CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of the Premodern World

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BREPOLS

A BYZANTINE CENTURY

Political, Colonial, and National Uses of Neo-Byzantine Architecture, 1820s–1920s

edited by
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A MOSAIC OF BYZANTIUMS

Neo-Byzantine Style Across
a Century of Dreams and Empires

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It was not until the 1970s that an art or architectural historian could admit to liking a nineteenth-century church without being taken for a sentimental amateur or an apologist for bad taste. How, after all, could one appreciate the imposing Neo-Byzantine presence of the Sacré-Cœur of Montmartre [**fig. 1**], now the second most visited monument in Paris yet long subject to the same dismissive mockery as Rome's "typewriter," the Vittoriano?[1] Although this may sound slightly caricatural, Bruno Foucart explicitly addressed the issue in 1974 in a provocatively titled essay "How Can One Like a Nineteenth-Century Church, or the Rehabilitation of Pastiche."[2] There, Foucart called for a reassessment of historicist architecture and of the intellectual framework through which it had long been dismissed. As he urged, the task awaiting scholars was to:

> "[...] restore the full value of the prefix *neo*. Newness can be, first and foremost, the surprise of a resurgence, which we need to re-examine with the eyes of contemporaries; it can also be, strictly speaking, a new Gothic, a new Romanesque, a new Byzantine [...] whose components, taken up and translated, express a new sensibility, a new style."[3]

Foucart invited us to consider the emergence of these styles not as mere pastiche, but as decisive moments in the redefinition of art and architecture within a century marked by eclecticism and transformation. Reinvention, in this perspective, emerges not as imitation but as creation. Of course, this argument must also be viewed alongside other interpretations, such as Anthony Kaldellis's observation that "the terms 'new' and 'neo' can also point to a more ambiguous relationship to a canonical past, where the 'new' lacks the authority of the old and yet still strives to live up to it, as we see in Neo-Latin and Neo-Hellenism (i.e., modern Greece and the modern Greeks)."[4] Both dimensions of the *neo*, the inventive and the derivative, coexist within the nineteenth century's engagement with Byzantine forms.

To navigate this complexity, this essay opens the way to the twelve contributions gathered in this volume with a twofold aim. It first sketches the major historiographical currents that have defined the study of the Neo-Byzantine

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1   In 1985, it is described as a *"prothèse blafarde nommée 'Sacré-Cœur' de Montmartre, chargée de rendre visible dans le paysage parisien l'un des sommets de la contre-révolution"*, entry "Abadie", in *Encyclopédie des nuisances. Dictionnaire de la déraison dans les arts, les sciences & les métiers*, (May 1985), pp. 46–48, p. 46. On the monument to Victor Emanuel ii in Rome, see Catherine Brice, *Monumentalité publique et politique à Rome. Le Vittoriano*, Rome 1998.

2   Bruno Foucart, "Comment peut-on aimer une église du xixe siècle, ou de la réhabilitation du pastiche", *Monuments historiques de la France*, 1 (1974), pp. 64–71.

3   "[...] *redonner toute sa valeur au préfixe* néo. *La nouveauté, ce peut être d'abord la surprise d'une résurgence, qu'il faut revoir avec l'œil des contemporains; ce peut être aussi, à la lettre, un nouveau gothique, un nouveau roman, un nouveau byzantin* [...] *dont les composantes, reprises et traduites, expriment une sensibilité, un style neuf." Ibidem*, pp. 64–65.

4   Anthony Kaldellis, *The Case for East Roman Studies*, Leeds 2024, p. 43.

[fig. 1] Basilique of the Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre, Paris, architect Paul Abadie, 1875–1919

style. It then turns to the geographical contours of the project "Dreaming Byzantium in Nineteenth-Century France," from which this volume emerges. A series of examples shows how the Neo-Byzantine in France operated at the crossroads of scholarship, science, politics, religion, and society, bringing into focus the broader argument of the volume: the ways in which Neo-Byzantine references were mobilized over a long century marked by the political, colonial, and national instrumentalization of this architectural language.

