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MIDDLE BYZANTINE AESTHETICS OF POWER AND THE INCOMPARABILITY OF ISLAMIC ART: THE ARCHITECTURAL EKPHRASEIS OF NIKOLAOS MESARITES

An early thirteenth-century historical treatise, *The Palace Revolt of John Komnenos* by Nikolaos Mesarites, an author of the middle Byzantine period (ca. 843–1204), contains a passage that briefly describes an Islamic-style building, the Mouchroutas, which was part of the imperial palace complex in Constantinople (see Appendix).[1] The author emphatically states that the structure was the work of "a Persian hand," that is to say, it was not a Byzantine interpretation of an Islamic building but was fabricated by craftsmen of Islamic, specifically Seljuk, origin.[2] The name of the hall, Mouchroutas, is thought to derive from the Arabic word *makhrūṭa* (cone), and presumably referred to the chamber's distinctive ceiling, which, judging from Mesarites's description, had the faceted, honeycomb structure of a muqarnas vault.[3] Mesarites reports that the surface of the ceiling depicts "Persians in their various costumes," suggesting that it was decorated with "princely cycle" imagery. Therefore, the building evoked Islamic models in both name and form.

Scholars typically treat the passage as a descriptive document upon which to base hypothetical reconstructions of the Mouchroutas.[4] While the archaeological potentials of the ekphrasis are unusually rich, a focus on these aspects of the text has obscured other possible interpretations, in particular its significance as a record of the Byzantine reception of Islamic art.[5] The document provides a rare and fascinating account of how a Byzantine viewer negotiated an Islamic work of art through Byzantine aesthetic principles, and how he judged this foreign work as simultaneously satisfying and falling short of Byzantine standards, particularly those encoded in religious and imperial art and architecture. I am not suggesting that the Mouchroutas hall was built with the expectation that viewers would make comparisons between churches and this building, or between sacred and imperial icons and the images on the ceiling of the Mouchroutas. Rather, these juxtapositions were constructed by Mesarites and indicate his reception of, not the original intentions behind, the Islamicizing work of art.

Nikolaos Mesarites (d. ca. 1214) was a Byzantine courtier from a prominent family. In *The Palace Revolt of John Komnenos*, which was composed on the eve of the Fourth Crusade, probably in 1203, he recounts a coup attempted on July 31, 1200 at the imperial palace in Constantinople.[6] The usurper, John Komnenos (d. 1200), was better known as John the Fat, an epithet that indicates the critical eye that history casts upon this character. John was related on his mother's side to the dynasty of the Komnenoi, who occupied the Byzantine imperial office from 1081 to 1185. This association provided the necessary lineage to justify his placement on the throne. But despite the high rank and illustrious reputation of his forefathers, John was a man of little merit. In the historical record, he is noted foremost for his drunkenness and obesity.[7] Placed on the throne after a popular revolt, he was a puppet emperor, who was violently unseated within a day. Mesarites's description of the Mouchroutas occurs at the climax of the historical narrative, just before John the Fat is captured, beaten, and decapitated, and his corpse is paraded through the Hippodrome by soldiers loyal to the reigning emperor, Alexius III Angelos (r. 1195–1203).

From a literary perspective, Mesarites's text employs an elevated prose style and a sophisticated, even innovative, rhetorical technique. It was clearly written for an erudite audience, presumably aristocrats of the Constantinopolitan court. These readers likely lived through the events that are described, and the setting of the story,

Fig. 1. Remains of the kiosk of Kılıç Arslan II, Konya, second half of the twelfth century. (After Rüçhan Arık, *Kubad Abad: Selçuklu Saray ve Çinileri* [Istanbul, 2000], 28, fig. 1)

Fig. 2. *Minā'ī* tile showing a figure playing a lute. Seljuk, from the kiosk of Kılıç Arslan II, Konya, second half of the twelfth century, diam. ca. 8 in. (20 cm). Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin. (Photo: courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, N.Y.)

the imperial palace in Constantinople, would have been familiar to them.

The Mouchroutas is no longer extant, but Mesarites purports that it was decorated by a "Persian" artist and depicted "Persian" figures.[8] The Byzantines commonly referred to contemporary foreigners by the names of their ancestors. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century Byzantine parlance, "Persian" meant Islamic, and specifically Seljuk.[9] The Seljuks were among the foremost enemies of the Byzantines from the eleventh until the mid-thirteenth century, and their victories at the battles of Manzikert, in 1071, and Myriokephalon, in 1176, were crucial turning points for the devolution of Byzantine power in the medieval world.[10] Although the precise construction date of the Mouchroutas is unknown, it was probably built in the mid-twelfth century, possibly during a period of détente around 1161, when the Seljuk Sultan Kılıç Arslan II (r. 1155–92) visited the court of the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–80).[11] In sum, the building marks an intriguing instance of artistic emulation in the midst of a predominantly adversarial political relationship.

The form and program of the Mouchroutas can be gleaned from Mesarites's description, and possible parallels can be identified in roughly contemporary Islamic and Islamicizing architectural decoration.[12] Mesarites first describes a staircase leading up to the hall, which indicates that the structure was composed of two levels. The staircase was built from brick, gypsum, and marble. Part of the building was decorated with cross-shaped polychrome tiles colored deep red, blue, green, and purple.[13] These features call to mind the early Seljuk palace pavilion in Konya, the kiosk of Kılıç Arslan II, the same Seljuk sultan who visited Constantinople in 1161.[14] The exact date of this structure is uncertain, but its patronage is secure; it is therefore typically placed within the period of Kılıç Arslan's reign, circa 1156 to 1192.[15] Like the Mouchroutas, the kiosk is composed of two levels (fig. 1). More importantly, it is the earliest preserved Seljuk building ornamented with ceramic tiles, many of which are cross-shaped and show a palette similar to that noted by Mesarites (figs. 2–4).[16]

Fig. 3. *Minā'ī* tiles in the shape of crosses. Seljuk, from the kiosk of Kılıç Arslan II, Konya, second half of the twelfth century, height of cross-shaped piece ca. 9 in. (23 cm). Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum, Istanbul. (After Rüçhan Arık and Oluş Arık, *Tiles, Treasures of Anatolian Soil: Tiles of the Seljuk and Beylik Periods* [Istanbul, 2008], 234, figs. 169 and 170)

Fig. 4. *Minā'ī* tiles showing a human-headed griffin. Seljuk, possibly from the kiosk of Kılıç Arslan II, Konya, second half of the twelfth century, fritware, overglaze-painted and gilded: diam. 9.2 in. (23.3 cm), ht. 9.25 in. (23.5 cm), wid. 8.25 in. (21 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jack A. Josephson, 1976 (1976.245), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, N.Y. (Photo: courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, N.Y.)

Fig. 5. Glazed tiles with crosses interspersed with small squares. Seljuk, early thirteenth century, lgth. 9.4 in. (24 cm). Antalya Museum, Antalya, Turkey. (Photo: courtesy of Kale Group Cultural Publications, Istanbul)

The tiles of the Konya kiosk are mostly disarticulated and many are damaged. Nevertheless, they preserve much of their original decoration, as well as evidence of their technique, providing useful comparanda for the Mouchroutas hall decorations. The kiosk tiles are executed in *minā'ī* (enamel), a highly refined overglaze technique of polychrome painting more commonly found in ceramic vessels. *Minā'ī* is also known as *haft-rangī* (seven-color), a reference to its multihued palette, which consists of several of the colors cited by Mesarites, including blue, green, red, brown/black, gold, yellow, and white.[17] In Seljuk architectural tile ensembles, cross-format pieces were often positioned at the interstices of large eight-pointed stars (fig. 3).[18] In this arrangement, the stars tend to dominate the composition. In another pattern, however, cross-format pieces are combined with small square-shaped tiles placed in the spaces between the arms, causing the crosses to appear more prominently (fig. 5).[19] Mesarites does not mention star-shaped tiles, raising the possibility that in the Mouchroutas, cross-format tiles were combined with small squares.[20]

Mesarites's reference to the "serrated" (ὀδοντουμένη) decoration to either side of the staircase may also find analogues in Seljuk architectural ornament, albeit of a later date. Seljuk modifications to the Roman theater in Aspendos (near modern-day Antalya, Turkey), dating to the 1220s to 1230s, include the application of chevron (zigzag)-patterned frescoes in a staircase leading to a belvedere (fig. 6). The *in situ* remains are greatly deteriorated, but nonetheless preserve a motif that could be described as "serrated" (fig. 7).[21] Seljuk palaces of the 1220s to 1230s preserve frescoes in chevron patterns on both exterior and large interior wall expanses. In addition, the palace in Alanya shows zigzag patterns executed in tile (fig. 8).

Moving into the hall, Mesarites explains that the ceiling was constructed from densely packed hemispheres

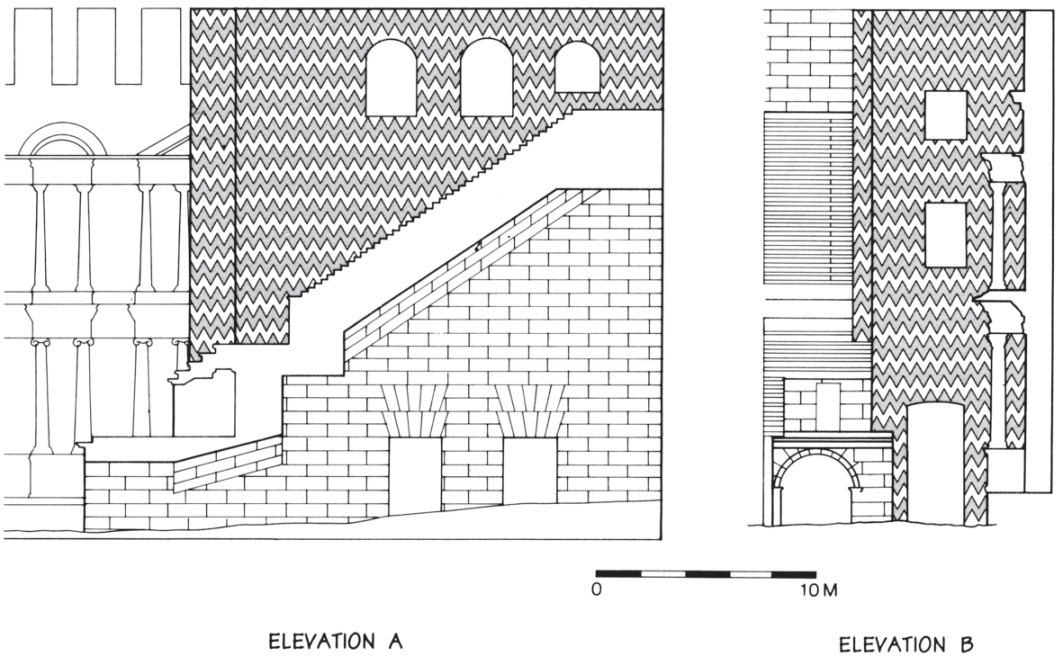

Fig. 6. Elevation drawing of the south staircase of the Roman theater at Aspendos in modern-day Turkey, showing Seljuk alterations including chevron frescoes, ca. 1220–30. (Illustration: J. A. Perlmutter, courtesy of Scott Redford)

