galla%20Placidia>; accessed 19 September 2017. Image used in accordance to the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 licence; accessed 5 December 2017.

<sup>50</sup> E. Ivanov, 'Iconographic Interpretations of Theological Themes in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and in St. Gregory Palamas and the Reception of these Themes by Meister Eckhart', in *Studii Teologice* 7/4 (2011), pp. 172-192; Gračanica is mentioned on p. 176 and reproduced in fig. 3 on that page.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*. Galla Placidia's mausoleum is mentioned on p. 176 and Gračanica Monastery on p. 174; the latter is also reproduced in fig. 3 on p. 176.

I would personally supplement the list of the exemplars adduced by Ivanov here by mentioning the famous White Angel from the church of Mileseva Monastery, Serbia.

However, we shall also refer to some representations of angels that are not very well known, yet are still valuable as illustrating the possible connection between Pseudo-Dionysius's ideas and the arts, certainly in its brandishing of angels. One particular instance – because of the media on which it was created – is a funerary cloth (embroidered taffeta and silk) displaying Othon de Grandon and the Virgin with Christ, today in the Historical Museum of Bern; two angels feature prominently on this piece<sup>52</sup>. Another, more recent item of Byzantine persuasion (with strong Western influence) is a Russian icon of Ascension, housed now by the Hermitage Museum<sup>53</sup>.

Zaga Gavrilović points out a particular sub-motif of Dionysian inspiration that is to be found within some depictions concerning angels: those who show them holding discs, “presumably mirrors”. The fresco of the Anastasis in Dečani Monastery (c. 1340) that renders this trope is the only one which has survived.

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<sup>52</sup> This funerary cloth was woven in Cyprus in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, 88x328 cm; it is reproduced and described in Cormack and Vassilaki (eds.), 2009, fig. 256 on pp. 295-296, caption on p. 294. This book has angels represented in many reproductions of frescoes, icons, and manuscript illuminations. See also Cormack and Jeffreys (eds.), 2000.

<sup>53</sup> This icon was painted in mid-eighteenth century, tempera on wood, 40x35x2 cm; reproduction and description in Yuri Piatnitsky, Oriana Badderley, Earleen Brunner, and Marlia Mundell Mango, *Sinai, Byzantium, Russia: Orthodox art from the sixth to the twentieth century*, London: Saint Catherine Foundation in association with the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, 2000, illustration R 114 on p. 343.



Figure 5. Anastasis at Dečani', c. 1340; from Gavrilović, 2001, p. 191.

The bright and “untarnished” mirrors visible in the fresco at Dečani signify the fact that the angels receive and reflect God’s light and beauty. As revealed within The Celestial Hierarchy, also the dignity of ‘enjoying’ the knowledge of the Divine (some of them the ‘immediate’ one<sup>54</sup>), has been bestowed on them. Two mentions need to be made with Gavrilović: sometimes Byzantine iconographers identify the angels by name: Jegudiel, Gabriel, Selaphiel, Michael, Uriel, Raphael, Barachiel<sup>55</sup>, Jerahmeel, etc. Other times they “confuse cherubim and seraphim by depicting them as visually identical, with six, many-eyed

<sup>54</sup> I. P. Sheldon-Williams, ‘Henads and Angels: Proclus and the ps.-Dionysius’, p. 68.

<sup>55</sup> The spiritual beings whose names are listed before that of Jerahmeel form what is represented in Byzantine iconography as ‘the Angelic Council’. Here are a few examples of works in which these are named: a Russian icon that portrays bishop Herodion of Patras gives the name of the archangel within as Selaphiel (1840), and archangels Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael are called as such within the stained glass windows at St. Ailbe’s Church in Ireland.

wings"<sup>56</sup>; in such cases, only the captions aid their recognition. Therefore attention should be paid to these accompanying texts. The above-mentioned description regarding the various categories of celestial powers with their 'eyed wings' is found in the Liturgy of John Chrysostom, which certainly Dionysius knew; therefore the source of this type of iconography is not to be searched for primarily within the Dionysiac Corpus.

