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Beholding the City and the Church: The Early
Byzantine Ekphraseis and Corresponding
Archaeological Evidence

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BEHOLDING THE CITY AND THE CHURCH:
THE EARLY BYZANTINE *EKPHRASEIS*
AND CORRESPONDING ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Descriptions and praises of cities (*ekphraseis* and *enkomiastikai ekphraseis*) were an attractive theme of early Byzantine rhetoric. They appear also as a component of various literary genres including historiography¹. While such descriptions followed rhetorical rules established earlier by orators of the Roman empire, especially Menander, the originality of each *ekphrasis* consists in the ways the theme of the praised city was used, the creative adaptation of the *topoi* in each literary work and the translation of rhetorical *clichés* to a new context. One of the themes developed in some early Byzantine texts is that of the praised city as seen by the orator who describes it. The visual comprehension and the visual or eye contact is known from earlier Greek literature, especially the epic and erotic poetry². It was rather typical in descriptions of art objects of the Roman period, when the narrator described the object as he saw it with a formulaic language with the verb ὁράω or its synonyms³. In *ekphraseis* of cities of the Roman period, the description was usually done without the involvement of the author as a viewer⁴. In contrast, in the early Byzantine literature we observe a

change in the treatment of the subject: the author states clearly that he observes the described city. Drawing on rhetorical conventions, this involves an emphasis on the visual aspects of the description, which produces vividness⁵. At the same time the process of viewing the city creates a sense of emotional involvement of the viewer. The distance between the author and the described city of the earlier style of description is eliminated. The narrator who is the eyewitness of his object of praise now produces a sense of closeness.

Libanius in his *Antiochikos* (Oration XI) in praise of the city of Antioch repeats the theme of beholding the city in a variety of images. The imperial palace on the island of Orontes offered a splendid view of the city: “It reaches to the middle of the island, which we have called an omphalos, and extends to the outer branch of the river, so that where the wall has columns instead of battlements, there is a view worthy of the emperor, with the river flowing below and the suburbs feasting the eyes on all sides”⁶. Further in the description of the suburb of Daphne the orator describes vividly the superlative beauty of the site and the spectator’s emotional re-

1. C.J. Classen, *Die Stadt im Spiegel der Descriptiones und Laudes urbium in der antiken und mittelalterlichen Literatur bis zum Ende des zwölften Jahrhunderts*, Zürich, New York 1986. H. Saradi, *The Kallos of the Byzantine City: The Development of a Rhetorical Topos and Historical Reality*, *Gesta* 34/1 (1995), p. 37-56.

2. Cf., for example, G. Nagy, *Irreversible Mistakes and Homeric Poetry*, in *Euphrosyne. Studies in Ancient Epic and its Legacy in Honor of Dimitris N. Maronitis* (eds J.N. Kazazis and A. Rengakos), Stuttgart 1999, p. 261.

3. Cf. Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, I.1.1, 2; 4.3; 6.3, 7 etc; Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*, 2.2, 4; 3.1, 4, 5; 5.2, etc; Callistratus, *Descriptions*, 1.3, 5; 2.3; 3.2, 4, 5, etc. This had roots in earlier literature. Cf., for example, J.B. Burton, *Theocritus’s Urban Mimes. Mobility, Gender, and Patronage*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1995, p. 97 and n. 24.

4. Cf., for example, Aelius Aristides’ *Panathenaikos* (ed. F. W. Lenz and C.A. Behr), *P. Aelii Aristidis Opera*, Lugduni Batavorum 1976, c. 351 ff. with the city’s description. There is only a reference to the theme of beholding the city in the phrase τούς δήμους πάρεστι δήπου θεωρεῖν (c. 351, p. 124.15). In Aristides’ *Oratio XVIII*.3-4, 5 (Ἐπι Σμύρνῃ Μονω-

δία) the act of viewing the city is formulated in a comparison with that of beholding a statue: ὡσπερ δὲ ἄγαλμα ἀκριβῶς πεποικιλμένον πάντη περιόντι θέαν ἔχει οὕτω σοι τῇ πρότερον μὲν ὠραιότητι πόλεων... περιῆν ἀφ’ ὅτου τις ἀεὶ θεωροῖ· νῦν δὲ τὸ κάλλιστον εἶδος παρέσται δοκεῖν, τοῦτο μὲν ἐξαιρῆς ἐκφανῆς... ἐγγυρομένη... (ed. B. Keil), Berlin 1898. Also in *Oratio XXVII*.6 (Πανηγυρικός ἐν Κυζίκῳ περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ): γνοίη δ’ ἂν τις καὶ πρὸς τὴν θεῖον εὐθύς αὐτῆς ἀποβλέψας...

