Constantinople as Center and Crossroad

Edited by
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................. 7

OLOF HEILO & INGELA NILSSON WITH RAGNAR HEDLUND
Constantinople as Crossroad:
Some introductory remarks ......................................................................................... 9

RAGNAR HEDLUND
Byzantion, Zeuxippos, and Constantinople:
The emergence of an imperial city ................................................................................ 20

GRIGORI SIMEONOVA
Crossing the Straits in the Search for a Cure:
Travelling to Constantinople in the
Miracles of its healer saints ....................................................................................... 34

FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK
When and How Were Byzantine Miliareas Brought to
Scandinavia? Constantinople and the dissemination
of silver coinage outside the empire ........................................................................... 55

ANNA LINDEN WELLE
Mediating the Eastern Frontier:
Classical models of warfare
in the work of Nikephoros Ouranos ........................................................................... 89

CLAUDIA RAPP
A Medieval Cosmopolis:
Constantinople and its foreigners ............................................................................. 100

MABI ANGAR
Disturbed Orders:
Architectural representations in Saint Mary Peribleptos
as seen by Ruy González de Clavijo ........................................................................... 116

ISABEL KIMMELFIELD
Argyropolis: A diachronic approach
to the study of Constantinople’s suburbs ................................................................ 142
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Miloš Petrović</strong>&lt;br&gt;Belgrade Toponyms along the Bosphorus:&lt;br&gt;From the Belgrade Forest to the Belgrade Gate</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Federica Gigante</strong>&lt;br&gt;‘New and Rare Items Coming from India and Turkey’:&lt;br&gt;Changing perceptions of Islamic artefacts in Early Modern Italy</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lee Beaudoen</strong>&lt;br&gt;A Mediterraneanizing Approach:&lt;br&gt;Constantinople as a nexus</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the lost mosaics of Constantinople, some Palaiologan portraits in the Monastery of Saint Mary Peribleptos (Gr. Μονή της Θεοτόκου της Περιβλέπτου, Turk. Sulu Manastır, Armen. Surp Kevork) and the Pammakaristos Monastery (Gr. Μονή της Θεοτόκου της Παμμακαριστού, Turk. Fethiye Camii) have attracted scholarly attention. Descriptions and pictorial representations by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century visitors triggered attempts to identify the Late Byzantine emperors, their wives, and children depicted within the Pammakaristos Church, and on the outer walls of the main church (katholikon) of the Peribleptos Monastery.

* I thank Cecilia Olovsdotter and Johan Mårtelius for inviting me to their inspiring conference Symbolic Aspects of Architecture: Late Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman Perspectives, held 5–6 November 2015 at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, where I gave a preliminary version of this paper. I thank Ingela Nilsson and Olof Heilo for including this paper in the present volume and for their helpful suggestions, as well as Olof Heilo and Kaspar Wittlake for their redrawings. I am grateful to Anne Dunlop, Nikolas Jaspert, Paul Magdalino, Peter Schreiner and Cristina Stanciu for their interest in this paper and valuable comments. All mistakes are mine.


In contrast to these Palaiologan portraits, an image inside the Peribleptos Church believed to be a donor mosaic of the eleventh century has remained scarcely studied.4 We only know of this image thanks to a description in a late medieval travel account known as Embajada a Tamorlán. Between 1403 and 1406 the author of the account, Ruy González de Clavijo, chamberlain and chief ambassador to Henry III, King of Castile and León (r. 1390–1406), led an embassy to the court of Timur in Samarkand and back to the Iberian Peninsula.5 The mission was part of diplomatic exchanges between Timur and Henry III, the latter making observation in regards to potential initiatives against the Ottomans with Timur’s help.6 The Mongol-Turkic ruler was increasingly perceived by Western powers as a negotiating partner after his victory over Beyazit I at the Battle of Ankara (July, 1402) which called to a halt the yearlong Ottoman siege of Constantinople.7

The Mongol empire under Timur is the main focus of the Embajada, but two chapters are dedicated to Constantinople and Pera, where the Castilian embassy stayed for five months.8 While Clavijo’s description structurally resembles traditional pilgrim accounts which enumerate one shrine after another, praising the Byzantine capital as a relic hoard,9 the pages dedicated to the Byzantine capital, and to the Genoese settlement on the other side of the Golden Horn, deserve closer


5. There are several editions and translations into modern languages of Clavijo’s Embajada a Tamorlán printed in Sevilla for the first time by Gonzalo Argote de Molina in 1582. All original passages cited here are from Embajada a Tamorlán. Estudio y Edición de un Manuscrito del Siglo XV por Francisco López Estrada (Madrid 1999). The English translation on the Peribleptos image proper is my own. All other passages are cited from: Embasy to Tamerlane 1403–1406. Ruy González de Clavijo (tr. G. L. Strange) (Kilkerran 2009). See also the German tr. Clavijos Reise nach Samarkand 1403–1406. Aus dem Altkastillischen übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung und Erläuterungen versehen von Uta Lindgren (Munich 1993). For the transmission history of the text and references to further translations into various modern languages, see Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 53–57. For narratological aspects see, F. López Estrada, “Procedimientos narrativos en la Embajada a Tamorlán,” in El Crotalón 1 (1984), 129–46.


8. The Castilians tried to continue their trip to Trapezunt on 13 November 1403, but heavy winter storms forced them to return to Pera, where the group remained until spring 1304, cf. Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 156–57; Clavijo, Embasy (tr. L. Strange), 67–77. For the itinerary, see F. López Estrada, “La relation de l’ambassade d’Henri III au Grand Tamerlan,” in Études des Lettres (1992/93), 5–28, at 14–15.

attention and contextualization within the broader narrative.\textsuperscript{10} The many reflections in Clavijo’s account about recent military encounters and the politically unstable situation in the Eastern Mediterranean around 1400 with Latins, Byzantines, Turks, and other stakeholders reveal a rather programmatic agenda. Clavijo’s remarks demonstrate to what extent Constantinople and Pera were understood as an entangled Byzantine-Latin entity within elsewise predominantly Turkish territories. Located at the easternmost end of the Mediterranean basin, the imperial city with its faded (but soon to be revitalized) glory and the bustling Genoese outpost are treated by Clavijo as an intrinsic part of the Western hemisphere from whose westernmost end the Castilian embassy originated (Fig. 1).\textsuperscript{11} The account oscillates between satisfying curiosity about the East, and Timur’s court and realm in particular, and advertising for ‘supranational’ initiatives against the Muslim Turks—the new adversary with whom the Byzantines and other Christians in the Eastern Mediterranean (e.g. Latin Orders, Armenians, Georgians, Nestorians) were more familiar than Westerners like Clavijo.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_1}
\caption{Itinerary of the Castilian embassy. Map: Olof Heilo after López Estrada.}
\end{figure}