For Ivanov, the representation of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, belongs to the artistic undertakings concerning angels – the more so because the icon-painters have sometimes shown this attribute of the Divine represented not only as a woman but also as "the image of an angel sitting at a festive [...] table". This is how the sacred Wisdom appears in the churches of St. Sophia (1235) and St. Clement (1294-1295), both in Ohrid, as well as in the monastic churches at Gračanica (1321) and Dečani (c. 1340). The same researcher also believes that an illustration of the opening statement from Pseudo-Dionysius's treatises *The Mystical Theology* ("Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness; Guide of Christians to Divine Wisdom!") was visually expressed in the frescoes referring to Sophia in Chrelio Tower of Rila Monastery, Bulgaria, 1335-1336, and in the church of St. John Prodromos, Yaroslavl, Russia, 1694-1695<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, Ivanov thinks that the celestial hierarchy as peculiar to Pseudo-Dionysius's thought is represented, for instance, in two places within the church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe (mosaics, 539)<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Z. Gavrilović, 'Discs Held by Angels in the Anastasis at Dečani', in Z. Gavrilović, *Studies in Byzantine and Serbian Medieval Art* (London: The Pindar Press, 2001), pp. 181-197.

<sup>57</sup> E. Ivanov, 'Iconographic Interpretations of Theological Themes in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and in St. Gregory Palamas and the Reception of these Themes by Meister Eckhart', p. 175.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 178.

The scholar details that inside the church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, the space around the image of Christ that has a central position is filled with stars that are depicted “on a blue background – an undoubtedly strong indication about the nine celestial ranks and [...] their angels and other powers, [which are of] a number that excels the potential of the human eye”<sup>59</sup>. A representation of the manner in which the space between heaven and earth is filled with angels is, for instance, the Ladder of Virtues; Pângărați Monastery, fig. 6 below (here the angels help people to ascend to God).



Figure 6. Pângărați Monastery, Neamț County. The Ladder of Virtues; personal photo, July 2015.

Ivanov also asserts that “The oldest undoubted iconographic examples showing (sic) the Celestial Hierarchy are in the collection of crosses at Limburg”<sup>60</sup>; these pieces were made of enamel on a gilded background. They are the products of a Constantinople workshop and were created in 963–968; so was a miniature in Vienna codex Suppl. gr. 2, fol. 1v from the second half of

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 177.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.

the twelfth century. Because of lack of space, it is not possible to comment on the historical context which various researchers assume it was conducive to the occurrence of a link between Pseudo-Dionysius's ideas and the creation of particular artistic works. I only mention Ivanov's conviction that in the fourteenth century Eastern Europe the Hesychasm (with its representatives mystically seeking God) was responsible for it<sup>61</sup>.

This scholar and Jean Favier (the latter together with his colleagues)<sup>62</sup>, see connections between the notions within Dionysius's treatise *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and multiple human creations. Moreover, Favier finds a resemblance between the artists described in EH IV.3 and those who built and decorated Chartres Cathedral in the Middle Ages (1194 and 1220). Ivanov, who sees the various depictions of 'The Last Judgement' as illustrations of this text, offers a few instances that are supposed to refer to it. Among these, there are the illuminations peculiar to the Greek codex 74, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (eleventh century); the mosaic on the western wall of the church at Torcello (eleventh century); two icons in St. Catherine Monastery, Sinai from the second half of the twelfth century; the frescoes in the church of Panagia Mavriotissa, Kastoria (twelfth century), and those in Kvarke Kilisse, Cappadocia (1212) as well as its representation in the southern wing of the church at Chora (1315-1320). Frescoes illustrating grouping of church prelates exist, for instance, in the fresco entitled 'The Dormition of the Mother of God' at Staro Nagoričino, in its upper part (1316-1318); in the church at Marko Monastery (around 1375) as well as in the fresco known as 'The Last Judgement' on the external north wall of St. George Church, Voroneţ Monastery, Romania (c.1488-1496) and that by the same name in St. Catherine Mon-

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<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 173.