5. Cf. Aristides, *Τεχνῶν ῥητορικῶν*, A, ζ, L. Spengel, *Rhetores graeci*, II, Lipsiae 1854, p. 496.11-15: Κατὰ δὲ σχήμα ἔμφασις γίνεται, ὅταν τις δεικτικῶς χρῆται... καὶ πάλιν ἐν συμβουλευτικῶς, ὁρᾶτε ταύτην τὴν πόλιν...

6. Libanius, *Oratio XI*.206 (ed. R. Foerster, I, p. 508.2-5): ὥστε καὶ τὸ τεῖχος ἂντ’ ἐπάλλεων κίονας δεξάμενον θεὰ βασιλεῖ πρέπουσα κατεσκεῦασται τοῦ ποταμοῦ μὲν ὑπορρέοντος, τῶν προαστείων δὲ πανταχόθεν εὐοχοῦντων τὰς ὄψεις. Transl. G. Downey, *Libanius’ Oratio in Praise of Antioch (Oratio XI)*. Translated with Introduction and Commentary, *PAPS* 103 (1959), p. 675.

action to the display of physical and architectural beauty: “When a man sees this he cannot but cry out and leap for joy and skip and clap his hands and bless himself for seeing the sight, and, so to speak, soar on wings from pleasure. One thing from one side and one thing from another enchants and astonishes; one thing holds one, and another tears one away, and there pours upon the spectator’s eyes an arresting brightness, the temple of Apollo, the temple of Zeus, the Olympic stadium, the theatre which furnishes every pleasure, the number and thickness and height of the cypresses, the shady paths, the choruses of singing birds, the even breeze, the odors sweeter than spices, the stately aqueducts, the vines trained to form banqueting halls...”⁷. The suburb of Heraclea is worthy of seeing (ἰδεῖν ἄξιον: c. 233). In the Monody for Nicomedia, the orator laments the city’s destruction by an earthquake with emotional tones. He is presented as an eyewitness (εἶδον)⁸. The city is viewed from the sea up to the hill, while to those coming from the mountain it appears below splendid⁹. In Oration XIII.19 referring to the studies of the emperor Julian in Athens, the visual contact with the city is emphatically repeated: Julian looked at the city of Athens, and the city was viewed by Julian (σύ τε γὰρ ἑώρας τὴν πόλιν ἢ τε πόλις ἐκτάτο σύμμαχον... ὦφθαι δὲ ὑπὸ σοῦ τὴν πόλιν ἔφην). In this process, Julian’s philosophical mind was captured by the cultural greatness of the eternal city. It was a way of experiencing the city. The theme of beholding the described object reappears in Libanius’ *Ekphraseis* of works of art¹⁰.

In the *Dionysiaka* of Nonnus of Panopolis, references to the visual comprehension are abundant in a variety of contexts¹¹.

The city of Tyre is described with lyric tones, baroque taste of Asianic rhetoric, and Dionysian passion. The god Dionysus is presented approaching Tyre, looking at its location from a distance, praising the beauties of its idyllic surroundings, and being captured by a love for the city. City and surrounding countryside are described with vivid words as if the reader were a spectator¹². Tyre is presented through the eyes of the god who is shown wandering “through the city casting his eyes about”¹³. The god admires the city’s architectural features: the streets, the fountains and the splendid glorious monuments¹⁴. Aphrodite modelled the city of Beirut after renowned ancient cities which she saw through her mind: “she sent her imagination wandering swiftly round, and driving her mind to wander about the whole earth surveyed the foundations of the brilliant cities of ancient days”¹⁵. She looked at Athens, saw there the column of Solon’s Laws, “and turned aside her eye to the broad streets of Athens”¹⁶. Envyng Athena, she made Beirut a major centre of legal studies. In Nonnus’ epic, we detect two models of seeing the city. The one is panoramic, when the god approaches from a distance and sees the city as a broad transversal picture. This model of seeing recalls the Hellenistic planning of cities built on hills and offering a splendid view to the approaching visitor. Similar was the description of Nicomedia by Libanius. At the same time, however, the gods of the *Dionysiaka* experienced the city–space directly with a visual comprehension of the city’s interior, by physically moving through the streets and the buildings or by focussing the eyes on specific urban features, or through a mental observation. The reader through the eyes and the mind of the gods and in direct con-

7. Libanius, *Oratio* XI.236 (Foerster, I, p. 519.15): ἦν ἰδόντι μὴ βοᾶν οὐκ ἔστι καὶ σιορτᾶν καὶ ἀνάπτειν καὶ κροτεῖν καὶ μακαρίζειν αὐτὸν τῆς θεᾶς καὶ οἶον ὑπὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς περοῦσθαι... περιρέχεται τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐγὴ περιστρέφουσα τὸν θεατῆν... Transl. Downey, op.cit., p. 677-678.

