

Chapter 12

ROME IN THE EAST

The Art of Byzantium

Summary:

This chapter presents a survey of Byzantium or the Byzantine Empire established by Constantine as the new Rome of the East. Byzantium renamed Constantinople (today known as Istanbul) in honor of himself.

- 315 CE - Constantine issued the *Edict of Toleration* – Christians have the right to follow their religion openly, but he did not outlaw other religions.
- 324 CE - Constantine was ruler of a united Roman Empire.
- 325 CE - Christianity became the official religion of the Empire
- 337 CE - Constantine was baptized a Christian on his deathbed.
- 383 CE - Christian emperor Theodosius made pagan religions crimes against the state and Christianity as the sole religion of the empire.
- 476 CE - Rome fell to the barbarians and Constantinople continued as the capital of the Roman Empire of the East.

Byzantine art is broken into three periods, which correspond to the historical periods:

- Early Byzantine 527-726 CE,
 - The Iconoclasm 726-843 CE,
 - Middle Byzantine 843-1204 CE and Late Byzantine 1204-1453 CE.
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- The Iconoclasm, or the formal prohibition of the use of images, occurred at the end of the Early Period and before the Middle Byzantine Period, sometimes referred to as the Medieval Period.
 - Diminishing territories and Western Christian Crusader occupation of the capital marked the Late Byzantine Period.
 - In 1261 CE, Constantinople was recaptured but this period ends with the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 and the Empire finally comes to an end.
 - The reign of the Byzantine Empire was long and fruitful; the *art created was stylized and formal.*

I. Lecture Model

The social and iconographic methodologies can be useful in gaining an understanding of the work commissioned. These approaches can help to *establish the importance of the duality of the religious commissions and their use in establishing important secular control and secular authority as a divine authority conferred on the emperor and granted by the Christian God or now as he is known the Orthodox God.*

- 1) The Early Byzantine Period begins with the reign of Justinian and Theodora. This is the period, which established the format for religious imagery and the interior

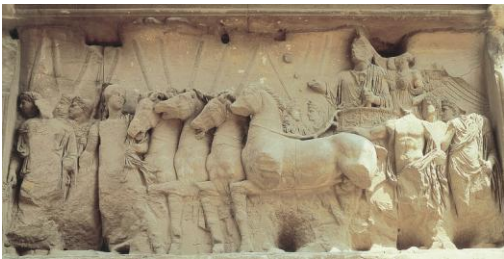
figural programs for the basilicas and churches that were constructed. *The importance of linking the Eastern Empire to the glory that was Rome never diminished.*



12-01 Justinian as world conqueror (Barberini Ivory), mid-sixth century. Ivory, 1' 1 1/2" X 10 1/2". Louvre, Paris.

The ivory diptych panel, Barberini Ivory c.550 CE (12-1):

- Depicts Justinian as a *triumphant and victorious general and ruler*. This sense of triumph and victory *comes from the Early Imperial tradition of Rome*.
- (Analyze painting after you show the comparisons)



The depiction of the emperor as triumphant general can be seen in Triumph of Titus from the Arch of Titus, Rome after 81 CE (10-39)



Or in scenes detailing *the triumphs of Trajan* seen on the *Column of Trajan, Rome c.112 CE (10-42)*.



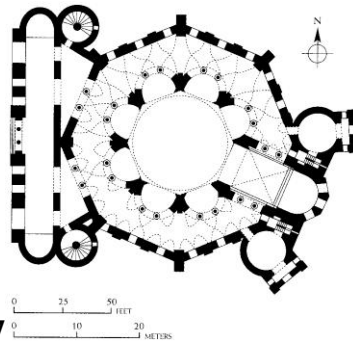
Marcus Aurelius c.175 CE (10-59)

The equestrian statue of *Marcus Aurelius c.175 CE (10-59)* created a format that illustrated the sense of the power of Imperial Rome and that power rested in the person of the emperor.

