

H. W. JANSON

HISTORY
OF ART

HISTORY

*A Survey of the
the Dawn*

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WITH DORA JANE JANSON

OF ART

Major Visual Arts from

f History to the Present Day

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P R E F A C E

A N D A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

The title of this book has a dual meaning: it refers both to the events that *make* the history of art, and to the scholarly discipline that deals with these events. Perhaps it is just as well that the record and its interpretation are thus designated by the same term. For the two cannot be separated, try as we may. There are no "plain facts" in the history of art—or in the history of anything else, for that matter; only degrees of plausibility. Every statement, no matter how fully documented, is subject to doubt, and remains a "fact" only so long as nobody questions it. To doubt what has been taken for granted, and to find a more plausible interpretation of the evidence, is every scholar's task. Nevertheless, there is always a large body of "facts" in any field of study; they are the sleeping dogs whose very inertness makes them landmarks on the scholarly terrain. Fortunately, only a minority of them can be aroused at the same time, otherwise we should lose our bearings; yet all are kept under surveillance to see which ones might be stirred into wakefulness and locomotion. It is these "facts" that fascinate the scholar.

I believe they will also interest the general reader. In a survey such as this, the sleeping dogs are indispensable, but I have tried to emphasize that their condition is temporary, and to give the reader a fairly close look at some of the wakeful ones. There will be revisions of detail in future printings of this book whenever necessary, as I am under no illusion that my present diagnosis is up to date in every case; the field is too vast for anyone to encompass all of it with equal competence. If the shortcomings of my account have been kept within tolerable limits, this is due to the many friends and colleagues who have permitted me to tax their kindness with inquiries, requests for favors, or discussions of doubtful points. I am particularly indebted to the following: Richard Ettinghausen, M. Ş. İpşiroğlu, Wolfgang Lotz, Richard Krautheimer, and Meyer Schapiro, who reviewed various aspects of the book; and Max Loehr, Florentine Mütherich, Ernest Nash, and Halldor Soehner, for generous help in securing photographic material. I must also record my gratitude to the American Academy in Rome, which made it possible for me, as art historian in residence during the spring of 1960, to write the chapters on ancient art under ideal conditions; and to the Academy's indefatigable librarian, Nina Langobardi. Irene Gordon, Celia Butler, and Patricia Egan have improved the book in countless ways. Patricia Egan also deserves the chief credit for the reading list. I should like, finally, to acknowledge the admirable skill and patience of Philip Grushkin, who is responsible for the design and layout of the volume; my thanks go to him and to Adrienne Onderdonk, his assistant.

H. W. J.

NOTE ON THE PICTURE CAPTIONS

Unless otherwise noted, all paintings are in tempera on panel, or oil on canvas, and all sculpture is of stone. Measurements are not given for objects that are inherently large (architecture, architectural sculpture, wall painting), or small (manuscript illuminations, drawings, prints). Height precedes width. A probable measuring error of more than one per cent is indicated by "c." Dates are based on documentary evidence, unless preceded by "c." A list of credits for the black-and-white illustrations appears at the end of the book.

INTRODUCTION

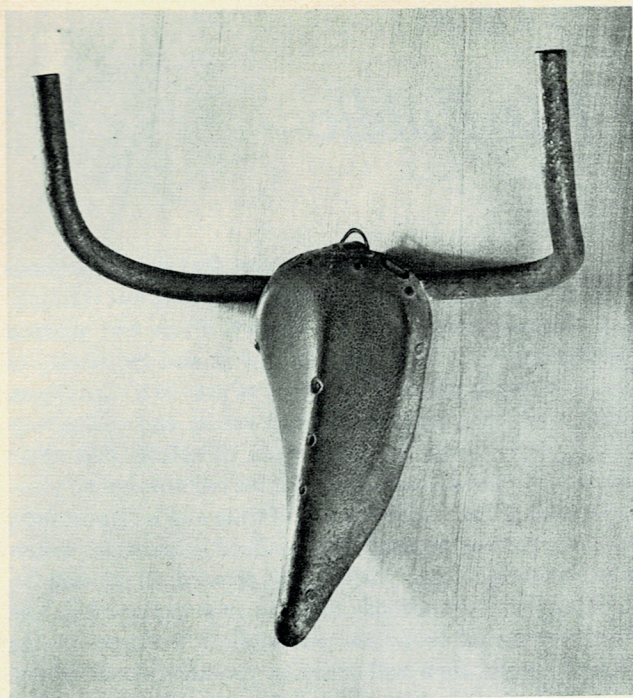
The Artist and His Public

"Why is this supposed to be art?" How often have we heard this question asked—or asked it ourselves, perhaps—in front of one of the strange, disquieting works that we are likely to find nowadays in museums or art exhibitions. There usually is an undertone of exasperation, for the question implies that we don't think we are looking at a work of art, but that the experts—the critics, museum curators, art historians—must suppose it to be one, why else would they put it on public display? Clearly, their standards are very different from ours; we are at a loss to understand them and we wish they'd give us a few simple, clear-cut rules to go by. Then maybe we would learn to like what we see, we would know "why it is art." But the experts do not post exact rules, and the layman is apt to fall back upon his final line of defense: "Well, I don't know anything about art but I know what I like."

It is a formidable roadblock, this stock phrase, in the path of understanding between expert and layman. Until not so very long ago, there was no great need for the two to communicate with each other; the general public had little voice in matters of art and therefore could not challenge the judgment of the expert few. Today both sides are aware of the barrier between them (the barrier itself is nothing new, although it may be greater now than at certain times in the past) and of the need to level it. That is why books like this one are being written. Let us begin, then, by examining the roadblock and the various unspoken assumptions that buttress it. The most fateful among them, it seems to me, is the belief that there are, or ought to be, exact rules by which we can tell art from what is not art, and that, on the basis of these rules, we can then grade any given work according to its merits. Deciding what is art and evaluating a work of art are separate problems; if we had an absolute method for distinguishing art from non-art, this method would not necessarily enable us to measure quality. People have long been in the habit of compounding the two problems into one; quite often when they ask, "Why is it art?" they mean, "Why is it *good* art?" Yet, all systems for rating art so far proposed fall short of being completely satisfactory; we tend to agree with their authors only if they like the same things we do. If we do not share their taste, their system seems like a strait jacket to us. This brings us to another, more basic difficulty. In order to have any rating scale at all, we must be willing to assume that there are fixed, timeless values in art, that the true worth of a given work is a stable thing, independent of time and circumstance. Perhaps such values exist; we cannot be sure that

they do not. We do know, however, that opinions about works of art keep changing, not only today but throughout the known course of history. Even the greatest classics have had their ups and downs, and the history of taste—which is part of the history of art—is a continuous process of discarding established values and rediscovering neglected ones. It would seem, therefore, that absolute qualities in art elude us, that we cannot escape viewing works of art in the context of time and circumstance, whether past or present. How indeed could it be otherwise, so long as art is still being created all around us, opening our eyes almost daily to new experiences and thus forcing us to adjust our sights? Perhaps, in the distant future, men will cease to produce works of art. It is not inconceivable, after all, that mankind may some day "outgrow" its need for art. When that happens, the history of art will have come to an end, and our descendants will then be in a better position to work out an enduring scale of artistic values—if the problem still interests them. Until that time, we had better admit that it is impossible to measure the merits of works of art as a scientist measures distances.

But if we must give up any hope of a trustworthy rating scale for artistic quality, can we not at least expect to find a reliable, objective way to tell art from non-art? Unfortunately, even this rather more modest goal proves so difficult as to be almost beyond our powers. Defining art is about as troublesome as defining a human being. Plato, it is said, tried to solve the latter problem by calling man "a featherless biped," whereupon Diogenes introduced a plucked rooster as "Plato's Man." Generalizations about art are, on the whole, equally easy to disprove. Even the most elementary statements turn out to have their pitfalls. Let us test, for instance, the simple claim that a work of art must be made by man, rather than by nature. This definition at least eliminates the confusion of treating as works of art phenomena such as flowers, sea shells, or sunsets. It is a far from sufficient definition, to be sure, since man makes many things other than works of art. Still, it might serve as a starting point. Our difficulties begin as soon as we ask, "What do we mean by making?" If, in order to simplify our problem, we concentrate on the visual arts, we might say that a work of art must be a tangible thing shaped by human hands. Now let us look at the striking *Bull's Head* by Picasso (fig. 1), which consists of nothing but the seat and handlebars of an old bicycle. How meaningful is our formula here? Of course the materials used by Picasso are man-made, but it would be absurd to insist that Picasso



1. PABLO PICASSO. *Bull's Head*. 1943. Handlebars and seat of a bicycle. Galerie Louise Leiris, Paris

must share the credit with the manufacturer, since the seat and handlebars in themselves are not works of art. While we feel a certain jolt when we first recognize the ingredients of this visual pun, we also sense that it was a stroke of genius to put them together in this unique way, and we cannot very well deny that it is a work of art. Yet the handiwork—the mounting of the seat on the handlebars—is ridiculously simple. What is far from simple is the leap of the imagination by which Picasso recognized a bull's head in these unlikely objects; that, we feel, only he could have done. Clearly, then, we must be careful not to confuse the making of a work of art with manual skill or craftsmanship. Some works of art may demand a great deal of technical discipline; others do not. And even the most painstaking piece of craft does not deserve to be called a work of art unless it involves a leap of the imagination. But if this is true, are we not forced to conclude that the real making of the *Bull's Head* took place in the artist's mind? No, that is not so, either. Suppose that, instead of actually putting the two pieces together and showing them to us, Picasso merely told us, "You know, today I saw a bicycle seat and handlebars that looked just like a bull's head to me." Then there would be no work of art and his remark would not even strike us as an interesting bit of conversation. Moreover, Picasso himself would not feel the satisfaction of having created something on the basis of his leap of the imagination alone. Once he had conceived his visual pun, he could never be sure that it would really work unless he put it into effect.

Thus the artist's hands, however modest the task they

may have to perform, play an essential part in the creative process. Our *Bull's Head* is, of course, an ideally simple case, involving only one leap of the imagination and a single manual act in response to it—once the seat had been properly placed on the handlebars, the job was done. Ordinarily, artists do not work with ready-made parts but with materials that have little or no shape of their own; the creative process consists of a long series of leaps of the imagination and the artist's attempts to give them form by shaping the material accordingly. The hand tries to carry out the commands of the imagination and hopefully puts down a brush stroke, but the result may not be quite what had been expected, partly because all matter resists the human will, partly because the image in the artist's mind is constantly shifting and changing, so that the commands of the imagination cannot be very precise. In fact, the mental image begins to come into focus only as the artist "draws the line somewhere." That line then becomes part—the only fixed part—of the image; the rest of the image, as yet unborn, remains fluid. And each time the artist adds another line, a new leap of the imagination is needed to incorporate that line into his ever-growing mental image. If the line cannot be incorporated, he discards it and puts down a new one. In this way, by a constant flow of impulses back and forth between his mind and the partly shaped material before him, he gradually defines more and more of the image, until at last all of it has been given visible form. Needless to say, artistic creation is too subtle and intimate an experience to permit an exact step-by-step description; only the artist himself can observe it fully, but he is so absorbed by it that he has great difficulty explaining it to us. Still, our metaphor of birth comes closer to the truth than would a description of the process in terms of a transfer or projection of the image from the artist's mind, for the making of a work of art is both joyous and painful, replete with surprises, and in no sense mechanical. We have, moreover, ample testimony that the artist himself tends to look upon his creation as a living thing. Thus, Michelangelo, who has described the anguish and glory of the artist's experience more eloquently than anyone else, speaks of his "liberating the figure from the marble that imprisons it." We may translate this, I think, to mean that he started the process of carving a statue by trying to visualize a figure in the rough, rectilinear block as it came to him from the quarry. (At times he may even have done so while the marble was still part of the living rock; we know that he liked to go to the quarries and pick out his material on the spot.) It seems fair to assume that at first he did not see the figure any more clearly than one can see an unborn child inside the womb, but we may believe he could see isolated "signs of life" within the marble—a knee or an elbow pressing against the surface. In order to get a firmer grip on this dimly felt, fluid image, he was in the habit of making numerous drawings, and sometimes small models in wax or clay, before he dared to assault



2, 3. MICHELANGELO. *St. Matthew*. 1506. Marble, height 8' 11". Academy, Florence

the "marble prison" itself, for that, he knew, was the final contest between him and his material. Once he started carving, every stroke of the chisel would commit him more and more to a specific conception of the figure hidden in the block, and the marble would permit him to free the figure whole only if his guess as to its shape was correct. Sometimes he did not guess well enough—the stone refused to give up some essential part of its prisoner, and Michelangelo, defeated, left the work unfinished, as he did with his *St. Matthew* (figs. 2,3), whose every gesture seems to record the vain struggle for liberation. Looking at the side view of the block (fig. 3), we may get some inkling of Michelangelo's difficulties here. But could he not have finished the statue in *some* fashion? Surely there is enough material left for that. Well, he probably could

have, but perhaps not in the way he wanted, and in that case the defeat would have been even more stinging.

Clearly, then, the making of a work of art has little in common with what we ordinarily mean by "making." It is a strange and risky business in which the maker never quite knows what he is making until he has actually made it; or, to put it another way, it is a game of find-and-see in which the seeker is not sure what he is looking for until he has found it. (In the *Bull's Head*, it is the bold "finding" that impresses us most, in the *St. Matthew*, the strenuous "seeking.") To the non-artist, it seems hard to believe that this uncertainty, this need-to-take-a-chance, should be the essence of the artist's work. For we all tend to think of "making" in terms of the craftsman or manufacturer who knows exactly what he wants to produce

from the very outset, picks the tools best fitted to his task, and is sure of what he is doing at every step. Such “making” is a two-phase affair: first the craftsman makes a plan, then he acts on it. And because he—or his customer—has made all the important decisions in advance, he has to worry only about means, rather than ends, while he carries out his plan. There is thus little risk, but also little adventure, in his handiwork, which as a consequence tends to become routine. It may even be replaced by the mechanical labor of a machine. No machine, on the other hand, can replace the artist, for with him conception and execution go hand in hand and are so completely interdependent that he cannot separate the one from the other. Whereas the craftsman only attempts what he knows to be possible, the artist is always driven to attempt the impossible—or at least the improbable or unimaginable. Who, after all, would have imagined that a bull’s head was hidden in the seat and handlebars of a bicycle until Picasso discovered it for us; did he not, almost literally, “make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear”? No wonder the artist’s way of working is so resistant to any set rules, while the craftsman’s encourages standardization and regularity. We acknowledge this difference when we speak of the artist as *creating* instead of merely *making* something, although the word is being done to

death by overuse nowadays, when every child and every lipstick manufacturer is labeled “creative.”