8. *Oratio* LXI.8 (Foerster, IV, p. 333.13).

9. Ibid., c. 7 (333.6-11): ἀναβαίνουσα δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν λόφον, στοῶν δύο δυάσι διελλημένη διηκούσας τοῦ παντός, λάμπουσα μὲν δημοσίοις κατασκευάσμασι, τοῖς δὲ ἰδίοις συνεχῆς ἐκ τῶν ὑπτίων ἐπὶ τὴν ἄκραν οἶον κυπαρίττου κλάδοι ἄλλος ἐπ’ ἄλλω, νάμασι διαρροεμένη, κήποις δορυφορούμενη; c. 8 (Foerster, IV, p. 333.17-334.1): παραμείψαντες δὲ τῶν ὄρων τοὺς ἔλιγμούς, ἐπεὶ φανεῖη τὸ ἄστυ, τοῦτο δὲ ἐγίγνετο τῆς ἀποστάσεως ἐν πεντήκοντα σταδίοις οὔσης καὶ ἑκατόν, ὅπου ὄν ἐκλάμψε, περὶ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων σιγὴ ἦν, ὁ λόγος δὲ ἅπας ἡ πόλις. Cf. also Aristides, *Oratio* XVIII.3 (Ἐπὶ Σμύρῃ Μονοῦδία): προσίοντι μὲν εὐθύς ἀστραπὴ κάλλους καὶ μεγεθῶν ἀριθμοὶ καὶ μέτρα καὶ συστάσεις ὥσπερ ἁρμονίας μιᾶς πόδες μὲν ἐπ’ ἡόνων καὶ λιμένων καὶ ἄλσῶν ἔρειδόμενοι, μεσότης δὲ ἴσον τοῦ πεδίου τε ὑπεραίρουσα καὶ τῶν ἄνωθεν ἀπολείπουσα, ἔσχατιά δὲ μεσημβρινὴ κατὰ μικρὸν ὑψουμένη, δι’ ὁμοίον τοῦ παντός λάθρα λήγουσα εἰς ἀκρόπολιν, σκοπιᾶν τῆς τε θαλάττης καὶ τῆς πόλεως ἔχουσαν. C. 5: ... νῦν δὴ τὸ κάλλιστον εἶδος

παρέσται δοκεῖν, τοῦτο μὲν ἐξαίφνης ἐκφανῆς... ἐγγιγνομένη, τοῦτο δὲ ἀπαντικρὺ γιγνομένῳ, τοῦτο δ’ ἐκ προαστίων ἐκ πορθμῶν ἐκ πελάγους, ἐκ γῆς ἐκ θαλάττης. *Himerii declamationes et orationes* (ed. A. Colonna), Romae 1951, *Or.* XXXIX.7 (p. 162, ll. 53-57).

10. Libanius, *Ἐκφράσεις* (Foerster, VIII), p. 460.10-461.2 (ἐγὼ δὲ θεατῆς γενόμενος μάχης τοιαύτης ἐθέλω σοι δεῖξαι λόγῳ τὴν θεᾶν). The words used are εἶδον (465.5), ἑωρῶντο (465.8), βλέπων (480.16), ἴδης (482.13), τεθέαμαι (485.8), θεωρήσαι (507.18), θαῦμα ἰδεῖν (531.12), etc. In the description of a beautiful girl the erotic theme imposes a greater development of the *topos*: τήμερον εἶδον κόρην (541.3), εἶδον (544.9), ἰδὼν (545.15), and the reaction of the viewer and the response of the person viewed through the eye-contact (545.15-24).

11. Cf. the terms ὄμμα, ὄραω, ὀπτεύω, δέγκομαι, etc. in W. Peek, *Lexikon zu den Dionysiaka des Nonnos*, Berlin 1968.

12. Nonnus, *Dionysiaka*, XL.304-336 (ed. B. Simon), Paris 1999.

13. Ibid., XL.353 (transl. W.H.D. Rouse, ed. Loeb): παραμείβε δι’ ἄστεος ὄμμα τιταίνων.

14. Ibid., XL.353-365.

15. Ibid., XLI.264-266 (transl. Rouse, op.cit.).

16. Ibid., XLI.274.

tact with the city pervades the urban space. This focus on parts of the city recalls depictions of urban segments in Roman paintings¹⁷.