<sup>62</sup> J. Favier, J. James, and Y. Flamand, *The World of Chartres*, pp. 168-173.

astery, Sinai (date unknown); the latter icons contain very noticeable figures of bishops and priests; fig. 7<sup>63</sup>.



Figure 7. The Sinai Peninsula, Monastery of St. Catherine, Last Judgement; date unknown. Published through the Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai.

While some of Ivanov's suppositions might be correct – that should be decided by academics working on the circulation of Pseudo-Dionysius's writings in Southern Europe – certainly not all of them are so. His assumptions referring to the works of art in Ravenna cannot be valid since today the scholarship is quasi-unanimous that Pseudo-Dionysius lived in the sixth century (he created after 528); it is reasonable to presume that Ivanov thought that Pseudo-Dionysius lived in the fifth century (as

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<sup>63</sup> K. Parry (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 383.

some scholarship held until recently)<sup>64</sup>. As Louth cautions about the creations of the Syrian: “secular scholars who readily trace the aesthetic ideals of the Byzantines, or their hierarchical notions of political society back to Dionysius sometimes perhaps [do so] without sufficient discrimination”<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, “Dionysius’ influence is pervasive, though not all-pervasive. It is also uneven, both in the sense that some Byzantines seem more open to his influence than others and also in the sense that there is a very generalized influence, alongside genuine attempts at engagement with his thought”<sup>66</sup>.

Jelena Bogdanovic adds to the list Ivanov proposes more examples of ecclesiastic art she believes were accomplished on the basis of Dionysian notions. Among those she enumerates the decoration in the churches of Virgin Parigoritissa, Arta (ca. 1290) and the Virgin Olympiotissa at Ellason, Thessaly (1295-1296); in both these buildings, the bust of Christ Pantocrator is encircled by various orders of heavenly powers. In Olympiotissa the central medallion representing the same image is circumscribed by two concentric zones containing angels, and their arrangement in this manner is reminiscent of the triads from the Syrian’s hierarchy<sup>67</sup>. For Bogdanovic the most illustra-

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<sup>64</sup> On Pseudo-Dionysius’s origin, in addition to Rorem, Louth, di Berardino, Campbell, and Gavriilyuk’s opinions already mentioned, also see, among others, E. S. Mainoldi, ‘La musica liturgica nel Corpus Dionysiacum’, in *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura religiosa*, 2017 (b): from here Mainoldi, 2017 (b); C. M. Mazzucchi, ‘Damascio, autore del Corpus Dionysiacum e il dialogo Peri Politikes Epistemos’, *Aevum: Rassegna di scienze storiche linguistiche e filologiche* 80, no. 2, 2006, pp. 299–335. I will express my own opinion on this topic at the end of the paper.

<sup>65</sup> A. Louth, ‘Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas’, p. 55.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 55–56.

<sup>67</sup> J. Bogdanovic, ‘Rethinking the Dionysian Legacy in Medieval Architecture: East and West’, pp. 120–121.

tive testimonies with respect to the imagery of the celestial hierarchy exist in the church of Bogorodica Ljeviša, Prizren (1309–1313), Dormition at Gračanica (c. 1311–1321), Staro Nagoričino (c. 1313–1318), and Kraljeva crkva at Studenica Monastery (c. 1314), all in the territory of medieval Serbian kingdom, as well as in the katholikon of the Hilandar monastery on Mount Athos (c. 1321)<sup>68</sup>.