Needless to say, there have always been many more craftsmen than artists among us, since our need for the familiar and expected far exceeds our capacity to absorb the original but often deeply unsettling experiences we get from works of art. The urge to penetrate unknown realms, to achieve something original, may be felt by every one of us now and then; to that extent, we can all fancy ourselves potential artists—mute inglorious Miltons. What sets the real artist apart is not so much the desire to *seek*, but that mysterious ability to *find* which we call talent. We also speak of it as a “gift,” implying that it is a sort of present from some higher power; or as “genius,” a term which originally meant that a higher power—a kind of “good demon”—inhabits the artist’s body and acts through him. All we can really say about talent is that it must not be confused with aptitude. Aptitude is what the craftsman needs; it means a better-than-average knack for doing something that any ordinary person can do. An aptitude is fairly constant and specific; it can be measured with some success by means of tests which permit us to predict future performance. Creative talent, on the other hand, seems utterly unpredictable; we can spot it only on the basis of *past* performance. And even past performance is not enough to assure us that a given artist will continue to produce on the same level: some artists reach a creative peak quite early in their careers and then “go dry,” while others, after a slow and unpromising start, may achieve astonishingly original work in middle age or even later.

Originality, then, is what distinguishes art from craft. We may say, therefore, that it is the yardstick of artistic greatness or importance. Unfortunately, it is also very hard to define; the usual synonyms—uniqueness, novelty, freshness—do not help us very much, and the dictionaries tell us only that an original work must not be a copy, reproduction, imitation, or translation. What they fail to point out is that originality is always relative: there is no such thing as a completely original work of art. Thus, if we want to rate works of art on an “originality scale,” our problem does not lie in deciding whether or not a given work is original (the obvious copies and reproductions are for the most part easy enough to eliminate) but in establishing just exactly *how* original it is. To do that is not impossible. However, the difficulties besetting our task are so great that we cannot hope for more than tentative and incomplete answers. Which does not mean, of course, that we should not try; quite the contrary. For whatever the outcome of our labors in any particular case, we shall certainly learn a great deal about works of art in the process.

Let us look at a few of the baffling questions that come up when we investigate the problem of originality. The *Thorn Puller*, or *Spinario* (fig. 4), has long been one of the most renowned pieces of ancient bronze sculpture and enjoys considerable fame as a work of art even today—

4. *Thorn Puller (Spinario)*. Bronze, height 28³/₄".
Capitoline Museums, Rome





5. ALBRECHT DÜRER. *Battle of Sea Gods*. 1494.
Pen drawing, $11\frac{3}{8} \times 15$ ". Albertina, Vienna



6. ANDREA MANTEGNA. *Battle of Sea Gods*.
c. 1493. Engraving, $11\frac{3}{8} \times 15\frac{3}{8}$ ".
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
(Rogers Fund, 1920)

except among classical archaeologists who have studied it with care. They will point out that the head, which is cast separately and is of slightly different metal, does not match the rest: the planes of the face are far more severe than the soft, swelling forms of the body; and the hair, instead of falling forward, behaves as if the head were held upright. The head, therefore, must have been designed for another figure, probably a standing one, of the fifth century B.C., but the body could not have been conceived until more than a hundred years later. As soon as

we become aware of this, our attitude toward the *Spinario* changes sharply: we no longer see it as a single, harmonious unit but as a somewhat incongruous combination of two ready-made pieces. And since the pieces are separate—though fragmentary—works of art in their own right (unlike the separate pieces, which are not works of art in themselves, in Picasso's *Bull's Head*), they cannot grow together into a new whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Obviously, this graft is not much of a creative achievement. Hence we find it hard to believe that the



7. EDOUARD MANET. *Luncheon on the Grass* (*Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*). 1863. Oil on canvas, 7'×8'10". The Louvre, Paris

very able artist who modeled the body should have been willing to countenance such a "marriage of convenience." The combination must be of a later date, presumably Roman rather than Greek. Perhaps the present head was substituted when the original head was damaged by accident? But are the head and body really authentic Greek fragments of the fifth and fourth century B.C., or could they be Roman copies or adaptations of such pieces? These questions may be settled eventually by comparison with other ancient bronzes of less uncertain origin, but even then the degree of artistic originality of the *Spinario* is likely to remain a highly problematic matter.

A straightforward copy can usually be recognized as such on internal evidence alone. If the copyist is merely a conscientious craftsman, rather than an artist, he will produce a work of craft; the execution will strike us as pedestrian and thus out of tune with the conception of the work. There are also likely to be small slip-ups and mistakes that can be spotted in much the same way as misprints in a text. But what if one great artist copies another? The drawing, *Battle of Sea Gods*, by Albrecht Dürer (fig. 5) is a case in point. An experienced eye will not only recognize it as a copy (because, while the "hand-

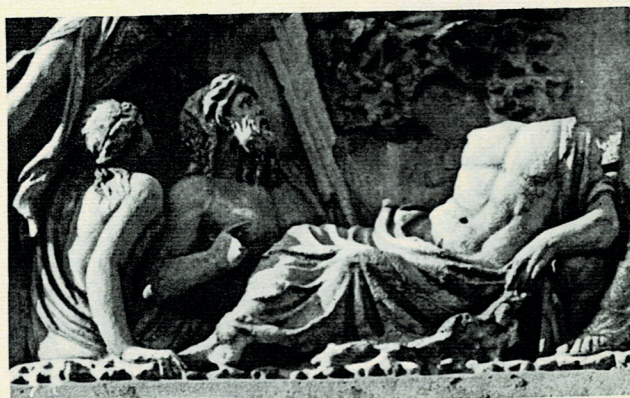
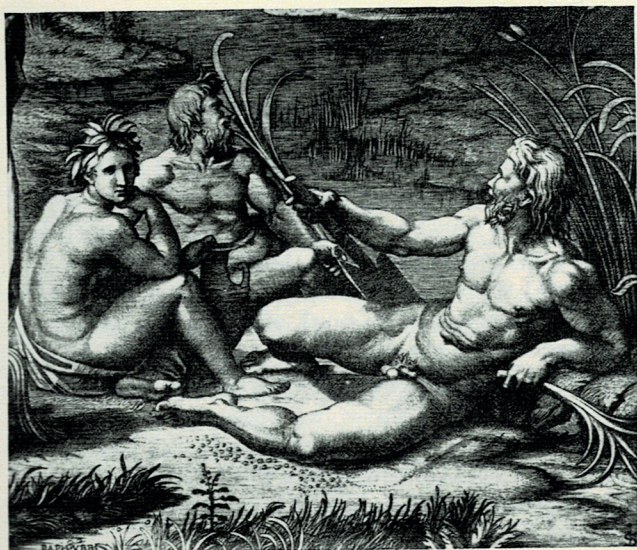
writing" is Dürer's, the design as a whole has a flavor distinctively different from that of the master's other output at that time), it will also be able to identify the source: the original must have been some work by Andrea Mantegna, a somewhat older Italian painter with a powerful artistic personality of his own. Dürer's drawing, of course, does not permit us to say with assurance what kind of work by Mantegna served as its model—it might have been a drawing, a painting, a print, possibly even a relief—or how faithful a copy it is. Yet it would be instructive to find this out, in order for us to gain a better insight into the character of our drawing. The next step, therefore, is to check through the known works of Mantegna; if the same composition does not occur among them, we will have learned nothing new about the drawing but we may have added something to our knowledge of Mantegna, for in that event the Dürer drawing would be a valuable record of an otherwise unknown—and thus presumably lost—composition by the older master. It so happens that Dürer's model, a Mantegna engraving, has survived (fig. 6). As we compare the two, we are surprised to see that the drawing, although it follows Mantegna's design detail for detail, somehow retains the qual-

ity of an independent work of art as well. How can we resolve this paradox? Perhaps we may put it this way: in using the engraving as his model, Dürer did not really copy it in the accepted sense of that word, since he did not try to achieve the effect of a duplicate. He drew purely for his own instruction, which is to say that he looked at the engraving the way he would look at something in nature, transcribing it very accurately yet with his own inimitable rhythm of line. In other words, he was not in the least constrained or intimidated by the fact that his model, in this instance, was another work of art. Once we understand this, it becomes clear to us that Dürer's drawing *represents* (it does not *copy*) the engraving in the same way that other drawings represent a landscape or a living person, and that its artistic originality does not suffer thereby. Dürer here gives us a highly original view of Mantegna, a view that is uniquely Dürer's.

A relationship as close as this between two works of art is not as rare as one might think. Ordinarily, though, the link is less obvious. Edouard Manet's famous painting, *Luncheon on the Grass* (fig. 7), seemed so revolutionary a work when first exhibited almost a century ago that it caused a scandal, in part because the artist had dared to show an undressed young woman next to two fashionably clothed men. In real life such a party might indeed get raided by the police, and people assumed that Manet had intended to represent an actual event. Not until many years later did an art historian discover the source of these figures: a group of classical deities from an engraving after Raphael (fig. 9). The relationship, so striking once it has been pointed out to us, had escaped attention, for Manet did not *copy* or *represent* the Raphael composition—he merely *borrowed* its main outlines while translating the figures into modern terms. Had his contemporaries known of this, the *Luncheon* would have seemed a rather less disreputable kind of outing to them, since now the hallowed shade of Raphael could be seen to hover nearby as a sort of chaperon. (Perhaps the artist

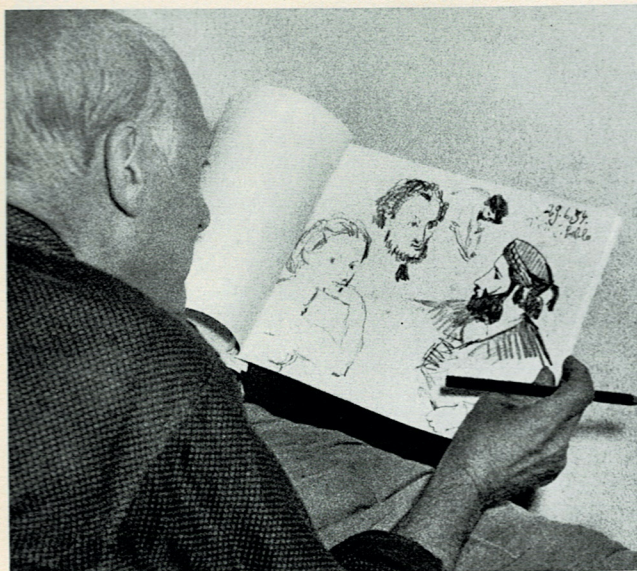
meant to tease the conservative public, hoping that after the initial shock had passed, somebody would recognize the well-hidden quotation behind his "scandalous" group.) For us, the main effect of the comparison is to make the cool, formal quality of Manet's figures even more conspicuous. But does it decrease our respect for his originality? True, he is "indebted" to Raphael; yet his way of bringing the forgotten old composition back to life is in itself so original and creative that he may be said to have more than repaid his debt. As a matter of fact, Raphael's figures are just as "derivative" as Manet's; they stem from still older sources which lead us back to ancient Roman art and beyond (compare the relief of *River Gods*, fig. 8).

Thus Manet, Raphael, and the Roman river gods form three links in a chain of relationships that arises somewhere out of the dim and distant past and continues into the future—for the *Luncheon on the Grass* has in turn served as a source of more recent works of art (see fig. 10). Nor is this an exceptional case. All works of art anywhere—yes, even such works as Picasso's *Bull's Head*—are part of similar chains that link them to their predecessors. If it is true that "no man is an island," the same can be said of works of art. The sum total of these chains makes a web in which every work of art occupies its own specific place, and which we call *tradition*. Without tradition—the word means "that which has been handed down to us"—no originality would be possible; it provides, as it were, the firm platform from which the artist makes his leap of the imagination. The place where he lands will then become part of the web and serve as a point of departure for further leaps. And for us, too, the web of tradition is equally essential. Whether we are aware of it or not, tradition is the framework within which we inevitably form our opinions of works of art and assess their degree of originality. Let us not forget, however, that such assessments must always remain incomplete and subject to revision. For in order to arrive at a definitive view, we



above: 8. *River Gods* (detail of a Roman sarcophagus). 3rd century A.D. Villa Medici, Rome

left: 9. MARCANTONIO RAIMONDI, after RAPHAEL. *The Judgment of Paris* (detail). c. 1520. Engraving



10. Pablo Picasso with sketches after Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass*. 1954 (Copyright Alexander Liberman)

should not only need to know *all* the different chains of relationships that pass through a given work of art, we should be able to survey the entire length of every chain. And that we can never hope to achieve.

If originality is what distinguishes art from craft, tradition serves as the common meeting ground of the two. Every budding artist starts out on the level of craft, by imitating other works of art. In this way, he gradually absorbs the artistic tradition of his time and place until he has gained a firm footing in it. But only the truly gifted ever leave that stage of traditional competence and become creators in their own right. No one, after all, can be taught how to create; he can only be taught how to go through the motions of creating. If he has talent, he will eventually achieve the real thing. What the apprentice or art student learns are skills and techniques—established ways of drawing, painting, carving, designing; established ways of *seeing*. And if he senses that his gifts are too modest for painting, sculpture, or architecture, he is likely to turn to one of the countless special fields known collectively as “applied art.” There he can be fruitfully active on a more limited scale: he may become an illustrator, typographer, or interior decorator; he may design textile patterns, chinaware, furniture, clothing, or advertisements. All these pursuits stand somewhere between “pure” art and “mere” craft. They provide some scope for originality to their more ambitious practitioners, but the flow of creative endeavor is hemmed in by such factors as the cost and availability of materials or manufacturing processes, accepted notions of what is useful, fitting, or desirable; for the applied arts are more deeply enmeshed in our everyday lives and thus cater to a far wider public than do painting and sculpture. Their purpose, as the name suggests, is to beautify the useful—

an important and honorable one, no doubt, but of a lesser order than that of art pure-and-simple. Nevertheless, we often find it difficult to maintain this distinction. Medieval painting, for instance, is to a large extent “applied,” in the sense that it embellishes surfaces which serve another, practical purpose as well—walls, book pages, windows, furniture. The same may be said of much ancient and medieval sculpture. Greek vases (see pages 78-81), although technically pottery, are sometimes decorated by artists of very impressive ability. And in architecture the distinction breaks down altogether, since the design of every building, from country cottage to cathedral, reflects external limitations imposed upon it by the site, by cost factors, materials, technique, and by the practical purpose of the structure. (The only “pure” architecture is imaginary architecture.) Thus architecture is, almost by definition, an applied art, but it is also a major art (as against the others, which are often called the “minor arts”).