The theme of beholding the city, implying an immediate contact with the urban space, is not found in the literature of the sixth century. Instead, in church descriptions the theme of beholding the church is developed in a variety of rhetorical compositions. In addition, such descriptions do not isolate the church from the city but they emphatically refer to the urban context of the churches. In the first *enkomiion* of bishop Marcian of Gaza by the orator Choricus, we find a strategy of parallels between church and city, a play between connection and dominance. Choricus praises bishop Marcian by including in his oration an *enkomiastike ekphrasis*, a praise of the church of St Sergius constructed by him. The orator begins the description of the church by explaining to those who were viewing it what was the purpose of his oration. He stresses repeatedly the act of beholding the church, and that his description aimed at offering an imitation of the viewed monument: “To those of you, who are viewing it [the church] I may perhaps appear to be doing something superfluous. For if the purpose of an oration is to imitate that which is seen (μιμῆσθαι τὴν θέαν), and every imitation is somehow inferior to the real thing, it is evident that I entertain you less than a pleasure that appears through the eyes (τῆς διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων ἐνιδουθείσης ὑμῖν ἡδονῆς). But a written account will, I think, instruct more vividly than an imprecise verbal report – those who have not experienced the place with their own eyes (τοὺς ὄψει μὴ παρειληφῶτας τὸν τόπον) but who some day perhaps will come upon what is being said [in this oration]; and even more to the point, the oration offers a certain pleasure to those who are seeing it [the church] now (μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ τοῖς ὄρωσιν ὑμῖν εἰσάγει τινα τέρασιν ὁ λόγος); for if it is pleasant to behold things, it is also agreeable to hear about them (εἴτερον ἂν βλέπειν ἢ δὲ, τούτων ἀκροᾶσθαι τερονόν)”¹⁸.

The visitor walking to the north approaches the church from the agora, turning to the left. There the propylon of the church makes a strong impression on him and he is puzzled as to whether to stay longer and enjoy its architectural beauty or enter the church and the internal beauty of the building¹⁹. In the first and in the second *enkomiion* for bishop Marcian, Choricus stresses the aesthetic importance of the propylon and the colonnaded forecourt in various literary modes: their ornamental role and their practical function as shelters from the rain²⁰. The theme has been celebrated in Libanius’ *Antiochikos*²¹. Choricus applies it to the church’s exterior colonnades. The strategy of parallels between traditional urban features and Christian churches is found also in another passage in the first oration: the four columns from Carystos inside the church of St Sergius were superior to those in the portico of the agora both “in size and in the beauty of their placement”²². In another section, the orator pushes the theme of the city’s connection with the church even further. He creates a unique parallel of the praised church of St Sergius with the cities of the empire in a twofold composition. First, cities famous for the production of marble supplied the material for the construction of the church, and they take pride in it. Second, the church is found to have received all of the fame, which some cities enjoyed for construction of palaces, their beautiful location, the quality of their materials, their size and the brightness of their paintings²³. In this comparison, the church and the cities share equal fame. The elaborate rhetorical composition elevating the excellence of the church to that of the cities is novel, having only a thin precedent in the Oration XXVII of Aelius Aristides²⁴.

Choricus repeats the *topos* of beholding the church in his description of the interior. The visitor upon entering the church would observe everything, turning his eyes to each one of the interior elements of the church: “Thus, entering the church, you will be astounded by the diverse beauty of

17. Lise Bek, ‘Venusta Species’. A Hellenistic Rhetorical Concept as the Aesthetic Principle in Roman Townscape, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 14 (1985), p. 139-148.

18. Ἐγκώμιον εἰς Μαρκανόν ἐπίσκοπον Γάζης. Λόγος α’: *Choricii Gazaei opera* (eds R. Foerster, E. Richtsteig), Leipzig 1929, c. 16 (p. 7), transl. F. K. Litsas, *Choricus of Gaza: An Approach to his Work (Introduction, Translation, Commentary)*, PhD, Univ. of Chicago, p. 115. On the construction of the early Byzantine *ekphrasis* of the Christian church cf. R. Macrides and P. Magdalino, The Architecture of *Ekphrasis*: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentiary’s Poem on Hagia Sophia, *BMGS* 12 (1988), p. 47-82. Cf. also R. Webb, The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor, and Motion in *Ekphraseis* of Church Buildings, *DOP* 53 (1999), p. 59-74.

19. *Laudatio* I.17 (p. 7.12-17): Βαδίσας τοῖνον πρὸς ἄρκτον τοῦ ἄστεος, ἐξ ἀγορᾶς εἰς εὐώνυμον παρακλίνας, ἐν προθύροις ἐστῶς ἐν ἀμφιβόλῳ γενήσῃ τὸν λογισμὸν, εἴτε δεῖ τῶν προπυλαίων ἀπολαύειν εἰς κόρον εἴτε πρὸς τὴν εἴσω δραμεῖν εὐφροσύνην, ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκτὸς εὐπρεπείας τὴν ἔνδον οἷα πέφυκε τεκμαυρόμενον.