With regard to the donor portrait at the Peribleptos Church, however, Clavijo’s account in the \textit{Embajada} is striking in its detailed description of a ubiquitous composition: thirty architectural models, each one identifiable by an accompanying Greek inscription, were represented below the Virgin Mary. This description suggests an abrupt departure from conventional Byzantine iconography.\textsuperscript{13} Instead, this type of imagery—donors displayed in combination with abbreviated architectural depictions of endowed properties such as fortresses,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{tabular}{p{1\textwidth}}
\textsuperscript{10} That Clavijo “passes no judgement for good or for ill on the Greeks” […] because the purpose of his journey lay thousands of miles to the east”, cannot be confirmed; Angold, \textit{Decline of Byzantium}, 221. \\
\textsuperscript{11} One may ask whether a statement such as “[…] Constantinople is similar to Seville, while Pera is like Triana [the suburb of Seville on the west bank of the Guadalquivir] with the port and ships lying between the two.” (cited after Clavijo, \textit{Embassy} [tr. Le Strange], 64) conveyed more than mere topographic observation. For mental mapping strategies linking e.g. the Iberian Peninsula to China by alluding to their common latitudinal position, see Liu, \textit{Re-Orienting Medieval Spanish Travel Narratives}, 52. \\
\textsuperscript{13} Mango, \textit{Peribleptos Revisited}, 475; See also A. Cutler & A. M. Talbot, “Peribleptos Monastery,” in \textit{OBD}, vol. 3, 1629 “[…] representations of 30 castles and towns in the monastery’s domain”; A. Kazhdan, “Clavijo, Ruy González de,” in \textit{OBD}, vol. 1, 469; “[…] at whose entrance were represented 30 castles and towns allegedly granted to the church by an emperor Romanos; privileges listing the rights of the church to these castles and confirmed by wax and lead seals were displayed nearby.”
\end{tabular}
\end{footnotesize}
walled cities, city gates or towers—appears often in monastic contexts in the West. As such, the Peribleptos image requires attention, all the more so as this was one of the imperial monastic foundations occupied by a Latin religious order, namely by Venetian Benedictines from San Giorgio Maggiore, for some time during the Latin Empire (1204–61).14 The relevant passage in Clavijo’s description of the Peribleptos Monastery reads as follows:

And then, at the entrance of the body of the church, on the left-hand side, are represented many images, among them is an image of St. Mary. And next to her is an image of an emperor, and on the other side, an image of an empress. And at the feet of the image of St. Mary thirty cities and castles were represented with the inscribed names of each of them in Greek. And they said that these cities and castles belonged to the territory of this church, that they were given by an emperor, and the one who had given them had been named Romanos, and that he was entombed at the feet of the aforementioned image. There were some parchment documents attached, sealed with seals of wax and lead and they say that these were the privileges that the church received over the mentioned cities and castles.15

This description invites a discussion about types and possible meanings of abbreviated city representations in monastic contexts in Byzantium, and comparatively in the Latin West. As I see it, Clavijo’s report is above all a testimony to the shifting powers and borders, and to concurrent conflicts over disputed estates as Byzantine territories were reorganized following the Latin Conquest of Constantinople in April 1204 and within the larger context of Ottoman expansion. Familiar with the experience of the Iberian Peninsula’s century-long Reconquista, Clavijo must have known and recognized the mechanisms of shifting territories and changes of ownership also at work in the Easter Mediterranean.

The founder of the Peribleptos Monastery, Romanos III Argyros (1028–34), ascended the throne in 1028 by marrying Zoë Porphyrogenneta (1028–50). Prior to the Peribleptos project Romanos had donated substantial amounts of

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15 Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 120–21: “E luego a la entrada del cuerpo del la iglesia, a la mano esquiera, están muchas imagines figuradas, entre las cuales está una imagen de santa Maria. A par d’ella está de la una parte una imagen de emperador e, a la otra parte, otra imagen de emperatrix; e a los pies de la imagen de santa Maria, estavan figurados trenta castillos e ciudad’s, escritos los nombres de cada uno d’ellos en griego. E estas dichas ciudades e castillos dixieron que solían ser del señorío de aquella iglesia, que las oviera dado un emperador, e que la dotó, que oviera nombre Romano, e que allí yazía enterrado a los pies de aquella imagen; e que estavan colgados unos privilejos de cuero, sellados con sellos de cera e plomo, que dezían que eran los dichos privilejos que aquella iglesia oviera de las dichas ciudades e castillos.” English tr. by the author, cf. Mango, Sources and Documents, 217. I thank Martin Becker for kindly discussing the passage with me.

money plus an annual income of 80 gold pounds to the Great Church. Only large endowments would have justified having one’s portrait within Hagia Sophia—and indeed, the well-known Zoë and Constantine mosaic panel in the south gallery was originally probably a representation of Zoë with her first husband Romanos (Fig. 2).

But are we dealing with a genuine eleventh-century Byzantine iconography in the Peribleptos Monastery at all? Or can we possibly assume that the particular donor composition was commissioned during the Benedictine phase of the Peribleptos, thus sometime during the Latin Empire? Or, was it more likely accomplished after 1261 as argued by Sophia Kalopissi-Verti? Bearing in mind the transcultural character of the *Romania* from the thirteenth century onwards, and in particular the presence of Latin religious orders in the Eastern Mediterranean in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade, one may ask whether the inclusion of architectural

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models as part of the donor image of the Peribleptos may be better understood as a merger of a Western monastic and an otherwise conventional Byzantine donor composition.\textsuperscript{20} Details in Clavijo’s description arouse indeed suspicion. While he initially conveys a spatial correlation between the donor image and the donor allegedly interred below the image, Clavijo later describes Romanos’s sarcophagus “at the head of the church” where he found it stripped of his precious metal panelling by marauding crusaders.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, the reference to legal documents that had been ostensibly hung onto the walls of the church by the actual Greek community to underline the rightfulness of the claims, contribute to the ambiguous situation.