It is now time to return to our troubled layman and his assumptions about art. He may be willing to grant, on the basis of our discussion so far, that art is indeed a complex and in many ways mysterious human activity about which even the experts can hope to offer only tentative and partial conclusions; but he is also likely to take this as confirming his own belief that “I don’t know anything about art.” Are there really people who know nothing about art? If we except small children and the victims of severe mental illness or deficiency, our answer must be no, for we cannot help knowing *something* about it, just as we all know something about politics and economics no matter how indifferent we may be to the issues of the day. Art is so much a part of the fabric of human living that we encounter it all the time, even if our contacts with it are limited to magazine covers, advertising posters, war memorials, and the buildings where we live, work, and worship. Much of this art, to be sure, is pretty shoddy—art at third- and fourth-hand, worn out by endless repetition, representing the lowest common denominator of popular taste. Still, it is art of a sort; and since it is the only art most people ever experience, it molds their ideas on art in general. When they say, “I know what I like,” they really mean, “I like what I know (and I reject whatever fails to match the things I am familiar with)”; such likes are not in truth theirs at all, for they have been imposed upon them by habit and circumstance, without any personal choice. To like what we know and to distrust what we do not know is an age-old human trait. We always tend to think of the past as “the good old days,” while the future seems fraught with danger. But why should so many of us cherish the illusion of having made a personal choice in art when in actual fact we have not? I suspect there is another unspoken assumption here, which goes something like this: “Since art is such an ‘unruly’ subject that even the experts keep disagreeing with each other, my opinion is as good as theirs—it’s all

a matter of subjective preference. In fact, my opinion may be *better* than theirs, because as a layman I react to art in a direct, straightforward fashion, without having my view obstructed by a lot of complicated theories. There must be something wrong with a work of art if it takes an expert to appreciate it."

Behind these mistaken conclusions we find a true and important premise—that works of art exist in order to be liked rather than to be debated. The artist does not create merely for his own satisfaction, but wants his work approved by others. In fact, the hope for approval is what makes him want to create in the first place, and the creative process is not completed until the work has found an audience. Here we have another paradox: the birth of a work of art is an intensely private experience (so much so that many artists can work only when completely alone and refuse to show their unfinished pieces to anyone), yet it must, as a final step, be shared by the public, in order for the birth to be successful. Perhaps we can resolve the paradox once we understand what the artist means by "public." He is concerned not with *the* public as a statistical entity but with his particular public, his audience; quality rather than quantity is what matters to him. At a minimum, this audience need consist of no more than one or two people whose opinion he values. If he can win them over by his work, he feels encouraged to go on; without them, he despairs of his calling. There have been some very great artists who had only such a minimum audience. They hardly ever sold any of their work or had an opportunity to display it in public, but they continued to create because of the moral support of a few faithful friends. These, of course, are rare cases. Ordinarily, artists also need patrons who will purchase their work, thus combining moral and financial support; from the artist's point of view, patrons are always "audience" rather than "customers." There is a vital difference between these last two terms. A customer buys the products of craftsmanship, he knows from previous experience what he will get and that he is going to like it—why else should he have established the custom of returning to the same source of supply? We think of him as "regular" and "satisfied." An audience, in contrast, merits such adjectives as critical, fickle, receptive, enthusiastic; it is uncommitted, free to accept or reject, so that anything placed before it is on trial—nobody knows in advance how the work will be received. Hence there is an emotional tension between artist and audience that has no counterpart in the relationship of craftsman and customer. It is this very tension, this sense of uncertainty and challenge, that the artist needs. He must feel that his work is able to overcome the resistance of the audience, otherwise he cannot be sure that what he has brought forth is a genuine creation, a work of art in fact as well as in in-

tention. The more ambitious and original his work, the greater the tension, and the more triumphant his sense of release after the response of the audience has shown him that his leap of the imagination is successful. On a tiny scale we all have a similar experience when we happen to think up a joke: we have an irresistible urge to tell it to someone, for we can't be sure that it really *is* a joke until we find out whether it strikes others as funny, too. This analogy should not be pressed too far, but it does suggest why artists need an audience to "complete" their work.

The audience whose approval looms so large in the artist's mind is a limited and special one, not the general public: the merits of the artist's work can never be determined by a popularity contest. The size and composition of this primary audience vary a good deal with time and circumstance; its members may be other artists as well as patrons, friends, critics, and interested bystanders. The one qualification they all have in common is an informed love of works of art—an attitude at once discriminating and enthusiastic that lends particular weight to their judgments. They are, in a word, *experts*, people whose authority rests on experience rather than theoretical knowledge. And because experience, even within a limited field, varies from one individual to the other, it is only natural that they should at times disagree among themselves. Such disagreement often stimulates new insights; far from invalidating the experts' role, it shows, rather, how passionately they care about their subject, whether this be the art of their own time or of the past.

The active minority which we have termed the artist's primary audience draws its recruits from a much larger and more passive secondary audience, whose contact with works of art is less direct and continuous. This group, in turn, shades over into the vast numbers of those who believe they "don't know anything about art," the laymen pure-and-simple. What distinguishes the layman, as we have seen before, is not that he actually *is* pure and simple but that he likes to think of himself as being so. In reality, there is no sharp break, no difference in kind, between him and the expert, only a difference in degree. The road to expertness invites anyone with an open mind and a capacity to absorb new experiences. As we travel on it, as our understanding grows, we shall find ourselves liking a great many more things than we had thought possible at the start, yet at the same time we shall gradually acquire the courage of our own convictions, until—if we travel far enough—we know how to make a meaningful individual choice among works of art. By then, we shall have joined the active minority that participates directly in shaping the course of art in our time. And we shall be able to say, with some justice, that we know what we like.

8. *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*

In 323 A.D. Constantine the Great made a fateful decision, the consequences of which are still felt today—he resolved to move the capital of the Roman Empire to the Greek town of Byzantium, which henceforth was to be known as Constantinople. Six years later, after an energetic building campaign, the transfer was officially completed. In taking this step, the Emperor acknowledged the growing strategic and economic importance of the eastern provinces (a development that had been going on for some time). The new capital also symbolized the new Christian basis of the Roman state, since it was in the heart of the most thoroughly Christianized region of the Empire. Constantine could hardly foresee that shifting the seat of imperial power would result in splitting the realm, yet within less than a hundred years the division had become an accomplished fact, even though the emperors at Constantinople did not relinquish their claim to the western provinces. The latter, ruled by western Roman emperors, soon fell prey to invading Germanic tribes—Visigoths, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Lombards. By the end of the sixth century, the last vestige of centralized authority had disappeared. The eastern, or Byzantine, Empire, in contrast, survived these onslaughts, and under Justinian (527–565) reached new power and stability. With the rise of Islam a hundred years later, the African and Near Eastern parts of the Empire were overrun by conquering Arab armies; in the eleventh century, the Turks occupied a large part of Asia Minor, while the last Byzantine possessions in the West (in southern Italy) fell to the Normans. Yet the Empire, with its domain reduced to the Balkans and Greece, held on until 1453, when the Turks finally conquered Constantinople itself.

The division of the Roman Empire soon led to a religious split as well. At the time of Constantine, the bishop of Rome, deriving his authority from St. Peter, was the acknowledged head, the pope, of the Christian Church. His claim to pre-eminence, however, soon came to be disputed by the patriarch of Constantinople, differences in doctrine began to develop, and eventually the division of Christendom into a Western, or Catholic, and an Eastern, or Orthodox, Church, became all but final. The differences between them went very deep: Roman Catholicism maintained its independence from imperial or any other state authority and became an international institution reflecting its character as the Universal Church, while the Orthodox Church was based on the union of spiritual and secular authority in the person of the emperor, who appointed the patriarch. It thus remained dependent on the power of the State, exacting a double allegiance from the faithful and sharing the vicissitudes of political power. We will recognize this pattern as the Christian adaptation of a very ancient heritage, the divine kingship of Egypt and the Near East; if the Byzantine emperors, unlike their pagan predecessors, could no longer claim the status of gods, they retained an equally unique and exalted role by placing themselves at the head of the Church as well as of the State. Nor did the tradition die with the fall of Constantinople. The tsars of Russia claimed the mantle of the Byzantine emperors, Moscow became “the third Rome,” and the Russian Orthodox Church was as closely tied to the State as was its Byzantine parent body.

It is the religious even more than the political separation of East and West that makes it impossible to discuss



252. Painted Ceiling. Early 4th century A.D.
Catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, Rome

the development of Christian art in the Roman Empire under a single heading. "Early Christian" does not, strictly speaking, designate a style; it refers, rather, to any work of art produced by or for Christians during the time prior to the splitting off of the Orthodox Church—or, roughly, the first five centuries of our era. "Byzantine art," on the other hand, designates not only the art of the Eastern Roman Empire but a specific quality of style as well. Since this style grew out of certain tendencies that can be traced back to the time of Constantine or even earlier, there is no sharp dividing line between Early Christian and Byzantine art. Thus the reign of Justinian has been termed the First Golden Age of Byzantine art, yet Justinian himself was a man of strongly western, Latin orientation who almost succeeded in reuniting the Constantinian domain; and the monuments he sponsored, especially those on Italian soil, may be viewed as either Early Christian or Byzantine, depending on which frame of reference we select. Soon after, it is true, the political and religious cleavage between East and West became an artistic cleavage as well. In Western Europe, Celtic and Germanic peoples fell heir to the civilization of late antiquity, of which Early Christian art had been a part, and transformed it into that of the Middle Ages. The East, in contrast, experienced no such break; in the Byzantine Empire, late antiquity lived on, although the Greek and Oriental elements came increasingly to the fore at the expense of the Roman heritage. As a consequence, Byzantine civilization never became wholly medieval. "The Byzantines may have been senile," one historian has observed, "but they remained Greeks to the end." The same sense of tradition, of continuity with the past, determines the development of Byzantine

art. We can understand it best, therefore, if we see it in the context of the final, Christian phase of antiquity rather than in the context of the Middle Ages.

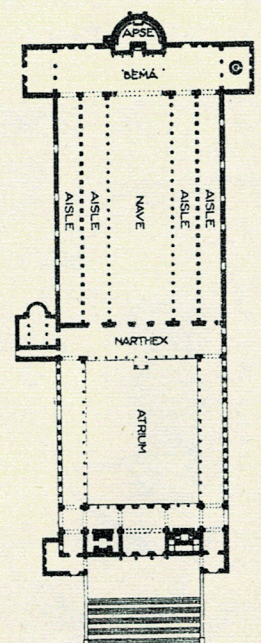
EARLY CHRISTIAN ART

When and where the first Christian works of art were produced remains a matter of conjecture. Of the surviving monuments, none can be dated earlier than about 200 A.D.; therefore, we lack all direct knowledge of art in the service of Christianity before that time. In fact, there is little we know for certain about Christian art until we reach the reign of Constantine the Great, because the third century, too, is poorly represented. The painted decorations of the Roman catacombs, the underground burial places of the Christians, are the only sizable and coherent body of material, but these constitute merely one among various possible kinds of Christian art. Before Constantine, Rome was not yet the center of the faith; older and larger Christian communities existed in the great cities of North Africa and the Near East, such as Alexandria and Antioch. They had probably developed separate artistic traditions of their own. The extraordinary murals of the synagogue at Dura-Europos (see colorplate 12) suggest that paintings of a similarly orientalizing character may have decorated the walls of Christian places of worship in Syria and Palestine, since the earliest Christian congregations were formed by dissident members of the Jewish community. Alexandria, the home of a large and thoroughly Hellenized Jewish colony, during the first or the second century A.D. may have produced illustrations of the Old Testament in a

253. Interior, St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.
Begun 386 A.D. [Etching by G.B. Piranesi, 1749]



254. Plan of
Old St. Peter's, Rome.
Begun c. 333 A.D.



style akin to that of Pompeian murals. We meet echoes of such scenes in Christian art later on, but we cannot be sure when or where they originated, or by what paths they entered the Christian tradition.

If the dearth of material from the eastern provinces of the Empire makes it difficult to judge the position of the catacomb paintings within the early development of Christian art, they nevertheless tell us a good deal about the spirit of the communities that sponsored them. The burial rite and the safeguarding of the tomb were of vital concern to the early Christian, whose faith rested on the hope of eternal life in paradise. The imagery of the catacombs, as can be seen in the painted ceiling in figure 252, clearly expresses this otherworldly outlook, although the forms are in essence still those of pre-Christian mural decoration. Thus we recognize the division of the ceiling into compartments as a late and highly simplified echo of the illusionistic architectural schemes in Pompeian painting; and the modeling of the figures, as well as the landscape settings, betray their descent from the same Roman idiom, which here, in the hands of an artist of very modest ability, has become debased by endless repetition. But the catacomb painter has used this traditional vocabulary to convey a new, symbolic content, and the original meaning of the forms is of little interest to him. Even the geometric framework shares in this task, for the great circle suggests the Dome of Heaven, inscribed with the cross, the basic symbol of the faith. In the central medallion we see a youthful shepherd, with a sheep on his shoulders, in a pose that can be traced back as far as Greek Archaic art (compare fig. 126); he stands for Christ the Saviour, the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep. The semicircular compartments tell the story of Jonah: on the left he is cast from the ship, on the right he emerges from the whale, and at the bottom he is safe again on dry land, meditating upon the mercy of the Lord. This Old Testament miracle, often juxtaposed with New Testament miracles, enjoyed immense favor in Early Christian art as proof of the Lord's power to rescue the faithful from the jaws of death. The standing figures represent members of the Church, with their hands raised in prayer, pleading for divine help. The entire scheme, though small in scale and unimpressive in execution, has a coherence and clarity that set it apart from its pagan ancestors as well as from the synagogue murals of Dura-Europos (see colorplate 12). It contains, if not the reality, at least the promise of a truly monumental new form (compare fig. 279).