20. *Laudatio* I.17 and 18 (p. 7); II.30-34 (p. 35-37).

21. Libanius, *Oratio* XI.196-202, 213-218.

22. Choricus, *Laudatio* I.18 (p. 7), transl. Litsas, op.cit., p. 115.

23. *Ibid.*, I.41-43 (p. 13).

24. The theme may derive from a passage of Aelius Aristides in the *Oration* XXVII.19 where the size of the sanctuary of Kyzikos is compared to the size of a city: τὸν δ’ αὖ περιβόλον τοῦ νεοῦ πόλεως ἀποχρῶντα γίγνεσθαι.

the sight (τῷ ποικίλῳ τῶν ὄρωμένων); and struggling to observe everything at once, while your eyes glance here and there, and trying not to pass over anything without seeing, you will leave having observed nothing properly (καὶ πάντα φιλονεικῶν ἀθρόως ἰδεῖν οὐδὲν ἑναργῶς οἰκίση τεθεαμένος περιφερομένων σοι τῆδε κάκεισε τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν οὐδὲν ἄορατον καρτεροῦντι παραλιπεῖν). For whatever part you may omit, you will lose the best”²⁵.

In the second praise of Marcian, Choricus returns to the theme of beholding the church and its architectural features in the description of the churches of St Sergius and St Stephanus²⁶. The church of St Stephanus was notably visible from afar and guided the visitor to it after he had descended from the city’s eastern gate and turned to the left (τοῦ νεῷ περιφανῶς ὄρωμένου καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀρκοῦντος ἰθύνειν).²⁷ The theme of urban landmarks making the city visible is known from rhetorical treatises²⁸. The church was built on a high ground and it was approached through a great number of steps²⁹. In the oration in praise of dux Aratius and archon Stephanus, Choricus returns to the theme of the interplay of the city and the church. Archon Stephanus contributed with personal funds (σῆ φιλοτιμία) to the construction of the church of St Stephanus³⁰. Its location was most appropriate for pointing to the city from afar while guiding spiritually those who were going there (τοὺς δεῦρο πορευομένους ψυχαγωγῆ πόρρωθεν ἐμφαινῶν τὴν πόλιν)³¹. The Christian message, implied by the verb ψυχαγωγῶ, is artfully intertwined with the image of the city, which emerges still powerful next to that of the church. Now the view of the city from afar is dominated by the Christian church.

Procopius, in his *Buildings*, describes the church of Saint Sophia rebuilt by Justinian after its destruction during the Nika revolt. He praises the superlative excellence of the church, its grandiose architectural plan, the variety of materials and colours. The building, as described by Procopius, is transformed by religion into the place where mystical experiences and contacts with the divine are achieved. Procopius begins his praise with the word θέαμα, spectacle, an emphat-

ic rhetorical device³², calling for a visual comprehension of the building: “So the church has become a spectacle of marvellous beauty, overwhelming to those who see it, but to those who know it by hearsay altogether incredible”³³. He returns to the theme of beholding in the description of the architectural parts of the interior (arches, the dome, etc.): “... and yet do not permit the spectator to linger much over the study of any one of them, but each detail attracts the eye and draws it on irresistibly to itself” (οὐ παρέχονται δὲ τοῖς θεωμένοις αὐτῶν τι ἐμφιλοχωρεῖν ἐπὶ πολὺ τὴν ὄψιν, ἀλλὰ μεθέλκει τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν ἕκαστον, καὶ μεταβιβάζει ῥᾶστα ἐφ’ ἑαυτό)³⁴. The movement of the eyes was constant (ἀγγίστροφός τε ἢ τῆς θεᾶς μεταβολὴ ἐς αἶε γίγνεται)³⁵ to observe the multitude of architectural forms and their harmonious combination in a broad synthesis. The beholder (τοῦ ἐσορῶντος) could not decide which part to observe and admire more than the others. Viewing is further emphasized with a reference to the beholders’ “contracted brows” (ὡς ἀποσκοποῦντες πανταχόσε τὸν νοῦν, τάς τε ὀφρῦς ἐπὶ πᾶσι συννευκότες)³⁶. No one felt that he could ever have enough of the magnificence and the beauty of the spectacle (τούτου κόρον οὐδεὶς τοῦ θεάματος ἔλαβε πάποτε), but people inside the church enjoyed what they saw (τοῖς ὄρωμένοις) and made it subject of their conversation³⁷.