- Justinian as conqueror mirrored that vision in the ivory panel. The base of the panel describes the victories of Justinian in Africa and Asia. It also depicts the barbarians seeking clemency;
 - the soldier to the left of Justinian holds a small victory statue, further stating visually the victories and triumphs of Justinian.
 - The departure from Early Imperial motifs is seen in the top portion of the panel.
 - *The sourcing of Justinian's power and triumph* is seen in the *presence of the youthful Christ*, cross in hand and even more importantly the other hand raised in a gesture of blessing. This gesture confers on the person of the emperor that his power is granted, supported and approved by God.
 - This plaque visually defines the theocratic state that Byzantium had become.
- Justinian authorized the conquest of Ravenna and it became an outpost in the West for the Eastern Empire. As he did in Constantinople, Justinian constructed churches in Ravenna.



12-6



12-7

San Vitale 526-547 CE (12-6 and 12-7) is a centrally planned church, dedicated to the 2nd C. CE saint, Vitalis, who was martyred in Ravenna.



12-09 Choir and apse of San Vitale with mosaic of Christ between two angels, Saint Vitalis, and Bishop Ecclesius, Ravenna, Italy, 526-547.

The mosaic program developed for the interior of the church (12-9) shows the integration of the classical and the abstract.



12-10 Justinian, Bishop Maximianus, and attendants, mosaic from the north wall of the apse, San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 547.

The north and south walls of the apse have two mosaic images of both the emperor and the empress.

- Justinian (12-10) is standing with the bread of the Eucharist in his hand, ready to participate in the ritual of the Mass.
- It is significant to note that this mosaic is in the apse, which contains the altar for the celebration of the Mass. Justinian is participating, and thus, by his very presence in the apse is further evidence of his confirmation by God to rule.



12-11 Theodora and attendants, mosaic from the south wall of the apse, San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 547.

■ *Even more significant is the presence of Theodora (12-11) on the opposite wall, but still in the apse. She, too, is participating in the ritual; she is holding the chalice for the wine a component in the Eucharist celebration.*

■ *It is a tribute to her position and her ability to function within the political state that Byzantium was.*



■ *A Byzantine feature of church architecture is a second story ambulatory, which was reserved for the women (12-8),*

■ *the presence of Theodora in the apse mosaic, is indicative of her importance to Justinian and her value to the Empire. She was truly an extraordinary woman; she was reviled but remained steadfast to Justinian and served him well as a counselor.*

■ *The integration of classical and abstract motifs is reflected in both mosaics.*

■ *The elongated figures of both Justinian and his entourage and Theodora and her entourage illustrate the abstraction; the stylized folds of the garments and the wide-staring eyes are also motifs that were favored by the Byzantine tradition. The classical element can be seen in the imperial purple garments of both Justinian and Theodora.*

■ *Another confirmation of divine authority Justinian enjoyed can be seen in the figure of the still youthful Christ above in the apse itself (12-9).*



■ *This figure is also garbed in the imperial purple, seated on the world, as if it were his throne. The mature bearded Christ figure is thought to have originated in the Holy Land.*



12-13 Transfiguration of Jesus, apse mosaic, Church of the Virgin, monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai, Egypt, ca. 548-565.

■ *The sixth century Transfiguration from the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai (12-13) is perhaps the first manifestation of this symbol.*

■ *It became the standard figural representation of Christ in both the East and the West.*

■ *Similarly there is a rigid formality and compression of space also seen in the mosaics from Ravenna, the progressive disembodiment and flattening of the figures*

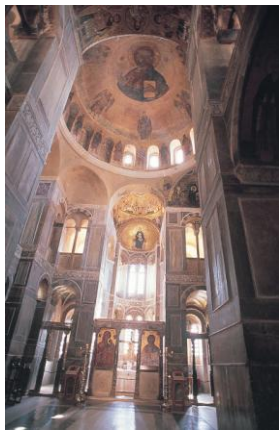
show the slow transformation during this period *for the presentation of figuration* in a mosaic program designed for a church interior.



12-05 ANTHEMIUS OF TRALLES and ISIDORUS OF MILETUS, interior of Hagia Sophia (view facing southwest), Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey, 532-537.

The *shimmering gold interior first seen in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople 532-537 CE (12-5)* continues on into the Middle Byzantine Period.