Constantine's decision to make Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire had a profound impact on Christian art. Until that time, congregations had been unable to meet for worship in public; services were held inconspicuously in the houses of the wealthier members. Now, almost overnight, an impressive architectural setting had to be created for the new official faith, so that the Church might be visible to all. Constantine himself



255. S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna. 533–549 A.D.

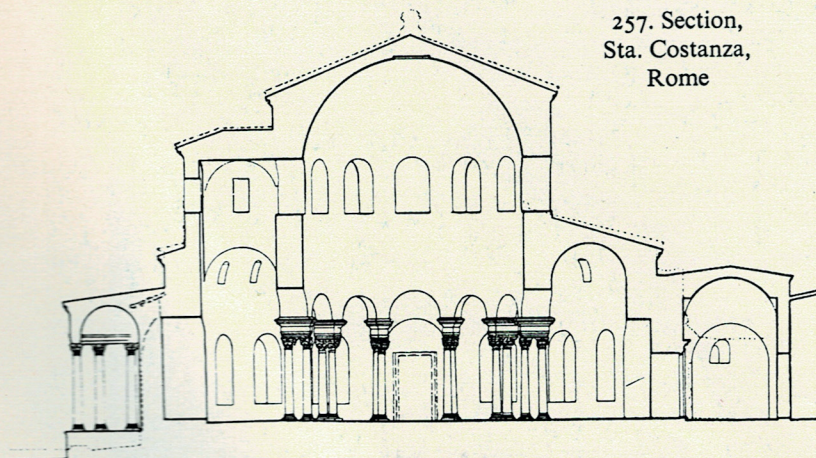
devoted the full resources of his office to this task, and within a few years an astonishing number of large, imperially sponsored churches arose, not only in Rome but also in Constantinople, in the Holy Land, and at other important sites. These structures were a new type, now called the Early Christian basilica, that provided the basic model for the development of church architecture in western Europe. Unfortunately, none of them has survived in its original form, but the plan of the greatest Constantinian church, St. Peter's in Rome, is known with considerable accuracy (fig. 254). To gain an impression of the interior, we must draw upon the slightly later basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, built on the same pattern, which remained essentially intact until it was wrecked by fire in 1823 (fig. 253). The Early Christian basilica, as exemplified in these two monuments, is a synthesis of assembly hall, temple, and private house. It also has the qualities of an original creation that cannot be wholly explained in terms of its sources. What it owes to the imperial basilicas of pagan times becomes obvious when we compare the plan of St. Peter's with that of the basilica at Leptis Magna, erected a hundred years earlier (fig. 215): the long nave flanked by aisles and lit by clerestory windows, the apse, the wooden roof, are familiar features of the earlier structure. The pagan basilica was indeed a uniquely suitable model for Constantinian churches, since it combined the spacious interior demanded by Christian ritual with imperial associations that proclaimed the privileged status of Christianity as the new State religion. But a church had to be more than an assembly hall; in addition to enclosing the community of the faithful, it was the sacred House of God, the Christian successor to the temples of old. In order to express this function, the design of the pagan basilica had to be given a new focus, the altar, which was placed in front of the apse at the eastern end of the nave, and the entrances, which in pagan basilicas had usually been on the flanks, were shifted to the western end.



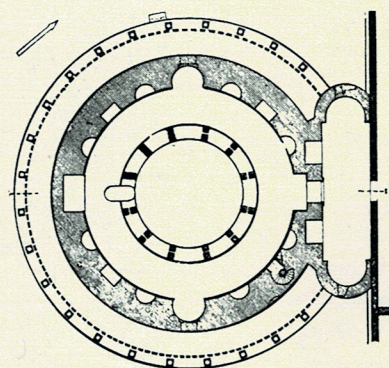
256. Interior, Sta. Costanza, Rome. c. 350 A.D.

The Christian basilica was thus oriented along a single, longitudinal axis that is curiously reminiscent of the layout of Egyptian temples (compare fig. 61). Before entering the church proper, we traverse a colonnaded court, the atrium (see page 137), the far side of which forms an entrance hall, the narthex. Only when we step through the nave portal do we gain the view presented in figure 253. The steady rhythm of the nave arcade pulls us toward the great arch at the eastern end (called the triumphal arch), which frames the altar and the vaulted apse beyond. As we come closer, we realize that the altar actually stands in a separate compartment of space placed at right angles to the nave and aisles, the bema or transept (in the lesser basilican churches, this feature is frequently omitted).

257. Section, Sta. Costanza, Rome

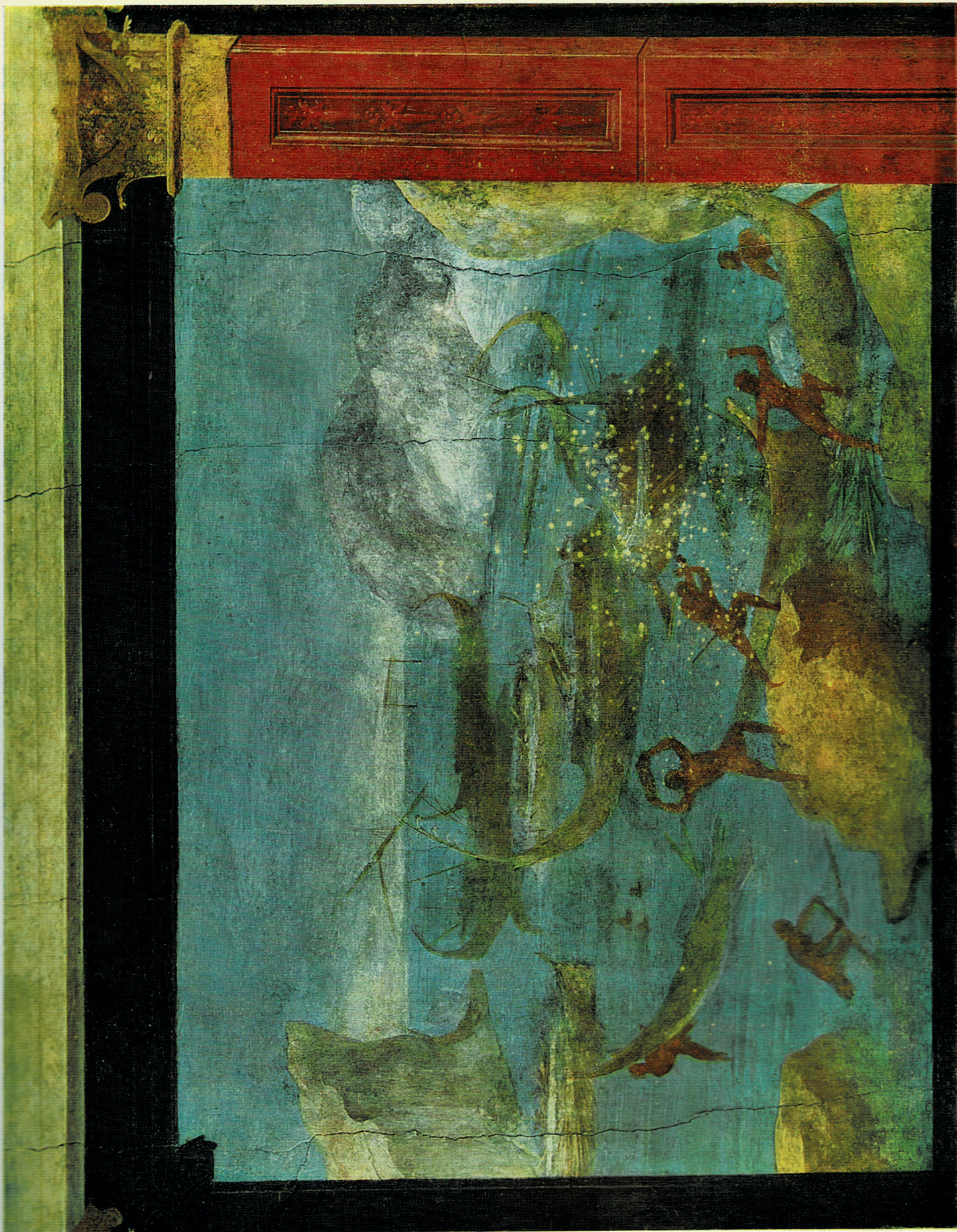


258. Plan of Sta. Costanza, Rome



One essential aspect of Early Christian religious architecture has not yet emerged from our discussion: the contrast between exterior and interior. It is strikingly demonstrated in the sixth-century church of S. Apollinare in Classe near Ravenna, which still retains its original appearance for the most part. The plain brick exterior (fig. 255) has been left conspicuously unadorned; it is merely a shell whose shape reflects the interior space it encloses—the exact opposite of the Classical temple. (Our view, taken from the west, shows the narthex but not the atrium, which was torn down a long time ago; the round bell tower, or campanile, is a medieval addition.) This ascetic, antimonumental treatment of the exterior gives way to the utmost richness as we enter the church (colorplate 13). Here, having left the everyday world behind us, we find ourselves in a shimmering realm of light and color where precious marble surfaces and the brilliant glitter of mosaics evoke the spiritual splendor of the Kingdom of God.

Before dealing with these mosaic decorations at greater length, we must take note of another type of structure that entered the tradition of Christian architecture in Constantinian times: round or polygonal buildings crowned with a dome. They had been developed, we will recall, as part of the elaborate Roman baths; the design of the Pantheon was derived from that source (see page 135). Similar structures had been built to serve as monumental tombs, or mausoleums, by the pagan emperors. In the fourth century, this type of building is given a Christian meaning in the baptisteries (where the bath becomes a sacred rite) and funerary chapels linked with basilican churches. The finest surviving example is Sta. Costanza, (figs. 256–258), the mausoleum of Constantine's daughter Constantia, originally attached to the (now ruined) Roman church of St. Agnes Outside the Walls. In contrast to its pagan predecessors, it shows a clear articulation of the interior space into a domed cylindrical core lit by clerestory windows—the counterpart of the nave of a basilican church—and a ring-shaped “aisle” or ambulatory covered by a barrel vault. Here

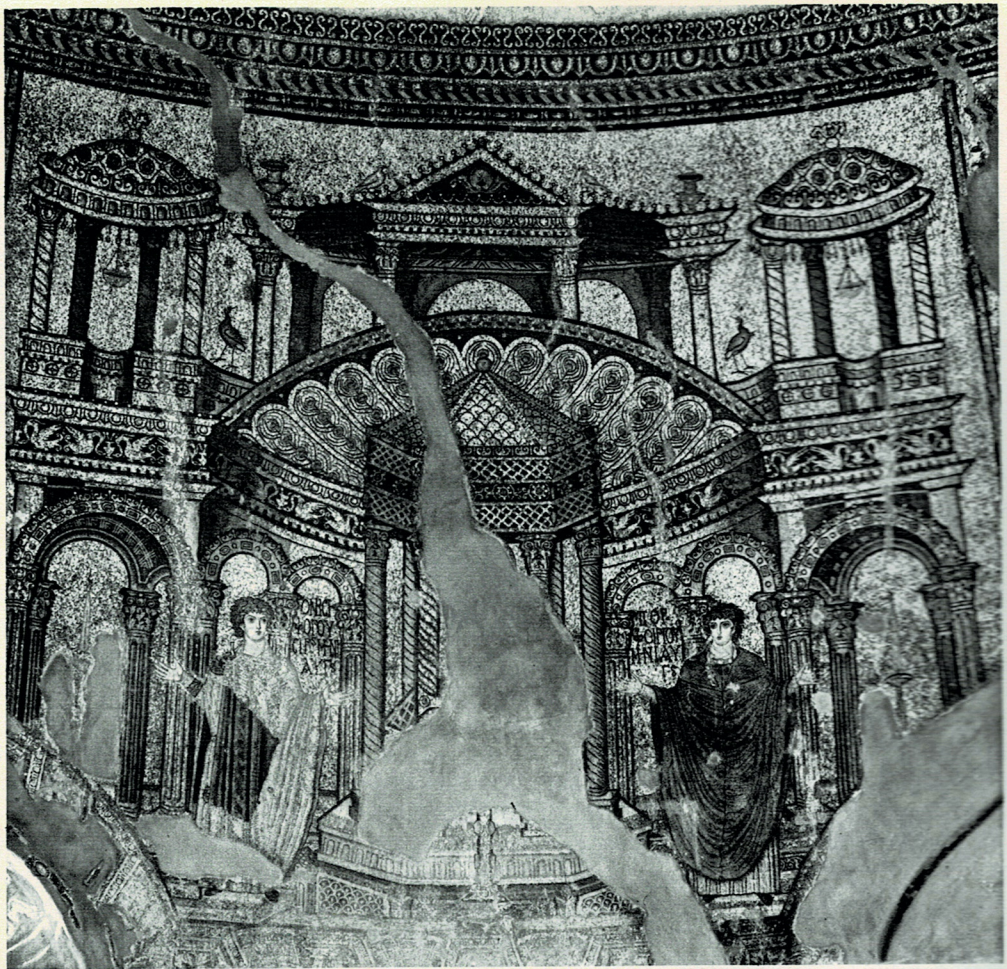


Colorplate 9. ROMAN. *The Lestrigonians Hurling Rocks at the Fleet of Odysseus*, wall painting from a house on the Esquiline. Late 1st century B.C. Museo Profano, The Vatican, Rome



Colorplate 10. ROMAN. Wall Painting Frieze. About 50 B.C.
Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii

259. Dome Mosaic (detail).
Late 4th century A.D.
St. George, Salonica



again the mosaic decoration plays an essential part in setting the mood of the interior.

