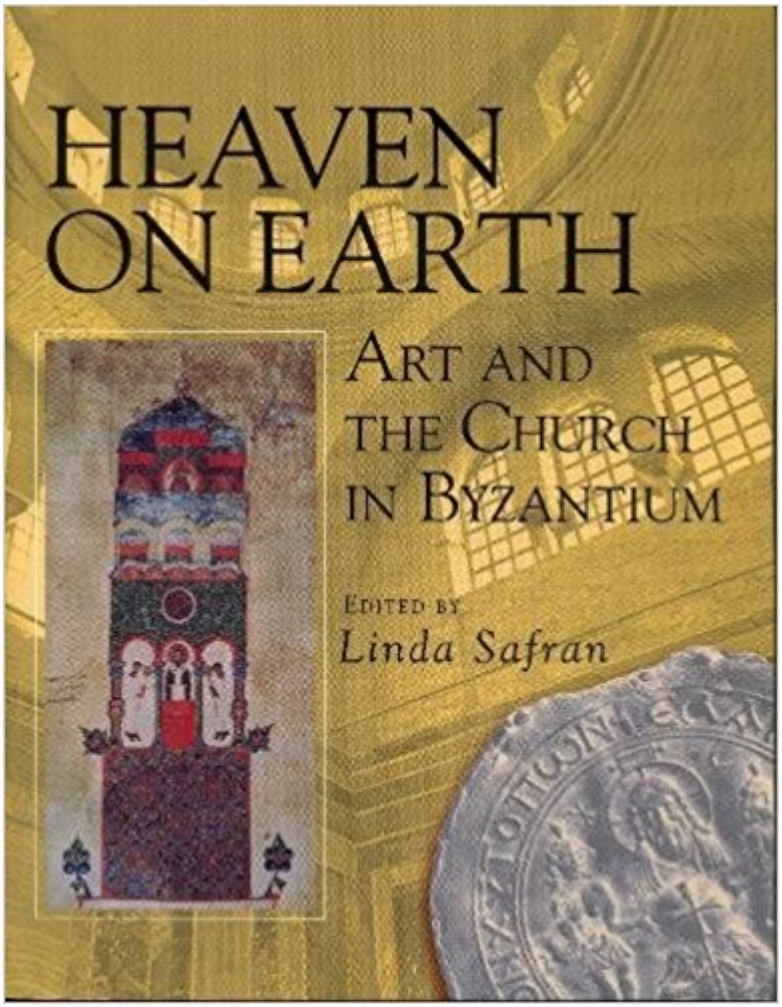
Heaven On Earth: Art And The Church In Byzantium



Synopsis

This easily accessible volume, which grew out of a series of lectures presented at the Smithsonian Institution in 1991, aims to provide a coherent introduction to Byzantine culture with a focus on the interconnected realms of art and religion. The eight participants have revised their lectures into chapters on Byzantine history, theology, icons and icon theory, church architecture, monumental painting, silver church furnishings, illustrated liturgical books, and pilgrimage. In addition to presenting current research on this range of topics, the chapters each contribute original scholarship from authors who are recognized experts in their respective fields. The Introduction, by Linda Safran, deals with views and definitions of Byzantium over the course of its long history and considers why that civilization deserves our attention today. It underscores the essential unifying role of the Orthodox religion in a vast and fluid empire and clarifies how the experiential aspects of that religionÃ¢â ¬â •churches, liturgy, church arts and imagery, religious travelÃ¢â ¬â •open a window into Byzantine culture. Throughout the book, the past is made vivid by considering what Byzantine believers heard and said and did, as well as what they saw. The book's chapters are cross-referenced and are complemented both by endnotes that cite primary and secondary sources and by "Suggestions for Further Reading" that include English and foreign-language references. There is no comparable art history text that combines this high-caliber range of current scholarship with more than 250 illustrations, including 16 pages of color plates, to introduce Byzantine culture to a broad readership.Contributors are Joseph Alchermes, Susan A. Boyd, Anna Kartsonis, Henry Maguire, Robert Ousterhout, Eric D. Perl, Nancy Patterson Ã…Â evÃ„Â•enko, and Gary Vikan.

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“This most useful book is the product of a lecture series titled Ã¢â ¬â„¢sailing to Byzantium: The Sacred Core of a Great CivilizationÃ¢â ¬â„¢ sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution. . . . Each scholar writes with a clarity sufficient for someone new to the subject while raising issues at a level of sophistication and with a range of bibliography (and a useful glossary) that provoke further study for the more engaged reader. Consistent use of primary sources provides a vivid context for the concepts surrounding the works discussed. . . . The particular virtue of this book is the singular priority given to the church and its art as an expression of the Orthodox liturgy conducted within the sanctuary space, the essence of what unifies a vast and important part of the world even after the political apogee of the empire itself.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Elizabeth C. Parker, Church History

Linda Safran is Associate Professor of Art History in the department of Greek and Latin at The Catholic University of America. She is the author of San Pietro at Otranto: Byzantine Art in South Italy (1992).