Having his Castilian audience in mind when compiling facts and fiction about foreign cultures,\textsuperscript{22} Clavijo could be sure to catch his readers’ attention by referring to this detail due to their distinct familiarity with iconic architectural imagery. The castillo (fortress, castle) had been a well-established and virtually omnipresent symbol in medieval Castile from the middle of the twelfth century onwards, especially used also in funerary contexts of royal family members in Las Huelgas, the Cistercian monastery in Burgos that served as burial site of the Castilian kings.\textsuperscript{23} Questions regarding the overall architectural design of the Peribleptos Church, as well the donor image’s medium (mosaic or painting), its exact location within the church building and its sponsorship and date must remain open.\textsuperscript{24} To be sure, Clavijo’s account is as valuable as other testimonies by foreign visitors to Constantinople, as long as we do not expect them to substitute the fragmented material evidence of Byzantine monuments.\textsuperscript{25}

One consequence of frequent changes in the leadership of imperial monasteries on the one hand, and territorial shifts which affected large areas of formerly Byzantine territories on the other, was the ultimate or intermediate loss of immovable monastic property to various parties.\textsuperscript{26} The new Latin dominance in formerly


\textsuperscript{21} One would assume an arcosolium in the narthex comparable to the spatial organisation of the tombs in the narthexes of the Chora Monastery, whereas the ‘head of the church’ seems to refer to the eastern end of the building; R. Ousterhout, The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul (Washington D.C. 1987). See also U. Weißbrod, „Hier liegt der Knecht Gottes…” Gräber in byzantinischen Kirchen und ihr Dekor (11. bis 15. Jahrhundert) (Wiesbaden 2003); Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 121: “[…] en el cabo de la iglesia, a la mano esquierda, estaba una grand sepultura de piedra de jaspe colorado, e allí jazía el dicho emperador Romano.”


\textsuperscript{24} The donor image in question was either located in the north part of a narthex, or in the north bay of the west aisle depending on what Clavijo meant by “entrance of the body of the church” (…a la entrada del cuerpo de la iglesia, Clavijo, Embajada [López Estrada], 120).


\textsuperscript{26} The new order of the broader landscape as negotiated in the Partitio terraorum imperii Romani was signed by the Crusader elites in October 1204; see F. Van Tricht, The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium: The Empire of Constantinople (1204–1228) (Leiden & Boston 2011), 41–53.
Byzantine territories as established in the early stages of the thirteenth century did not only generate a Latin Empire in Constantinople and Byzantine courts in exile for almost sixty years, but also numerous smaller principalities and spheres of influence with often blurred and changing borders. These shifts fostered conflicts, while the Ottoman expansion in the course of the fourteenth century further affected the territorially vague situation. 27 The passage in Clavijo’s account can be thus seen as a vivid record of the long lasting consequences and problems caused by the ongoing disruptions of established geospatial orders in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Before discussing comparable iconographies, a note on one of the primary functions of the Peribleptos Monastery may be allowed. If we believe Psellus’s characterization in the Chronographia, Romanos was a mercurial character obsessed with his building project on which he spent far too much money and efforts, boldly competing with Solomon and Justinian. 28 According to this biased narrative, the size and elaborate design of the new foundation resulted from miscalculation and indecision in aesthetic matters on the emperor’s side. 29 More recently, Örgü Dalgiç and Thomas Mathews underlined the importance of the innovative architectural design of the Peribleptos (cf. Fig. 3) as a prototype for various later projects, 30 while Paul Magdalino convincingly pointed to the trend to found monasteries by a number of emperors prior to Romanos III and his successors. 31 Thus, Romanos’s ambitious commission of the Peribleptos Monastery fits perfectly within this relatively new tradition. One remembers that the Church of the Holy Apostles, the traditional sepulchral church of the Byzantine emperors hitherto, was utterly overcrowded and could not accommodate further sarcophagi when Romanos ascended the throne. In 1028, Constantine VIII (1025–28), his predecessor, was the last emperor to be buried there. 32 The urgent necessity to create a suitable new imperial burial place by 1028 might have contributed to the unprecedented grandeur and speedy completion of the Peribleptos complex. 33

28 Psellus, Chronographia (Reinsch), III, 14, 142. According to Skylitzes the “emperor Romanos purchased the estate of Triakontaphyllos and transformed it into a monastery dedicated in the name of Our Sovereign Lady the Mother of God. No expense was spared but the subjects were sorely oppressed as they were obliged to convey the stones and other building materials.” Quoted from Skylitzes, Synopsis (tr. Wortley), 362–63; Skylitzes, Synopsis (Thurn), 384, 8, 15–19.
29 Psellus, Chronographia (Reinsch), III, 14–15, 142–149. See also R. Ousterhout, Master Builders of Byzantium (Princeton 1999), 88.
30 Mango, Peribleptos Revisited; D. Kuban, Istanbul: An Urban History (Istanbul 1996), 151; Dark, St. Mary Peribleptos, 656; Dalgiç & Mathews, Church of Peribleptos, 424–31.
32 Zoe’s marriage to Romanos is commonly understood as a continuation of the Macedonian dynasty, but according to Psellus it was Romanos’ intention to establish a new dynasty and era when ascending the throne (unrealistic as it may have been given Zoe’s advanced age), Psellus, Chronographia (Reinsch), III, 1, 120: οὕτω τούτον ὁ Ρωμανός, ὡσπερ ἀρχήν περίοδόν τὴν ἡγεμονίαν οἴρων, ἐπιθύμητος ἑαυτῷ εἰς τὸν πεντῆρον ἱστορίαν τὸ βασιλείαν γένος ἀπελευθήσεται, ἐκ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μακεδόνος ἐκφθαγμένου, εἰς μέλλουσαν ἄποικας γενεάς. When Romanos died in April 1034 (following a drowning incident in the imperial bath; Zoe’s role in this remains obscure), his corpse was transferred to his new foundation for burial, cf. Psellus, Chronographia (Reinsch), IV, 5, 172. See also P. Grierson, “The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337–1042),” in DOP 16 (1962), 3–60, 59; N. Asutay-Ellenberger & A. Ellenberger, Die Porphyryarkophage der osmanischen Kaiser. Versuch einer Beständigkeitserfassung, Zeitbestimmung und Zuordnung (Wiesbaden 2006), 10.
33 According to Magdalino, the Peribleptos Monastery’s unique feature is the lack of charitable institutions otherwise common for newly founded monastic complexes of the tenth to twelfth centuries,
Architectural representations in early Byzantine donation contexts

Since the Peribleptos Church has not survived, the depicted endowments by Romanos remain nameless, the more so as the monastery’s typikon, which normally would have listed all donated properties, is also lost. However, monastic communities maintained a good record of the various grants of mobile and immobile possessions endowed to their institution, since foundation charters containing such endowments were read aloud at regular intervals to the monastic community. Churches and monasteries could only function in the long run if the supply of goods was secured, salaries of clerics and other staff were paid, and buildings were maintained regularly. Right after the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and with more emphasis in 537, canons were issued stipulating that property once endowed to a monastery had to remain irrevocable and untouchable. Monasteries greatly benefited from such privileges and soon became wealthy landowners in Byzantium, while at the same time, legal conflicts about property issues emerged more often just as forged documents.