The rapid growth of Christian architecture on a large scale must have had a well-nigh revolutionary effect on the development of Early Christian painting. All of a sudden, huge wall surfaces had to be covered with images worthy of their monumental framework. Who was equal to this challenge? Certainly not the humble artists who had decorated the catacombs with their limited stock of types and subjects. They were superseded by masters of greater ability, recruited, we may suppose, under imperial auspices, as were the architects of the new basilicas. Unfortunately, so little has survived of the decoration of fourth-century churches that its history cannot be traced in detail. Apparently, great pictorial cycles were spread over the nave walls, the triumphal arch, and the apse from the very start. These cycles must have drawn upon a great variety of earlier sources, reflecting the whole range of Graeco-Roman painting. The heritage of the past, however, was not only absorbed but transformed so as to make it fit its new environment, physical and spiritual. Out of this process, there emerged a great new art form, the Early Christian wall mosaic, which to a large extent replaced the older and cheaper technique of mural painting. Mosaics—designs composed of small pieces of colored material set in plaster—had been used by the Sumerians as early as the third millennium B. C. to embellish architectural surfaces. The Hellenistic Greeks and

the Romans, employing small cubes of marble called tesserae, had refined the technique to the point that it could reproduce paintings, as in the *Battle of Issus* (see fig. 243). Theirs were almost always floor mosaics, however, and the color scale, although rich in gradations, lacked brilliance, since it was limited to the various kinds of colored marble found in nature. The Romans would also produce wall mosaics occasionally, but only for special purposes and on a limited scale. The vast and intricate wall mosaics of Early Christian art thus are essentially without precedent. The same is true of their material, for they consist of tesserae made of colored glass. These, too, were not entirely unknown to the Romans, yet their special virtues had never been exploited before; they offered colors of far greater range and intensity than marble tesserae, including gold, but lacked the fine gradations in tone necessary for imitating painted pictures. Moreover, the shiny (and slightly irregular) faces of glass tesserae act as tiny reflectors, so that the over-all effect is that of a glittering, immaterial screen rather than of a solid, continuous surface. All these qualities made glass mosaic the ideal complement of the new architectural aesthetic that confronts us in Early Christian basilicas. The guiding principle of Graeco-Roman architecture, we recall, had been to express a balance of opposing forces, rather like the balance within the *contrapposto* of a Classical statue—a muscular, physical display of active and passive, supporting and supported members, whether



260. *The Parting of Lot and Abraham* (mosaic). c. 430 A.D.
Sta. Maria Maggiore, Rome

these were structurally real or merely superimposed on a concrete core. Viewed in such terms, Early Christian architecture is strangely inexpressive, even antimemorial. The tangible, material structure has become subservient to the creation and definition of immaterial space; walls and vaults have the quality of weightless shells, their actual thickness and solidity hidden rather than emphasized as before. The brilliant color, the light-filled, transparent brightness of gold, the severe geometric order of the images in a mosaic complex such as that of S. Apollinare in Classe (colorplate 13) fit the spirit of these interiors to perfection. One might say, in fact, that Early Christian and Byzantine churches demand mosaics the way Greek temples demand architectural sculpture.

Roman mural painting had developed elaborate illusionistic devices in order to suggest a reality beyond the surface of the wall. Early Christian mosaics also denied the flatness of the wall surface, but for the purpose of achieving an "illusion of unreality," a luminous realm peopled by celestial beings or symbols. The difference in aim becomes particularly striking whenever these mosaics make use of the old formulas of spatial illusionism. Such is the case in figure 259, which shows a section of the magnificent dome mosaics from the church of St. George at Salonica, done at the end of the fourth century. Two saints, their hands raised in prayer, stand against a background that clearly betrays its descent from the perspective vistas of "stage architecture" in Pompeian painting; the foreshortening, to be sure, seems somewhat askew, but a surprising amount of it survives intact. Even so, the structure no longer seems real, for it lacks all physical substance: its body consists of the same gold as the background (other colors, mainly purple, blue, and green, are used only in the shaded portions and the ornament), so that the entire building becomes translucent. This is not a stage set but a piece of symbolic, other-

worldly architecture meant to evoke such concepts as the Heavenly Jerusalem or the City of God.

In narrative scenes, too, we can watch the illusionistic tradition of ancient painting being transformed by the new content. Long sequences of them, selected from the Old and New Testaments, adorned the nave walls of Early Christian basilicas. *The Parting of Lot and Abraham* (fig. 260) is taken from the oldest surviving cycle of this kind, executed about 430 in the church of Sta. Maria Maggiore in Rome. Abraham, the boy Isaac, and the rest of his family occupy the left half of the composition; Lot and his clan, including his two small daughters, turn toward the city of Sodom on the right. The task of the artist who designed our panel is comparable to that faced by the sculptors of the Column of Trajan (see fig. 233): how to condense complex actions into a visual form that would permit them to be read at a distance. He has, in fact, employed many of the same "shorthand" devices, such as the abbreviative formulas for house, tree, and city, or the trick of showing a crowd of people as a "grape-cluster of heads" behind the foreground figures. But in the Trajanic reliefs, these devices could be used only to the extent that they were compatible with the realistic aim of the scenes, which recreate actual historic events. "Look, this is what happened in the Dacian wars," we are told. The mosaics in Sta. Maria Maggiore, on the other hand, depict the history of salvation; the reality they illustrate is the living word of the Scriptures (in our instance, Genesis 13), which is a *present* reality shared by artist and beholder alike, rather than something that happened only once in the space-and-time context of the external world. Our panel does not tell us, "This

261. Miniature from the *Vatican Vergil*.
Early 5th century A.D. Vatican Library, Rome

IORSIANTHINQVISHORTOSQVACORACOLINDI
QVARETICANERINQBIRIQUERACONINESTI
QVOCMODOTOTISGNODERINTITBARICIS
ITQVADISATIOALINOTIUSQVITERHERBAM
CRISCIETINQVINTAENICOCUMISNECERACOMANTI
NARCISQVAMQVITEXITACQVITQVIMINACANTIT
TALLINTISHEDRAMANTISLITACANNIATOS



is what happened in Genesis 13" (we are expected to know that already), but "Behold the working of the Lord's will." Hence the artist need not clothe the scene with the concrete details of historic narrative; glances and gestures are becoming more important to him than dramatic movement or three-dimensional form. The symmetrical composition, with its cleavage in the center, makes clear the symbolic significance of this parting: the way of Abraham, which is that of righteousness and the Covenant, as against the way of Lot, destined for divine vengeance. And the contrasting fate of the two groups is further emphasized by the juxtaposition of Isaac and the daughters of Lot, whose future roles are thus called to mind.

From what source did the designers of narrative mosaic cycles such as that of Sta. Maria Maggiore derive their compositions? Were they the first to illustrate scenes from the Bible in extensive fashion? For certain subjects, they could have found models among the catacomb murals, but their most important prototypes may have come from illustrated manuscripts, especially of the Old Testament. As a scriptural religion, founded on the Word of God as revealed in Holy Writ, the early Christian Church must have sponsored the duplicating of the sacred text on a vast scale; and every copy of it was handled with a reverence quite unlike the treatment of any book in Graeco-Roman civilization. But when did these copies become works of pictorial art as well? And what did the earliest Bible illustrations look like? Books, unfortunately, are frail things; thus, their history in the ancient world is known to us largely from indirect evidence. It begins in Egypt—we do not know exactly when

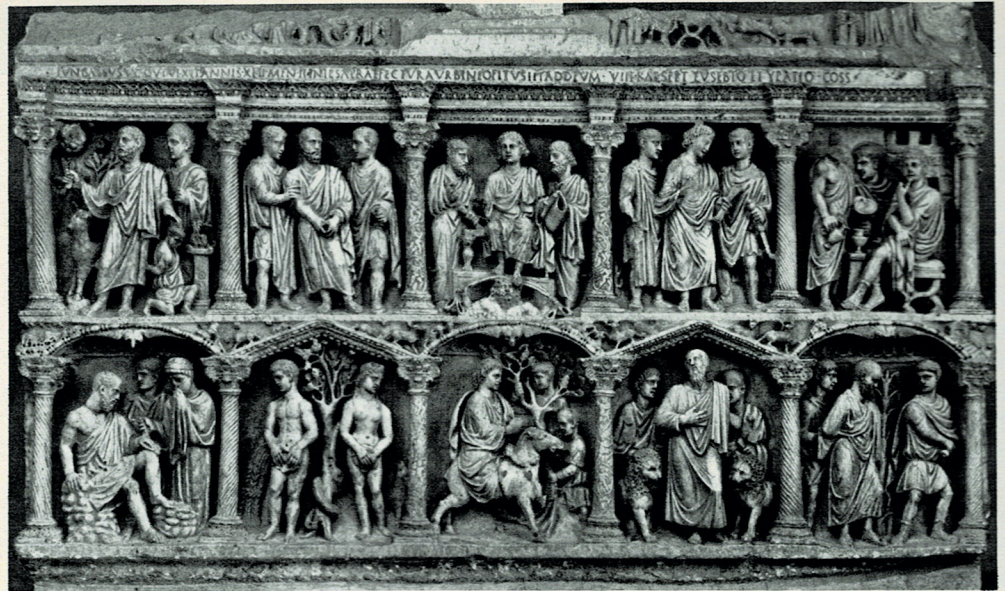
—with the discovery of a suitable material, paper-like but rather more brittle, made from the papyrus plant. Books of papyrus were in the form of rolls; they remained in use throughout antiquity. Not until late Hellenistic times did a better substance become available: parchment or vellum, thin, bleached animal hide, far more durable than papyrus. It was strong enough to be creased without breaking, and thus made possible the kind of bound book we know today, technically called a codex. Between the first and the fourth century A.D., the vellum codex gradually replaced the roll, whether vellum or papyrus. This technological change must have had an important effect on the growth of book illustration. As long as the roll form prevailed, illustrations seem to have been mostly line drawings, since layers of pigment would soon have cracked and come off in the process of rolling and unrolling; only the vellum codex permitted the use of rich colors, including gold, that was to make book illustration—or, as we usually say, illumination—the small-scale counterpart of murals, mosaics, and panel pictures. When, where, and at what pace the development of pictorial book illumination took place, whether biblical or classical subjects were primarily depicted, how much of a carry-over there might have been from roll to codex—all these are still unsettled problems. There can be little question, however, that the earliest illuminations, whether Christian, Jewish, or pagan, were done in a style strongly influenced by the illusionism of Hellenistic-Roman painting of the sort we meet at Pompeii. One of the oldest illustrated manuscripts preserved, the *Vatican Vergil*, probably executed in Italy about the time of the Sta. Maria Maggiore mosaics, reflects this tra-

262. *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, from the *Vienna Genesis*. Early 6th century A.D. National Library, Vienna



right: 263. Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus.
c. 359 A.D. Marble, 3' 10 1/2" x 8'.
Vatican Grottoes, Rome

below: 264. Christ Enthroned
(detail of fig. 263)



dition, although the quality of the miniatures is far from inspired (fig. 261); the picture, separated from the rest of the page by a heavy frame, has the effect of a window, and in the landscape we find remnants of deep space, perspective, and the play of light and shade.

The oldest illustrated Bible manuscripts so far discovered apparently belong to the early sixth century (except for one fragment of five leaves that seems related to the *Vatican Vergil*); they, too, contain echoes of the Hellenistic-Roman style, in various stages of adaptation to religious narrative, often with a Near Eastern flavor that at times recalls the Dura-Europos murals (see color-plate 12). The most important example, the *Vienna Genesis*, is a far more striking work than the rather lame *Vergil*. Written in silver (now turned black) on purple vellum and adorned with brilliantly colored miniatures, it achieves a sumptuous effect not unlike that of the mosaics we have examined. Figure 262 shows a part of the story of Jacob; in the foreground, we see him wrestling with the angel and receiving the angel's benediction. The picture, then, does not show a single event but a whole sequence, strung out along a single U-shaped path, so that progression in space becomes progression in time. This method, known as continuous narration, has a complex—and much debated—history going back as far as ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia; its appearance in miniatures such as ours may reflect earlier illustrations made for books in roll form. (Our picture certainly looks like a frieze turned back upon itself.) For manuscript illustration, the continuous method offers the advantage of spatial economy; it permits the painter to pack a maximum of narrative content into the area at his disposal. Our artist apparently thought of his picture as a running account to be read like so many lines of text, rather than as a window demanding a frame. The painted forms are placed directly on the purple background that holds the letters, emphasizing the primary importance of the page as a unified field.



Compared to painting and architecture, sculpture played a secondary role in Early Christian art. The biblical prohibition of graven images was thought to apply with particular force to large cult statues, the idols worshiped in pagan temples, so that religious sculpture, in order to avoid the taint of idolatry, had to eschew life-size representations of the human figure. It thus developed from the very start in an antimonumental direction: away from the spatial depth and massive scale of Graeco-Roman sculpture toward shallow, small-scale forms and lacelike surface decoration. The earliest works of Christian sculpture are marble sarcophagi, which were produced from the middle of the third century on for the more important members of the Church. Before the time

of Constantine, their decoration consisted mostly of the same limited repertory of themes familiar from catacomb murals—the Good Shepherd, Jonah and the Whale, and so forth—but within a framework borrowed from pagan sarcophagi. Not until a century later do we find a significantly broader range of subject matter and form. A key example for those years is the richly carved sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, a prefect of Rome, who died in 359 (figs. 263, 264). Its colonnaded front, divided into ten square compartments, shows a mixture of Old and New Testament scenes: in the upper row (left to right), the Sacrifice of Isaac, St. Peter Taken Prisoner, Christ Enthroned between SS. Peter and Paul, Christ before Pontius Pilate (two compartments); in the lower, the Misery of Job, the Fall of Man, Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, Daniel in the Lions' Den, and St. Paul Led to His Martyrdom. This choice, somewhat strange to the modern beholder, is highly characteristic of the early Christian way of thinking, which stresses the divine rather than the human nature of Christ. Hence His suffering and death are merely hinted at; He appears before Pilate as a youthful, long-haired philosopher expounding the true wisdom (note the scroll), and the martyrdom of the two apostles is represented in the same discreet, nonviolent fashion. The two central scenes are devoted to Christ the King: as Ruler of the Universe He sits enthroned above the personification of the firmament, and as an earthly sovereign He enters Jerusalem in triumph. Adam and Eve, the original sinners, denote the burden of guilt redeemed by Christ, the Sacrifice of Isaac is the Old Testament prefiguration of Christ's sacrificial death, while Job and Daniel carry the same message as Jonah—they fortify man's hope of salvation.