In the first section of his description, Procopius connects the church with the city by placing it into the urban setting in a composition of balance and contrast. We may easily discern a similarity in language and in thematic motif with the descriptions of Choricus mentioned above. Using opposition in the ideas and the forms of the composition³⁸, the images of the church and of the city are intermingling, the one complementing the other: “For it (the church) soars to a height to match the sky, and as if surging up from amongst the other buildings it stands on high and looks down upon the remainder of the city, adorning it, because it is a part of it, but glorying in its own beauty, because, though a part of the city and dominating it, it at the same time towers above it to such a height that the whole city is viewed from there as from a

25. Choricus, *Laudatio* I.23 (transl. Litsas, op.cit., p. 117). Cf. also c. 24: ... ἀπορήσας δὲ πάλιν περισκοπήσεις· οὐκ ἔχων δὲ κρῖνειν ἀντερωτᾶς· οὐ δὲ τίνι μᾶλλον ἦσθης τῶν ὄρωμένων; the theme of viewing is repeated in c. 36, 39 (p. 12), 45 (p. 14), 54 (p. 16).

26. *Ibid.*, II.21 (p. 33), 26 (p. 35), 34 (p. 36-37), 36 (p. 37), 49 (p. 40), 57 (p. 42).

27. *Ibid.*, II.28 (p. 35).

28. Aphthonius, *Προγυμνάσματα*, Spengel, op.cit. (n. 5), 48.25-29.

29. Choricus, *Laudatio* II.29 (p. 35.22).

30. *Ibid.*, III.60 (p. 64.10-11).

31. *Ibid.*, III.61 (p. 64.14-15).

32. Aristides, *Τεχνῶν ῥητορικῶν*, A, στ’, Spengel, op.cit. (n. 5), p. 496.3-4: ἐμφανὶς δὲ ποιεῖ καὶ τὸ ἐπισημαίνεσθαι ταῖς ποιότησιν, ὅπου λέγει, θέαμα δεινόν...

33. Procopius, *Buildings*, I.1.27: Θέαμα τοίνυν ἡ ἐκκλησία κεκαλλιστευμένον γενένηται, τοῖς μὲν ὄρωσιν ὑπερφυές, τοῖς δὲ ἀκούουσι παντελῶς ἄπιστον.

34. *Ibid.*, I.1.47.

35. *Ibid.*, I.1.48.

36. *Ibid.*, I.1.49.

37. *Ibid.*, I.1.63.

38. Hermogenes, *Τέχνης ῥητορικῆς*. Περὶ εὐρέσεως, Spengel, op.cit.

watch-tower”³⁹. It would appear that this way of viewing the city and the church from a distance continues the Hellenistic description of a townscape⁴⁰, as we have identified it in Libanius’ Monody of Nicomedia, and in the *Dionysiaka* of Nonnus. Procopius describes the church of Saint Sophia as rising high up to the sky above the other buildings of the city. Below, the church beautifies the city. The church is intimately connected with the city: it belongs to it by being part of it. Yet, the church dominates the city with its mass and majesty of construction. From its height, the spectator could enjoy a panoramic view of the entire city. Next to the Hellenistic and the Roman ways of beholding the city, a third theme emerges in Procopius’ description: the church’s command of the sixth-century urban landscape. This theme forms the concluding image in the parallels and *antitheseis*, in the interplay of words and imagery of the opening paragraph of Saint Sophia’s description.

This literary theme in the *ekphrasis* of the early Byzantine church appears in the sixth century. It is also fully documented in the archaeological evidence. The location of early Byzantine churches depended on the availability of land. Thus, some were built on vacant civic land, some on lots donated to the Church, and others occupied the sites of pagan temples. Most of them were very large and indeed dominated the surroundings. An early Christian basilica was built in the fifth century on the site of the temple of Aphrodite north of the agora of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor. The Christian church was much larger and more commanding than the pagan temple⁴¹. In contrast, other churches were small and un-