A FRAGMENTED HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the wake of Foucart's appeal, the period between 1970 and 1990 witnessed pioneering studies that established the foundations for a more nuanced understanding of historicist and eclectic architectural culture.[5] Comparable developments took place in Germany and Austria as early as the 1970s, with attention to major figures such as Heinrich Hübsch or Theophil Hansen, as well as, to a lesser extent, in Italy.[6] In Anglo-American scholarship, key figures

5   E.g., Jean-Michel Leniaud, *Jean-Baptiste Lassus (1807–1857) ou le temps retrouvé des cathédrales*, Paris 1980; François Loyer, *Le siècle de l'industrie*, Paris/Geneva 1983.
6   In German-speaking literature, see, e.g., Villads Villadsen, "Studien uber den byzantinischen Einfluß auf die europäische Architektur des 19. Jahrhunderts", *Hafnia. Copenhagen Papers in the History of Art*, 5 (1978), pp. 43–77;

such as Robin Middleton and David Watkin played a decisive role in shaping the study and periodization of nineteenth-century architectural styles.[7] What followed was a succession of studies reaching into the 1990s devoted to broader themes, architects, buildings, cities, and source typologies.[8]

In this context, the Byzantine revival, or Neo-Byzantine, emerged as but one of the many expressions of historicism, often approached through the lens of selected themes. Figures instrumental for the notion of Neo-Byzantine such as Paul Abadie, for example, became the focus of studies during the 1980s.[9] Abadie's restorations at Saint-Front in Périgueux [fig. 2] and Saint-Pierre in Angoulême in the 1850s constitute the first true Neo-Byzantine

Renate Wagner-Rieger, Mara Reissberger, *Theophil Hansen*, Wiesbaden 1980. For Italy, see, e.g., Lucio Franchini, "Il cimitero monumentale di Milano nel dibattito sull'electtismo nell'architettura funeraria", *Arte lombarda*, 68/69, 1–2 (1984), pp. 79–95.

7   David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture: The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement*, Oxford 1977; Robin D. Middleton, David Watkin, *Architettura moderna*, Venice 1977, first ed. in Italian and in English as *Neoclassical and 19th Century Architecture*, 2 vols, London / New York 1980; Robin D. Middleton, *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth-Century French Architecture*, Cambridge, MA, 1982.

8   See the synthesis in Laurent Baridon, "L'historiographie de l'architecture au XIXe siècle : périodiser l'historicisme?", *Perspective*, 4 (2008), pp. 715–732, with a rich bibliography.

9   *Entre archéologie et modernité. Paul Abadie, architecte, 1812–1884*, cat. exh. (Musée d'Angoulême, October 21, 1984 – January 13, 1985), Marcel Durliot ed., Angoulême 1984; Paul Abadie, architecte: 1812–1884, cat. exh. (Musée national des monuments français, Paris, November 4, 1988 – January 16, 1989), Claude Laroche ed., Paris 1988.

experiments on French soil. Abadie's approach was impacted by the scholarship of his time, particularly Félix de Verneilh's *L'architecture byzantine en France*, in which the author suggests that echoes of Byzantine architecture could be found in France, identifying in particular the church of Saint-Front as a direct descendant of the lost Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.[10] Beyond restoration, Abadie translated these ideas into new architectural realities, most famously in his most contentious creation, the Sacré-Cœur of Montmartre.

Most of the works on the topic come from architectural history, while art historians largely ignored it, a divide that, as Alina Payne noted in 1999, reflects a "suspended dialogue" born of specialization, with each field turning away from the other.[11] In direct engagement with this disciplinary rift, Barry Bergdoll's work deserves particular attention, especially his monograph on Léon Vaudoyer.[12] Through Vaudoyer, architect of Marseille's Neo-Byzantine cathedral and a key figure in modern architectural thought, Bergdoll clarified fundamental issues in nineteenth-century historicism, from the tensions between industry and modernity to the uses of historical reference and the religious and political forces that transformed urban space. His monograph remains one of the earliest efforts to reinsert historicist architecture into a broader panorama where political, religious, and artistic concerns are tightly interwoven in the making of the Neo-Byzantine. In *European Architecture 1750–1890*, he similarly sought to move beyond entrenched disciplinary frameworks by adopting a thematic approach that traced shared problems across the period in both art and architecture.[13] Among them, the formation of historical consciousness, the rise of scientific culture, and the emergence of new patrons are issues that also inform the present volume.