When measured against the anti-Classical style of the frieze on the Arch of Constantine, carved almost half a century before (see fig. 242), the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus seems decidedly classicistic. The figures in their deeply recessed niches betray a conscious attempt to recapture the statuesque dignity of the Greek tradition. Yet beneath this superimposed quality we sense a basic kinship to the Constantinian style in the doll-like bodies, the large heads, the oddly becalmed, passive air of scenes calling for dramatic action. The events and personages confronting us are no longer intended to tell their own story, physically or emotionally, but to call to our minds a higher, symbolic meaning that binds them together. Classicizing tendencies of this sort seem to have been a recurrent phenomenon in Early Christian sculpture from the mid-fourth to the early sixth century. Their causes have been explained in various ways. On the one hand, during this period paganism still had many important adherents who may have fostered such revivals as a kind of rear-guard action; recent converts (such as Junius Bassus himself, who was baptized shortly before his death) often retained a strong allegiance to the values of the past, artistic and otherwise; there were also important leaders of the Church who favored a reconciliation of



265. *Priestess of Bacchus*
(leaf of a diptych).
c. 390–400 A.D.
Ivory, 11 3/4 × 5 1/2".
Victoria & Albert
Museum, London
(Crown Copyright
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Christianity with the heritage of Classical antiquity; and the Imperial courts, too, both East and West, always remained aware of their institutional links with pre-Christian times, and could thus become centers for revivalist impulses. Whatever its roots in any given instance, classicism had its virtues in this age of transition, for it preserved—and thus helped to transmit to the future—a treasury of forms and an ideal of beauty that might have been irretrievably lost without it. All this holds true particularly for a class of objects whose artistic importance far exceeds their physical size: the ivory panels and other small-scale reliefs in precious materials. Designed for private ownership and meant to be enjoyed at close range, they often mirror a collector's taste, a refined aesthetic sensibility not found among the large, official enterprises sponsored by Church or State. Such a piece is the ivory leaf (fig. 265) forming the right half of a hinged diptych that was carved about 390–400, probably on the occasion of a wedding among the Nicomachi and Sym-



266. *The Archangel Michael* (leaf of a diptych). Early 6th century A.D. Ivory, $17 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ ". British Museum, London

machi, two aristocratic Roman families. Their conservative outlook is reflected not only in the pagan subject (a priestess of Bacchus and her assistant before an altar of Jupiter) but also in the design, which harks back to the era of Augustus (compare fig. 228). At first glance, we might well mistake it for a much earlier work, until we realize, from small spatial incongruities such as the priestess's right foot overlapping the frame, that these forms are quotations, reproduced with loving care but no longer



267. *Portrait of Eutropios*. c.450 A.D. Marble, height $12\frac{1}{2}$ ". Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

fully understood. Significantly enough, the pagan theme did not prevent our panel from being incorporated into the shrine of a saint many centuries later; its cool perfection had an appeal for the Middle Ages as well. Our second ivory (fig. 266), done soon after 500 in the Eastern Roman Empire, shows a classicism that has become an eloquent vehicle of Christian content. The majestic archangel is clearly a descendant of the winged Victories of Graeco-Roman art, down to the richly articulated drapery. Yet the power he heralds is not of this world; nor does he inhabit an earthly space. The architectural niche against which he appears has lost all three-dimensional reality; its relationship to him is purely symbolic and ornamental, so that he seems to hover rather than to stand (notice the position of the feet on the steps). It is this disembodied quality, conveyed through classically harmonious forms, that gives him so compelling a presence.

If monumental statuary was discouraged by the Church, it retained, for a while at least, the patronage of the State. Emperors, consuls, and high officials continued the old custom of erecting portrait statues of themselves in public places as late as the reign of Justinian, and sometimes later than that (the last recorded instance is in the late eighth century). Here, too, we find retrospective tendencies during the latter half of the fourth century and the

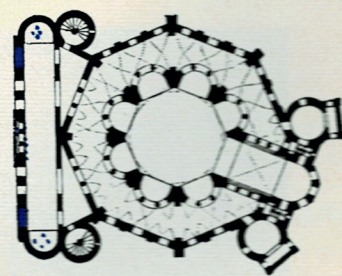
early years of the fifth, with a revival of pre-Constantinian types and a renewed interest in individual characterization. From about 450 on, however, the outward likeness gives way to the image of a spiritual ideal, sometimes intensely expressive but increasingly impersonal; there were not to be any more portraits, in the Graeco-Roman sense of the term, for almost a thousand years to come. The process is strikingly exemplified by the head of Eutropios from Ephesus (fig. 267), one of the most memorable of its kind. It makes us think of the strangely sorrowful features of the "Plotinus" (fig. 239) and of the masklike colossal head of Constantine (fig. 240), but both of these have a physical concreteness that seems almost gross compared to the extreme attenuation of Eutropios. The face is frozen in visionary ecstasy, as if the sitter were a hermit saint; it looks, in fact, more like that of a specter than of a being of flesh and blood. The avoidance of solid volumes has been carried so far that the features are for the most part indicated only by thin ridges or shallow engraved lines. Their smooth curves emphasize the elongated oval of the head and thus reinforce its abstract, otherworldly character. Not only the individual person but the human body itself has ceased to be a tangible reality here; and with that the Greek tradition of sculpture in the round has reached the end of the road.

BYZANTINE ART

There is no clear-cut line of demarcation between Early Christian and Byzantine art. It could be argued that a Byzantine style (that is, a style associated with the imperial court of Constantinople) becomes discernible within Early Christian art as early as the beginning of the fifth century, soon after the effective division of the Empire. We have avoided making this distinction, for East Roman and West Roman—or, as some scholars prefer to call

them, East and West Christian—characteristics are often difficult to separate before the sixth century. Until that time, both areas contributed to the development of Early Christian art, although the leadership tended to shift more and more to the East as the position of the West declined. During the reign of Justinian (527–565) this shift was completed; Constantinople not only reasserted its political dominance over the West but became the undisputed artistic capital as well. Justinian himself was an art patron on a scale unmatched since Constantine's day; the works he sponsored or promoted have an imperial grandeur that fully justifies the acclaim of those who have termed his era a golden age. They also display an inner coherence of style which links them more strongly with the future development of Byzantine art than with the art of the preceding centuries.

Ironically enough, the richest array of monuments of the First Golden Age survives today not in Constantinople (where much has been destroyed) but on Italian soil, in Ravenna. That town, originally a naval station on the Adriatic, had become the capital of the Western Roman emperors in 402 and, at the end of the century, of Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, whose tastes were patterned after those of Constantinople. Under Justinian, Ravenna was the main stronghold of Byzantine rule in Italy. The most important church of that time, S. Vitale, built 526–547, represents a type derived mainly from Constantinople. We recognize its octagonal plan, with the domed central core (figs. 268–270), as a descendant of the mausoleum of Sta. Costanza in Rome (see figs. 256–258), but the intervening development seems to have taken place in the East, where domed churches of various kinds had been built during the previous century. Compared to Sta. Costanza, S. Vitale is both larger in scale and very much richer in its spatial effect; below the clerestory, the nave wall turns into a series of semicircular niches that penetrate into the aisle and thus link it to the nave in a



above: 268. Plan of S. Vitale, Ravenna

left: 269. S. Vitale, Ravenna. 526–547 A.D.



270. Interior (view from the apse), S. Vitale, Ravenna

new and intricate way. The aisle itself has been given a second story (the galleries were reserved for women). A new economy in the construction of the vaulting permits large windows on every level, which flood the interior with light. We find only the merest remnants of the longitudinal axis of the Early Christian basilica: a cross-vaulted compartment for the altar, backed by an apse, toward the east, and a narthex on the other side (its odd, non-symmetrical placement has never been fully accounted for). Remembering S. Apollinare in Classe, built at the same time on a straightforward basilican plan, we are

particularly struck by the alien character of S. Vitale. How did it happen that the East favored a type of church building (as distinct from baptisteries and mausoleums) so radically different from the basilica and—from the Western point of view—so ill-adapted to Christian ritual? After all, had not the design of the basilica been backed by the authority of Constantine himself? Many different reasons have been suggested—practical, religious, political. All of them may be relevant, yet, if the truth be told, they fall short of a really persuasive explanation. In any event, from the time of Justinian domed, central-plan churches were to dominate the world of Orthodox Christianity as thoroughly as the basilican plan dominated the architecture of the medieval West. As for S. Vitale, its link with the Byzantine court is evidenced by the two famous mosaics flanking the altar (fig. 271 and color-plate 14), whose design must have come directly from the imperial workshop. Here Justinian and his Empress, Theodora, accompanied by officials, the local clergy, and ladies-in-waiting, attend the service as if this were a palace chapel. In these panels, executed shortly before the consecration of the church, we find an ideal of human beauty quite distinct from the squat, large-headed figures we had encountered in the art of the fourth and fifth centuries; occasionally (see figs. 259, 266, 267) we had caught a glimpse of this emerging new ideal, but only now do we see it complete: extraordinarily tall, slim figures, with tiny feet, small, almond-shaped faces dominated by the huge, staring eyes, and bodies that seem to be capable only of slow ceremonial gestures and the display of magnificently patterned costumes. Every hint of movement or change is carefully excluded—the dimensions of time and earthly space have given way to an eternal present amid the golden translucency of Heaven, and the solemn, frontal images seem to present a celestial rather than a secular court. This union of political and spiritual authority accurately reflects the “divine kingship” of the Byzantine Emperor. We are, in fact, invited to see Justinian



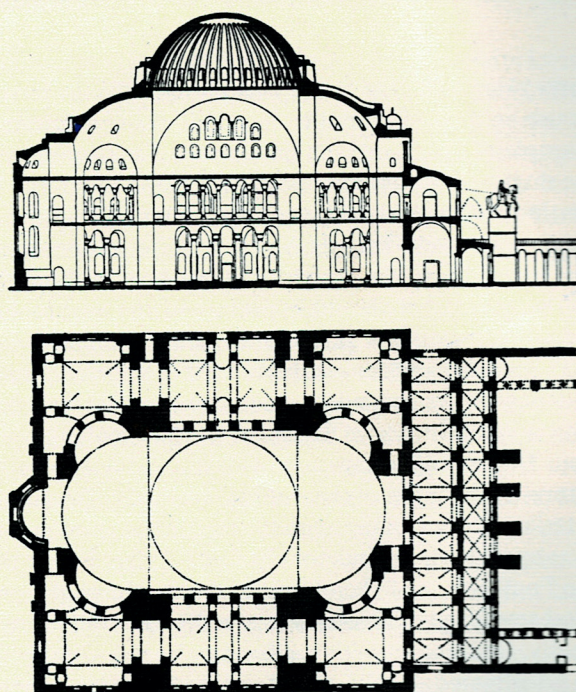
271. Justinian and Attendants (mosaic).

c. 547 A.D. S. Vitale, Ravenna

and Theodora as analogous to Christ and the Virgin: the hem of Theodora's mantle (not shown in our illustration) is conspicuously embroidered with the three Magi carrying their gifts to Mary and the newborn King, and Justinian is flanked by twelve companions—the imperial equivalent of the twelve apostles (six of them are soldiers, behind a shield with the monogram of Christ). If we turn from these mosaics to the interior space of the church, we discover that it, too, shares the quality of dematerialized, soaring slenderness that endows the figures with their air of mute exaltation. Justinian, Theodora, and their immediate neighbors were surely intended to be individual likenesses, and their features are indeed differentiated to a degree (those of the Archbishop, Maximianus, more so than the rest), but the ideal type has molded the faces as well as the bodies, so that they all have a curious family resemblance. We shall meet the same large dark eyes under curved brows, the same small mouths and long, narrow, slightly aquiline noses countless times from now on in Byzantine art.

Among the surviving monuments of Justinian's reign in Constantinople, the most important by far is Hagia Sophia (the Church of Holy Wisdom), the architectural masterpiece of the age and one of the great creative triumphs of any age (figs. 272–276). Built 532–537, it achieved such fame that the names of the architects, too, were remembered—Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus. After the Turkish conquest, it became a mosque (the four minarets were added at that time) and the mosaic decoration was largely hidden under whitewash. Some of the mosaics were uncovered in recent years (see colorplate 15), after the building was turned into a museum. The design of Hagia Sophia presents a unique combination of elements: it has the longitudinal axis of an Early Christian basilica, but the central feature of the nave is a square compartment crowned by a huge dome and abutted at either end by half-domes, so that the nave becomes a great oval. Attached to these half-domes are semi-

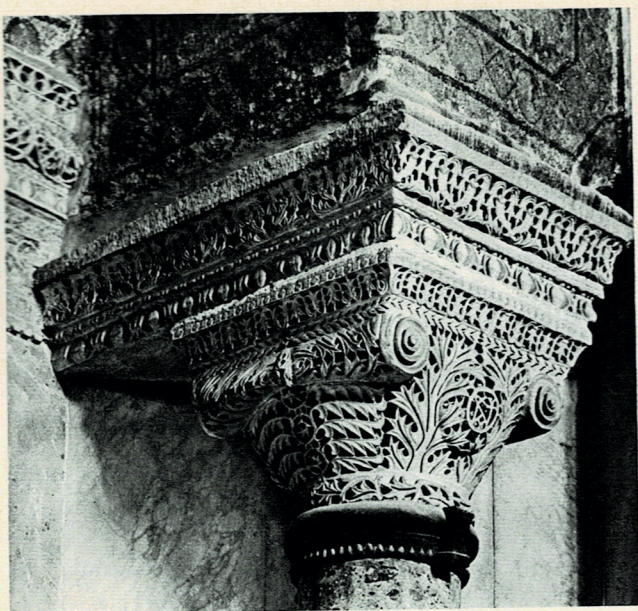
circular niches with open arcades, similar to those in S. Vitale; one might say, then, that the dome of Hagia Sophia has been inserted between the two halves of a central-plan church. The dome rests on four arches that carry its weight to the great piers at the corners of the square, so that the walls below the arches have no supporting function at all. The transition from the square formed by these arches to the circular rim of the dome is achieved by spherical triangles called pendentives; hence we speak of the entire unit as a dome on pendentives. This device permits the construction of taller, lighter, and more economical domes than the older method (as seen in the Pantheon, Sta. Costanza, and S. Vitale) of placing the dome on a round or polygonal base. Where or when the dome on pendentives was invented we do not



top: 272. Section of Hagia Sophia
(after Gurlitt)

above: 273. Plan of Hagia Sophia
(after v. Sybel)

left: 274. ANTHEMIUS OF TRALLES and
ISIDORUS OF MILETUS. Hagia Sophia,
Istanbul. 532–537 A.D.



left: 275. Capital, Hagia Sophia

below: 276. Interior, Hagia Sophia



know; Hagia Sophia is the earliest example we have of its use on a monumental scale, and it must have been an example of epoch-making importance, for from now on the dome on pendentives became a basic feature of Byzantine architecture and, somewhat later, of Western architecture as well. There is, however, still another element that entered into the design of Hagia Sophia. The plan, the buttressing of the main piers, and the vast scale of the whole recall the Basilica of Constantine (figs. 212, 213), the most ambitious achievement of imperial Roman vaulted architecture and the greatest monument associated with a ruler for whom Justinian had particular admiration. Hagia Sophia thus unites East and West, past and future, in a single overpowering synthesis. Its massive exterior, firmly planted upon the earth like a great mound, rises by stages to a height of 184 feet—41 feet higher than the Pantheon, and therefore the dome, although somewhat smaller (its diameter is 112 feet), stands out far more boldly. Once we are within, all sense of weight disappears, as if the material, solid aspects of the structure had been banished to the outside; nothing remains but an expanding space that inflates, like so many sails, the apsidal recesses, the pendentives, and the dome itself. Here the architectural aesthetic we saw taking shape in Early Christian architecture (see page 160) has achieved a new, magnificent dimension. Even more than previously, light plays a key role: the dome seems to float—"like the radiant heavens," according to a contemporary description of the building—because it rests upon a closely spaced ring of windows, and the nave walls are pierced by so many openings that they have the transparency of lace curtains. The golden glitter of the mosaics must have completed the "illusion of unreality." We can sense the new aesthetic even in ornamental details such as moldings and capitals (fig. 275). The motifs—scrolls, acanthus foliage, and such—all derive from Classical architecture, but their effect is radically different; instead of actively cushioning the impact of heavy weight upon the shaft of the column, the capital has become a sort of open-work bas-

ket whose delicate surface pattern conceals the strength and solidity of the stone.