Pseudo-Dionysius's texts were also considered (positively) 'responsible' for works in architecture. The concept of the Syrian regarding the ascent towards God through continual spiritual exercise (which culminates in union, henosis, with the One<sup>69</sup>) is another one that very probably served to Suger, the abbot of Saint-Denis from 1122 to 1151, to oversee the construction of his church<sup>70</sup>. He knew very well the text of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, where Pseudo-Dionysius analyses the aesthetics of visual symbols and speaks about "uplifting and luminous beauty"<sup>71</sup>; (CH 120A-124A<sup>72</sup>). Jean Bony considers that the construction of Saint-Denis was a sign of a "revival of Greco-Roman and Late Antique vocabulary in architecture,"<sup>73</sup> but I think that this is debatable. According to Rorem, Suger intended the building to reflect in its design the ideas of the 'Areopagite', and reasoned that the abbot managed to accomplish his goal. Because the church has been widely considered the first Gothic structure,

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 121.

<sup>69</sup> Y. de Andia, *Denys l'aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997); *idem*, *Henosis: l'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, coll. *Philosophia Antiqua* 71, 1996).

<sup>70</sup> Rorem, 1993, p. 16. See also Mainoldi, 2017 (a), pp. 23-45.

<sup>71</sup> Rorem, 1993, p. 16.

<sup>72</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite/Heil and Ritter, CD II, pp. 7- 10.

<sup>73</sup> J. Bony, 'What Possible Sources for the Chevet of Saint-Denis?', pp. 131-143.

the discussion about a Dionysian influence in its construction and in that of other similar edifices has been perpetuated"<sup>74</sup>.

Further evidence to support Rorem's estimation may be found in Bogdanovic's work "Rethinking the Dionysian Legacy in Medieval Architecture: East and West", where she makes a case that some Romanesque and Gothic churches display in their carved decoration and their sculptures elements mentioned in Pseudo-Dionysius's texts, "from angelic figures via humans to the lowliest creatures such as worms, from personifications of natural phenomena (winds, clouds) to attempts to record miracles"<sup>75</sup>. She also thinks that Gothic cathedrals reflect "the compendium of human knowledge, transience of the material world and search for the immortal, ultimate, and divine truth"<sup>76</sup>. The fact that some patrons of cathedrals and churches thought along the same lines, and that Pseudo-Dionysius wrote compositions about the ascent of the soul to God, which some of the benefactors read, resulted in the urge for the latter to put their own as well as the Syrian's ideas into practice.

The Dionysian concept of hierarchy itself was thought to be, at least partially, accountable for the erection and the adornment of some of the medieval structures. It is known that those we discuss here are rich in symbolism; several of them, as we have already noticed, contain representations (in sculpture and painting) of angels and church dignitaries in the sophistication of their various ranking. Moreover, the very materiality of the buildings can witness to the fact that they are pointers to the characteristics of the Divine. Nadine Schibille elaborates on the

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<sup>74</sup> Rorem, 1993, p. 16.

<sup>75</sup> J. Bogdanovic, 'Rethinking the Dionysian Legacy in Medieval Architecture: East and West', p. 132.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132.

aesthetic values peculiar to the Byzantine Empire<sup>77</sup>, to the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, and those maintained by the Neoplatonists in Late Antiquity. Schibille expands on the role of the senses and generally of perception within the encounters with Beauty people had in the sixth century, when this Constantinopolitan shrine dedicated to the Divine Wisdom was constructed. Among other sources, this researcher has studied the ekphrases of the period<sup>78</sup>. One of the results of this exercise reveals that in the same way Pseudo-Dionysius's treatises do, these rhetorical descriptions make evident that the use of light (which is traditionally connected with wisdom), is one of the factors believed to be instrumental in the act of worship. Given this, it is to be expected that attention was paid in Byzantium to how the light was channeled within a sacred space. Liz James elaborates on this issue<sup>79</sup>, as does Bissera V. Pentcheva; the former author is preoccupied with the way the reflection of light from the tesserae of the mosaics helps a believer to concentrate better dur-