- The Theotokos from the Hagia Sophia was dedicated in 867 CE. The enthroned Virgin and Child are against a gold background devoid of figuration.
- The emotional quality of this work is one of serene and spiritual majesty.
- The wide staring eyes of both figures present an image of calmness, which can be attained in the spiritual realm according to the Byzantine tradition.
- This work is a continuation of the abstraction of not only the figure but also the philosophical abstract thought which became an important component of the Orthodox Church.
- This mosaic was one of the first to be commissioned since the Iconoclasts (726-843 CE) it could be suggested that the representation of the Virgin and Child enthroned could also indicate the preference of the heavenly figures for the Macedonian dynasty and their continuing efforts to restore the images.



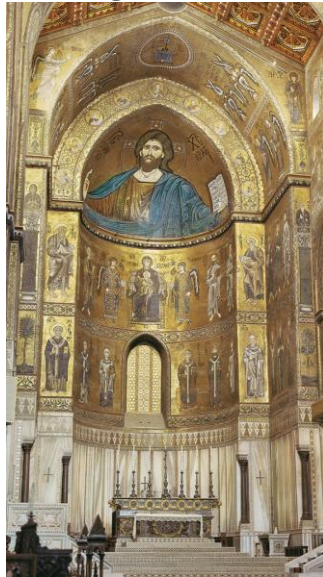
12-20 Interior of Katholikon (view facing southeast), Hosios Loukas, Greece, first quarter of eleventh century.

- The interior of the Katholikon at Hosios Loukas, Greece c.1000-25 CE (12-20) also shows that gold interior which was an earthly representation of heavenly grace and the divine presence of God.

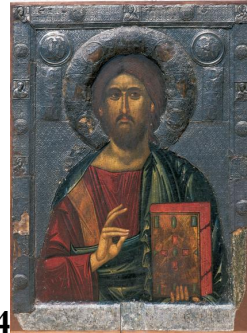
- These church interiors were to inspire the congregation with the divine presence, the domed apse containing the image of the Pantocrator was to serve as an image indicating the promise of salvation and redemption.
- It also served as an image for the divine protection of the Empire.



11-6



12-24



12-32

- As discussed earlier, the representation of the Christ figure had undergone a transformation from the beardless youthful figure of the Early Christian tradition (11-6) and similar representations in the Early Byzantine Period (12-9) to a mature bearded figure (12-24).

It could be suggested that as the religion took hold and shape in both the East and the West, *the iconic representation had to take on a more mature representation to indicate the importance of religion.*

The Late Byzantine Period saw a return to the earlier classical tradition. Again from Hagia Sophia, a representation in mosaic demonstrates *the plasticity and virtuosity* that mosaic had attained. The Deesis c.1260 in the south gallery shows the figure of Christ, albeit a mature figure creates a dialog between the viewer and the divine figure.



12-31 Anastasis, apse fresco in the parekklesion of the *Church of Christ in Chora* (now the Kariye Museum), Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey, ca. 1310–1320.

In the *Church of Christ in Chora* (now the Kariye Museum) in the apse, there is a representation of the Anastasis or the Harrowing of Hell (12-31), c.1310-20.

- The representation *shows the blending of the classical and the abstract*
- The powerfully striding figure of Christ, releasing Adam and Eve from the pre-redemption state they occupied, presents a corporeal body beneath the white of his robe.
- The mandorla surrounding the figure of Christ is reminiscent of the mandorla seen in the 6th century mosaic from St. Catherine, Mt. Sinai (12-13).

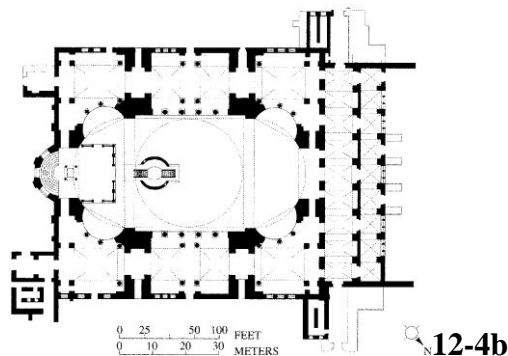
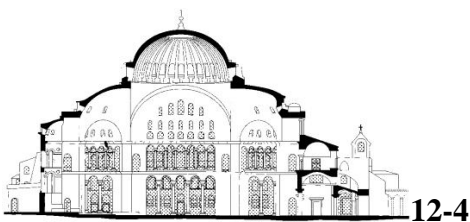