Byzantine architecture never produced another structure to match Hagia Sophia. The churches of the Second Golden Age (from the late ninth to the eleventh century) and after were modest in scale, and monastic rather than imperial in spirit. Their usual plan is that of a Greek cross (that is, a cross with arms of equal length) contained in a square, with a narthex added on one side and an apse (sometimes with flanking chapels) on the other. The central feature is a dome on a square base; it often rests on a cylindrical drum with tall windows, which raises it high above the rest of the building, as in the two churches of the Monastery of Hosios Loukas in Greece (fig. 277). These also illustrate two other characteristics of later Byzantine architecture: a tendency toward more ornate exteriors, in contrast to the extreme severity we observed earlier (compare fig. 269), and a preference for elongated proportions. The full impact of this verticality, however, strikes us only when we enter the church (fig. 278 shows the interior of the Katholikon, which appears on the left in fig. 277). Here the tall, narrow space compartments produce a sense of crowdedness, almost of compression, which is dramatically relieved as we raise our glance to-



left: 277. Churches of the Monastery of Hosios Loukas (St. Luke of Stiris), Phocis, Greece. Early 11th century

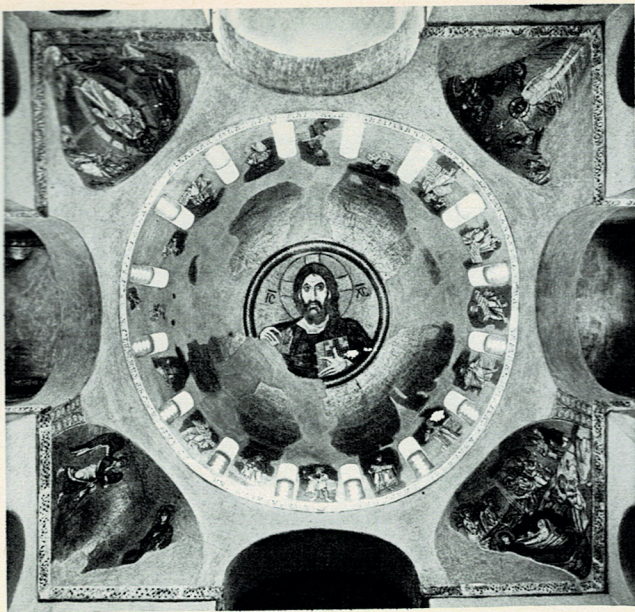


below: 278. Interior, Katholikon, Hosios Loukas

ward the luminous pool of space beneath the dome. Figure 279 shows this view as it presents itself to us in the Greek monastery church of Daphnē, where the pictorial decoration of the dome is better preserved than in the Katholikon of Hosios Loukas. Staring down from the center of the dome is an awesome mosaic image of Christ the Pantocrator (the Ruler of the universe) against a gold background, its huge scale emphasized by the much smaller figures of the sixteen Old Testament prophets between the windows. In the corners, we see four scenes revealing the divine and human natures of Christ—the

Annunciation (bottom left) followed in counterclockwise order by the Birth, Baptism, and Transfiguration. The entire cycle represents a theological program so perfectly in harmony with the geometric relationship of the images that we cannot say whether the architecture has been shaped by the pictorial scheme or vice versa. A similarly strict order governs the distribution of subjects throughout the rest of the interior.

The largest and most lavishly decorated church of the Second Golden Age surviving today is St. Mark's in Venice, begun in 1063. The Venetians had long been under Byzantine sovereignty and remained artistically dependent on the East long after they had become a political and commercial power in their own right. St. Mark's, too, shows the Greek-cross plan inscribed within a square, but here each arm of the cross is emphasized by a dome of its own (figs. 280, 281). These domes are not raised on drums; instead, they have been encased in bulbous wooden helmets covered by gilt copper sheeting and topped by ornate lanterns, to make them appear taller and more conspicuous at a distance. They make a splendid landmark for the seafarer. The spacious interior, famous for its mosaics, shows that it was meant to receive the citizenry of a large metropolis, and not just a small monastic community as at Daphnē or Hosios Loukas. During the Second Golden Age, Byzantine architecture also spread to Russia, along with the Orthodox faith. There the basic type of the Byzantine church underwent an amazing transformation through the use of wood as a structural material. The most famous product of this native trend is the Cathedral of St. Basil adjoining the Kremlin in Moscow (fig. 282). Built during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, it seems as unmistakably Russian as that extraordinary ruler. The domes, growing in limitless profusion, have become fantastic tower-like structures whose vividly patterned helmets may resemble anything from mushrooms and berries to Oriental turbans. These huge ice-cream cones have the gay unreality of a fairy tale, yet their total effect is oddly impressive. Keyed as they are to the imagination of simple peasant folk (who must have



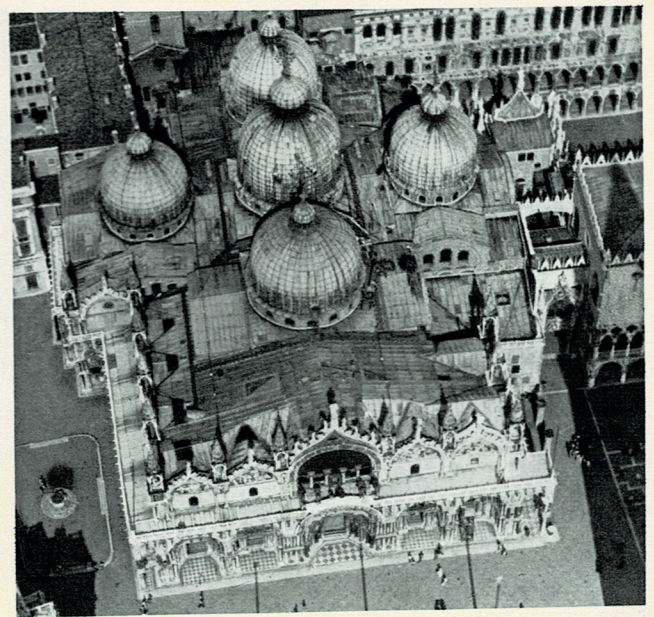
279. Dome Mosaics. 11th century. Monastery Church, Daphnē, Greece

stared at them in open-mouthed wonder on their rare visits to the capital), they nevertheless convey a sense of the miraculous derived from the more austere miracles of Byzantine architecture.

The development of Byzantine painting and sculpture after the age of Justinian was disrupted by the Iconoclastic Controversy, which began with an imperial edict of 726 prohibiting religious images. It raged for more than a hundred years, dividing the population into two hostile groups. The image-destroyers (iconoclasts), led by the emperor and supported mainly in the eastern provinces of the realm, insisted on a literal interpretation of the biblical ban against graven images as conducive to idolatry; they wanted to restrict religious art to abstract symbols and plant or animal forms. Their opponents, the iconophiles, were led by the monks and centered in the western provinces, where the imperial edict remained in-

effective for the most part. The roots of the conflict went very deep: on the plane of theology they involved the basic issue of the relationship of the human and divine in the person of Christ, while socially and politically they reflected a power struggle between State and Church. The Controversy also marked the final break between Catholicism and the Orthodox faith.

Had the edict been enforceable throughout the Empire, it might well have dealt Byzantine religious art a fatal blow. It did succeed in reducing the production of sacred images very greatly, but failed to wipe it out altogether, so that there was a fairly rapid recovery after the victory of the iconophiles in 843. While we know little for certain about how the Byzantine artistic tradition managed to survive from the early eighth to the mid-ninth century,



above: 280. St. Mark's (aerial view), Venice. Begun 1063



left: 281. Interior, St. Mark's, Venice

Iconoclasm seems to have brought about a renewed interest in secular art, which was not affected by the ban. This may help to explain the astonishing reappearance of Late Classical motifs in the art of the Second Golden Age, as in the scene of David composing the Psalms from the so-called *Paris Psalter* (fig. 283). It was probably illuminated about 900, although the temptation to put it earlier is almost irresistible. Not only do we find a landscape here that recalls Pompeian murals; the figures, too, obviously derive from Classical models. David himself could well be mistaken for Orpheus charming the beasts with his music, and his companions prove even more surprising, since they are allegorical figures that have nothing to do with the Bible at all: the young woman next to David is Melody, the one coyly hiding behind a pillar is Echo, and the male figure with a tree trunk personifies the mountains of Bethlehem. The late date of the picture is evident only from certain qualities of style such as the abstract zigzag pattern of the drapery covering Melody's legs. Another fascinating reflection of an early source is the sequence of scenes from Genesis among the mosaics of St. Mark's in Venice (fig. 285), which must have been adapted from an Early Christian illuminated manuscript. The squat, large-headed figures recall the art of the fourth century, as does the classical young philosopher type representing the Lord (compare fig. 264), which had been long since replaced in general usage by the more familiar bearded type (see fig. 279). Of particular interest is the scene in the upper right-hand corner. Ancient art had visualized the human soul as a tiny nude figure with but-

terfly wings; here this image reappears—or survives, rather—under Christian auspices as the spirit of life that the Lord breathes into Adam.

The *Paris Psalter* and the Genesis mosaics in St. Mark's betray an almost antiquarian enthusiasm for the traditions of Classical art. Such direct revivals, however, are extreme cases. The finest works of the Second Golden Age show a classicism that has been harmoniously merged with the spiritualized ideal of human beauty we encountered in the art of Justinian's reign. Among these, the *Crucifixion* mosaic at Daphnē (fig. 284) enjoys special fame. Its Classical qualities are more fundamental, and more deeply felt, than those of the *Paris Psalter*, yet also completely Christian: there is no attempt to re-create a realistic spatial setting, but the composition has a balance and clarity that are truly monumental as against the cluttered Pompeian landscape of the David miniature. Classical, too, is the statuesque dignity of the figures, which seem extraordinarily organic and graceful compared to those of the Justinian mosaic at S. Vitale (fig. 271). The most important aspect of their Classical heritage, however, is emotional rather than physical; it is the gentle *pathos* conveyed by their gestures and facial expressions, a restrained and noble suffering of the kind we first met in Greek art of the fifth century B.C. (see pages 105–106). Early Christian art had been devoid of this quality. Its view of Christ stressed the Saviour's divine wisdom and power, rather than his sacrificial death, so that the Crucifixion was depicted only rarely and in a notably unpathetic spirit. The image of the Pantocrator as we saw it on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and above the apse of S. Apollinare in Classe (fig. 264 and colorplate 13) retained its importance throughout the Second Golden Age—



left: 282. Cathedral of St. Basil, Moscow. 1554–60

below: 283. *David Composing the Psalms*, illustration from the *Paris Psalter*. c. 900 A.D. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris



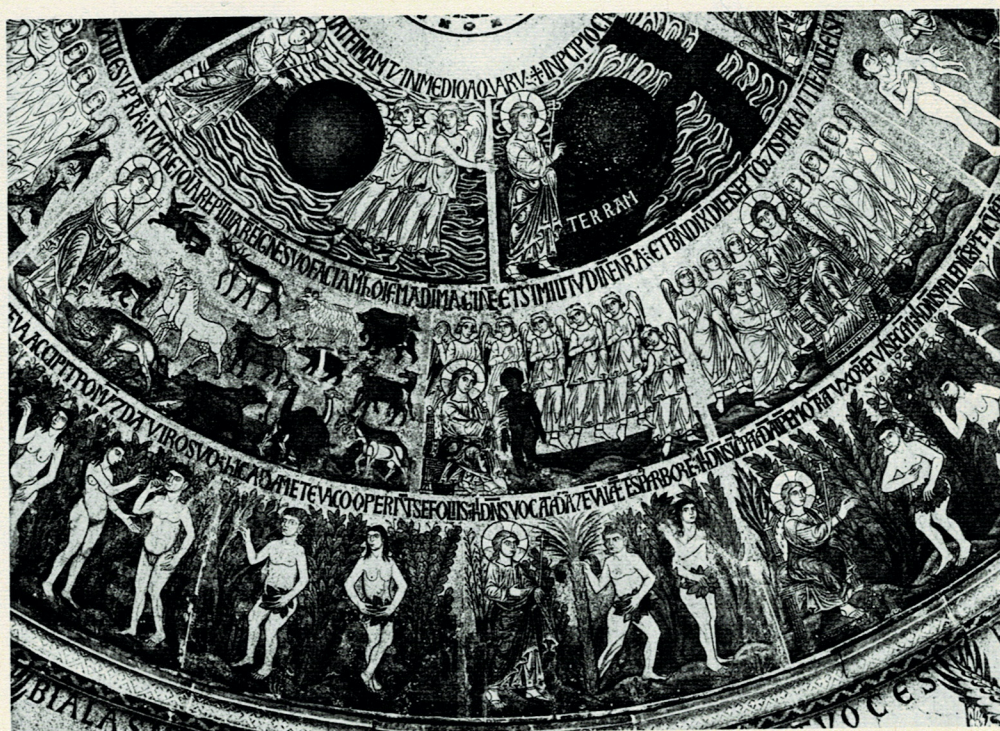
the majestic dome mosaic at Daphne stems from that tradition—but alongside it we now find a new emphasis on the Christ of the Passion. When and where this human interpretation of the Saviour made its first appearance, we cannot say for sure; it seems to have developed in the wake of the Iconoclastic Controversy. There are few examples of it earlier than the Daphnē *Crucifixion*, and none of them has as powerful an appeal to the emotions of the beholder. To have introduced this compassionate quality into sacred art was perhaps the greatest achieve-

ment of the Second Golden Age, even though its full possibilities were to be exploited not in Byzantium but in the medieval West (see fig. 405). Yet Byzantine art, too, preserved and developed the human view of Christ in the centuries to come. The wonderful mosaic fragment from Hagia Sophia (colorplate 15), probably a work of the thirteenth century, no longer has the forbidding severity of the Daphnē *Pantocrator*: instead, we find an expression of gentle melancholy, along with a subtlety of modeling and color that perpetuates the best Classical tradition of the Second Golden Age.