Fig. 7. Detail showing the chevron frescoes that were part of the Seljuk alterations to the Roman theater at Aspendos. (Photo: courtesy of Scott Redford)

Fig. 8. Tiles with a chevron pattern. Seljuk, from the inner castle in Alanya, early thirteenth century. Antalya Museum, Antalya, Turkey. (Photo: courtesy of Kale Group Cultural Publications, Istanbul)

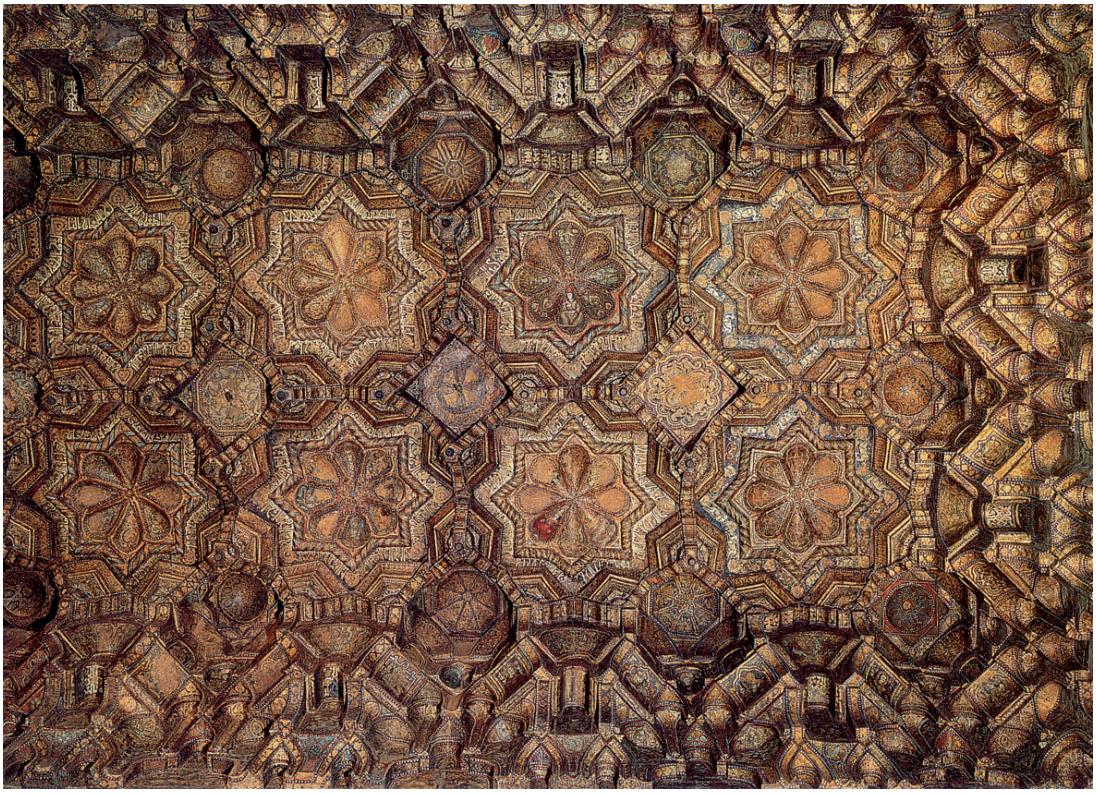

Fig. 9. Muqarnas ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, Sicily, ca. 1140. (After Richard Ettinghausen et al., *Islamic Art and Architecture, 650–1250* [New Haven, 2001], 298, fig. 487)

arranged at angles. As noted above, his description recalls the appearance of muqarnas vaults. Yet structures of this kind are not attested in extant Seljuk monuments prior to the mid- to late thirteenth century.[22] Parallels are found instead among twelfth-century and earlier monuments of North Africa and Sicily, including the wooden ceiling in the Norman royal chapel, the Cappella Palatina in Palermo (ca. 1140), where concave forms compose an intricate stalactite structure of faceted stars and cones (fig. 9).[23] Mesarites further specifies that the decoration of the Mouchroutas portrays "Persians and their various costumes," and that John the Fat sat on the floor of this marvelous room, "gulping his drink quickly, courting favor with the Persians painted on the chamber and drinking to them." This description suggests that the subject matter of the Mouchroutas program imitated an Islamic princely cycle, which would have depicted courtiers engaged in elite pastimes such as drinking, hunting, and listening to music.[24] These themes appear in tiles from the kiosk at Konya (fig. 2), as well as on the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, where hunters pursue their quarry and courtiers sit cross-legged on the floor, imbibing wine, watching wrestlers and dancers, and listening to musicians (fig. 10).[25] A similar structure and decorative repertoire appear in fragments from a mid-tenth- to mid-eleventh-century Fatimid fresco program excavated from the remains of a bath complex (destroyed in 1168) in the city of Fustat, near Cairo. It preserves hemispherical elements, including one decorated with an elaborately attired seated figure holding a prominent drinking cup (fig. 11).[26] Close scrutiny of Mesarites's description, in combination with comparative study of extant medieval monuments, suggests that the Mouchroutas possessed features of roughly contemporary Islamic and Islamicizing buildings, such as polychrome cross-shaped tiles,

Fig. 10. Detail of the muqarnas ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, Sicily, ca. 1140. (After Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Le pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella palatina in Palermo* [Rome, 1950], fig. 39)

Fig. 11. Fresco motif of a seated figure from a fragment of a muqarnas vault. Fatimid, Fustat (near Cairo), mid-tenth to mid-eleventh century. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. (After Jonathan Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt* [New Haven, 2007], fig. 142)

chevron patterns, a muqarnas ceiling, and a figural program depicting princely pleasures.

This kind of architectural comparison and hypothetical reconstruction marks the extent of most art historical interpretations of Mesarites's ekphrasis. Certainly one factor contributing to this tendency is the brevity of the ekphrasis itself, which constitutes a relatively short passage within a much longer historical account. In addition, reticence to investigate the text more deeply may be due to the fact that Mesarites describes a secular building, which scholars might tacitly assume to lack the degree of complexity and sophistication commonly perceived in Byzantine ecclesiastical structures and the ekphraseis on them.[27] It has also been suggested that a Byzantine viewer may not have understood the significance of the Islamic program that decorated the Mouchroutas and would therefore have engaged with it in only superficial terms. According to this argument, Mesarites's lack of elaboration regarding specific details of the program indicates that "their meaning was lost on" him; he registered the material richness of the monument, but ultimately viewed it as "a piece of exotic, even decadent, orientalism."[28]

At stake in this passage, however, is not Mesarites's understanding of the original Islamic meaning of the decorative program of the Mouchroutas. Rather, the significance of the ekphrasis lies in how Mesarites interpreted this monument through Byzantine modes of visuality.[29] It seems that Mesarites did consider the Mouchroutas to be "a piece of exotic, even decadent, orientalism," but this perception is articulated in a more complex manner than has heretofore been recognized. Furthermore, the terseness of Mesarites's description of the Mouchroutas hall might indicate his expectation that the audience would be well familiar with the monument and the tradition of Islamic palace decoration from which it drew, thus making a more detailed description superfluous.[30]

Regardless of the reasons behind the scholarly tendency to focus on the descriptive potentials of the passage, the result is that relatively little attention has been paid to the use of the Mouchroutas as a rhetorical

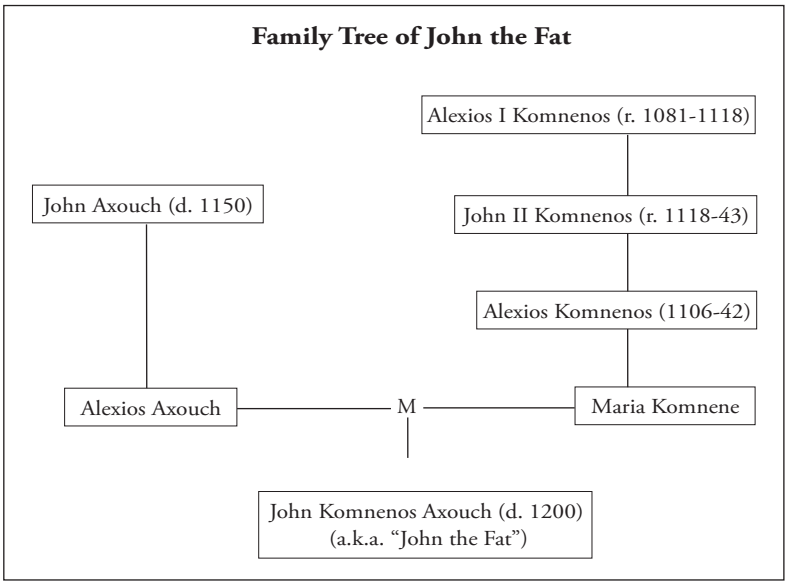

Fig. 12. Diagram of the family tree of John "the Fat" Komnenos. Designed by Alice Davis. © 2010 Alicia Walker.

device. The description of the Mouchroutas is not an independent ekphrastic document, but an ekphrastic passage in service of a larger narrative and argument.[31] The description of the building is not undertaken for its own sake; rather, it is tightly intertwined with Mesarites's intensely critical characterization of John the Fat. The passage introduces the climax of the narrative, when John is executed by soldiers of the true emperor. As such, Mesarites's description of the Mouchroutas contributes to his broader purpose of vilifying John as unfit for the Byzantine throne.

In a key phrase, Mesarites states that the building was a "Persian stage—the work of the hand of John's kinsman from his grandfather's family." This passing comment epitomizes Byzantine muckraking at its best, because it reminds the reader that John Komnenos was in fact John Komnenos *Axouch*. Although on his mother's side John the Fat was descended from two emperors, Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118) and John II Komnenos (r. 1118–43), his father's family name indicates a less illustrious paternal origin (fig. 12). Axouch was a foreign, specifically Turkic, name, and it recorded the Seljuk heritage of the other branch of John's parentage. His paternal grandfather, John Axouch (d. 1150), was taken prisoner in 1097, when still a youth, and kept at the Byzantine court of Alexios I Komnenos, where he converted to Christianity. John Axouch became a favorite of the imperial heir, John II Komnenos, who eventually granted him the prestigious title *sebastos* (venerable). In the Komnenian era, this rank was given almost exclusively to members of the imperial family, a clear indication of John Axouch's prominence at court and his intimacy with the emperor. Under John II Komnenos, John Axouch later held the important position of *megas domestikos* (supreme military commander after the emperor). John Axouch continued to serve under John II Komnenos's son and successor, Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–80).[32] The clearest evidence of John Axouch's prestige was the marriage of his son (and John the Fat's father), Alexios Axouch, to Maria Komnene, the granddaughter of the emperor John II Komnenos and daughter of his eldest son, Alexios Komnenos (d. 1142).[33] Alexios Axouch held the respectable office of *protostrator* (chief of the imperial grooms) and led military expeditions to Italy, Cilicia, and Hungary. However, he fell from imperial favor in 1167 under suspicion of conspiring against Manuel I Komnenos.[34]

In twelfth-century sources, reference is often made to the Persian origins of John the Fat's family in order to question their fitness for imperial service.[35] Indeed,

Fig. 13. Plaque showing the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. Byzantine, mid-tenth century, ivory, ht. 7.3 in. (18.6 cm), wid. 3.7 in. (9.5 cm). State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, II 2 b 329. (After Helen Evans, ed., *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* [New York, 1996], 203, cat. no. 140)

Mesarites's reference to John the Fat's part-Seljuk origins can be read as a thinly veiled indictment of John as an enemy of Byzantium. As Paul Magdalino notes, "[i]t could be argued that Mesarites' description isolates the Islamic elements in the building because the author's purpose is to evoke the dramatic irony of a usurping emperor of Turkish descent who spent his last tragic moments in suitably infidel surroundings."[36] Yet this observation might be extended to argue that John was lampooned not only for being a "Seljuk John Axouch," but also for not being enough of a "Byzantine John Komnenos," because the rhetorical force of Mesarites's description of John the Fat was generated in part through its striking contrast with the standard image of the middle Byzantine ruler.