pretentious next to large impressive pagan temples, as the “Temple Church” at Sardis⁴². Many churches were built on high grounds or raised platforms accessed with monumental staircases⁴³. But this was far from being the rule⁴⁴. The preference for high grounds for many early Christian churches follows the Roman tradition of placing temples on podia or elevated sites⁴⁵. Archaeological evidence indicates that early Byzantine churches were often built on a high podium so that they were raised above the surrounding buildings⁴⁶. Other churches were built on hilltops offering spectacular views over a plain or the sea: the sixth-century Justinianic basilica on the summit of Mt Berenice of ancient Tiberias was constructed on a cliff from which a panoramic view over the Sea of Galilee could be enjoyed⁴⁷; the emperors Zeno and Justinian built a church and a monastery on top of the mountain that dominated the city of Neapolis (mod. Nablus)⁴⁸. In smaller settlements similar variety has been observed in the selection of sites for churches. In some small towns in the East, churches were architecturally totally integrated into the towns, with building materials and techniques similar to those of the towns’ other buildings⁴⁹. In numerous other sites, however, early Byzantine churches occupied the top of a hill on the slopes of which were built the settlements, or the summit of small forts⁵⁰. Representative of the sixth-century urban planning is Justiniana Prima (Caričin Grad), where the bishop’s church dominates the city on the hilltop surrounded by a strong wall⁵¹. In the new model of city emerging in the sixth century, the church was conveying a powerful statement of dominance over the ur-

(n. 5), p. 238.2-4: τὸ δὲ ἐναντίον ἀναστρέφει τὸ πρᾶγμα ἀπὸ τῶν δρώ-
ντων εἰς τοὺς πάσχοντας, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν πασχόντων εἰς τοὺς δρώντας.

39. Procopius, *Buildings* I.1.27 (transl. H. B. Dewing, ed. Loeb): ἐπιῆρ-
ται μὲν γὰρ ἐξ ὕψος οὐράνιον ὄσον, καὶ ὥσπερ τῶν ἄλλων οἰκοδο-
μημάτων ἀποσαλεύουσα ἐπινένευκεν ὑπερκειμένη τῇ ἄλλῃ πόλει,
κοσμοῦσα μὲν αὐτήν, ὅτι αὐτῆς ἐστίν, ὠραιζομένη δέ, ὅτι αὐτῆς οὔσα
καὶ ἐπεμβαίνουσα τοσοῦτον ἀνέχει ὥστε δι’ ἐνθένδε ἡ πόλις ἐκ πε-
ρωπῆς ἀποσκοπεῖται.

40. Cf. *supra*, n. 17.

41. Cf. R. Cormack, The Temple as the Cathedral, *Aphrodisias Papers*
(eds Ch. Roueché and K. T. Erim), *JRA*, Suppl. 1, Ann Arbor 1990, p.
75-88.

42. G.M.A. Hanfmann, The Fourth Campaign at Sardis (1961), *BASOR*
166 (1962), p. 49-54.

43. Cf. R.H. Smith, A.W. McNicoll, The 1982 and 1983 Seasons at Pella
of the Decapolis, *BASOR* 1986, Suppl. 24, p. 106, and the famous
Cathedral Church at Gerasa.

44. J. Guyon and G. Cardī, L’eglise B, dite ‘basilique cruciforme’, in N. Du-
val, V. Popović (eds), *Caričin Grad*, I, Belgrade, Rome 1984, p. 12, 19 ff.

45. J. E. Packer, Report from Rome: The Imperial Fora, a Retrospec-

tive, *AJA* 101 (1997), p. 327.

46. Cf., for example, Z. Weiss and E. Netzer, Zippori-1992/1993, *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 14 (1994), p. 43.

47. Y. Hirschfeld, The Anchor Church at the Summit of Mt. Berenice,
Tiberias, *BibArch* 57 (1994), p. 122-133; id., Tiberias, Mt. Berenice -
1992, *Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 14 (1994), p. 33-38.

48. Y. Magen, The Church of Mary Theotokos on Mount Gerizim,
Christian Archaeology of the Holy Land, 1990.

49. B. de Vries, Jordan’s Churches. Their Urban Context in Late Anti-
quity, *BibArch* 51 (1988), p. 222-226.

50. For example, T. Gregory, Diporto: An Early Byzantine Maritime
Settlement in the Gulf of Corinth, *ΔΧΑΕ IB* (1984), p. 287-304, esp.
293, 295, 302, 304; S. Aydal et al., The Pisidian Survey 1995: Panemotei-
chos and Ören Tepe, *AnatSt* 47 (1997), p. 141-172; St. Mitchell, Pisidian
Survey, *AnatArch* 1 (1995), p. 17.

51. N. Duval, L’architecture religieuse de Tsaritchin Grad dans le cadre
de l’Illyricum oriental au VIe siècle, in *Villes et peuplement dans l’Il-
lyricum protobyzantin. Actes du colloque organisé par l’École française de
Rome (Rome, 12-14 mai 1982)*, Rome 1984, p. 399-480, esp. 406-419.

ban space. The theme of the visual interrelation of the church with the city is reflected in the mosaic representations of cities with churches of the sixth and seventh centuries⁵².