Following a more self-reflective turn and a renewed engagement with the historiography of the field, in the 2000s art history again turned to historicism, this time not as a derivative field but as a subject worthy of sustained inquiry

10   Félix de Verneilh, *L'architecture byzantine en France. Saint-Front de Périgueux et les églises à coupoles de l'Aquitaine*, Paris 1851. On De Verneilh's theory, see Adrien Palladino "Byzance à Conques? An Unrealized Dream of 'Neo-Byzantine' Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France", in *Contextualizing Conques: Imaginaries, Narratives & Geographies*, Ivan Foletti *et al.* eds, Brno/Turnhout 2023 (= *Convivium Supplementum*, 2 [2023]), pp. 24–41. For an overview on the Apostoleion, see *The Holy Apostles: a Lost Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past*, Margaret Mullett, Robert G. Ousterhout eds, Washington, D.C. 2020.

11   A notable exception is Anthony Cutler, "The Tyranny of Hagia Sophia: Notes on Greek Orthodox Church Design in the United States", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 31/1 (1972), pp. 38–50; see Alina A. Payne, Architectural History and the History of Art: A Suspended Dialogue, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58/3 (1999), pp. 292–299.

12   Barry Bergdoll, *Léon Vaudoyer: historicism in the age of industry*, New York / Cambridge, MA / London 1994; the book followed an exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay, *Les Vaudoyer: une dynastie d'architectes*, cat. exh. (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, October 22, 1991 – January 12, 1992), Barry Bergdoll, Daphné Doublet, Antoinette Le Normand-Romain eds, Paris 1991.

13   Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture 1750–1890*, New York 2000.

in its own right.[14] Within this intellectual climate emerged Jean Nayrolles's study on the invention of "Romanesque" art, in which the "Byzantine" occupies a central role.[15] Drawing primarily on French historiography, Nayrolles explicitly addressed the dense interplay between art-historical discourse, scientific ideas, ideological construction, and the formation of a vocabulary whose effects proved remarkably durable. At various moments, the adjective "Byzantine" was applied to what would later be defined as "Romanesque," while other designations — "Neo-Greek," "Romano-Byzantine," "Lombard," or the German *Rundbogenstil* ("round-arch style") — were used to describe hybrid or transitional idioms.[16] To these one may add the labels generated by nineteenth-century architectural Orientalism — "Moorish," "Neo-Turkish," "Neo-Persian," among others — which likewise absorbed, however obliquely, elements drawn from the architecture of the Eastern Roman Empire and from the enduring fantasy of Byzantium.[17]

Published in the same years, J. Barrie Bullen's *Byzantium Rediscovered* turned instead to questions of aesthetics and artistic reception.[18] In this book, Bullen examined the renewed vitality of the Byzantine reference across Germany, France, Austria, Britain, and the United States, while largely setting aside its prominence in Eastern and Central Europe, where, as he noted, "Byzantium was experienced as a survival rather than a revival."[19] This framing exposed a larger historiographical paradox: Byzantium's reception appeared more paradoxical in the West of Europe than in regions that could more directly claim its legacy, a result of both nationalist narratives in Eastern and Southeastern Europe and the colonial gaze of Western observers. The outcome was an uneven map of the Neo-Byzantine, where "inheritance" became a political construct. In Central and Eastern Europe in particular, the style indeed functioned as a means of negotiating faith, ethnicity, and collective