In 1204 Byzantium sustained an almost fatal defeat when the armies of the Fourth Crusade, instead of warring against the Turks, assaulted and took the city of Constantinople. For over half a century, the core of the Empire remained in Latin hands. Byzantium, however, survived even this catastrophe; in 1261, it once more regained its sovereignty, and the fourteenth century saw a last efflorescence of Byzantine painting, with a distinct and original flavor of its own, before the Turkish conquest in 1453. Because of the impoverished state of the greatly shrunken Empire, mural painting often took the place of mosaics, as in the recently uncovered wall decoration of a mortuary chapel attached to the Kariye Camii (the former Church of the Saviour in Chora) in Istanbul. From this impressive cycle of pictures, done about 1310–20, we reproduce the *Anastasis* (Greek for the Resurrection), in figure 286. The scene actually depicts the event just before the Resurrection—Christ's descent into Limbo. Surrounded by a radiant gloriole, the Saviour has vanquished Satan and battered down the gates of Hell (note the bound Satan at His feet, in the midst of an incredible profusion of hardware) and is raising Adam and Eve from the dead. What amazes us about this central group is its dramatic force, a quality we would hardly expect to find on the basis of what we have seen of Byzantine art so far. Christ here moves with extraordinary



above: 284. *The Crucifixion* (mosaic).
11th century. Monastery Church, Daphnē



right: 285. *Scenes from Genesis* (mosaic).
c. 1200. St. Mark's, Venice



left: 286. *Anastasis* (fresco).
c. 1310–20. Kariye Camii
(Church of the Saviour in Chora), Istanbul

below: 287. *Madonna* (detail).
6th–7th century A.D. Encaustic on wood.
Sta. Francesca Romana, Rome

physical energy, tearing Adam and Eve from their graves, so that they appear to fly through the air—a magnificently expressive image of divine triumph. Such dynamism had been unknown in the earlier Byzantine tradition. Coming in the fourteenth century, it shows that 800 years after Justinian, Byzantine art still had its creative powers.

During the Iconoclastic Controversy, one of the chief arguments in favor of sacred images was the claim that Christ Himself had permitted St. Luke to paint his portrait, and that other portraits of Christ or of the Virgin had miraculously appeared on earth by divine fiat. These original, “true” sacred images were supposedly the source of the later, man-made ones. Such pictures, or icons, had developed in early Christian times out of Graeco-Roman portrait panels (such as colorplate 11). Little is known about their origins, for examples antedating the Iconoclastic Controversy are extremely scarce. Of the few discovered so far, perhaps the most important is the *Madonna* from Sta. Francesca Romana in Rome, brought to light some years ago by the cleaning of a much-repainted panel. Only the Virgin’s face still shows the original surface in fair condition (fig. 287). Its link with Graeco-Roman portraiture is evident not only from the painting medium, which is encaustic (see page 154), a technique that went out of use after the Iconoclastic Controversy, but also from the fine gradations of light and shade. The forms themselves, however—the heart-shaped outline of the face, the tiny mouth, the long, narrow nose, the huge eyes under strongly arched brows—reflect an ideal of human beauty as spiritualized as that of the S. Vitale mosaics, while retaining a far higher degree of three-dimensional solidity. What makes this image so singularly impressive is the geometric severity of the design, which endows the features with a monumental grandeur such as we never encounter again in Early Christian or Byzantine art. Where and when was it produced? In the sixth or



seventh century, we must assume, but whether in Italy or the East we cannot say, for lack of comparable material. Be that as it may, it is a work of extraordinary power which makes us understand how men came to believe in the superhuman origin of sacred pictures.

Because of the veneration in which they were held, icons had to conform to strict formal rules, with fixed



288. ANDREI RUBLEV. *Old Testament Trinity*. c. 1410–20. Panel, $55\frac{1}{2} \times 44\frac{1}{2}$ ". Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

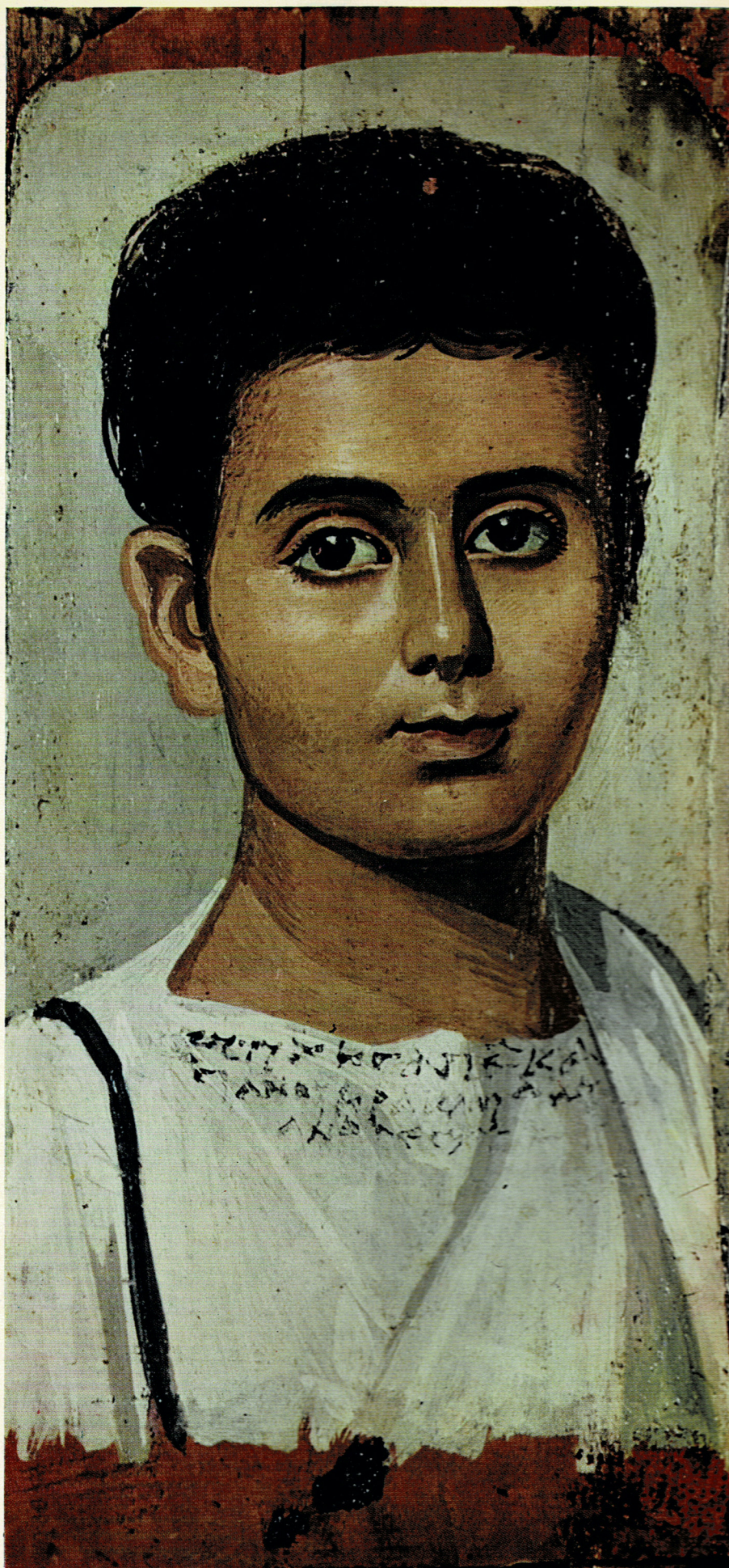
patterns repeated over and over again. As a consequence, the majority of them are more conspicuous for exacting craftsmanship than for artistic inventiveness. The *Madonna Enthroned* (fig. 289) is a work of this kind; although painted in the thirteenth century, it reflects a type several hundred years earlier. Echoes of the Classicism of the Second Golden Age abound: the graceful pose, the rich play of drapery folds, the tender melancholy of the Virgin's face, the elaborate, architectural perspective of the throne (which looks rather like a miniature replica of the Colosseum). But all these elements have become oddly abstract. The throne, despite its foreshortening, no longer functions as a three-dimensional object, and the highlights on the drapery resemble ornamental sunbursts, in strange contrast to the soft shading of hands and faces. The total effect is neither flat nor spatial but transparent, somewhat like that of a stained-glass window; the shapes look as if they were lit from behind. And this is almost literally true, for they are painted in a thin film on a highly reflecting gold surface that forms the highlights, the halos, and the background, so that even the shadows never seem wholly opaque. This all-pervading celestial radiance, we will recall, is a quality we first encountered in Early Christian mosaics. Panels such as ours, therefore, should be viewed as the aesthetic equivalent of mosaics on a smaller scale and not simply as the descendants of the ancient panel painting tradition. In fact, the most precious Byzantine icons are miniature mosaics done on panels, rather than paintings.

Along with the Orthodox faith, icon painting spread throughout the Balkans and Russia, where it continued



289. *Madonna Enthroned*. 13th century. Panel, $32 \times 19\frac{1}{2}$ ". National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (Mellon Collection)

to flourish even after the disappearance of the Byzantine Empire. The shifting of the creative impulses within this tradition to the outlying areas of the Orthodox world is signaled by the work of Andrei Rublev, the finest Russian icon painter and a great artist by any standard. Figure 288 shows his famous panel, the *Old Testament Trinity*, done about 1410–20. (The title refers to the three angels who visited Abraham at Mamre.) Although parts of it are poorly preserved—most of the background has disappeared—the picture reveals a harmonious beauty of design and a depth of lyrical feeling that vie with the most Classical products of the Second Golden Age. Rublev must have been thoroughly acquainted with the best Byzantine art had to offer, either through contact with Greek painters in Russia or through a sojourn in Constantinople. The most individual element—and also the most distinctively Russian—is the color scale, brighter, more complex, and different in key from that of any Byzantine work. In the hands of a lesser master, such combinations as orange, vermillion, and turquoise might easily have assumed a primitive garishness of the sort we often encounter in folk art; here, the controlled intensity of these tones becomes an essential part of the composition.



Colorplate 11. EGYPTO-ROMAN. *Portrait of a Boy*,
from the Faiyum, Lower Egypt, 2nd century A.D.
Encaustic on panel, $13 \times 7\frac{1}{4}$ ".
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
(Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1918)



Colorplate 12. ROMAN. *The Consecration of the Tabernacle and Its Priests*, from the Assembly Hall of the Synagogue at Dura-Europos.
245-256 A.D. Mural, 4' 8 1/4" x 7' 8 1/4". National Museum, Damascus



Colorplate 13. BYZANTINE. Interior (view toward the apse).
Sant' Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna. 533-549 A.D.



Colorplate 14. BYZANTINE. *Empress Theodora and Her Attendants*
(portion of a mosaic). About 547 A.D. San Vitale, Ravenna

290. *The Harbaville Triptych*.
Late 10th century. Ivory, 9½ × 11". The Louvre, Paris



Monumental sculpture, as we saw earlier, tended to disappear completely from the fifth century on. In Byzantine art, large-scale statuary died out with the last imperial portraits, and stone carving was confined almost entirely to architectural ornament (see fig. 275), while small-scale reliefs, especially in ivory and metal, continued to be produced throughout the Second Golden Age and beyond. Their extraordinary variety of content, style, and purpose is suggested by the two samples shown here, both of them dating from the tenth century. One is a *triptych*—a small portable altar shrine with two hinged wings—of the sort a high dignitary might carry for his private devotions while traveling (fig. 290); in the upper half of the center panel we see Christ Enthroned, flanked by St. John the Baptist and the Virgin—who plead for divine mercy on behalf of mankind—and five apostles below. The exquisite refinement of this icon-in-

miniature recalls the style of the *Daphnē Crucifixion*. Our second panel, representing the Sacrifice of Iphigenia (fig. 291), belongs to an ivory casket meant for wedding gifts and, rather surprisingly, is decorated with scenes of Greek mythology. Even more than the miniatures of the *Paris Psalter*, it illustrates the antiquarian aspects of Byzantine classicism subsequent to the Iconoclastic Controversy, for the subject is that of a famous drama by Euripides; and our composition (which is curiously shallow, despite the deep undercutting of the relief) probably derives from an illustrated Euripides manuscript, rather than from a sculptural source. Though drained of all tragic emotion and reduced to a level of ornamental playfulness, these knobby little figures form a coherent visual quotation from ancient art. It was through channels such as this that the Graeco-Roman heritage entered the mainstream of Byzantine tradition.

291. *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* (detail of ivory casket). 10th century.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Crown Copyright Reserved)

