

Curator's Foreword

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WITH THE EXCEPTION of Hagia Sophia, no Byzantine monument in the modern city of Istanbul can rival the former church of the monastery of the Chora (Kariye Camii) in either the lavishness and splendor of its interior decoration, the upkeep of its grounds and garden, or, for that matter, the number of tourists from all over the world visiting the site each year in search of the city's glorious Byzantine past. "The Glories of Ancient Byzantium: Mosaics and Frescoes Newly Revealed and Restored in the Church of the Chora" was, in fact, the headline of an article, cut out of the *Illustrated London News* of 30 April 1955 and marked with the cipher "RB to H K," that ended up one morning, just about two years ago, in my mailbox at Columbia University. What neither my esteemed colleague Richard Brilliant, the prolific donor of this and other notes and offprints on Byzantine art and architecture, nor I realized at the time was that this clipping would provide crucial inspiration for me to organize an exhibition on the very restoration hailed in the article as having revealed the glories of ancient Byzantium. Reading the news clipping on the recovery of the mosaics and frescoes of the Kariye Camii, I remembered that several years earlier, while doing research at the Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies in Washington, D.C., Helen Evans, the Curator of Early Christian and Byzantine Art in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters at the Metropolitan Museum, had come to look at a number of largescale replicas of several of the frescoes in the Kariye Camii's parekklesion. Painted during the Byzantine Institute of America's restoration of the building in the mid1950s, these facsimiles had been rolled up and stored in the basement of Dumbarton Oaks since the completion of the institute's work in Istanbul. The canvases had never been put back on stretchers after their arrival in Washington, and therefore they had never been exhibited. Back in the fall of 1999, Helen Evans had just entered into the planning stages of a Late Byzantine sequel to the Middle Byzantine blockbuster *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A. D. 843-1261* and had come to Dumbarton Oaks to see if these canvases could somehow be incorporated into the future exhibition *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*. As I learned from Helen Evans about two years later -- shortly after the retrieval of the news clipping from my Columbia University mailbox, in fact - this plan had never materialized. Since the Metropolitan Museum of Art no longer intended to use the Byzantine Institute's fresco replicas in its exhibition, the possibility arose of developing a separate but concurrent exhibition of these replicas at Columbia University's Wallach Art Gallery, a space established in 1986 through the generosity of Miriam and Ira D. Wallach and operating under the auspices of Columbia's Department of Art History and Archaeology.

As the exhibition on the Kariye Camii started to take shape, it became clear that Columbia University could contribute much more than just a venue for showing full-scale replicas of the Kariye Camii's famous parekklesion frescoes. Thomas Whittemore, the charismatic founder and director of the Byzantine Institute of America, had a direct connection with Columbia, having taught courses in Greek and Egyptian art in its summer program. (1) The university was also in the possession of a large amber of archival documents and records relating to Thomas Whittemore's early career as a fund-raiser and director of various charitable organizations and committees - among them the Refugees Russia/International Reconstruction League, the Committee for the Rescue and Education of Russian Children, and the Committee for the Education of Russian Youth in Exile - that he helped to establish during and after the First World War. Those documents now form part of Columbia University's Bakhmeteff Archive, officially founded in 1951 as a result of the establishment of the Russian institute at Columbia and currently one of the largest depositories of Russian émigré material outside of Russia. (2) Reviewing these documents, I recognized that Columbia's holdings, together

with other archival records currently preserved at the Byzantine Photograph and Fieldwork Archives at Dumbarton Oaks, would provide enough material for an exhibition to highlight not only the important Palaiologan mosaic and fresco cycles of the Kariye Camii, but also the yet unwritten history of this Americansponsored conservation campaign of a key Byzantine monument in Istanbul from 1947 through 1958.

The timing for such an undertaking could not have been more appropriate, as the Kariye Camii itself and its interior decoration are once again in urgent need of repair and conservation. In fact, the Kariye Museum - the monument's official name since its secularization - has just been placed on the World Monuments Fund's 2004 watch list of the hundred most endangered sites. According to the citation, "changes in the levels of humidity and rising ground water have resulted in the weakening and deterioration of plaster surfaces, which is exacerbated by the leaching of salts that have left destructive efflorescence on the frescoes." (3) The fact that, nearly fifty years after Thomas Whittemore and the Byzantine Institute's restoration of the Kariye Camii, its famous mosaic and fresco cycles are once again in a precarious state of preservation was reason enough to proceed with plans for an exhibition. It would not only draw attention to the present needs of one of the most important monuments of Late Byzantine art in Constantinople but also pay homage to the team of scholars, conservators, and workmen who unveiled "the glories of ancient Byzantium" for us in the 1940's and 1950's. In addition to a select number of archaeological finds from the Byzantine Institute's 1957-58 excavations at the church, the photographs taken and the scale replicas painted during this period form the core of the exhibition. The latter function as historical records that reveal the state of preservation of the Kariye Camii's decoration immediately after the Byzantine Institute's cleaning and stabilization of the mosaics and frescoes. Continuing a practice already established in the early years of the Byzantine Institute's activity in Istanbul, these and previous replicas were made with the intention "to safeguard these paintings for the future . . . [by] copy[ing] them in colors and bring[ing] the copies to America." (4) Forty years after their creation, they now fulfill for the first time this very function and serve to remind us of our responsibilities for the continued care and preservation of the Kariye Camii's original decoration.