It was common practice to list possessions in the typikon, amongst other immobile property conferred to the monastery by the patron, see e.g. the eleventh century-rule of Michael Attaleiates for the Constantinopolitan Monastery of Christ Panoiktirmon. See J. Thomas & A. Constantinides-Hero (eds.), Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders’ Typika and Testaments (5 vols.) (Washington D.C. 2000), I, xiii, 360 (hereafter: BMFD).


From the eleventh century onwards further instability was caused due to new measures such as the charistike dorea (kitiorial rights obtained by an individual for obliging oneself to beautify and renovate ruinous monasteries), see E. Papagianni, “Legal Institutions and Practice in Matters of Monastic Property,” in A. Laiz (ed.), The Economic History of Byzantium (3 vols.) (Washington D.C. 2002), III, 1059–1069, 1063.


Fig. 3. Ground plan of the Peribleptos church. Olof Heilo after Dalgiç and Mathews, Church of Peribleptos p. 431 (Fig. 15).
The architectural representations of the Peribleptos composition are unique compared to other Middle Byzantine donor portraits, but we know of an earlier textile example in the capital and several floor mosaics in Jordan that might serve as iconographic comparanda. In his famous ekphrasis delivered on the occasion of the re-dedication of Hagia Sophia in 563, Paulos Silentiarios mentions a peplos with figurative representations. One side was decorated with Christ flanked by Peter and Paul in the center, while the border consisted of alternating scenes from the Life of Christ and architectural images of churches and hospitals, pious foundations by Justinian and Theodora. The imperial couple, flanking Virgin Mary, and Christ, respectively, was represented on another side of the altar cloth. If the peplos still existed in the early eleventh century, Romanos—being a former aikonomos of Hagia Sophia—would certainly have had access to it, or at least to inventories that might have described the precious item.

Floor mosaics in churches in Jordan provide further interesting prototypes. Indeed, the thirty estates at the Peribleptos could have been modelled on the architectural portraits of cities inscribed with their names represented on floor mosaics in various churches dating from the sixth to the eighth century. Examples can be found in the Church of the Acropolis in Ma’in built in 719/20, where Transjordanian cities, represented by “dismembered and recomposed” church building

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39 See *PmbZ*, no. 26935, 602.

elements such as “cupolas, facades, sloping or vaulted roofs, apses, and areas annexed to churches” are set in alternation with trees in a framing bordure, and the Church of St. Stephen in Umm al-Rasas (Kastron Mefaa) preserves a border occupied by framed architectural portraits of cities in an outer zone and architectural portraits combined with Nilotic scenes in an inner zone (Figs. 4–5). 41

41 Piccirillo, Mosaics of Jordan, 35.
Altogether, the floor mosaics in Jordan bear a wide range of architectural representations—some schematized, others with characteristic urban features, and almost all of them accompanied by toponyms allowing immediate identification. Some are embedded in landscapes such as the singular Madaba Map, which is a special case (Figs. 6–7). Others remain in a framing border zone surrounding the main motif in the center. The specific meaning of the city vignettes in churches erected under Muslim rule, remains obscure, yet for the purpose of imagining the Peribleptos donor image within genuine Byzantine iconographic traditions, it suffices to point to their existence. While an exact reconstruction of the Peribleptos composition eludes us, we can assume that the 30 estates were rendered as stylized, indistinctive city models.

One could also think of painted foundation charters as part of donor compositions in important Serbian monasteries like Studenica, Žiča or Gračanica, dating from the twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries. But these examples, comparable as they might appear, do not employ architectural representations other than the conventional church model in the hands of the donor. As noted by Cyril Mango, an interesting parallel, though again without any architectural representations, can be found in Late Byzantine Mistras, in the katholikon of the

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43 On the Madaba Map, see M. Piccirillo & E. Alliata, Madaba Map Centenary; A. Tishby (ed.), Holy Land in Maps (Jerusalem 2001), 66–69. A map-like rendition would make sense if the estates were all in a contiguous area, which was sometimes the case: The estates Attaleiates granted to his foundation in Constantinople were all located in Thrace; the immobile properties of Kosmosoteira were all concentrated in the area of the Maritza delta, see K. Smyrillis, “The Management of Monastic Estates: The Evidence of the Typika,” in DOP 56 (2003), 245–61, esp. 247, n. 6.

44 The framing city vignettes in churches of Jordan have been interpreted as representations of networking (monophysite) cities or political city alliances, see Piccirillo, Mosaics of Jordan, 28; P. Baumann, Spatantike Stifter, 169, interprets the city representations in the Church of St. Stephen as a visualization of an “Idealzustand der Vergangenheit.”

45 Most of the surviving typika of Middle Byzantine monasteries imply that monastic property was often scattered and not in a coherent region. For the possessions of the Pantokrator Monastery, founded in 1136, see Magdalino, Endowment. See also K. Smyrillis, La Fortune des grands monastères byzantins (fin du Xe-millénaire du XIVe siècle) (Paris 2006), 99–104, 127–132. Typika of the Lips Monastery and other monasteries in the Byzantine capital mention endowments distributed all over Thrace, Macedonia, Asia Minor and Constantinople, see BMFD, III, 1254–1286. This is also the case for the Monastery of the Mother of God Petritzonissa in Backovo, founded by Gregorios Pakourianos in 1083. According to the typika, the estates were located in Philippoupolis (Plovdiv), but also as distant as in the theme Armeniakon, see BMFD, II, 555.


47 The foundation charter of Studenica was written (or rather painted) on the wall of the church, cf. Sv. Sava, Sobranja dela (ed. T. Jovanović) (Belgrade 1998), 51–52. In Žiča, built around 1220, the content of two documents was written on the walls of the portico, see B. Živković, Žiča crteži fresaka (Belgrade 1985), 38–41; D. Sindik, Jedna ili devi štizke povelje? Istorijski časopis knj. XIV–XV (Belgrade 1963–65), 390–15. For Gračanica completed in 1321, see B. Živković, Gračanica povelja (Belgrade 1992); B. Todić, Gračanica (Belgrade 1988), fig. 5. I thank Ćedomila Marinković for the bibliographic references. See also Kalopissi-Verti, “Εγγραφα σε εγγραφές ναών.”
wealthiest monastery in the Morea, the Brontochion.\textsuperscript{48} Abbot Pachomios felt compelled to emphasize the possessions endowed to the monastery by Andronikos II between 1312 and 1320, by literally painting them onto the walls of the southern side room of the narthex. This endowment consisting of domains, villages, dependent churches, vineyards, olive groves and mills was confirmed by three chrysobulls, signed by Andronikos II, and a fourth one issued in November 1318 by Michael IX, who was then co-emperor.\textsuperscript{49}