Between the end of Iconoclasm in 843 and the advent of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, imperial portraits followed a decidedly Christian iconography of divine endorsement.[37] This visual ideology is evident in portraits of the Macedonian dynasty (867–1056). In an ivory panel depicting Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (r. 945–59), the emperor bends his head to receive Christ's blessing (fig. 13). The primacy of the Son of God is demonstrated by his higher elevation, but the emperor's depiction in the presence of the divinity makes clear the ruler's exalted status among men.[38] Harmony of mind between emperor and Christ is conveyed through their strikingly similar physiognomies. The emperor is defined in part by his Christomimetic (Christ-like) appearance. Parallel concepts are at play in imperial portraits of the subsequent dynasty, that of John the Fat's own family, the Komnenoi. In the frontispiece to a twelfth-century Gospel book, John II Komnenos and his son Alexios—the maternal great-grandfather and grandfather, respectively, of John the Fat—are blessed by Christ, who sits enthroned above them (fig. 14).[39] These images express in clear visual terms the ideology of divine sanction and parallelism that was at the core of middle Byzantine notions of royal authority. Henry Maguire characterizes the depiction of imperial grandeur "as a diagram of supernatural qualities."[40] In their lack of movement and dearth of human emotion, the emperors are said to mirror the visual signs of divinity conveyed through Christ's immobility and "impassive or detached expression."[41] This perception and projection of the imperial image is found in both art and literature. For example, the eleventh-century courtier and scholar Michael Psellos (d. ca. 1081) characterized the imperial image as "an icon of the signs of God."[42]

It therefore comes as little surprise that when Mesarites wanted to lampoon the false emperor John the Fat he inverted the very qualities that constituted the core of the imperial ideal. Rather than presenting a stoic picture of John on the royal throne receiving blessings from Christ, Mesarites describes the degenerate imposter as

Fig. 14. Frontispiece from the Gospels of John II Komnenos. Byzantine, Constantinople, ca. 1128, tempera and gold on vellum, ht. 7.3 in. (18.5 cm), wid. 4.7 in. (12 cm). Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, Ms. Urb. Gr. 2, fol. 10v. © 2010 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. (Photo: courtesy of Biblioteca Apostolica)

an obese and sweaty drunkard squatting on the floor of an Islamic-style hall and raising a glass to toast the colorful "Persian" figures depicted on the ceiling. Mesarites paints in words the image of a man whose erratic movements, disheveled appearance, and undignified posture form an absolute antithesis to the static, orderly, and imposing figures preserved in extant representations of the emperor.[43]

In addition to these rather blunt condemnations, Mesarites criticizes John with more subtle, although no less damaging, associations. In true Byzantine fashion, Mesarites's final insults are delivered through a backhanded compliment. He shows little reservation in praising the aesthetic achievement of the Mouchroutas, celebrating it as a spectacle of color and design, one that provides "insatiable pleasure." But as he concludes his survey of its superlative qualities, he states that the building surpasses not a Byzantine monument, but an ancient Greek one: "This Persian hall is more delightful than the Lakonian ones of Menelaus." The genuineness of his praise would have been evident to any educated reader who knew of the marvelous palace of Menelaus from Homer's description in Book IV of the *Odyssey*.[44] But to a Byzantine ear, Mesarites's extolling remark might have simultaneously been heard as cleverly conditional praise. By comparing the Mouchroutas to a non-Byzantine, non-Christian building, Mesarites firmly placed the Islamic monument in a category that operates outside a Byzantine aesthetic system.[45] What, specifically, was at stake in the distinction that Mesarites took pains to express?

While physical properties of color, form, and light were important factors in the appreciation of works of art, Byzantine ekphrasis constantly juxtaposes the sensible with the intelligible, indicating that Byzantine aesthetic values were concerned with both the physical and spiritual impact of a work of art.[46] The most essential aspect of Byzantine visuality was the viewer's anagogical engagement. This experience was at its most quintessential when one gazed upon a sacred icon of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint. The viewer perceived not just the beautiful image rendered in paint, but also its prototype. In post-Iconoclastic Byzantium, an image furnished a passage from the depiction of a saint to the actual holy person.[47] Dynamics of sacred visuality could also shape secular visuality, particularly in viewing images of the emperor.[48] The earthly court was understood as a parallel to the court of heaven, and the Byzantine emperor was a reflection of the celestial ruler, Christ.[49] Much as an icon served as a conduit to and from the saint it depicted, the emperor was a link with

the divine authority of God and His Son. This anagogical principle was conveyed through imperial images like the crowning of John II and Alexios Komnenos (fig. 14), which clearly depicts the conductive relationship between emperor and Christ.

In other instances, however, it is possible that secular art was defined not by its adoption of strategies germane to sacred art but by the lack of an anagogical dynamic. I suggest that in his description of the Mouchroutas and John the Fat, Mesarites draws upon the viewer's familiarity with the anagogical process of Byzantine visuality, in reference to both religious and imperial images, so as to highlight the failure of the Islamic paintings to realize the spiritual potential attained by Byzantine art. While the figure of the true emperor or the icons of the saints connected the viewer with a higher level of sacred reality, the images of the Mouchroutas provided no such revelation. Indeed, they quite simply could not compare.

Access to these more subtle messages embedded in Mesarites's text is greatly aided by the fact that between 1198 and 1203 Mesarites penned a much longer ekphrastic account of another monument in Constantinople, the Church of the Holy Apostles.[50] Liz James and Ruth Webb propose that in the description of this Christian building, Mesarites deploys ekphrasis not only to describe the physical appearance of the structure, but also to reveal the spiritual reality of the images that decorate it.[51] They localize this attitude in the introduction to the ekphrasis, in which Mesarites states:

> Now however it is time for us to proceed in our description to the things within the Church and to look at the things there with the eyes of sense and to understand them with eyes of the spirit. For the spirit is wont to advance from those things that are perceived by the senses, and led by the lesser faculty [of sight], to *understand ultimate things* and to *penetrate to the secret places*, to which the faculty which leads it [physical sight] is in no wise able to come [italics are mine]. [52]

In other words, the material form and decoration of the building operate as cues or pathways to spiritual revelation. For this reason, ekphrasis was not necessarily intended to describe the work of art for the viewer in objective terms, but rather to guide the viewer toward looking at it in a specific way. Mesarites's task is to lead his audience to a hidden meaning via description of the physical monument and its decoration. What distinguishes Mesarites is not his reference to the spiritual dimension of sacred art, but rather the explicit manner in which he identifies the revelation of this deeper significance as the fundamental purpose of his ekphrasis.[53] Mesarites's self-proclaimed rhetorical intentions in the case of the Church of the Holy Apostles support the notion that concealed meanings were likewise communicated through his account of the Mouchroutas.

But what of Mesarites's statement that ekphrasis guides the reader beyond the material splendor of the work of art to its *spiritual* significance? This might be true of the Church of the Holy Apostles, but the Mouchroutas—not just a secular structure, but an Islamic monument—was no doubt as distant as a Byzantine author might fear to fall from the sacred truth of art. In fact, it is this very incomparability of Islamic art to Byzantine art, and of John the Fat to the Byzantine emperor, that underlies Mesarites's text. The spiritual reality of the Mouchroutas hall—and John the Fat—is insufficient and corrupt; it is characterized by failure and absence, and Mesarites took it upon himself to lay bare this truth.

There are two keys to understanding the "ultimate things" that Mesarites intended to communicate and accessing the "secret place" where spiritual truth was to be found in the decoration of the Mouchroutas hall. The first is the Byzantine concept of the relationship of images, specifically icons, to their prototypes. The second is the ideology of the Byzantine emperor's Christomimetic nature. As noted above, in Byzantine post-Iconoclastic thought, the icon was not a dwelling place of the divine but a pathway of access to the holy.[54] When looking at an icon, the physical eye might be limited to perception of the paint, wood, ivory, or precious metal of an image, but the mind could penetrate this material surface to reach a more profound spiritual understanding.[55] The anagogical dimension of an icon—its ability to carry the viewer beyond the materiality of an image to the spiritual reality of the holy figure it depicted—was essential to the post-Iconoclastic justification of icon veneration.