In conclusion, the rhetorical theme of beholding the praised city was developed in the early Byzantine period to create greater emphasis in the *enkomiastikai ekphraseis*. The Hellenistic city planning and the Roman way of depicting cities were the models for such descriptions. In the sixth century

the *ekphrasis* of the church emerges in elaborate rhetorical compositions as a parallel to the city, but also as an opposition to it. Ultimately the church appears dominating the city. The development of this rhetorical theme is fully documented in the archaeological evidence. It corresponds to the historical reality of diminishing urban vitality in the sixth century. Thus through various rhetorical forms, the texts of the period depict the increasingly dominating role of the church in the urban architecture.

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ΠΑΡΑΤΗΡΩΝΤΑΣ ΤΗΝ ΠΟΛΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ: ΤΑ ΠΡΩΤΟΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΑ ΕΓΚΩΜΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΤΙΣΤΟΙΧΕΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΕΣ ΕΞΕΛΙΞΕΙΣ

Κατά την πρωτοβυζαντινή εποχή στις περιγραφές των πόλεων –*ἐκφράσεις ἢ ἐγκωμιαστικὰς ἐκφράσεις*– εμφανίζεται η προσωπική παρέμβαση του ρήτορα, ο οποίος παρατηρεί την περιγραφόμενη πόλη, τα μνημεία της ή την περιβάλλουσα περιοχή της. Η ρητορική αυτή τεχνική προσέδιδε έμφαση στο κείμενο, παραστατικότητα στην περιγραφή και τη δυνατότητα έκφρασης των συναισθημάτων του ρήτορα, που προκαλούσαν ανάλογες αντιδράσεις στον ακροατή.

Η οπτική επισκόπηση στην περιγραφή των πόλεων παρουσιάζεται κατεξοχήν σε λόγους του Λιβανίου και στα *Διονυσιακά* του Νόννου. Σε αυτά τα κείμενα αναγνωρίστηκαν δύο τρόποι περιγραφής της πόλης: α) Η περιγραφή από μακριά, η οποία αποδίδει την ελληνιστική οργάνωση του οικιστικού χώρου. β) Η εστίαση της περιγραφής σε συγκεκριμένα τμήματα της πόλης, η οποία παρουσιάζει ομοιότητες με τον τρόπο απόδοσης της πόλης στη ρωμαϊκή ζωγραφική.

Το θέμα της περιγραφής της πόλης από το συγγραφέα, με τη γλαφυρότητα που προσδίδει η προσωπική οπτική παρατήρηση, μειώνεται στα κείμενα του βου αιώνα. Αντ' αυτού εμφανίζεται η περιγραφή της χριστιανικής εκκλησίας μέσα στον αστικό χώρο.

Χαρακτηριστικά παραδείγματα προσφέρουν οι περιγραφές των εκκλησιών του Αγίου Σεργίου και του Αγίου Στεφάνου της Γάζας από το ρήτορα Χωρίκιο, καθώς και η περιγραφή της Αγίας Σοφίας από τον ιστορικό Προκόπιο. Σε αυτά τα κείμενα η οπτική περιγραφή του εξωτερικού και του εσωτερικού της εκκλησίας γίνεται πλέον *τόπος*. Η σύνθεση των κειμένων αυτών περιλαμβάνει άφθονα ρητορικά σχήματα με παράλληλες εικόνες της πόλης και της εκκλησίας, από τις οποίες προκύπτει η υπεροχή της δεύτερης σχετικά με την τοποθεσία, την ποιότητα των υλικών κατασκευής, το μέγεθος και τη λαμπρότητα της διακόσμησης. Ιδιαίτερα τονίζεται η υπερυψωμένη θέση της εκκλησίας και ο επιβλητικός της όγκος. Κατ' αυτόν τον τρόπο κυριαρχούσε στο αστικό τοπίο, αποτελώντας ταυτόχρονα τμήμα της πόλης. Το λογοτεχνικό αυτό θέμα ανταποκρίνεται στα αρχαιολογικά δεδομένα, σύμφωνα με τα οποία αρκετές πρωτοβυζαντινές εκκλησίες ήταν κτισμένες πάνω σε υπερυψωμένο κρηπίδωμα ή στην κορυφή ενός λόφου, στις πλαγιές του οποίου απλωνόταν η πόλη, χωρίς βέβαια να πρόκειται για γενικευμένο φαινόμενο.

52. Cf. N. Duval, Représentations d'églises sur mosaïques, *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 22 (1972), p. 441-448; R. Farioli Campanati, Città, edifici e strutture architettoniche nei mosaici pavimentali

del vicino Oriente: Giordania e Siria, *FelRav* 1993-1994 (CXLV-CXLVIII), p. 259-291 with earlier bibliography.