It is difficult to assess what precisely prompted Clavijo to differentiate between ciudades and castillos. Are these terms used because two different types of architectural representations were discernible at the Peribleptos? Do they reflect terms used by the Greek monks or do they apply to fiscal terminology in medieval Castile?\textsuperscript{50} The reference to documents written on cuero (translated by Le Strange as steel,\textsuperscript{51} and more convincingly as leather [parchment] by Mango\textsuperscript{52}) “sealed with seals in lead and wax” that allegedly approved the privileges received by the monastery “over the aforesaid cities and castles” is also problematic, as one would traditionally expect chrysobulls.\textsuperscript{53} Furthermore, Clavijo does not specify who approved the original endowments. Is the mention of wax and lead seals a further reference to the impoverished state of Byzantium or are we possibly dealing with documents issued by other parties, for example the Patriarch? The usage of lead seals would imply the latter.\textsuperscript{54} Whether Byzantine privileges and sealing customs concerning the approval of monastic property were comparable to practices in Castile, whether Clavijo’s readership could understand such seemingly random details, and how reliable Clavijo’s observations actually are, remain open questions. Similar practices in both realms, however, would reinforce the notion of a shared “language of power” as postulated by Robert Ousterhout for Western, Byzantine, and Muslim elites in regards to medieval heraldry.\textsuperscript{55}

Visual strategies of claiming monastic property by Benedictines and Cistercians

It is striking that the closest parallels to specific details of the Peribleptos image can be found in Europe, where Benedictines and Cistercians often recorded their donation history also visually, in addition to common textual records such as

\textsuperscript{48} Smyrlis, Fortune, 38.
\textsuperscript{50} P. Magdalino, Endowment, 7; see also J. Irmsher, “Κάστρον,” in Matschke (ed.), Die byzantinische Stadt, 93–98.
\textsuperscript{51} Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 121; Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 40.
\textsuperscript{52} Mango, Sources and Documents, 217.
\textsuperscript{53} Quoted from Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 40. I thank Andreas Müller for kindly sharing information.
\textsuperscript{54} F. Dölger, Aus den Schatzkammern des Heiligen Berges. 115 Urkunden und 50 Urkundensiegel aus 10 Jahrhunderten. Textband (Munich 1948), 218, 316–19 (Goldsiegel) (Kaisersiegel), 319–22 (Bleisiegel).
In some cases, claims on donated estates under dispute were underlined by exactly this kind of iconography: architectural models accompanied by their names as symbols of specific estates (villages, fortified towns) combined with images of the donors and the receiving institution.

An interesting example is San Clemente a Cesauria, a Benedictine abbey in the province of Pescara founded in the second half of the ninth century. A bronze door, commissioned around 1200 under Abbot Johel presents 36 squares with high relief depictions of stylized fortresses (Fig. 8). The uniform fortresses on the door wings, only individualized by accompanying Latin inscriptions, represent estates donated of the monastery. Their presence on the door can be understood as a sophisticated record of a long and complex endowment history. Markus Späth concluded that the depicted fortresses did not represent actual claims raised by San Clemente. Instead, they collectively serve as a commemorative device rather than a legally motivated concept of recording the monastery’s immovable possessions. The iconic representation of privileges of the monastery was thus an ostentatious display of properties (elsewise listed in a cartulary which would also mention potential disputes and successful reclaims) and power—to the community and also to the outside world.

Further Benedictine examples from 1200 onwards appear in and around Trier. As elaborately discussed by Christine Sauer, the three so called *libri aurei* from

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Echternach, Prüm, and St. Maximin in Trier are precisely bound manuscripts that combine commemorative aspects of the founders and later benefactors with the history of the foundations and their privileges and properties. This can be stated in terms of the content of the books and also in terms of the iconographic program of the covers. Furthermore, a staurotheke from the Benedictine Abbey Sankt Matthias and a triptych-staurotheke from the likewise Benedictine Abbey of Mettlach bear interesting pictorial solutions for the act of commemorating individual donations of immobile property (figs. 9–10).

Fig. 9. Backside of the St. Matthias Staurotheke displaying founders with their endowments, Trier, ca. 1220. © Abtei Sankt Matthias Trier. Photo by Rita Heyen.

Fig. 10. Backside of the Mettlach Staurotheke displaying founders with their endowments, Trier, ca. 1220. Drawing by Kaspar Witlake after Sauer, Fundatio et Memoria, fig. 68.

The huge staurotheke from Sankt Matthias measuring 73 x 56 cm was executed by a local goldsmith’s workshop sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century to house a fragment of the True Cross which had been donated to the monastery by Heinrich of Ulmen, a prolific participant in the Fourth Crusade, best known as the carrier of the famous tenth century Limburg Staurotheke, now in the Limburg Cathedral.\(^6\) The general stylistic concept of the Mettlach Staurotheke is closely connected to the Limburg Staurotheke, which was donated to Stuben in 1208, and also served as a prototype for the later reliquary in St. Matthias. For our purpose, interesting details can be found on the rear side of the reliquaries. While the center is occupied by Christ enthroned and flanked by the four symbols of the Evangelists set in medallions, the composition is framed in both cases by two

horizontal stripes with donors holding endowments in the form of medallions that bear either the name of a village or an abbreviated representation of it. The donation history of the two institutions was commemorated by adding individual benefactors of the past to newly-made objects of considerable value for the monastic community and its status. In both cases the depicted donors, high-ranking figures of the past closely associated with Mettlach and St. Matthias proudly hold their endowments.

By contrast, the Monastery of Santi Vincenzo e Anastasio (Tre Fontane) in Rome, a foundation of Cilician monks, which became a Cistercian institution in 1140, is a good example of employing architectural ideograms in various media in the context of disputed property claims. When the abbey’s claim to twelve fortified towns in Tuscany, allegedly donated to the monastery by Charlemagne in 807 according to a (most likely forged) twelfth-century document, aroused protest by the neighboring community of San Paolo fuori le Mura, various measures were

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undertaken to underline these claims by visual means. The towns, represented as twelve fortresses, were incised on a now lost twelfth-century silver reliquary of St. Anastasios the Persian of which we know from a seventeenth-century record. The immovable property was also depicted in the portico known as Arco di Carlo Magno. These paintings in the portico of Santi Vincenzo e Anastasio, dating from the first third of the thirteenth century, are still visible today despite some damage; a series of watercolors by Antonio Eclissi made in the 1630s elucidate some of the lost details (Figs. 11–12). Here too, the endowment was recorded as architectural representations combining crenelated towers with hills and ponds representing the estates. Next to the Siege of Ansedonia-scene there was a donation scene with Pope Leo III and Charlemagne on one side and the monks of Tre Fontane on the other jointly holding a plaque which lists the conquered Maremma towns.