Mesarites's celebration of the beauty of the Mouchroutas, the skill of its construction, and the lavishness of its decoration at first suggests that the author is satisfied merely to indulge in the "insatiable enjoyment"

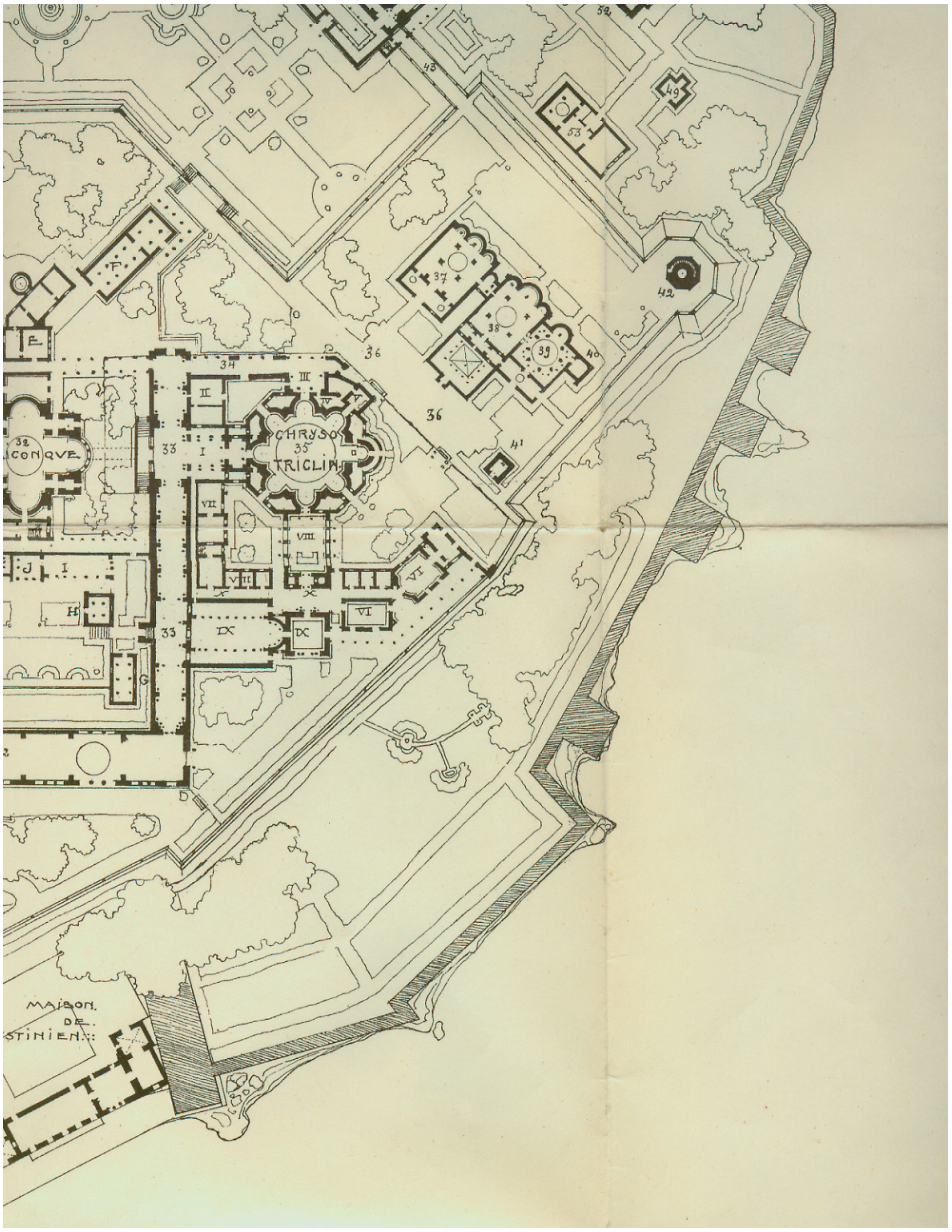

Fig. 15. Hypothetical plan of the imperial palace in Constantinople, showing the proposed location of the Chrysotriklinos at no. 35. (After Jean Ebersolt, *Le Grand Palais de Constantinople et le Livre des cérémonies* [Paris, 1910], 149–50)

that the building provides. But in the process of articulating his experience of aesthetic wonder, Mesarites makes specific reference to another characteristic of this Islamic work of art: the satisfaction found in these foreign images is "not hidden, but on the surface." Unlike the Christian icon, which provides a conduit to holy beings, these Islamic images do not conceal deeper spiritual reality; they are devoid of the profound connection with the divine that constitutes the essence of the power of the Christian icon. Just as Mesarites claims responsibility for guiding his audience to recognize the concealed truth of the sacred images at the Church of the Holy Apostles, he likewise draws his reader's attention to the absence of this dimension in the paintings

of the ceiling of the Mouchroutas.[56] Although a wonder to the physical eye, they provide little for the mind and nothing for the soul.

On the one hand, this distinction between foreign and Byzantine art is not at all surprising; on the other hand, it is striking that Mesarites expends the effort to alert his audience to this obvious difference. Indeed, having established the lack of an anagogical referent for the Islamic work of art, he shifts immediately from a description of the building to a description of John. It is here that Mesarites concludes his anti-anagogical reading of the Islamic decorative program, for it is in John—sitting on the floor, drunk and disheveled, wiping sweat from his brow—that these Islamic images find their referent.[57] In this way, a distinction drawn between the anagogical potential of Byzantine as opposed to Islamic art simultaneously serves as a critique of John and casts a critical gaze upon the otherwise celebrated "Persian" paintings decorating the ceiling.[58] Mesarites's subtle comparisons of the Islamic image to both the Christian icon and John the Fat constitute the first "ultimate thing" that Mesarites intends his reader to understand. Penetration of this secret meaning is predicated on the audience's familiarity with Byzantine theories of the relation of images to their prototypes. It demonstrates the use of a sacred, Christian mode of seeing to underscore both the shortcomings of a secular, Islamic work of art and the corruption of the figure of John the Fat, who parallels the painted "Persians" in both ethnic origin and indecorous behavior.

Still, the "secret place" to which Mesarites seeks to lead his reader requires a second key: familiarity with Byzantine imperial ceremonial at the Great Palace and the concept of Christomimesis that informed these rituals. It is clear that Mesarites presents John as unimperial: although wearing a crown, he is not a king; slothful and degenerate, he sits on the floor, not a throne.[59] The lack of royal dignity in this portrait is absolute. Still, Mesarites may further allude to a more specific way in which this scene confirmed John's status as an anti-emperor. In the opening reference to the Mouchroutas, the author cites the building's proximity to the Chrysotriklinos (Golden Hall), the throne room of the Byzantine emperor and the symbolic center of his authority.[60] In Jean Ebersolt's hypothetical plan of the tenth-century imperial palace, the Chrysotriklinos is located at the southeastern side of the complex (fig. 15).[61] The Mouchroutas, which was built about two hundred years after the phase represented in Ebersolt's plan, is thought to have occupied a space in the area of the longitudinal hall to the west of the Chrysotriklinos. While Mesarites's reference to the Chrysotriklinos might be understood as simply topographical, it is also possible that through this association he intended to cue his reader to further criticism of John the Fat.

From textual accounts, the Chrysotriklinos can be reconstructed as a freestanding, eight-lobed building resembling a small chapel with an extended alcove at its eastern end. This footprint is evident in Ebersolt's reconstruction (fig. 15, no. 35). In the apse-like space was located the imperial throne, and a mosaic in the half-dome above depicted the enthroned Christ. A post-Iconoclastic inscription running around the ceiling of the room is preserved in the *Anthologia Graeca*, a tenth- or eleventh-century compendium of epigrams, many of which were from monuments in Constantinople. The inscription referred specifically to the image in the conch.[62] It read:

> The ray of Truth has shone forth again and has dimmed the eyes of the imposters. Piety has grown, error has fallen, faith blooms, and Grace spreads out. For behold, *once again the image of Christ shines above the imperial throne* and confounds the murky heresies; while above the entrance is represented the Virgin as divine gate and guardian. The Emperor and the Bishop are depicted close by along with their collaborators inasmuch as they have driven away error, and all around the building, like guards, [stand] angels, apostles, martyrs, priests. Hence we call "the new Christotriklinos" that which aforetime had been given a golden name [i.e., Chrysotriklinos], since it contains the throne of Christ, our Lord, the forms of Christ's Mother and Christ's heralds, and the image of Michael whose deeds are filled with wisdom [italics are mine].[63]

In this passage, the centrality of the image of Christ for imperial ideology in the post-Iconoclastic period is conveyed by the pun on the name of the hall: *Chryso*triklinos (Golden Hall), becomes *Christo*triklinos (Christ's Hall). When the emperor sat on the throne, he assumed a position directly below the image of Christ. This arrangement established a visual parallel between Christ as emperor of Heaven and the emperor as Christ's

representative on earth, drawing a composition much like that of the image of John II Komnenos and his son Alexios (fig. 14).

As noted above, in Byzantine political theory, the earthly and heavenly courts were understood as "interpenetrating" realms: the emperor was second in rank below Christ in the heavenly court, but first within the earthly court; the emperor ruled below as Christ ruled above.[64] When the emperor mounted the throne beneath the image of Christ in the Chrysotriklinos, he became the earthly reflection of the true emperor in Heaven, serving as a conduit to the divinity much in the way that a painted icon provided access to the saint it portrayed. Accounts of middle Byzantine court ceremonial make clear the essential role that this performative juxtaposition of Christ and emperor played in rituals conducted in the throne room.[65] The Christomimetic scene would have been familiar to Mesarites's well-educated, aristocratic readers because high-ranking courtiers constituted the primary audience for these imperial displays.

Returning to the description of the Mouchroutas, an expectation to see the emperor enthroned in the Chryso/Christotriklinos, below the image of Christ, would have been ingrained in the minds of Byzantine readers, particularly the elite audience to whom Mesarites's *History* was addressed. John the Fat was positioned, however, not only outside the imperial throne room but in an *anti*-Christotriklinos, below an image not of Christ but of "Persians," sitting not on a throne but on the floor. While the representation of Christ above the emperor in the Chrysotriklinos attested to the divine origin of the emperor's authority and his exalted status as Christ's representative on earth, the image of the "Persians" in the ceiling of the Mouchroutas led back to earth and to the pathetic, drunken, sweaty John the Fat.

One could take this line of reasoning a step further, extrapolating as a Byzantine viewer might have, into another absent-but-present space, that of actual contemporary Islamic palaces, which the Mouchroutas was thought to imitate. One would imagine the "Persian" king sitting on the floor of his hall, staring at the images that decorated the ceiling of his throne room and searching in vain to "understand ultimate things and to penetrate secret places."[66] But unlike the true earthly king, the Byzantine emperor, whose authority was sanctioned by God through the image of Christ guarding over his throne, the "Persian" ruler was sheltered by mere gold and paint, squatting under images, which, although beautiful to the eye, were "on the surface" only. By recalling the contemporary "Persian" court, Mesarites's ekphrasis on the Mouchroutas might have been intended to criticize not only John the Fat, but also the Seljuk rulers to whom he was implicitly likened.

This final suggestion highlights how Mesarites's description of the Mouchroutas might be understood to employ ekphrasis as a particularly effective tool of alterity. As argued by W. J. T. Mitchell, when the object of ekphrasis is non-verbal and non-active, it speaks only through the description of the author.[67] As such, ekphrasis functions to give voice to its object, but in so doing, ekphrasis also has the power to deny the thing described of original agency or self-determination. In the case of the Mouchroutas, the Islamic monument is denied its significance as an emblem of Islamic princely authority and status. Instead, its meaning is reoriented to critique the Islamic culture that produced it and the Seljuk ruler whom it was originally intended to celebrate. In other words, while it might be correct to interpret Mesarites's view of the Mouchroutas as "a piece of exotic, even decadent, orientalism,"[68] his attitude is not necessarily the result of ignorance. Rather, it might indicate a highly intentional and well-informed subversion of the original significance of the Islamic palace buildings that were the models for the Mouchroutas in order to serve Mesarites's rhetorical aim of condemning John the Fat as unworthy of the Byzantine throne.