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14   See, e.g., Simona Talenti, *L'histoire de l'architecture en France : émergence d'une discipline, 1863–1914,* Paris 2000 and *L'architecture religieuse au xixᵉ siècle : entre éclectisme et rationalisme,* conference proceedings (Sorbonne, Paris, September 21–22, 2000), Bruno Foucart, Françoise Hamon eds, Paris 2006. On *patrimoine,* see esp. Françoise Bercé, *Des Monuments historiques au patrimoine, du xviiiᵉ siècle à nos jours,* Paris 2000. See also Roland Recht, *Penser le Patrimoine : mise en scène et mise en ordre de l'art,* Paris 1998; *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art en France au xixᵉ siècle,* Roland Recht, Philippe Sénéchal, Claire Barbillon, François-René Martin eds, Paris 2008.

15   Jean Nayrolles, *L'Invention de l'art roman à l'époque moderne (xviiiᵉ–xixᵉ siècles),* Rennes 2005.

16   Lei Huang, "L'invention de l'expression 'architecture romane' et ses traductions: réception d'un terme architectural et stylistique dans l'historiographie du xixᵉ siècle", in *Traduire l'architecture. Texte et image, un passage vers la création?,* Robert Carvais *et al.* eds, Paris 2015, pp. 97–105 and the fundamental article of David B. Brownlee, "Neugriechisch/Néo-Grec: The German Vocabulary of French Romantic Architecture", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* 50/1 (1991), pp. 18–21.

17   See, e.g., *Mudejarismo and Moorish Revival in Europe. Cultural Negotiations and Artistic Translations in the Middle Ages and 19ᵗʰ-century Historicism,* Francine Giese ed., Leiden / New York 2021; *L'Orientalisme architectural, entre imaginaires et savoirs,* Nabila Oulebsir, Mercedes Volait eds, Paris 2009; Ivan Davidson Kalmar, "Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews and Synagogue Architecture", *Jewish Social Studies,* 7 (2001), pp. 68–100.

18   J. B. Bullen, *Byzantium Rediscovered,* London 2003.

19   *Ibidem,* p. 229.

identity, and in the Orthodox world its revival was closely tied to national self-definition, supplying the symbolic vocabulary through which Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, Greece, and others asserted historical legitimacy.[20] Recent scholarship has shown that the opposition between "revival" and "survival" is far less clear-cut, as for example in post-independence Greece, where the Byzantine reference was simultaneously exported and reimported as a foreign construct.[21] In Russia, the Neo-Byzantine served simultaneously to affirm Orthodox continuity and Moscow's claim as the "Third Rome," while also acting as a vehicle of imperial ambition, using Byzantine forms to legitimize territorial expansion and to assert spiritual supremacy over the Orthodox world from the Balkans to the Caucasus.[22] The same stylistic vocabulary proved