Spanish eyes? Architectural imagery in Castile

It is intriguing to understand Clavijo’s interest in architecture and, above all, his sensitivity to architectural imagery in the framework of a presumed overall familiarity with abbreviated architectural representations due to the abundant use of the castillo within his home culture. Generally, as recently discussed by Nikos Kontogiannis in terms of coinage, the triple-towered castle had become a widely used ideogram during the medieval period in Western Europe, and so it likely impacted corresponding iconographies of Late Byzantine coinage. For the visual self-perception and identity of medieval Castile, the eponymous castle was especially fundamental. In various media the kingdom of Castile employed an emblematic representation of a fortress as an intrinsic element of its royal imagery. The stylized architectural motif consisting of a square crenelated substructure pierced by an arched gate in the center with two flanking window openings and a second level with three rising towers was virtually omnipresent. Earliest textile examples can be linked to Alfonso VIII (1158-1214), founder of the Castilian dynasty. From approximately 1217 onwards the Casti-
lian coat of arms consisted of a stylized fortress and now, in addition, a lion rampant—representing the kingdom of León, which was unified with Castile in the same year. The royal garments of the Castilian rulers henceforward bore the coat of arms with both emblems as can be seen in a widely-known representation of the enthroned Alfonso X in the *Book of Games* dating to 1283 (Fig. 13).  

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figs. 14–15. The sarcophagi of Don Fernando de la Cerda and Don Alfonso de la Cerda, Monasterio de las Huelgas, Burgos. Photo by Flickr user ElCaminoDeSantiago092006, Wikimedia commons, licensed under the terms of cc-by-sa-2.0.**

69 Böse, *Cultures Re-Shaped*, 9; see also Cat. *Vestiduras Ricas* no. 3, 144–145. The castillo also appeared on tombs of the members of the royal dynasty in Las Huelgas and was also used as ornament of figurative wooden sculptures, see Cat. *Vestiduras Ricas*, 30, fig. 10; 63, fig. 24; 66, fig. 27 (Fernando de la Cerda).
More importantly in our context, the *castillo* also appears on royal sarcophagi in the famous Cistercian nunnery Santa María la Real de Las Huelgas in Burgos, the burial site of the Castilian royalty (Figs. 14–15). Clavijo must have expected a general familiarity among his readership with royal endowments and the problem of donated estates under dispute, in part due to property issues related to the Reconquista in the Iberian Peninsula. The donation of property to churches and monasteries for the purpose of posthumous commemoration was a widespread habit among Castilian elites from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. For the royal family it was one of the first noble duties to donate property to religious foundations or to fund one’s own monastery. Furthermore, crusading missions and newly founded orders of knights, such as the Santiago Order, enjoyed generous royal support; Castilian monarchs gladly employed orders of knights, such as the armed forces in the Reconquista. A miniature in a thirteenth-century cartulary of the Order of Santiago displays Alfonso VIII and his wife Eleonor as donors: Uclés, a successfully reconquered fortified town that was given to the newly founded order in 1174, is represented as a fortress with three towers flanked by the master of the Santiago Order and a priest (Fig. 16). The legally binding aspect of the assignment of property is represented most elaborately by the laces of a royal seal as connecting link between the two parties.

These iconographic comparisons invite bifocal observations. A great deal of abbreviated architectural representations existed in the Byzantine realm, particularly in churches and therefore in connection with pious donations. One could consequently argue that the Peribleptos iconography was part of a genuinely Byzantine visual culture that made ample use of architectural representations for

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72 See S. Ćurčić and E. Hadjitryphonos, *Architecture as Icon*. 
differently accentuated purposes. Embedded within a pristine Byzantine tradition, the Peribleptos composition known only through Clavijo’s observation could then very well be a donor image from the first third of the eleventh century employing city and fortress representations as symbols of endowments—the Early Byzantine examples discussed above provide a variety of iconographic models. Given the immense losses of Byzantine monuments, an accordingly lacunar body of iconographic evidence should not come as a surprise.\(^\text{73}\) If the donor image would have been commissioned after 1261—for example by Michael VIII who immediately after re-conquering the capital started to restore selected monuments, among them the Peribleptos Monastery\(^\text{74}\)—one would still speak of, and treat the image as a Byzantine composition. Yet, these reductive classifications appear inadequate given the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional landscape of Constantinople and formerly Byzantine territories that were heavily trodden by Western groups who brought their own traditions and concepts, as well as a distinct visual vocabulary. Monks and laymen of different Latin religious works were active in Constantinople before, during, and after the Latin Empire, though the range and impact of their activities, and especially their role as commissioners of art and architecture remain obscure due to patchy evidence. To the fragmented St. Francis cycle discovered in the late 1960s in the Monastery of the Theotokos Kyriotissa (Kalenderhane Camii)\(^\text{75}\) one can now add more recently found frescoes with Latin inscriptions in the former Dominican convent (Arap Camii), also executed sometime during the Latin Empire.\(^\text{76}\) Comparable original Benedictine works from San Giorgio Maggiore, are not known hitherto, but we do know that the Benedictines were in charge of St. Mary Peribleptos and other monasteries in Constantinople, as a consequence of Latin rule (cf. Fig. 17).\(^\text{77}\) According to Tsougarakis, the Benedictines of San Giorgio Maggiore benefited from the increasingly dominant role of the Venetians in the East since the twelfth century. Less interested in the evangelical mission than the Mendicants, one of their main aims was to administer monastic estates profitably. Inside and outside of Constantinople they managed to increase “their property through a series of donations.”\(^\text{78}\) The circumstances are not clear, but at a certain point they also acquired the Peribleptos Monastery, presumably from the Latin emperors of Constantinople.\(^\text{79}\) It is impossible to state how long this specific

\(^{73}\) Dalgic & Mathews, *Church of Peribleptos*, 431.


Latin monastic group was holding this particular foundation and what its main intentions were, but “the Benedictines of San Giorgio seem to have seen their possessions in the East as assets, to be exchanged with more valuable or useful ones, rather than as integral parts of their spiritual mission.” Did the Benedictines of San Giorgio possibly alienate properties of the Peribleptos, maybe for a third party, such as the Venetians or the Latin emperors? Or were they in charge of either claiming lands without any legal basis, or re-claiming already lost or disputed properties? Is it conceivable in this context that they commissioned an ‘original donor image’ in retrospect—a traditional Byzantine donor composition enriched by a ‘Western’ detail of thirty architectural icons representing the donated estates? It is generally hard to imagine artistic commissions in view of a financially troubled Latin Empire (1204–61); with more ease one would agree with Kalopissi-Verti and presume a Late Byzantine commission.

Fig. 17. Benedictine and Cluniac houses (black triangles), Dominican convents (white triangles) within the Latin Empire. Map by Olof Heilo after Mike Shand (Tsougarakis, Latin Religious Orders, 79, 168).