Theories of Byzantine rhetoric and visuality support the hypothesis that Mesarites would have expected his audience to grasp subtle juxtapositions of Byzantine icons and Islamic wall painting, of imperial throne room and exotic pleasure palace. According to ancient and Byzantine rhetorical texts, the most effective ekphraseis were written with a sense of the "storehouse" of imagery already in the minds of the audience.[69] The author's task was to make the images in the reader's mind more vivid and to direct understanding of what was "seen" to a higher level. Still, the ultimate connection between physical reality and spiritual truth was completed in

the mind of the beholder, through his or her imagination.[70] Readers were expected to link the scenes generated in their minds with the visual compendium of other images they already possessed and, through these connections, discern the deeper meaning of the author's ekphrasis.[71] It is reasonable to hypothesize that in constructing his critique of John the Fat, Mesarites anticipated his elite audience's familiarity not only with the Mouchroutas and the Chrysotriklinos—two buildings still standing in the imperial palace in the early thirteenth century—but also with the anagogical relationship of icons to their prototypes, the Byzantine imperial ideology of Christomimesis, and the implicit impossibility that "Persian" (Islamic) art and culture could participate in the ultimate truths of Byzantine visuality.

Mesarites's reticence to state openly his reading of the Mouchroutas is very much in keeping with middle Byzantine rhetorical strategies. For example, in a tenth-century commentary on the second- to third-century rhetorician Hermogenes (d. ca. 230), an anonymous Byzantine author proposed the usefulness of subtle and even obscure argument, stating: "when the speaker intends one thing but says another, and the listener accepts what was said, having grasped its true import, then obscurity (ἀσάφεια) becomes beneficial."[72] In this case, obscurity draws the reader deeper into the text, implicating the audience in the interpretation of the author's message.[73] A similar technique might be said to inform Mesarites's strategy of praising the aesthetic achievement of the Mouchroutas on a material level while at the same time condemning its aesthetic shortcomings on a spiritual level. Mesarites's statement is subtle, but the audience's presumed ability to understand his true meaning makes the obliqueness of his message a flourish of rhetorical virtuosity. By requiring his readers to come to their own conclusions regarding the ultimate message of his text, Mesarites engages them in a demanding resolution of veiled allusions and subtle literary structures, exactly the kind of rhetorical techniques in which this erudite, courtly audience would have themselves been trained. When they arrived at these conclusions, the force of the argument was enhanced by the effort required to understand it.

This reading of the Mouchroutas aligns well with the intentions of ekphrasis that Mesarites himself states. In the course of his description of the Church of the Holy Apostles, he asks for divine guidance so that his mind

> may enter and gaze on the things within [the church] and may, so far as it can, furnish for its appreciative and grateful hearers a clear conception, through the description in pen and ink, of the outwardly expressed and inwardly contained meaning.[74]

It would seem that in Mesarites's ekphraseis attention to hidden meaning was a concern not only of Christian works of art, but of secular and foreign works of art as well.

Mesarites's ekphrasis on the Mouchroutas hall allows for the partial recuperation of a now-lost building that attests to Byzantine emulation of Islamic architectural models on the eve of the Fourth Crusade. But beyond this archaeological application, the text also provides a rare glimpse into the reception of Islamic art by a Byzantine viewer. In this way, it sheds light on the position of Islamic art within middle Byzantine aesthetic sensibilities. Mesarites uses the Mouchroutas to highlight John the Fat's unsuitability for the imperial throne by depicting his un-imperial character and half-Seljuk origins. But the text also cues the reader to a deeper meaning. By comparing the Mouchroutas not to a Byzantine building but to an ancient Greek monument, the palace of Menelaus, Mesarites implies that the Mouchroutas operates within an aesthetic category that is outside the tradition and dynamics of Byzantine Christian visuality. Noting that the beauty and wonder of the Mouchroutas functions only on the surface, Mesarites makes clear the superficial nature of this foreign work of art and draws attention to its inability to fulfill Byzantine aesthetic expectations. The ekphrasis is predicated on the reader's ability to connect Mesarites's verbal description with his own mental images of icons and imperial ceremony. The text anticipates that the audience will apply the logic of these viewing experiences to penetrate to a deeper level of significance embedded in Mesarites's account.[75] Mesarites negotiates Islamic art through the conventions of Byzantine imperial imagery and ceremonial by inverting his reader's expectations for imperial Christomimesis.[76] In so doing, he employs the Mouchroutas in an unambiguous but still subtle verbal and visual condemnation of the emperor-for-a-day, John the Fat.

The aesthetic incomparability of the Mouchroutas to Byzantine art and of John the Fat to the image of the emperor reaffirms the most essential and defining qualities of the very categories to which both the man and the monument fail to compare. At the same time, Mesarites attests to a Byzantine engagement with Islamic art that went beyond mere physical appreciation, requiring his audience to reflect on the meaning of Islamic royal art and the reasons why, in Mesarites's estimation, it could never rival that of Byzantium.

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APPENDIX

Excerpt describing the Mouchroutas hall from *The Palace Revolution of John Komnenos* by Nikolaos Mesarites[77]

27. From that point on, the doors of the palace lay open and unguarded, the Triklinos of Justinian [another hall in the imperial palace] being stripped of men. An assault was made on the Chrysotriklinos and the soldiers spread out as they charged the corners of the palace, piercing with swords and cutting down to pieces those who huddled together in fear. But the soldiers were still made nervous by the small number coming out to meet them face to face. On account of this they held back, being anxious lest some ambush, or some secret scheme, or plot, was lying in wait somewhere. Therefore, because of the dearth of pursuers, the shield-bearers of John, seized by fear, proceeded up to the Mouchroutas. The Mouchroutas is an enormous hall, next to the Chrysotriklinos, located on the westerly side. The steps to this hall are made from baked brick, gypsum, and marble. The staircase bears serrated decoration on either side and turns in a circle. It is painted with dark blue, shining with deep red, dyed with green, blooming with purple from mixed, cross-shaped tiles joined together. The chamber was the work not of a Roman, Sicilian, Celt, Sybarite, Cypriot, or a Cilician hand, but rather of a Persian hand, because it bears figures of Persians and their various costumes. Everywhere on the ceiling are scenes of various types applied to the heaven-like ceiling made of hemispheres. The recesses and projections of the angles are densely packed. The beauty of the carving is extraordinary, the spectacle of the concave spaces is delightful; overlaid with gold, it produces the effect of a rainbow more colorful than the one in the clouds. There is insatiable pleasure—not hidden, but on the surface: not just for those who for the first time direct their gaze upon it, but also for those who visit it frequently [it evokes] amazement and surprise. This Persian hall is more delightful than the Lakonian ones of Menelaus.

28. This Persian stage—the work of the hand of John's kinsman from his grandfather's family—framed the actor John. Although crowned, he was not dressed royally, sitting on the ground, a symbol of the suffering that had seized the wretch, and of the unbearableness of his misfortune. He was gulping his drink quickly and courting favor with the Persians painted on the chamber and drinking to them. Running with sweat, he sometimes wiped the sweat with a towel, sometimes flicked the sweat away with his crooked finger; already he was passing into a very deep sleep.

27. Ἠνεῳγμένα τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦδε τὰ τῶν ἀνακτόρων θύρετρα καὶ ἀφύλακτα, ὁ Ἰουστινιάνειος τρίκλινος γεγυμνωμένος ἀνδρῶν. ἐπὶ τὸν Χρυσοτρίκλινον ἡ ὁρμὴ καὶ σποράδην ἡ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ῥύμη ἐπὶ τᾶς γωνίας τῶν ἀνακτόρων, τοὺς τῷ φόβῳ σεσωρευμένους κατασπαθίζουσά τε καὶ κατακόπτουσα. ἀλλὰ δεδοίκει πάλιν ἡ στρατιὰ τῷ ὀλιγαρίθμῳ τῶν ὑπαντιαζόντων αὐτοῖς κατὰ πρόσωπον· διά τοι τοῦτο καὶ συνεστέλλετο ἐννοουμένη, μή που ἐνέδρά τις ἐστὶν ἐλλοχῶσα, μὴ λαθραία τις σκέψις, μὴ διαβούλιον. τοίνυν καὶ κατὰ πολλὴν τοῦ διώκοντος ἐρημίαν οἱ τῷ φόβῳ κατειλημμένοι τοῦ Ἰωάννου ὑπασπισταὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἄνοδον προεχώρουν τοῦ Μουχρουτᾶ. ὁ δὲ Μουχρουτᾶς ἔστι τι δῶμα τεράστιον, τοῦ Χρυσοτρικλίνου ἁπτόμενον, ὡς πρὸς δυσμὴν διακείμενον. αἱ πρὸς τοῦτον βαθμίδες ἐξ ὀπτῆς πλίνθου καὶ τιτάνων καὶ μαρμάρων πεποιημέναι, ἡ κλῖμαξ ἔνθεν κἀκεῖθεν ὀδοντουμένη περιγυρουμένη, κεχρωσμένη τῷ κυανῷ, τῷ βυσσίνῳ λελευκασμένη, βεβαμμένη τῷ χλοανῷ, ἐξανθοῦσα τῷ πορφυρίζοντι ἐξ ἐγκεκολαμμένων συμμίκτων βεβαμμένων ὀστράκων σχῆμ᾽ ἐχόντων

σταυρότυπον. τὸ οἴκημα χειρὸς ἔργον οὐ Ῥωμαΐδος, οὐ Σικελικῆς, οὐ Κελτίβηρος, οὐ Συβαριτικῆς, οὐ Κυπρίου, οὐ Κίλικος· Περσικῆς μὲν οὖν, ὅτι καὶ ἰδέας φέρει Περσῶν παραλλαγάς τε στολῶν. αἱ τοῦ ὀρόφου σκηναὶ παντοδαπαὶ καὶ ποικίλαι, ἐξ ἡμισφαιρίων τῷ οὐρανοειδεῖ ὀρόφῳ προσηλωμέναι, πυκναὶ αἱ τῶν γωνιῶν εἰσοχαί τε καὶ ἐξοχαί, κάλλος τῶν γλυφίδων ἀμήχανον, τῶν κοιλωμάτων θέαμα πάντερπνον, ἶριν φαντάζον πολυχρωμοτέραν τῆς ἐν τοῖς νέφεσι, χρυσοῦ τούτῳ ὑπεστρωμένου. οὐκ ἐς βάθος, κατ᾽ ἐπιφάνειαν ἀκόρεστος τερπωλή, οὐ τοῖς ἄρτι πρώτως τὴν ὁρατικὴν πέμπουσιν εἰς αὐτά, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς συχνὰ παραβάλλουσι θάμβος καὶ ἔκπληξις. τερπνότερος ὁ Περσικὸς οὗτος δόμος τῶν Λακωνικῶν ἐκείνων τῶν τοῦ Μενέλεω.