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<sup>77</sup> On this, see also L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>78</sup> For renowned examples of ekphrasis in Byzantium see for instance Nicholas Mesarites (b. 1163), Ekphrasis, in *Cod. Gr. 350/Codex Ambrosianus*, fols. 93 sup.- 96 sup., called by August Heisenberg *Codex Ambrosianus*, fols. 93 sup.-96 sup. For the role of ekphrasis in general see J. Elsner, 'Introduction: The Genres of Ekphrasis', *Ramus*, 31, 2002, pp. 1-18; R. Webb, 'The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor and Motion in Ekphraseis of Church Buildings', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 53, 1999, pp. 59-74; L. James, R. Webb, 'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium', *Art History*, 14, 1991, pp. 1-17; H. Maguire, 'Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 28, 1974, pp. 111-140; G. Downey, 'Ekphrasis', in T. Klausner (ed.), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Hiersmann, 1959), vol. 4, pp. 921-944.

<sup>79</sup> L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

ing the act of worship, and the latter with specifying how, by their gleaming, the rays of the Sun and the light of the candles fulfill the same function<sup>80</sup>. We have already referred to the manner in which light was used in the arts and the architecture dedicated to the sacred; as observed, its impact on believers was a serious issue in the Empire. As Louth emphasizes, the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius's ideas, especially in Gregory of Palamas<sup>81</sup> and Maximus the Confessor's works, points out the importance of light for the aesthetics espoused by the texts pertaining to the Syrian monk<sup>82</sup>.

Similarly to some of the authors introduced at the outset of the chapter, Bogdanovic thinks that materiality and light play important roles in architecture, and considers these to be specific factors of church design that can be very helpful in enabling people to relate to God. She contends that the main church within Studenica monastery, which she defines as a "Byzantine-Romanesque 'hybrid'"<sup>83</sup>, was built "of fine marble, which under

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<sup>80</sup> B. V. Pentcheva, , *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press), 2010; idem, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017); idem, 'Hagia Sophia and Multisensory Aesthetics', in *Gesta*, vol. 50, No. 2 (2011), pp. 93-111.

<sup>81</sup> A. Louth, 'Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas', pp. 55-71; A. Golitzin, 'Dionysius the Areopagite in the works of Gregory Palamas: On the question of a "Christological corrective" and related matters', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 46, 2002, pp. 163-190; N. Sakharov, 'The Uncreated Light in Palamas and in Elder Sophrony', in *Ο Άγιος Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς στην Ιστορία και το Παρόν*, ed. Georgios I. Mantzaridis (Athos: Vatopaidou Monastery, 2000), pp. 307-318.

<sup>82</sup> A. Louth, 'Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas', pp. 55-71.

<sup>83</sup> J. Bogdanovic, 'Rethinking the Dionysian Legacy in Medieval Architecture: East and West', p. 132.

ideal conditions would grant it longevity [...]. Because the polished white marble of the church glitters and shines in the sunlight, it offers a confirmation about the sophistication people manifested in the manner in which they used light, especially that which didn't have a clearly defined source"<sup>84</sup>. God, as the supreme beauty, was conceived as being the origin of all light and as calling people to Himself *inter alia* by the means of it. Within a milieu infused by such ideas, the Church was considered "a potent symbol that propels anagogical, uplifting movement"<sup>85</sup>. Bogdanovic takes her argument even further and claims that the three stages of Dionysian "orthopraxy" – purification, illumination and perfection – correspond to those of "founding, building and bringing to completion" that a construction undergoes during its coming into being. I am not certain that such a comparison is of substance because any act of creation has a point of beginning, and phases of development as well as a moment of attainment. Nevertheless, generally speaking, the associations this researcher makes are interesting.

#### **4 Pseudo-Dionysius's references to church music**

Indications about the music chanted in churches in the sixth century exists in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, and one can notice that some of what he narrates is still valid today. The Liturgical hymnody that is supposed to be a part of the Heavenly Eucharistic services is sung in every church on Earth. Both Ivanov and Bogdanovic make remarks about the fact that Byzantine iconography indicates a part of this reality by inserting fragments of liturgical texts among images; the Trisagion hymn

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<sup>84</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem.