- The red, blue and violet colors create a forceful image of divine grace and love.
- The figures themselves create an illusion of physical presence.
- The arrangement of the scene within the circular apse is complementary, all those present lean inward, pointing to the drama of the moment, *the salvation of Adam and Eve*, literally being pulled from their tombs.
- The point of the mandorla and the gestures of the figures going up and out also serve as a visual reminder of the heavenly reward.
- This art spanned generations and culminated in tying together the heritage of the classical tradition and the abstract tradition of Byzantine art.

2. Byzantine architecture is a synthesis of the classical, Early Christian tradition and oriental or eastern fusion. Early Byzantine churches used both the centralized and basilica plans. A dialog was set up between centralized structures and the basilica, with many combinations of these two forms.

The most outstanding church of the Byzantine period was Hagia Sophia or Holy Wisdom, built at Constantinople under Justinian in the sixth century.

This magnificent building, which was designed *by the architects Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus*, is a masterful merging of the centralized dome church with the longitudinal basilica form (12-4).



- 2) Two supporting half-domes flank the mighty dome, spanning 107 feet. The great dome, which symbolizes the dome of heaven, seems to float above the congregation rather than being supported by any materiality of earth or secular world. As a

matter of fact, the original dome had not been supported well enough, for it collapsed twenty years after it was built.

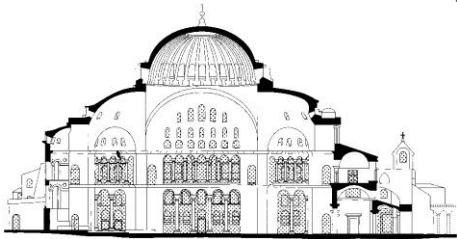


A nephew of Isidorus rebuilt it; he added the great exterior buttresses to the piers that now support the dome (12-3).

From the interior, however, one is not aware of how the great dome is supported, which is exactly the effect the architects wanted to achieve (12-5).



There is a problem about how one sets a round dome on a square base, and essentially two different solutions had been proposed (12-4).



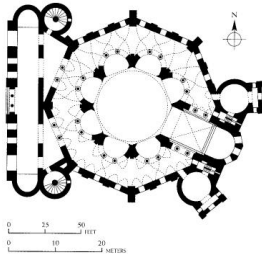
The one that was to become most popular throughout Byzantium and the West was a dome on pendentives.

Pendentives are the triangular-shaped elements that allow the distribution of the weight of the dome from the circular base to the four piers.

Pendentives enable a round dome to sit on a square or rectangular support.

The other solution, which was favored by Islamic architects, was the *squinch*.

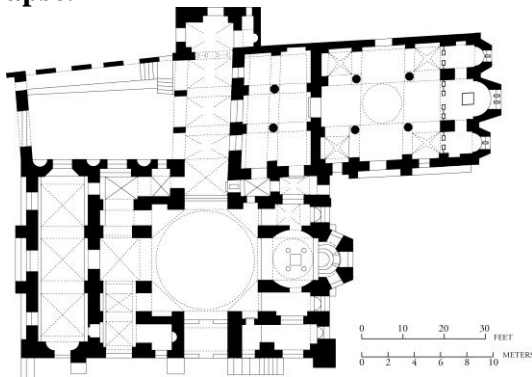
Squinches were elements that were placed diagonally across the four corners of a square, turning it into an octagon, and as such, a more suitable base for a dome.



The centralized type plan can be seen in the church of San Vitale at Ravenna (12-7). Other Early Byzantine churches like the church of Sant' Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, followed a simplified variation of the basilica type.

Byzantine architects of later periods explored variants of the centralized plan combined with one or more domes.

A typical example is the church of the Holy Apostles in Athens. Here a shallow narthex preceded the sanctuary proper, which was made up of a central square topped by a dome set on a tall drum and surrounded by four equal arms, each ending in a semi-circular apse.



Other variants of the plan can be seen at Hosios Loukas in Greece (12-19), and in the church of San Marco in Venice, Italy.