Constantinople and Pera in Clavijo’s report

If we finally take a closer look at the pages of the Embajada dedicated to Constantinople and Pera, some aspects seem especially remarkable. Clavijo and his companions had to stay five entire months on the Bosphorus—from 24 October

was similar, though here the status formerly enjoyed by the monasteries was crucial in deciding who would now control them: imperial monasteries came under the control of the state, patriarchal ones came under the control of the Latin Patriarch of Constantinople [...].

According to Venetian traditions, relics of St. Paul of Thebes were sent from the Peribleptos to Venice in 1240, see Tsougarakis, Latin Religious Orders, 82; Comte P. Riant, Exuviae Sacrae Constantinopolitanae. Préface de Jannic Durand (2 vols.) (Paris 2004), II, 263.

Tsougarakis, Latin Religious Orders, 85.
1403 to 20 March 1404. Yet, the description of Constantinople is organized like traditional pilgrim accounts, which list Constantinople’s mundane and spiritual must-see monuments that could be visited within a couple of days. In fact, Clavijo and his party spent only their first week on the Golden Horn in this manner. Clavijo’s report differs from earlier and contemporary pilgrim accounts by a certain degree of sobriety and accuracy explained by circulating Humanist ideas to which Clavijo was open. Furthermore, Clavijo’s much-appreciated distance, was the result of a professional attitude befitting an ambassador according to Michael Angold. The first part of the Embajada is indeed full of details which reveal the author’s access to actual geo-political, strategic information by using Genoese ships and relying on a well-working network of various stakeholders in the Aegean islands, and finally in Constantinople and Pera. Many seemingly en paissant references in his account can be understood as rooted in knowledge available only through intensive contacts with various groups in the Eastern Mediterranean. As a whole, the references fit well with the overall scope of Clavijo’s account: to mobilize against the Muslim Turks who are described as a potential threat to Christians based in the East, and to invoke empathy and identification with the future of Constantinople. As he travels onwards from Rhodes, Clavijo’s account will be punctuated by statements about territories now in Turkish hands—thus danger zones to be avoided by Christian ships—and references to Turkish attacks of various kinds. Later on, populated Turkish areas are contrasted with depopulated Greek areas; references to destroyed churches are frequent. And references to high-ranking military leaders in their struggle against Turkish raids are warning examples for the untrustworthiness of the Turks. Accordingly, a description of the sixth-century equestrian statue of Justinian standing by Hagia Sophia serves to recall the glorious days of the Byzantines, when the emperor and founder of the Great Church fought the ‘Turks’ of the past. The Byzantine capital at the edge of Europe—understood as a Christian stronghold under attack that enjoys a respite thanks to Timur’s recent victory over el Turco (Beyazit)—is now, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, more than ever viewed as belonging to the Western hemisphere: due to the Latin appropriation and reorganisation of the broader region in the context of the Fourth Crusade, and the reinforcement of Latin presence and power along with the Byzantine re-conquest of Constantinople in 1261 which enabled Genoese, but also Venetian, Catalan, and other Western groups to rise thanks to favourable trade privileges.

82 See above, n. 8.
83 “[...] los dichos embaxadores enviaron dezir al Emperador en como ellos avían en voluntad de ver e mirar aquella ciudad; otrosi de ver las sus reliquias e iglesias que en ella avía; e que le pedían por merced que se lo mandase mostrar.” Quoted from Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 117; Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 37–38. Manuel II provided horses and sent his Genoese relative, Ilario Doria, and further imperial household members to accompany the Castilians on their sightseeing tour. Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 114–117.
84 Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), xiv (Introduction).
85 Angold, Decline of Byzantium, 220–21.
86 Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 101, 102, 103, 113; Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 22, 23, 24, 36. See also Pryor, Geography, 165–73.
87 Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 150–51; Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 69–70.
88 Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 107–8, 149; Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 28–29, 68. The incorporation of such kind of news—in maltreatment of Christians, depopulation due to Turkish raids—is also discernible in Cristoforo Buondelmonti’s Liber insularum Archipelagi, see M. Balard, “Buondelmonti and the Holy War,” in R. Gertwagen & E. Jeffreys (eds.), Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in Honour of John Pryor (Farnham 2012), 278–84 (eBook).
89 Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 129; Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 47.
AWARE of the debates about the errores Graecorum to which Clavijo refers, he nevertheless explicitly stresses that the Greeks are a very pious people providing information about their liturgy, the various fasting periods and further details of Orthodox belief and practice. Other instances show his overall sympathy with the Orthodox Greeks. Clavijo’s perspective clearly stresses similarities rather than differences with the Byzantines, while it is unambiguous in the description of the Turks who are consistently unreliable and vicious. In this, Clavijo’s account differs from other Western reports that sometimes have a disparaging undertone when it comes to the contemporary Byzantines and their “ill-fated city” (Buondelmonti) or rank Byzantines behind Turks (Bertrandon de la Broquièrè).

Further details in Clavijo’s account can be read as indirect pleas for uniting the two Christian Churches. The description of the precious Passion relics in the Monastery of St. John of Petra culminates in joint veneration by Clavijo and his companions together with Byzantines who rushed to the shrine when they learned about the relic display on the occasion of the embassy’s visit. The sovereign of the Byzantines is described as a pious man who was just returning from Mass when the first meeting with the Castilians was due, and significantly as the father of three little children, in the manner of other Christian rulers. Manuel II was a well-known figure at various European courts, where he tried to promote a joint initiative against the Ottomans (1399–1402). He is furthermore described as procurator of the Passion Relics in Constantinople. Clavijo’s mentioning of the missing finger of the hand relic of St. Anne in the Monastery of St. Francis in Pera—allegedly cut off by Manuel to keep it among his private relics—sounds like an accusation in the first place, but contemporaneous readers probably also understood such behaviour as a sign of Manuel’s love for God and the saints. It is furthermore presented as a case of compensatory justice for in the same passage Clavijo mentions efforts of the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople to recover relics that had been taken away by Latin crusaders. Finally, to make sure that the main menace to be feared in the area are doubtlessly the Turks, he refers to the tomb of Philipp of Artois in St. Francis, a French count who was imprisoned by Beyazit in the Battle of Nikopolis. Likewise the tomb of the Lord of Truxi in St. Paul underlines Beyazit’s treacherous nature, as the Sultan poisoned him and some other captured French knights, despite having already received ransom money.”