(“holy, holy, holy”) appears most often in such contexts. Tova A. Leight-Choate has dedicated her doctoral dissertation to what she calls the ‘liturgical faces of Saint Denis’ referring both to Pseudo-Dionysius and the Abbey of St. Denis in France<sup>86</sup>. Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi elaborates on the musical terminology and other related aspects in Pseudo-Dionysius’s work and considers that this is partially about the harmony of the universe, *harmonia mundi*. He builds his argument mainly on the fact that hierarchies are about order, hence about harmony, and that is peculiar not only to numerology but also to music<sup>87</sup>. Mainoldi also identifies in the treatises about the ecclesiastical and the celestial hierarchies, as well as in *The Divine Names*, liturgical passages and textual expressions referring to those, as well as hymns mentioned outside the liturgical context and other chants. The liturgical hymnography revealed is about baptism, the consecration of the Myron, and about funerary rites<sup>88</sup>. This information from the writings of the Syrian is essential as it

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<sup>86</sup> T. A. L. Leight-Choate, *Liturgical Faces of Saint Denis: Music, Power and Identity in Medieval France* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, New Haven, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Mainoldi, especially in 2017 (b); idem, ‘Accezioni e rifocalizzazioni del simbolismo musicale tra suono, numero e segno durante il medioevo’, «*Philomusica on-line*», IX, 3, 2010, pp. 149-172; idem, *Ars musica. La concezione della musica nel Medioevo*, Rugginenti, Milan, 2001, and in two forthcoming publications; I thank Ernesto for trusting their manuscripts to me. Among others scholars who have published on similar topics see A. Lingas, “From Earth to Heaven: The Changing Soundscape of Byzantine Liturgy”, in M. Jackson and C. Nesbitt (eds.), *Experiencing Byzantium: Papers from the 44th Spring Symposium of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, Routledge, 2013), pp. 311-358.

<sup>88</sup> Mainoldi, 2017b. There is substantial material published especially about baptism which can be relevant for our discussion; see for instance Th. M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechuminate: West and East Syria* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 98.

enriches our knowledge about liturgical and other Church practices observed during his lifetime.

Ivanov appreciates that the mosaics on the central dome in the Church of the Mother of God in Palermo (1143), in the baptistery in San Marco, Venice (thirteenth century), and in the apse of the church in Staro Nagoričino in Macedonia (c. 1316-1318) depict the Liturgy in the celestial realm<sup>89</sup>. Bogdanovic elaborates on the latter thus: “Thrones, cherubim, seraphim, and angels are usually represented as celebrants of heavenly liturgy encircling God, leader of all understanding and action”, underlining the concordance of the earthly and celestial liturgy in words, images, and rites<sup>90</sup>. Such an idea connects with another she holds in regard to the architecture that is supposed to have been influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius’s notions: “The builders of medieval churches, in particular, emphasized their material glory and beauty as inseparable from their apophatic aesthetics propelled by their kataphatic, material and sensible, and thus also symbolic, values. Such a participatory approach underlines the use of architecture to complement the material with the immaterial world as was done within the liturgy. The material body of architecture acquires significance beyond its nature and allows the beholder to “bring to completion” the union with God in the space beyond<sup>91</sup>. I have elaborated elsewhere on the fact that in the case of Byzantine churches there is a connection between the Liturgical setting, the painting, and architecture<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>89</sup> E. Ivanov, ‘Iconographic Interpretations of Theological Themes in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and in St. Gregory Palamas and the Reception of these Themes by Meister Eckhart’, p. 177.

<sup>90</sup> J. Bogdanovic, ‘Rethinking the Dionysian Legacy in Medieval Architecture: East and West’, p. 121.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132.