In San Marco each of the equal arms has its own dome, creating a composition of five great domes (best seen in an aerial view). The Byzantine influence extended to Russia and can be seen in the Greek plan of a single dome set on a high drum an example is the Church of St. Dimitri at Vladimir. A later variant that was to characterize Russian Orthodox architecture can be seen in the Cathedral of the Annunciation constructed in Moscow in the late fifteenth century.

3) *The development of icons as small portable objects used in the act of worship has a long history in the Byzantine tradition.*



12-16 Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George, icon, sixth or early seventh century. Encaustic on wood, 2' 3" X 1' 7 3/8". Monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai, Egypt.

First seen in the sixth century (12-16), icons were used in order to facilitate devotional prayers.

- In this icon, Theotokos with Sts. Theodore and George, the presentation follows closely the format developed for the mosaic programs for church interiors.
- The figures are elongated and appear to float in space.
- The seated Virgin and Child are the same height as the two saints, these saints are not meant to be real portraits of the departed, but rather symbols of their presence in heaven. They have achieved salvation and redemption. They serve as mediators between the faithful and the almighty.
- The large staring eyes of the Virgin, the Child and the Saints establish a dialog with the worshipper by their very gaze they create a spiritual link between the worshiper and the Divine.
- The Byzantine worshiper believed that the icon itself could channel his or her prayers to the Almighty. The icon also reinforced the promise of heavenly salvation.

A seventh century icon found in Rome, a Madonna and Child, depicts the same spiritual feeling seen in the Theotokos. Similar to the Theotokos, the Madonna's face is delicately colored, just a bit of pink on her cheeks, yet her wide-staring eyes give this icon the same sacred transcendence.

Between the Early and Middle Byzantine periods occurred the Iconoclasm (726-843). During this period *no figurative art was commissioned* and even more devastating, there was a concerted effort to destroy what images had been commissioned during the Early Byzantine period. Only those icons, which had been commissioned on the perimeters of the Empire, survived this destruction, thus only a very few images remain.

The resurgence of icon production came with the advent of the Middle Byzantine Period.



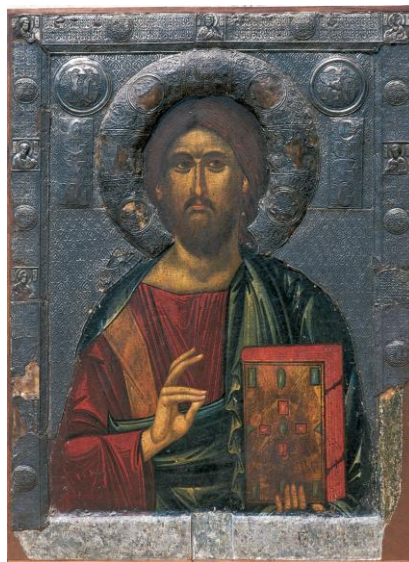
12-29 Virgin (Theotokos) and Child, icon (Vladimir Virgin), late eleventh to early twelfth century. Tempera on wood, original panel approx. 2' 6 1/2" X 1' 9". Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

- The Vladimir Virgin, late eleventh-early twelfth centuries (12-29), illustrates the evolution of the icon.
- Gone is the classicism; it has been replaced by the stylized presentation that had become a template for the production of icons representing the Virgin and Child theme.
- She has gone from being presented as the throne of God, now she is being presented as the mother of God. The tenderness of the presentation might be explained as a tribute to the ending of the Iconoclasm and a resurgence of the Byzantine Empire.

In the Late Byzantine Period, the double-sided icon of the Annunciation and Christ as Savior of Souls early fourteenth century (12-33 and 12-32) shows the excellence this art form had reached.



12-33



12-32

These icons were mounted on stands so worshippers could view both sides. In the church of St. Clement, Ohrid, Macedonia, the icon depicts Christ as Savior of Souls (12-32) and the Annunciation (12-33); both images compliment the other.