20   The bibliography is exponential and too vast to be cited systematically, see Maximilian Hartmuth, *The Kaiser's Mosques. Islamic Architecture and Orientalizing Style in Habsburg Bosnia, 1878–1918*, New York *et al.* 2024; *The Governance of Style. Public buildings in Central Europe, 1780–1920*, Maximilian Hartmuth *et al.* eds, Vienna 2023; the essays by Anna Adashinskaya, Cosmin Minea, Timo Hagen, and Ada Hajdu in *Periodization in the Art Historiographies of Central and Eastern Europe*, Shona Kallestrup *et al.* eds, London 2022; Ljubomir Milanović, "Re-animation of Byzantium: the Case of the Chapel of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Belgrade", *Études byzantines et post-byzantines*, 3 (2021), pp. 219–237; Ada Hajdu, "The Search for National Architectural Styles in Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria from the Mid-nineteenth Century to World War I", in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans – Volume 4: Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-)Representations*, Roumen Dontchev Daskalov *et al.* eds, Leiden 2017, pp. 394–439; Dragan Damjanović, "The Neo-Byzantine Style in the Architecture of Serbian Orthodox Churches in 19ᵗʰ-Century Croatia", in *Imagining the Past. The Reception of the Middle Ages in Serbian Art from the 18ᵗʰ to the 21ˢᵗ Century*, Lidija Merenik, Vladimir Simić, Igor Borozan eds, Belgrade 2016, pp. 107–118; Jelena Bogdanović, "Evocations of Byzantium in Zenitist Avant-Garde Architecture", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 75/3 (2016), pp. 299–317; Aleksandar Ignjatović, "Competing Byzantinisms: The Architectural Imaginations of the Balkan Nations at the Paris World Exhibition in 1900", in *Ephemeral Architecture in Central-Eastern Europe in the 19ᵗʰ and 20ᵗʰ Centuries*, Miklós Székely ed., Paris/Budapest 2015, pp. 107–122; Aleksandar Ignjatović, "Byzantium Evolutionized: Architectural History and National Identity in Turn-of-the-Century Serbia", in *Regimes of Historicity in Southeastern and Northern Europe, 1890–1945. Discourses of Identity and Temporality*, Diana Mishkova, Balázs Trencsényi, Marja Jalava eds, New York 2014, pp. 254–274; Aleksandar Kadijević, *Jedan vek traženja nacionalnog stila u srpskoj arhitekturi (sredina xix – sredina xx veka)* [A Century of Searching for a National Style in Serbian Architecture (Mid-19ᵗʰ – Mid-20ᵗʰ Century)], Belgrade 2007; Ákos Moravánszky, *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867–1918*, Cambridge, MA, 1998; on Greece, see, e.g., Panayota Volti, "La cathédrale de l'Annonciation d'Athènes, chantier fondateur de l'architecture néobyzantine. Une dynamique plurielle diachronique", *Histoire de l'art*, 86 (2020), pp. 207–220; François Loyer, *L'architecture de la Grèce au xixᵉ siècle (1821–1912)*, Athens 2017; Stamatios T. Chondrogiannis, *Byzantium in the World. Artistic, Cultural & Ideological Legacy from the 19ᵗʰ to the 21ˢᵗ Century*, Thessaloniki 2017. See also Adrien Palladino, Jan Galeta, "An Inherited Mirage: Tracing Theory, Architecture, and Ideologies of the 'Neo-Byzantine' Style between France and Central Europe (1820s–1890s)", *Umění/Art*, forthcoming (2025).

21   See Effie F. Athanassopoulos, "Byzantine Monuments and Architectural 'Cleansing' in Nineteenth-Century Athens", in *Héritages de Byzance en Europe du Sud-Est à l'époque moderne et contemporaine*, Olivier Delouis, Anne Couderc, Petre Guran eds, Athens 2013, pp. 195–218; Nikos Magouliotis, "French architects and 'églises grecques': the discovery of Byzantine architecture in Greece, 1820s–1840s", *The Journal of Architecture*, 25 (2020), pp. 1028–1054; Eleni Anna Chlepa, "La découverte de l'héritage médiéval : de l'historicisme romantique à l'architecture néo-byzantine", in *Paris-Athènes : naissance de la Grèce moderne, 1675–1919*, Jean-Luc Martinez ed., Paris 2021, pp. 320–329; Volti, "La cathédrale" (n. 20); Loyer, *L'architecture* (n. 20), esp. pp. 107–140; Nikolaos Karydis, "Discovering the Byzantine Art of Building: Lectures at the RIBA, the Royal Academy and the London Architectural Society, 1843–58", *Architectural History*, 63 (2020), pp. 171–190; Kostis Kourelis, "Early Travelers in Greece and the Invention of Medieval Architectural History," in *The Architecture of Tourism: Perceptions, Performance and Space*, D. Medina Lasansky, Brian McLaren eds, Oxford 2004, pp. 37–52. See also several essays in the volume *Byzantium and the British Heritage. Byzantine Influences on the Arts and Crafts Movement*, Amalia G. Kakissis ed., London / New York 2023.