<sup>92</sup> Elena Ene D.-Vasilescu, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Icons and Icon-painters in Romania* (Saarbrücken: VDM, 2009).

Here I mention a mosaic from a villa in Byzantine Syria (Mariamin; late fourth century AD) in which musical instruments are visible; these are an organ, aulos, and a lyre<sup>93</sup>.

Other church patrons and iconographers appreciated that the cymbals, flute, and the lyre, for instance, can have a role in the Liturgy, just as they had in the Jewish worship. Today the musical instruments have disappeared from the Eucharistic services of Byzantine heritage (there are a few Greek churches in the diaspora – in Australia for certain – where the organ is played). Iconographers also depicted church hymnographers as John Cucuzeles<sup>94</sup> and Joseph the Hymnographer<sup>95</sup>; the former is famously depicted in a fifteenth-century musical codex at the Great Lavra Monastery, Mount Athos, where he lived, composed, and chanted.

Moreover, because we speak about customs in relation with the Liturgy, we shall recount that it was a dispute in the literature whether the intimations about it in the *Corpus Dionysiaca* are

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<sup>93</sup> Trudy Ring (ed.), *International Dictionary of Historic Places: Middle East and Africa*, Taylor & Francis, 1994, vol. 1, p. 4; description on p. 318 in vol. 4.

<sup>94</sup> John Cucuzeles/John Koukouzelis/Jan Kukulzeli was an Albanian-Bulgarian (born in Durazzo) composer, singer and reformer of Orthodox Church music, who lived in the fourteenth century. He created for and chanted in the Great Lavra on Mount Athos. See, for instance, A. Kazhdan, (ed). 'Koukouzeles, John', *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 1155; N. K. Moran, *Singers in Late Byzantine and Slavonic Painting*, 1986, pp. 99-101. On p. 100 is written that John was already known as a composer by 1302 and that he died sometimes between 1360 and 1375.

<sup>95</sup> Joseph the Hymnographer (and defender of icons), was a Greek born in c. 810 in Sicily. He was forced to leave his island in 830 in the wake of an invasion by the Arabs, journeying to Thessalonica and then to Constantinople, where eventually he founded a monastery; see, for instance, R. Hillier, 'Joseph the Hymnographer and Mary the Gate', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 1985, 36, pp. 311-320.

about the Liturgy in Constantinople or Antioch. On this Paul L. Gavrilyuk concludes that “we have more grounds for believing that the EH reflects the liturgical customs of the Empire’s capital than those of Antioch. Extrapolating this evidence, it seems reasonable to suggest that Dionysius the Areopagite could be with greater justification referred to as Dionysius of Constantinople”<sup>96</sup>. The rite of baptism described by him in EH belongs to “‘West Syrian’ liturgical family”, but as it was carried out in the Byzantine capital<sup>97</sup>. I would be cautious in reaching a definite point of view on this subject because we cannot yet say with certainty how different the Eucharistic services were in the two cities during the sixth century.

Here is the place where, as announced in footnote 63, I have to insert my own view about Pseudo-Dionysius’s identity; it is almost compulsory for any specialist working on the topic to have an opinion about this. After going through the bibliography attached here, and through more than that<sup>98</sup>, including reading Charles M. Stang’s still recent book that presents the newest information concerning the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius’s writings and the identity of their author<sup>99</sup> – and also attending in Oxford the international workshop ‘Corpus Dionysiicum Areopagiticum: Ancient and Modern Readers’ (July 2017), I have reached the conclusion that Pseudo-

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<sup>96</sup> P. L. Gavrilyuk, ‘Did Pseudo-Dionysius Live in Constantinople?’, p. 514.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 506; see also A. Di Berardino, *Patrology* (Cambridge, UK: J. Clarke, 2006), p. 45; Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite: *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, edited by Th. L. Campbell (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>98</sup> I am working on a book about the notion of time in Patristics and Byzantium for Oxford University Press and in this context I mention Pseudo-Dionysius’s stand on that issue, hence I had to read more publications than those listed in the bibliography attached to the chapter.