What the exhibition sets out to achieve, however, is more than raising awareness of the current state of Byzantine monuments in Istanbul. It is also meant to introduce visitors to an aspect of Byzantine art that an exhibition of precious liturgical and devotional objects and isolated architectural fragments cannot necessarily provide: an experience of the scale and refined quality of a Late Byzantine monumental fresco and mosaic program produced in a city that eagerly sought to restore the glories of its past after more than two generations of Latin occupation (1204-61). The title of the exhibition, *Restoring Byzantium*, thus has a double meaning, referring on the one hand to the Byzantine Institute's dramatic uncovering and thus "restoration" - of a longhidden cycle of Palaiologan frescoes, and on the other hand to Theodore Metochites' restoration of the Chora monastery, which itself formed part of a broader Byzantine effort to "restore" the former glories of the Byzantine empire.

Since it is impossible to bring the Kariye Camii to New York City, the idea of its *representation* forms an important concept of the exhibition. Through historical representations of the city of Constantinople /Istanbul from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century, the visitor is led back in time to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. These images stress the virtual quality and representational character of an exhibition that features not tangible Byzantine objects but rather a remote and intangible Byzantine monument that forms part of an everchanging and expanding modern metropolis. What is presented in this exhibition is not Istanbul, Constantinople, or the former Byzantine church now known as the Kariye Museum, but rather representations of them created at

different times, in different media, and with different objectives. The visitor travels back in time with the French draftsman Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, who arrived in Istanbul in 1670 and stayed there for two years. His *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople* of 1680 contains not only his well-known interiors of Hagia Sophia, the most accurate representations published at the time, but also a view of the city as seen from Galata (pl. 28, cat. III3), the same location later chosen by the studio of Sebah & Joaillier for their noted photographic panorama of the city. Petrus Gyllius' *De Constantinopoleos Topographia* of 1632, with its frontispiece view of Constantinople (pl. 27, cat. III2), is exhibited along with a passage from his description of the church of the Chora monastery and its location. Similarly, a passage from Stephan Gerlach's description of the Chora in his sixteenth-century *TageBuch* is included in the exhibition as a textual record and representation of a traveler's visit to Theodore Metochites' former monastery. The building itself is represented in the exhibition by means of the earliest published renderings of its exterior in Albert Lenoir's *Architecture monastique* of 1852 (pl. 29, cat. III6), Alexandros Paspates' more accurate view of 1877 (Pl. 31, cat. III8), and, one year later, Domenico Pulgher's first color reproductions of the Kariye Camii's interior and exterior decoration (pls. 1617, cat. III9).

With the publication of Fedor Shmit's monograph on the Kariye Camii in 1906 (pls. 1819, 32, cat. III10), the photographic medium is established as the most important instrument for the study, documentation, and visual dissemination of the building. To reproduce the extensive mosaic and fresco cycles of the church in an accurate and satisfying manner, however, has remained a challenge since then. The exhibition therefore includes a number of experimental displays and computer-animated programs that allow the visitor to (virtually) enter the church and to explore its decorative program in more detail. It is hoped that the juxtaposition of old and new ways of representing the art and architecture of the Kariye Camii will engage the visitor in a creative way and supplement the experience of the more precious remains of Late Byzantine art and culture concurrently on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This catalogue serves as a permanent record of the exhibition and brings together scholars who have studied aspects of the Kariye Camii's art, architecture, and history. Their essays and the extensive section of plates are meant as an introduction to the monument, allowing the reader to explore further its Byzantine and later history as well as the multifaceted story of its scholarly rediscovery and restoration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

1) Thomas Whittemore taught two summer sessions at Columbia University, one in 1908, described in the Summer Session Announcement as "a brief history of Greek art, with an introduction in the arts of Egypt, Assyria, and Phoenicia," the other one in 1917, described as "a survey of Egyptian life in the arts of Egypt from the predynastic period to the days of the Emperors." Columbia University. University Archives, Columbiana Collection. Summer Session Announcements for 1908, 42, and 1917, 59.

2) Originally founded as the Archive for Russian History and Culture, it was later (in 1975) renamed in honor of Boris A. Bakhmeteff (1880-1951), a Russian-born diplomat and later professor of engineering at Columbia, who had been influential in establishing the archive at the university in the mid to late 1940s.

3) See <http://wmf.org/html/programs/watchlist2004.html>.

4) Thomas Whittemore in an undated letter, probably addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss

in Washington. See the essay by Natalia Teteriatnikov in this volume, pp. 4360.