90 Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 165, 167 (“gente muy devota”); Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 87, 89.
92 Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 138; Clavijo, Embassy (tr. Le Strange), 59.
93 Comparable to Henry III of Castile and León.
94 He was also recognized as a generous distributor of relics, also in the Iberian Peninsula, see Mergiali-Sahas, Holy Relics, 264–75; C. Marinesco, “Du nouveau sur les relations de Manuel II Paléologue (1391–1425) avec Espagne,” in Studi bizantini e neoollenici 7 (1953), 435–36.
95 Comparable to Louis IX of France.
97 Clavijo, Embajada (López Estrada), 149 with n. 153: “En el monesterio de sant Pablo jazía el señor de Truxín e otros cavalleros que’ll turco fezo matar con yervas, e después que los ovo rendido e rescivido el precio d’ellos.” According to López Estrada, the Lord of Truxin can be identified with a companion
Clavijo’s Dominican connection

A hitherto unaddressed group among the incoming Latin orders mentioned so far are the Dominicans. One of the most active Latin religious order in the Eastern Mediterranean, they were heavily committed to missionary work and the reunification of the two Churches on the one hand, and to advance a rich culture of writing theological and dogmatic treatises on the other.98 The Dominicans established themselves on the Bosporus from the 1230s onwards (cf. Fig. 17). After being expelled from Constantinople in 1261, they were closely associated with the convent of San Domenico in Pera, also known as St. Paul.99 The church and headquarters of the Dominican convent was turned into a mosque around 1475 and is known today as Arap Camii.100 It is represented most eminently in several versions of Cristoforo Buondelmonti’s so-called Map of Constantinople and Pera (Fig. 18).101 More recently, Nicholas Melvani stressed the important role of the Dominicans in Pera towards facilitating a dialogue between Greeks and Latins with the Union of the Churches as an ultimate goal.102 Claudine Delacroix-Besnier discussed in depth the relationship between Dominicans and the Churches of the East as well as the impact of polemic writings by Dominican authors based in Constantinople, Pera, and also in Caffa.103 Among Clavijo’s fellow diplomats was a Dominican friar and theologian by the name of Alfonso Paéz de Santa María. While half a century ago Sebastián Cirac Estopañan suggested that we identify Paéz rather than Clavijo as the author of the Embajada,104 the question of authorship has been decided in favour of Clavijo.105 However, based on a more comprehensive reading of the two chapters on Constantinople and Pera, it seems relevant to take Paéz’s, or more generally a Dominican impact on the diplomatic mission and Clavijo’s messages into consideration. Clavijo does not specify where exactly in Pera the Castilian ambassadors with the learned friar amongst them were based, but to presume St. Paul (as the Dominican convent St. Dominic in Pera is referred to by Clavijo) or one of the other Dominican establishments in Pera as a...

101 Cristoforo Buondelmonti was a Florentine Dominican priest, author and traveler, see C. Barsanti, “Il Panorama di Cristoforo Buondelmonti e le chiese latine di Costantinopoli,” in Monge & Pedone (eds.), *Domenicani a Costantinopoli*, 51–67. I thank Claudio Monge for kindly sharing the articles by Barsanti and Melvani prior to publication.
103 Delacroix-Besnier, *Dominicains*, 201–71.
104 S. Cirac Estopañan, “Tres monasterios de Constantinopla visitados por Españoles en el año 1403,” in *REB* 19 (1961), 358–81, 365. See also Clavijo, *Embajada* (López Estrada), 38: “Fray Alfonso Páez de Santa María puede ser, pues, otro candidato para la autoría de la obra o, al menos, para que esta sea algo más que un estricto documento cancelleresco.”
105 López Estrada considers Clavijo as main author, see “La ‘Embajada a Tamorlán’ Castellana como Libro de Relación entre Occidente y Oriente en la Edad Media,” in A. Temini (ed.), *Mélanges María Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti* (2 vols.) (Zaghouan 1999), I, 73–80; Mason, *Embajada a Tamorlán*. 
host institution is probably not unlikely in view of the larger framework of the diplomatic contacts between Castile and Timur’s realm, the activities of Dominicans in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions, and Alfonso Paéz de Santa María’s participation in the embassy. Close ties and contacts to the Dominicans (and also to the Franciscans being the other major Latin religious group) in Pera would explain Clavijo’s apparent access to a wide range of ecclesiastic information ranging from theoretical and doctrinaire questions to liturgical details, litigation, gossip and stereotypes. The talkativeness of the Latin and Greek monks at the various shrines of Constantinople and Pera that Clavijo and his companions visited might have had something to do with the constellation of the visiting group.

Due to the lack of material evidence we will continue to trawl accounts like Clavijo’s *Embajada* for information on specific monuments of Byzantine Constantinople, while hoping at the same time that new relevant textual and material evidence will come to light. In the case of the Peribleptos Monastery the scarce evidence does not allow us to solve the questions initially posed, but the discussion of the donor composition within the broader framework of Clavijo’s account has triggered new questions related to a very entangled geopolitical and cultural space where clear-cut categorizations and classifications mostly fail. A closer look at Clavijo’s description of Constantinople demonstrates that Genoese Pera was conceived as a connecting limb between the Western Mediterranean on the one side, and Constantinople and what lied further east- and northwards on the other; the notion of Genoese Pera as a center and crossroad, and in the words of Delacroix-Besnier as a trampoline for Westerners on their way further to the East, can be very well comprehended.

It remains difficult to understand how informed or clueless, how attentive or distracted, how impartial or biased a privileged visitor like Clavijo was. How much did he remember correctly when he ultimately put together his account years after the trip? And what in the *Embajada* might be ascribed to manipulations by later copyists, printers, and editors? How were such texts perceived and understood in their time, after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, and what can we further extract from them today? Comparative approaches might reveal congruencies and deviations of accounts like those of Clavijo and others that were based on real and imagined travels in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. To examine in broader interdisciplinary enquiries how such primarily descriptive texts worked, how programmatic they were and to what extent they served as carriers of theological and political thought and propaganda in the guise of entertaining

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107 The main guide of the Castilians during their first week in Constantinople was the Genoese Ilario Doria who belonged to one of the influential families in Pera with close ties to the Convent of St. Paul (St. Dominic). Various members of this family were buried within the Dominican convent as surviving tomb stones attest, see Melvani, *Dominicans in Byzantium*, 44. On the family relation between Manuel II and Ilario Doria, see T. Ganchou, “Ilario Doria, Le gambros génois de Manuel II Palaiologos: beau-frère ou gendre?” in REB 66 (2008), 71–94.


travelogues would be a complex, time consuming, and yet very worthwhile task. Admittedly, more questions have been raised than answers delivered. But the murky waters of the late medieval Eastern Mediterranean—the changeable constellations, shifts and reorganizations of territories and institutions following the Fourth Crusade, the increasing ethnic, confessional, institutional, and artistic diversity on the one hand, and the patchy material evidence on the other—prevent neat assignments and narratives.

Fig. 18. Map of Constantinople and Pera, in Cristoforo Buondelmonti’s Liber insularum Archipelagi, Ms. Plut. 25.29, f. 42r, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, 15th century (Reproduced with kind permission of MiBACT).