<sup>99</sup> C. M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: “No Longer I”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Dionysius was a scholar of the sixth century who practiced Theology and Philosophy; he was also a pious Christian. Since Christianity has incorporated Platonic Philosophy to a considerable extent, when the Syrian discovered it ‘made holy’ in St. Paul’s letters, he felt that a disciple of the Apostle was the most appropriate person with whom he could best identify himself. As we know, Paul was a good scholar and had played a central role in the intellectual life of his time – especially before his conversion. After that he imparted both from his knowledge and experience to various congregations; he did not forget what he studied but used it for the mentioned purpose.

It should not be surprising that Pseudo-Dionysius followed the Christian fashion of writing under a pseudonym. Some Christians still use pseudonyms today<sup>100</sup>.

## **5 Conclusion**

It seems that at least in some cases the presumption that a relationship exists between Pseudo-Dionysius’s texts and various achievements in the arts and architecture is sustainable. Certainly the Syrian conceived the “symbols at the level of what can be perceived through the senses as a kind of stepping-stone, provided by God’s love for humankind, to the realm of the intel-

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<sup>100</sup> Christian authors, even now, date their works according to the religious feast that falls closest to their completion time – one such instance is Andrew Louth’s second edition of the book *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys* of which completion is marked as having taken place on the ‘Feast of St. Nicolas Kavalas, 2006’.

ligible – the spiritual, immaterial world, beyond which lies the divine”<sup>101</sup>.

An appropriate conclusion to a chapter that has dealt with theology, senses, and arts can be a reminder about how people experience and describe beauty. Plotinus, in *Enneads*, Book 6. 1, says: “Beauty addresses itself chiefly to sight; but there is a beauty for the hearing too, as in certain combinations of words and in all kinds of music, for melodies and cadences are beautiful; and minds that lift themselves above the realm of sense to a higher order are aware of beauty in the conduct of life, in actions, in character, in the pursuits of the intellect; and there is the beauty of virtues [...] What, then, is it that gives comeliness to material forms and draws the ear to the sweetness perceived in sounds, and what is the secret of the beauty there is in all that derives from Soul?”<sup>102</sup> Augustine recognized Beauty in God and felt that this was apt to lift his spirit and generate love within (at the same time he expressed regret that material things brought him down<sup>103</sup>). We know from his *Confessions* that the soul of the bishop of Hippo, like that of any human being, continually ascended and descended during its journey towards God – to use Pseudo-Dionysius’s terminology. It, like that of any human being, alternatively experienced the lightness of the divine beauty and the ‘heaviness’ of the mundane world.

As we have indicated at the beginning of the chapter, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite himself appreciated Beauty as being a divine energy and called God by this word. The ‘virtue’ of Beau-

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<sup>101</sup> A. Louth, ‘Cappadocian Fathers and Dionysius in Iconoclasm’, in Jostein Børtnes and Tomas Hägg (eds.), *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2006), p. 278.

<sup>102</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, p. 56.

<sup>103</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, a new translation by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, repr. 1998, 2008), p. 127.

ty is greeted by the senses and Rorem underlines the function they play in our lives: “Our context within this created world of space and time means that we humans are dependent upon sense perception”<sup>104</sup>. This is true: beyond the physical mechanism of the sense organs, the senses in themselves, i.e., as part of the mind, are responsible for the way we interpret the reality around us, including the artistic accomplishments people carry out.

But when the Syrian thinker brought the discussion about perceptible symbols and statues into that concerning the world of the soul<sup>105</sup>, he only did so in order to underline that the essence of things lies beyond the outcome of the activity of the senses and indeed presents itself after much of what we perceive about the reality around us is left unattended to. Only then a person obtains glimpses into the kingdom of God; that happens through a mystical experience.

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<sup>104</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius/Rorem, 1993, p. 94.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 193.

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