- The Annunciation (12-33) forecasts the coming of the Lord and Christ as Savior of Souls
- (12-32) is the response to the Annunciation; it is the conclusion of the salvation dogma.
- The Annunciation clearly illustrates the event as a statement of fact. The angel Gabriel approaches the seated Virgin with authority. She is seated in almost the same posture as earlier representations, the throne of God, ready to accept the pronouncement and become, in fact, the throne of God.



12-34 ANDREI RUBLYEV, Three angels (Old Testament Trinity), ca. 1410. Tempera on wood, 4' 8" X 3' 9". Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Andrei Rublyev painted the icon of the Old Testament Trinity c.1410 (12-34)

- which was to serve as a reminder to the faithful of the promise of the salvation and the mystery of the Godhead.
- The presentation of the story is created by rounded shapes of color counterbalanced by the delicate folds of the gold garments.
- The positioning of the figures forms a very gentle pyramid, another symbol for the Trinity and each side equal to the other.
- The table is another reminder of the promise of salvation, for on it is a chalice-like goblet containing bread, an abbreviated version of the Eucharist.
- The turning heads of the angels are balanced by their wings, Rublyev has created a strong yet gentle fusion of intense color and subtle shape.

4) Manuscripts served both the Empire and the West. It was through manuscripts and the icon that the West became acquainted with Byzantine art. The manuscript, easily portable became a very elegant means of conveying a text, which both the East and the West recognized as the “word of God.”

Manuscripts also became *very useful as political gifts especially in the West*. The interchange between the Byzantine Empire and the West was one that sometimes was mutually beneficial and sometimes not, *for example, the occupation Constantinople by the Western Crusaders in 1204-61. The desire to be acquainted with and acknowledged by the Byzantine emperors led many Western rulers to seek and establish trading partnerships.*

In the ninth century, Charlemagne actively sought just such a partnership. In the tenth century Otto I sought an even closer political alliances with Byzantium, he contracted a marriage between his son and an imperial princess, Theophanu.

Byzantine manuscripts illustrated the intellectual representation of the Byzantine religion for the West.



12-15 Ascension of Christ, folio 13 verso of the Rabbula Gospels, from Zagba, Syria, 586. Approx. 1' 1" X 10 1/2". Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Florence.

■ In the Ascension from the Rabbula Gospels 586 CE (12-15), the final act in the Passion of Christ was the return of Christ to heaven. That particular event is depicted on this manuscript page. The intriguing point of this depiction was the inclusion of the Virgin; her presence was not recorded in the texts of the gospels.

■ Similar images of this depiction could have made their way to the West, for just such a rendering appears in the West.

■ A page from the Bible of St. Paul's Outside the Wall 870 CE, includes the Virgin, this particular example is a double depiction, in that it details both the Ascension and the Pentecost. Another manuscript the Mount-Michel Abbey Sacramentary somewhat later, c.1060, shows just the Ascension but the Virgin is once again included. These manuscripts from the West illustrate the exchange of ideas and visual representation that did, in fact, take place between the East and the West.

The long period of the Byzantine Empire went through a range of political and social upheavals; the one constant was their art. It went through phases of change, yet it always served the emperor and the religion.

Resources:

Videotapes

Byzantium From Splendor to Ruin 43 min. BVL1959 \$129.95

Crusaders and Schism in the East 48 min. BVL9364 \$149.95

The Glory of Byzantine Art 12 min. BVL8834 \$89.95

Byzantium and the Holy Roman Empire: Christianity in the 7th and 8th Centuries 48 min.

BVL9362 \$149.95

Treasures of San Marco 40 min. BVL133 \$89.95

Films for the Humanities

1-800-257-5126

<http://www.films.com>

Books

Belting, Hans. Likeness and Presence. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Gerstal, Sharon E. J. Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999.

Kalavrezou, Ioli ed. Byzantine Woman and their World. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Laiou, Angeliki E. and Roy Paviz Mattahedeh ed. The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World. Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001.

Onasch, Konrad. Icons: The Fascination and the Reality. New York: Riverside Book Co., 1997.

Ousterhout, Robert and Leslie Brubaker ed. The Sacred Image East and West. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Web Resources

<http://www.interoz.com/Egypt/Catherines.htm>

http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/San_Vitale.html

<http://gort.ucsd.edu/sj/timken/a-icon.html>

<http://www.donellelynmosaics.com>