This is a required text for an art history course on Byzantine art and architecture that I am taking. The eight well-written lectures cover the rise of Constantinople (modern day Istanbul, Turkey), the central themes of Byzantine theology (Eastern Orthodoxy), and the place of art, particularly iconography, in the worship of the Orthodox Church. As an Orthodox Christian, much of this material is already familiar to me, but I am very impressed with the depth and quality of understanding of Orthodox religion and art by writers who are not. This is one textbook I will not be selling when the course is finished. It will have a permanent place on my book shelf.

A wonderful book that provides such in-depth studies of the nature of Byzantine art that would be hard to find elsewhere! Thrilled to find this treasure trove of information, research and thought.

Byzantine art, while majestic and regal, is often accused of being bland. No creativity, just repetitive images of saints and biblical scenes. After taking a class on the topic, I am still trying to make sense of the deeper aesthetic of Byzantine art. Linda SafranÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s edited volume, one of the books of my class, brings together eight major scholars of this art to connect that art with the religion that inspired it. All of the chapters in this volume were originally talks given in connection with a Smithsonian Institute lecture series in 1991. I decided to finish the volume to see what lay in store for me. Here IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll focus on the three chapters I enjoyed most."While sight is invoked

most often in the chapters that follow, the other senses augmented the experience of the Byzantine church-goer or pilgrim: the holy books were read aloud, hymns were sung, icons or relics were touched or kissed, scented oils were used for anointing, and the smell of incense exorcised evil spirits and accompanied veneration. From differing but overlapping perspectives, the eight chapters that follow consider how Byzantine religious arts functioned in their settings and in society, and how they responded to and shaped the circumstances of their creation ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • in short, how art and architecture contributed in significant ways to the experience of the faithful." (8)Eric D. PerlÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s chapter, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦That Man Might Become God: Central Themes in Byzantine Theology,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• expanded on the central theme of theosis, or deification, the idea that humanity can become God or Godlike. He explores how theosis expressed itself in the ByzantinesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ strongly incarnational Christology, its negative theology of Pseudo-DionysusÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“divine darknessÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and the hesychasm, and the liturgy, where God reveals himself to us through the senses. I was left with a strong sense of the Christian paradox that while God becomes human, allowing for the overwhelming sensuality of Byzantine devotion, God is also beyond all the forms of art, scripture, and liturgy."Theology is liturgy in thought, liturgy is theology in action." (53)In ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Responding Icon,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Anna Kartsonis explicates the multiple meanings of icons for Byzantine Christians. Icons were not just images of holy figures. They were representations of those figures, embodiments of them on earth. Byzantine literature is abound with stories of people being healed after touching icons of Jesus, Mary, and saints. Icons are themselves incarnations of heavenly bodies. I see this as the Byzantine equivalent of the Roman dogma of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist: a way to bring Jesus into concrete contact with the faithful. This kind of presence, which in folk miracles can veer on the superstitious, was one of the fuels in the IconoclastsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ fire."The image interrelates the prototypical event (the historical Crucifixion), its numerous representations (visual, verbal, ceremonial), and the faithful, who as beholder, witness, and participant responds to its reenactment and re-creation. In the process, the pictorial representation ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • the icon ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • remains both constant and flexible in communicating the interrelation and interaction between the prototype, its representation, and the faithful." (75)Lastly, Robert OusterhoutÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s chapter, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Holy Space: Architecture and the Liturgy,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• argues that Byzantine architecture was not monotonous repetition, but subtle variations on a theme designed to be decoded by the faithful. Byzantine churches, he points out, were like Byzantine liturgy in that they evoked heaven. Icons and mosaics were placed in the culture in a way too suggest transcendence: saints at the human level,

biblical figures up higher, Mary and the angels at the penultimate level, and Christ Pantokrator at the high point of the dome. The Hagia Sophia, that massive and massively atypical example of Byzantine architecture, is an apt example of the evoking of heaven:"The sense of weightlessness, despite the huge mass of the building, led Prokopios to conclude that the great dome was not supported from below but suspended by a golden chain from heaven. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| More than anything the architecture of Hagia Sophia was meant to transform the ceremonies it housed, the place them on a level different from common existence, transforming them into more symbolic, heavenly drama." (90-91)By way of conclusion, IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll share a story. I have a friend who attends Gregorian chant mass. Last month I attended at her invitation. Much of the afternoon, I felt bored: why the endless dragging out of syllables, the ceaseless repetition of incantations? Afterwards, she explained to me that the chant is supposed to evoke the angels praising God in heaven, and the chantsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ length evokes the eternal bliss of GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s presence. It clicked. Perhaps Byzantine art is the visual equivalent of Gregorian chant. It seems dull at first, but only because it operates on a deeper rhythm than we expect. While SafranÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s book does not make those connections ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • I wish there were a chapter specifically on aesthetics ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • it does have moments of insight. And as art history, it was solid and enjoyable.

If you are studying Byzantine iconography, you must have this book or at least read it. It consists of a number of articles by experts in the field, who are writing about the subject from various points of views - icons in connection to Byzantine (Christian Orthodox) theology, Byzantine liturgy, architecture, manuscript illumination, society in general.The book that I ordered from came in the perfect shape, completely new and shiny. Furthermore, it arrived even before I expected it. All in all, the service was without a spot.

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