22   Ivan Foletti, *Russian Imperialism and the Medieval Past*, York 2024; Jurij Savel'ev, *Vizantijskij stil' v arxitekture Rossii* [The Byzantine Style in Russian Architecture], Saint Petersburg 2005; *Idem, Iskusstvo istorizma i gosudarstvennyj zakaz* [The Art of Historicism and State Commissions], Moscow 2008.

remarkably adaptable. The spread of Neo-Byzantine synagogues across Central Europe, from Prague to Sofia, shows how architectural form mediated between integration and distinction. Byzantine and broadly "Oriental" motifs enabled a nuanced negotiation of Jewish identity, asserting modernity and cultural rootedness while responding to an Orientalizing gaze that both exoticized and excluded.[23] Last but not least, a growing body of research has considered the use of the Neo-Byzantine as an architecture of colonialism, notably in Northern Africa.[24] This topic is closely tied to a wider critical shift in architectural and art history that questions the categories on which the discipline rests. Scholars, such as Charles L. Davis II, have increasingly shown that stylistic labels and classificatory systems were forged within, and still reproduce, the racist and racialized frameworks of their formation.[25] The term "Byzantine" itself is bound up in these histories, carrying the epistemic and ideological legacies that marked its very invention.

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PARADIGM: HAGIA SOPHIA

Within the historiography on the Neo-Byzantine, Robert S. Nelson's *Hagia Sophia, 1850–1950* deserves particular mention: centered on the Great Church, it offers a broad perspective on the Western reception of Byzantine architecture throughout the nineteenth century.[26] As the author notes in the preface, the book must be seen within the intellectual climate of the 1990s, a decade

23   For the broader context, Dominique Jarrassé, "L'architecture des synagogues au xixᵉ siècle: entre francisation et 'sémitisation'", *Revue des études juives*, 155/1–2 (1996), pp. 319–326; *Idem, Synagogues: Architecture and Jewish Identity*, Paris 2001; Kalmar, "Moorish Style" (n. 17). Amongst a large bibliography, in recent years see, e.g., Gülferi Akın Ertek, "A 19th-Century Representation of Identity: An Evaluation of the Architectural Design of the Yüksek Kaldırım Ashkenazi Synagogue (Austrian Temple) in Istanbul", *Religions*, 16/11 (2025), 1354, with a rich bibliography; Fani Gargova, *The Central Synagogue of Sofia. Westernization, Urban Change, and Religious Reform*, Cologne 2024; Carsten L. Wilke, "Building the Great Synagogue of Pest: Moorish Revival Architecture and the European-Ottoman Alliance in the Crimean War", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 111 (2021), pp. 444–469; and the articles by Hildegard Frübis and Barbara von Orelli-Messerli in *The Power of Symbols: The Alhambra in a Global Perspective*, Francine Giese, Ariane Varela Braga eds, Bern 2018. See also Fani Gargova's paper in this volume, pp. 118–133.

24   See, e.g., Ralph Ghoche, "Erasing the Ketchaoua Mosques. Catholicism, Assimilation, and Civic Identity in France and Algeria", in *Neocolonialism and Built Heritage. Echoes of Empire in Africa, Asia, and Europe*, Daniel E. Coslett ed., London / New York 2019, pp. 87–105; Daniel E. Coslett, "(Re)creating a Christian Image Abroad: The Catholic Cathedrals of Protectorate-era Tunis", in *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities across the Islamic World*, Mohammad Gharipour ed., Boston 2015, pp. 353–375; Dalila Senhadji, "La cathédrale du Sacré-Cœur d'Oran (1898–1913). Options architecturales, entre jeux d'acteurs et enjeux idéologiques", *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 44/2 (2014), pp. 249–278; Leonard R. Koos, "Razzia in Stone: Building Colonial Algiers, 1830–1900", in *Institutions and Power in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture*, David Evans, Kate Griffiths eds, Amsterdam / New York 2011, pp. 149–166; Nabila Oulebsir, *Les Usages du patrimoine: monuments, musées et politique colonial en Algérie (1830–1930)*, Paris 2004; Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism and French North Africa*, Berkeley 2003. An essential book remains Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations. Algiers under French Rule*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / Oxford 1997.