28. Εἶχεν οὖν ἡ Περσικὴ σκηνὴ τὸν σκηνικὸν Ἰωάννην, τὸ τῆς πρὸς πάππου συγγενικῆς ἔργον χειρός, τεταινιωμένον οὐκ ἐστολισμένον βασιλκῶς, ἐφιζημένον χαμαί, σύμβολον τοῦτο τοῦ κατειληφότος τὸν ἄθλιον πάθους καὶ τοῦ ἀφορήτου τῆς συμφορᾶς, ἀναρροφῶντα πυκνὰ καὶ τοῖς ἐγγεγραμμένοις τῷ δόμῳ Πέρσαις χαριζόμενον τε καὶ τούτοις προπίνοντα, πολλῷ περ ἱδρῶτι καταρρεόμενον καὶ διὰ χειρομάκτρου ποτέ μεν τὸν ἱδρῶτα ἐκμάσσοντα, ἔστι δ᾽ ὅτε καὶ ὑπ᾽ ἀγκύλῳ τῷ δακτύλῳ τοῦτον ἐκσφενδονοῦντα μακράν, ἤδη δὲ πρὸς ὕπνον τραπῆναι μέλλοντα ἐγγὺς ἀδιύπνιστον.[78]

NOTES

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1. Although *The Palace Revolt of John Komnenos* was edited in 1907 and a German translation was published in 1958, the text as a whole has received little further critical attention. The passage that describes the Mouchroutas is found in an abridged translation in Cyril Mango's collection of primary source documents on Byzantine art. See Nikolaos Mesarites, *Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos*, ed. A. Heisenberg (Würzburg, 1907), par. 27–28; Nikolaos Mesarites, *Die Palastrevolution des Joannes Komnenos*, ed. and trans. Franz Grabler (Graz, 1958); and Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972; repr. Toronto, 1997), 228–29.
2. The Seljuks emerged during the 1040s in eastern Iran. Two separate, and at times rival, dynasties were actively engaged with the Byzantines: the dynasty known today as the Great Seljuks (1040–1194) and the Seljuks of Anatolia, also known as the Seljuks of Rum (ca. 1080–1307). As Koray Durak notes, Byzantine authors of the eleventh century and, in some cases, twelfth century (e.g., Anna Komnene [d. 1153–54]) differentiate between the Great Seljuks and the Seljuks of Anatolia by referring to the former as "Persians" and the latter as "Turks." This distinction disappears in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, after the decline and eventual disappearance of the Great Seljuks. Byzantine historians writing in this period (e.g., John Kinnamos [d. after 1185], Niketas Choniates [d. 1217], and George Akropolites [d. 1282]) use the terms "Turk" and "Persian" interchangeably. See Koray Durak, "Defining the 'Turk': Mechanisms of Establishing Contemporary Meaning in the Archaizing Language of the Byzantines," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 59 (2009): 65–78.
3. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 228 n. 229.
4. In art historical literature, the larger context of the passage, both textual and historical, is rarely discussed. Important exceptions include: Paul Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 4 (1978): 101–15; Lucy-Anne Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration: Descriptions and Islamic Connections," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. Michael Angold (Oxford, 1984), 138–70, esp. 141–42; and Neslihan Asutay-Effenberger, "'Muchrutas': Der seldschukische Schaupavillon im Grossen Palast von Konstantinopel," *Byzantion* 74, 2 (2004): 313–29.
5. In this regard, I follow the recent trend in the study of ekphrasis to view such texts as "evidence for response to images…as a depiction of the process of viewing." Ruth Webb, "Accomplishing the Picture: *Ekphrasis*, Mimesis, and Martyrdom in Asterios of Amaseia," in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Liz James (Cambridge, 2007), 13–32, at 14. It must be noted, however, that such records are themselves self-conscious constructions of—not spontaneous responses to—the experience of viewing a work of art.
6. Other accounts of the palace revolution were recorded by Nikephoros Chrysoberges (d. ca. 1213), Niketas Choniates, and Euthymios Tornikios (d. ca. 1222). See Nicephorus Chrysoberges, *Ad Angelos orationes tres*, ed. M. Treu (Breslau, 1892), 1–12; Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. J. A. van Dieten, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1975), 1:9–11, 97, 143–46; Nicetas Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, ed. J. A. van Dieten (Berlin, 1972), 104; and J. Darrouzès, "Les discours d'Euthyme Tornikès (1200–1205)," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 26

(1968): 66–67. For discussion of these texts, see Charles M. Brand, "The Turkish Element in Byzantium, Eleventh–Twelfth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 1–25, esp. 23–24.

7. Brand, "Turkish Element in Byzantium," 9–10 and 23–24.
8. The presence of a "Persian" (Seljuk) artist at the Byzantine court would not have been surprising. Individuals of Seljuk origin were active at the Byzantine court from the tenth to twelfth centuries, and populations conquered in the course of military confrontations with the Seljuks were settled in Byzantine lands. Regarding Seljuk and other Muslim foreigners in Constantinople, and Byzantine attitudes toward them, see M. Canard, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les arabes," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 33–56; Brand, "Turkish Element in Byzantium," 1–25; N. Oikonomides, "The Turks in the Byzantine Rhetoric of the Twelfth Century," in *Decision Making and Change in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Caesar E. Farah (Kirksville, Mo., 1993), 149–55, esp. 151–52; Jean-Claude Cheynet, "L'apport arabe à l'aristocratie byzantine des Xe-XIe siècles," *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995): 137–46; Stephen Reinert, "The Muslim Presence in Constantinople, 9th–15th Centuries: Some Preliminary Observations," in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki Laiou (Washington, D.C., 1998), 125–50; and Liliana Simeonova, "Foreigners in Tenth-Century Byzantium: A Contribution to the History of Cultural Encounter," in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed. Dion C. Smythe (Aldershot, 2000), 229–44. On the subject of Islamic artists working in Byzantine lands, see Anthony Cutler, "A Christian Ewer with Islamic Imagery and the Question of Arab *Gästarbeiter* in Byzantium," in *Iconographica: Mélanges offerts à Piotr Skubiszewski*, ed. Robert Favreau and Marie Hélène Debiès (Poitiers, 1999), 63–69; and Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace," 109. The presence of mosques in Constantinople suggests that significant populations of Muslims, probably merchants, were living in the capital during the middle Byzantine period. See Mansouri Mohamed Tahar, "La mosquée de Constantinople à l'époque byzantine d'après un manuscrit arabe (BN de Paris)," *Byzantiaka* 11 (1991): 117–27; and Glaire Anderson, "Islamic Spaces and Diplomacy in Constantinople (Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.)," *Medieval Encounters* 15, 1 (2009): 86–113.
9. See n. 2 above. Mesarites's use of "Persians" to mean Seljuks, and specifically the Seljuks of Anatolia, is also attested in an earlier passage, in which he refers to the "Persians" as the ones who held sway over "Asia" in his own day. Mesarites, *Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos*, 21, par. 3, line 15.
10. Regarding the rise of the Seljuks and their relations with Byzantium, see Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey: A General Survey of the Material and Spiritual Culture and History, c. 1071–1330* (New York, 1968), esp. 1–118; Speros Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1971); Speros Vryonis, Jr., "*The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*: The Book in the Light of Subsequent Scholarship, 1971–98," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond (Aldershot, 2001), 1–15; C. E. Bosworth et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (henceforth *EI2*) (Leiden, 1960–2004), s.v. "Saldjūḳids"; and Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, "Seljuks," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1991), 3:1867. Regarding Byzantine conflicts and alliances with Islamic polities, especially the Ayyubids, in the late twelfth century, see Dimiter Angelov, "Domestic Opposition to Byzantium's Alliance with Saladin: Niketas Choniates and His Epiphany Oration of 1190," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 30, 1 (2006): 49–68, with earlier bibliography.
11. Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace," 108–9. I do not, however, endorse the argument that the Mouchroutas was built to house the Seljuk delegation. Mesarites's description suggests that it was a reception hall.

    The date of John the Fat's revolt (1200) provides a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the Mouchroutas. The absence of the hall from earlier references to the Great Palace, particularly the mid-tenth-century record of palace rituals, *The Book of Ceremonies*, indicates that the structure was built in a subsequent period. Magdalino proposes Manuel I Komnenos and Isaac II Angelos (r. 1185–95) as the most likely patrons because these emperors are known to have undertaken major building campaigns at the Great Palace: Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace," 108–9. Hunt reads Mesarites's statement that the building is "the work of the hand of John's kinsman from his grandfather's family" to imply that the Mouchroutas was constructed during the lifetime of John the Fat's grandfather, John Axouch, who died in 1150: Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration," 142. But Mesarites's statement need not be taken literally. Instead he may be alluding to the purported common "Persian" ancestry of John the Fat and the artist who executed the ceiling.
12. Regarding medieval Islamic palaces and their historiography, see Gülru Necipoğlu, "An Outline of Shifting Paradigms in the Palatial Architecture of the Pre-Modern Islamic World," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 3–24, and additional essays in that volume.
13. It is unclear from Mesarites's text whether the tiles decorate the staircase or the chamber itself. They are described after the walls of the staircase and before the ceiling of the hall, suggesting that they may have decorated the walls of the main chamber, possibly as a dado. Although painted ceramic tile decoration was used in Constantinople during the middle Byzantine period, its popularity seems to have been limited to the ninth to eleventh centuries. See Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Julie A. Lauffenburger, eds., *A Lost Art Rediscovered: The Architectural Ceramics of Byzantium* (Baltimore, 2001), passim. None of the preserved Byzantine

ceramic architectural material resembles that described for the Mouchroutas hall, supporting Mesarites's statement that the style of the building and the origin of the craftsman responsible for it were foreign.

14. Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration," 142 and figs. 9 and 10, who misidentifies the kiosk as a thirteenth-century building; and Asutay-Effenberger, "'Muchrutas,'" 320–23. For the kiosk, also see Friedrich Sarre, *Der Kiosk von Konia* (Berlin, 1936), and Rüçhan Arık, "Tiles in Anatolian Seljuk Palace Architecture," in *Tiles, Treasures of Anatolian Soil: Tiles of the Seljuk and Beylik Periods*, ed. Rüçhan Arık and Oluş Arık (Istanbul, 2008), 225–38. For a brief introduction to the arts of the Seljuks, see Oya Pancaroğlu, "The Emergence of Turkic Dynastic Presence in the Islamic World: Cultural Experiences and Artistic Horizons," and Nazan Ölçer, "The Anatolian Seljuks," in *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*, ed. David Roxburgh (London, 2005), 72–77 and 104–13. Also see Robert Hillenbrand, ed., *The Art of the Saljūqs in Iran and Anatolia* (Costa Mesa, Calif., 1994).
15. Asutay-Effenberger, "'Muchrutas,'" 320, posits the date 1173–74 for the construction of the kiosk and further argues for its close connection to the Mouchroutas. While it is tempting to draw conclusions for the date of the Mouchroutas based on the speculation that it was modeled specifically on the kiosk at Konya, a direct correspondence between these structures is neither evident in the sources, nor necessary for an understanding of the Mouchroutas. It seems more prudent to conclude that the Mouchroutas emulates a Seljuk architectural *type* of the second half of the twelfth century—of which the kiosk is representative—rather than a particular building.
16. See Arık, "Tiles in Anatolian Seljuk Palace Architecture," 225 and 228, figs. 163 and 164. Decorative tile work is also widely attested in thirteenth-century Seljuk structures, but these later buildings post-date the probable mid- to late twelfth-century foundation of the Mouchroutas. Regarding thirteenth-century Seljuk tile decoration, see Arık, "Tiles in Anatolian Seljuk Palace Architecture," 218–398, esp. 249–59 and 290–345; and Roxburgh, *Turks*, 116–19. For Kubadabad, also see Gönül Öney, "Kubadabad Ceramics," in *Art in Iran and Anatolia from the 11th to the 13th Century A.D.*, ed. William Watson (London, 1974), 68–84.
17. Priscilla Soucek, *EI2*, s.v. "Minā'ī"; Oliver Watson, "Minai Enamel Painting: Iran Late 12th–Early 13th Century," in *Ceramics from Islamic Lands* (New York, 2004), 362–71.
18. Arık, "Tiles in Anatolian Seljuk Palace Architecture," 255, figs. 195 and 196; 300, fig. 269; 327–28, fig. 330.
19. Ibid., 269–70, figs. 217 and 218.
20. For cross-shaped purple tiles that recall one of the colors cited by Mesarites, see ibid., 238, fig. 184.
21. Scott Redford, "Thirteenth-Century Rum Seljuq Palaces and Palace Imagery," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 219–38, esp. 223.
22. Seljuk monuments did not participate in the early development and dissemination of muqarnas domes and vaults, which began in the mid-eleventh century; the earliest muqarnas elements in Seljuk buildings date to the end of the twelfth century, are in stone, and are limited to relatively small spans covering niches: Yasser Tabbaa, "The Muqarnas Dome: Its Origin and Meaning," *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 61–74, esp. 61 and 63; Ayla Ödekan, "Anadolu Selçuklu Çağında Mukarnas Bezeme," in *Selçuklu Çağında Anadolu Sanatı*, ed. Doğan Kuban (Istanbul, 2002), 329–35. While it is possible that mid-twelfth-century Seljuk muqarnas ceilings once existed but are now lost, it must also be noted that Mesarites wrote his account several decades after the construction of the Mouchroutas, and therefore may not have been accurately informed regarding the specific identity of the artist(s) and designer(s) who were responsible for its construction and decoration. Indeed, according to the text, Mesarites identifies the artist as "Persian" because the ceiling "bears figures of Persians and their various costumes." In other words, he infers the painter's origin from the style of the building and its ornamentation. It is possible that his specification of the painter and work of art as "Persian" may have been an invention intended to draw a closer connection between the Mouchroutas and John the Fat, who was himself of Seljuk descent.
23. Slobodan Ćurčić, "Some Palatine Aspects of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 125–44, esp. 141–42. For additional possible models for the muqarnas ceiling of the Mouchroutas, see Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration," 141–42, fig. 7. For discussion of muqarnas in medieval architecture and the permutations of its form and meaning across geographical and socio-political spectra, see Tabbaa, "Muqarnas Dome," 61–74; Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Introduction of the Muqarnas into Egypt," *Muqarnas* 5 (1988): 21–28; J. W. Allan, "The Transmission of Decorated Wooden Ceilings in the Early Islamic World," in *Learning, Language, and Invention: Essays Presented to Francis Maddison*, ed. W. D. Hackmann and A. J. Turner (Aldershot, 1994), 1–31; Armen Ghazarian and Robert Ousterhout, "A Muqarnas Drawing from Thirteenth-Century Armenia and the Use of Architectural Drawings during the Middle Ages," *Muqarnas* 18 (2001): 141–54.
24. Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration," 142, 151 n. 36.
25. Ibid., 142, fig. 8. For an extensive compendium of images from the Cappella Palatina and a wide range of comparanda, see Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Le pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella palatina in Palermo* (Rome, 1950); and Ernst J. Grube and Jeremy Johns, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina* (Genoa, 2005).
26. Jonathan Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt* (New Haven, 2007), 171–72, fig. 142.
27. For discussion of Byzantine ekphraseis on secular structures, including other areas of the imperial palace, see Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration," 138–47; Paul Magdalino, "The Bath of Leo the Wise and the 'Macedonian Renaissance' Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremo-

nial, Ideology," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988): 97–118; Henry Maguire, "A Description of the Aretai Palace and Its Garden," *Journal of Garden History* 10 (1990): 209–13; Henry Maguire, "The Beauty of Castles: A Tenth-Century Description of a Tower at Constantinople," *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaiologikes Etaireias* 17 (1993–94): 21–24; and Helen Saradi, "The *Kallos* of the Byzantine City: The Development of a Rhetorical *Topos* and Historical Reality," *Gesta* 34, 1 (1995): 37–56.

28. Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration," 142.
29. The term "visuality" recognizes that the act of viewing and the cognition of the visual is neither innocent nor natural but acculturated and even open to manipulation. For discussion of Byzantine visuality, see J. Trilling, "The Image Not Made by Human Hands and the Byzantine Way of Seeing," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna, 1998), 109–27. Regarding the distinct visualities of pre-modern and non-western cultures, see Robert S. Nelson, ed., *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge, 2000).
30. As Ruth Macrides and Paul Magdalino note, early Byzantine ekphrasis was often delivered in close proximity to the monuments or works of art that it described and to audiences familiar with the buildings and objects: see Ruth Macrides and Paul Magdalino, "The Architecture of Ekphrasis: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentiary's Poem on Hagia Sophia," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988): 47–82, esp. 50; and Liz James and Ruth Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places': Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium," *Art History* 14, 1 (1991): 1–17, esp. 12. Henry Maguire perceives a similar phenomenon in middle Byzantine ekphrasis, including Mesarites's own description of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. He argues that Mesarites's audience would have likely been familiar not only with the building he described but with many of the rhetorical devices he employed: Henry Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1975): 113–40, esp. 139.
31. James and Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places,'" 5; and Ruth Webb, "*Ekphrasis* Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre," *Word & Image* 15, 1 (1999): 7–18, esp. 15–18. On the relationship between Byzantine rhetoric and art, see the seminal work by Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, N.J., 1981). Regarding the role of ekphrasis in antique literature, see Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham, U.K., 2009).
32. Regarding John Axouch's relationship with John II and Manuel I, see Paul Magdalino, "Isaac *Sebastokrator* (III), John Axouch, and a Case of Mistaken Identity," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 11 (1987): 207–14.
33. Alexios Komnenos was made co-emperor in 1122, but died before his father and therefore never assumed independent rule. On the careers of John and Alexios Axouch, see Brand, "Turkish Element in Byzantium," 4–6, 8–9, 15–16, 18, 23.
34. Alexios Axouch was censured for decorating the walls of his palace with scenes of the Seljuk sultan's campaigns. Hunt suggests that this program may in fact have been an Islamic princely cycle, misinterpreted or intentionally misconstrued as representing the enemy's victories: Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration," 140, 142; also see Brand, "Turkish Element in Byzantium," 10.
35. Criticizing the forefathers of John the Fat, the historian and imperial secretary John Kinnamos (d. ca. 1185) raises the issue of their questionable loyalty, an accusation that seems to stem from their Seljuk origins and, therefore, suggests distortion bred as much from prejudice as from fact. John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, trans. Charles Brand (New York, 1976), 14, 47, 82–83, 199–202.
36. Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace," 106.
37. For a brief introduction to ruler imagery of the middle Byzantine era, see Henry Maguire, "Imperial Images," in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261*, ed. Helen Evans (New York, 1997), 182–91.
38. Ioli Kalavrezou, "Plaque Fragment with Christ Crowning Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos Emperor," in Evans, *Glory of Byzantium*, 203–4, cat. no. 140.
39. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Urb. Gr. 2, fol. 10v; Jeffrey Anderson, "The Gospels of John II Komnenos," in Evans, *Glory of Byzantium*, 209–10, cat. no. 144.
40. Henry Maguire, "Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art," *Gesta* 28, 2 (1989): 217–31, at 217.
41. Ibid., 225.
42. Michael Psellos, *Scripta minora*, ed. Eduard Kurtz, 2 vols. (Milan, 1936–41), 1:46–47, lines 35–58, at line 36; cited by Maguire, "Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art," 224.
43. Regarding disorderliness as an indication of unfitness for the imperial throne, see Maguire, "Imperial Images," 185–88.
44. *Odyssey*, Book IV, lines 43–113. It is possible that an additional factor motivated Mesarites's selection of this particular ancient monument. In response to words of praise for his palace, Menelaus says that he would readily sacrifice his abode and possessions in order to revive all the comrades lost in the battles that brought him his riches. In this way, the beauty of Menelaus's palace carries a moralizing message regarding human vanity and the high price of material wealth. A similarly critical perspective may have been cast on the Mouchroutas and John the Fat.
45. Regarding the Byzantine habit of grouping ancient pagan and contemporary Islamic artistic forms in a common category, see Alicia Walker, "Meaningful Mingling: Classicizing Imagery and Islamicizing Script in a Byzantine Bowl," *The Art Bulletin* 90, 1 (2008): 32–53.
46. Ruth Webb, "The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor and Motion in *Ekphraseis* of Church Buildings," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 59–74, at 73. Regarding

Byzantine aesthetic categories for the perceptible realm, in particular Byzantine values for color and light, see Liz James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford and New York, 1996). For discussion of the synesthetic nature of Byzantine veneration and the icon's role in stimulating such experiences, see Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *The Art Bulletin* 88, 4 (2006): 631–55.

47. Basil of Caesarea (d. ca. 379) summarizes this theory as follows: "The honor shown to the image is transmitted to its model," that is to say, when a Christian venerated an icon, she venerated not the wood and paint of the image, but the actual holy person the image represented: Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, Ch. XVIII, in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–91), 32: col. 149, par. 45; Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 47. The same point was later reiterated by John of Damascus (d. ca. 753): "As the God-inspired Basil, who was learned in things divine, says, 'The honor [shown] to the image is conveyed to its prototype'": John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa*, Bk. IV, Ch. 16, in *Patrologiae Graeca*, 94: col. 1169, par. 93; Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 169. Anxiety regarding the materiality of icons lingered to such an extent that the role of the icon as an aid to, rather than end point of, spiritual truth was self-consciously maintained in post-Iconoclastic Byzantine icon theory. See James and Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places,'" 12; Leslie Brubaker, "Byzantine Art in the Ninth Century: Theory, Practice and Culture," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 13 (1989): 23–83; and Leslie Brubaker, "Perception and Conception: Art, Theory, and Culture in Ninth-Century Byzantium," *Word & Image* 5, 1 (1989): 19–32. Regarding the dynamics of Byzantine icon theory and the parameters of post-Iconoclastic visuality, see Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), esp. 138–39, 144–45; Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and Its Icons* (London, 1985), esp. 141–78; Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich, 1990), trans. as *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago, 1994); and Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, N.J., 2002).
48. Regarding the unusual status of the imperial image between secular and sacred representation, see Antony Eastmond, "Between Icon and Idol: The Uncertainty of Imperial Images," in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium: Studies Presented to Robin Cormack*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Aldershot, 2003), 73–85. The emperor and depictions of him also featured in debates surrounding the definition of sacred images during and after the Iconoclastic controversy. On this point, see Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 74–75.
49. For discussion of the mirroring and interpenetration of heavenly and earthly courts in Byzantine imperial ideology and art, see Henry Maguire, "The Heavenly Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C., 1997; repr. 2004), 247–58; and Galina Tirnanić, "Divine Images and Earthly Authority at the Chora *Parekklesion* in Constantinople," in *Negotiating Secular and Sacred in Medieval Art*, ed. Alicia Walker and Amanda Luyster (Aldershot, 2009), 75–101. For a brief synopsis of Byzantine theories of imperial authority, see George Ostrogorsky, "The Byzantine Emperor and the Hierarchical World Order," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 35, 84 (1956): 1–14
50. Glanville Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites: Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., 47, 6 (1957): 857–924. On the date of the building's construction and decoration, see A. W. Epstein, "The Rebuilding and Redecoration of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 23 (1982): 79–92.
51. James and Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places,'" 11.
52. Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites," 867 and 900, Ch. XII, line 1.
53. For additional Byzantine authors who cite the necessity to move beyond the physicality of an image to the spiritual truth it conveyed, see James and Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places,'" 11.
54. On this distinction, see n. 47, above.
55. For example, in his discussion of the Church of the Holy Apostles, Mesarites refers to Christ as a means to access God. He describes the image of Christ Pantokrator in the dome over the central space of the building (from which extended four lateral halls) as follows:

> …the other [hall] in the center stands up above them [the four lateral halls], and the direction of this one faces toward heaven, calling on the heavenly God-Man, I believe, to descend to it and through it as though from heaven, and, in His portrayed form, to gaze down upon all of the sons of men, who by His command dwell upon the earth, but possess their commonwealth in heaven. And like a square-cut stone or a geometric outline, it [the central hall] binds the other four to itself and binds them to each other as well, and stands there as a kind of mediator and a reconciler of those which formerly were separated from each other, in this, I believe, imitating the mediator between God and Man, who is portrayed in the midst of it [in the dome of the central hall], Christ, truly the square-cut stone, who bound together those things which formerly were far divided, and who through Himself drew us, who were formerly His foes, to His own Father and our God (Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites," 869 and 901, Ch. XIII, lines 5–6; also see James and Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places,'" 17 n. 80).

56. Webb, "Aesthetics of Sacred Space," 69, notes that in ekphraseis on churches, Byzantine authors carefully enjoin the

viewer not to dwell on the physical beauty of these structures, but to "lift their perception from the material to the spiritual." Mesarites's emphasis on the physical properties of the Mouchroutas might, therefore, be read as a statement regarding its lack of spiritual significance.

57. In this respect, the relationship between the "Persian" images and John the Fat has something in common with Byzantine theories about the mechanics of pagan idols, which are considered either embodiments of corrupt and malevolent otherworldly forces or mere material objects that lacked spiritual prototypes. On this point, see Eastmond, "Between Icon and Idol," 76–77.
58. Regarding the Byzantine notion that political truth could be realized through physical images, see Ioli Kalavrezou, Nicolette Trahoulia, and Shalom Sabar, "Critique of the Emperor in the Vatican Psalter gr. 752," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993): 195–219. On the broader topic of Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*, see Franz H. Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates* (Munich, 1971); and Paul Magdalino, "Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*," *Speculum* 58, 2 (1983): 326–46.
59. In Byzantine imperial panegyrics, buildings were commonly used as a means to acclaim the achievements of an emperor as founder or renovator: Macrides and Magdalino, "Architecture of Ekphrasis," 50; and Jaś Elsner, "The Rhetoric of Buildings in the *De Aedificiis* of Procopius," in James, *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, 33–57. In the case of Mesarites, however, this topos is inverted: John is not himself a patron of the hall, but only the passive recipient of his predecessor's accomplishments. Furthermore, these predecessors and their building are, like John, foreign, and as such intrinsically inferior, even morally and physically corrupt.
60. The Chrysotriklinos was likely built in the sixth century and renovated in subsequent eras. As Mango notes, the *Book of Ceremonies* does not provide a concise and specific description of the Chrysotriklinos, but rather mentions different features at various points throughout the text: Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, xii. Also see Gilbert Dagron, "Trônes pour un empereur," in *Byzantio, Kratos kai Koinōnia: Mnēmē Nikou Oikonomidē*, ed. Anna Abramea (Athens, 2003), 180–203; and Jeffrey Michael Featherstone, "The Chrysotriklinos Seen through *De Cerimoniis*," in *Zwischen Polis, Provinz und Peripherie: Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte und Kultur*, ed. Lars M. Hoffmann (Wiesbaden, 2005), 845–52.
61. Jean Ebersolt, *Le Grand Palais de Constantinople et le Livre des cérémonies* (Paris, 1910), 149–50. Regarding the identification and location of the Mouchroutas, see Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace," 101–8. Based on structures depicted in early modern views of Constantinople, which she interprets as parallels to Mesarites's description of Mouchroutas, Asutay-Effenberger, "'Muchrutas,'" 323–28, positions the monument between the western end of the Hippodrome and the Marmara sea wall. She declines to address, however, the relative location of the Chrysotriklinos (Asutay-Effenberger, "'Muchrutas,'" 315), a question that is essential to any argument for the placement of the Mouchroutas because Mesarites clearly states that the two structures are in close proximity to one another.
62. Regarding the potential of monumental inscriptions to assist in accessing the viewing experience of Byzantine audiences, see Amy Papalexandrou, "Echoes of Orality in the Monumental Inscriptions of Byzantium," in James, *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, 161–87.
63. Pierre Waltz, ed. and trans., *Anthologie grecque*, 12 vols. (Paris, 1960), 1:106; Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 184 and 184 n. 9. The "imposters" mentioned in the inscription are the Iconoclast emperors, who removed images of Christ and other holy figures from the churches and palaces of Constantinople. "Michael whose deeds are filled with wisdom" refers to Emperor Michael III (r. 842–67), under whose rule Iconoclasm was ended in 843. Mango dates the decoration and the inscription at the Chrysotriklinos between 856 and 866 because no mention is made of Empress Theodora (r. 842–56; expelled from the palace in 856) or Emperor Basil I (who was crowned co-emperor in 866 and ruled independently from 867 to 886): Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 184.
64. Maguire, "Heavenly Court," 257.
65. The divine origin of imperial authority is also attested in the acclamations that were publicly recited during imperial ceremonies. For example, the *Book of Ceremonies* records that on the feast of Epiphany, the emperor was greeted with the words: "He [Christ] who today was baptized through the hand of the Prodromos [John the Baptist], proclaims you today emperor with his awesome hand, god-crowned benefactors, and points you out as worthy throughout the universe." Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *Le Livre des cérémonies*, ed. and trans. Albert Vogt, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1935), 1:36–37, lines 23–27; cited and discussed in Ioli Kalavrezou, "Helping Hands for the Empire: Imperial Ceremonial and the Cult of Relics at the Byzantine Court," in Maguire, *Byzantine Court Culture*, 53–79, at 73.
66. Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites," 867 and 900, Ch. XII, line 1.
67. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, 1994), 151–82.
68. Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration," 142.
69. As Ruth Webb summarizes, "The impact [of ekphrasis] derived from the judicious choice of details that corresponded to the audience's prior knowledge and expectations, calling up the mental images already stocked in the storehouse of memory": Webb, "*Ekphrasis* Ancient and Modern," 13–14. Webb introduces the concept of *enargeia*, or vividness, to explain the process of mutual imagination of author and audience as well as the author's anticipation and manipulation of imagery in the audience's visual storehouse. For a full discussion of *enargeia* and its relation to *phantasia*

(the audience's imaging of references made by the author/orator), see Ruth Webb, "*Enargeia*: Making Absent Things Present," and "*Phantasia*: Memory, Imagination and the Gallery of the Mind," in Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion*, 87–130.

70. In terms of the beholder's completion of the work of art, scholars suggest that the characteristic abstraction of Byzantine art may indicate an expectation that the viewer would complete the image, that mimesis was realized not in the work of art but in the viewer's mind. Within this "transfer of aesthetic responsibility," rhetoric, especially ekphrasis, played an important role as a means of guiding the viewer in the completion of the work of art. See John Onians, "Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity," *Art History* 3 (1980): 1–23; and Trilling, "Image Not Made by Human Hands," 121–23, with additional references, 121 n. 31.
71. Webb expertly articulates these points in relation to Mesarites's account of the Church of the Holy Apostles. See Webb, "Aesthetics of Sacred Space," 73–74.
72. *Rhetores Graeci*, ed. Christian Walz, 9 vols. (Stuttgart, 1832–36), 7:951, lines 13–16. Regarding the emergence of obscurity as a virtue in Byzantine rhetoric of the tenth and eleventh centuries, see George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric* (Thessaloniki, 1973), esp. 89–96. On the value of obscurity in the eyes of middle Byzantine rhetoricians and audiences, see Andrew F. Stone, "On Hermogenes's Features of Style and Other Factors Affecting Style in the Panegyrics of Eustathios of Thessaloniki," *Rhetorica* 19, 3 (2001): 307–39, esp. 334–35.
73. In his account of the Church of the Holy Apostles, Mesarites describes the various levels of students who attend the school attached to the church, the most advanced of whom, "have achieved the higher and more complete stages, weave webs of phrases, and transform the written sense into riddles, saying one thing with their tongues, but hiding something else in their minds": Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites," 866 and 899, Ch. VIII, line 3. Yet he seems to cast a potentially negative judgment on this type of rhetorical dissembling. In a subsequent passage, he asks St. Thomas to drive off "those who say one thing with their tongues and hide something else in their minds, who are white and black at once, seeming white so far as the outward man is affected, and showing the white and pure character of friendship, and, so to speak, clad with it outwardly, but black within, in their hearts which sit in ambush, full of envy and abuse and anger and darkness": Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites," 868 and 900, Ch. XII, line 13. We might assume, therefore, that Mesarites's own obscurity and hidden messages were pure in intention.
74. Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites," 868 and 901, Ch. XII, line 18.
75. Such expectations were not limited to Mesarites. Macrides and Magdalino argue that Paul the Silentiary's sixth-century ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia was recited for a select group of Byzantine elites and that the effectiveness of the speech relied on the audience's previous exposure to both the building and the mosaic that he described, as well as to a Syriac hymn sung at Hagia Sophia. The hymn made typological parallels between the church and Jewish Tabernacle that were contrasted in the ekphrasis so as to promote a more secular, imperial reading of the church. They propose that Paul's ekphrasis was in part shaped by theological precepts, and that middle Byzantine descriptions of Hagia Sophia incorporate explicitly mystical interpretations of the decoration: Macrides and Magdalino, "Architecture of Ekphrasis," 76–79.
76. As James and Webb posit, "Ekphrasis thus made present not the actual picture, which could be seen, but the spiritual reality behind it": James and Webb, "'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places,'" 12.
77. The following translation adapts and expands that of Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 228–29. I thank Emmanuel Bourbouhakis for his assistance with translation of the text.
78. Mesarites, *Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos*, 44–46.