25   See esp. Charles L. Davis II, *Building Character. The Racial Politics of Modern Architectural Style*, Pittsburgh 2021; *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightment to the Present*, Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, Mabel O. Wilson eds, Pittsburgh 2020.

26   Robert S. Nelson, *Hagia Sophia, 1850–1950: Holy Wisdom, Modern Monument*, Chicago 2004.

marked by renewed attention to historiography and to "medievalism," as scholars sought to understand both how art history emerged through its entanglement with cultural, political, and religious concerns, and how the very perception of medieval art is inseparable from modernity's fantasies, aspirations, and reinventions of the past.[27] In 1989, Nelson, Linda Seidel, and Michael Camille received a Getty Trust grant to investigate the modern lens through which the Middle Ages had been constructed and its monuments interpreted. Their collaboration produced three studies examining key moments in this reinvention: the reception of the "Romanesque" at Saint-Lazare in Autun, Viollet-le-Duc's "Gothic" fantasies at Notre-Dame, and the Western myth of the "Byzantine" Hagia Sophia.[28] The renewed interest in the "Byzantine" is inseparable from the broader nineteenth-century rediscovery of the "Western" Middle Ages. Within this context, Nelson showed how Hagia Sophia modelled Europe's imagination of an "Eastern" Middle Ages. From early modern times, and far more forcefully in the nineteenth century, the Great Church in the "lost" Christian capital became a singular model for the European architectural imagination.[29]

Hagia Sophia's reception is thus inseparable from a dreamed Byzantium determined by political ambition, the rise of Byzantine studies, Orientalism, and modernism. For the concerns of this volume, these "medievalist" imaginaries grew directly out of large restoration projects that were, at their core, profoundly political.[30] In the 1840s, one may thus draw a parallel between two of the century's most famous restorations. In Paris, starting from 1843, Notre-Dame rose anew under Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, the great restorer and inventor of the Middle Ages, whose project came to embody the monumental ambitions of the French Second Empire. At the very moment when Baron Haussmann was remodeling Paris in the name of modernity, Viollet-le-Duc's Gothic revival stood as both counterpart and complement, a medieval crown for an imperial regime [fig. 3].[31] At the opposite edge of Europe and only few

27   William J. Diebold, "Medievalism", *Studies in Iconography*, 33 (2012), pp. 247–256. Recently, see *Medieval Art, Modern Politics*, Brigitte Buettner, William J. Diebold eds, Berlin/Boston 2025; Philippe Cordez, "Introduction: Art médiéval et médiévalisme", in *Art médiéval et médiévalisme, Idem* ed., Paris 2024, pp. 15–17.

28   Respectively corresponding to Linda Seidel, *Legends in Limestone. Lazarus, Gislebertus, and the Cathedral of Autun*, Chicago/London 1999; Michael Camille, *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame. Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity*, Chicago/London 2009; and Nelson, *Hagia Sophia* (n. 26).

29   For the early reception of the church, see, e.g., Andrea Paribeni, "Saint Sophia and the Adjoining Monuments of Byzantine Constantinople through the Lens of Renaissance Scholars and Travellers", in *Byzantium in the Sixteenth Century: Constantinople and its Afterlife. Topography, Institutions, Reception*, Nicholas Melvani ed., Mainz 2025; Ludovic Bender, "Regards sur Sainte-Sophie (fin xviie–début xixe siècles) : prémices d'une histoire de l'architecture byzantine", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 105/1 (2012), pp. 1–28. For the nineteenth century, see now also *Hagia Sophia in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Emily Neumeier, Benjamin Anderson eds, Edinburgh 2024.

30   *Pour une histoire de la restauration monumentale. Un manifeste pour le temps présent (xixe–début xxe siècle)*, Fabienne Chevallier, Bruno Phalip eds, Clermont-Ferrand 2021.

31   Bérénice Gaussuin, *Les manières de Viollet-le-Duc. La forge d'une théorie de la restauration par la pratique*, Paris 2024; Martin Bressani, *Architecture and the Historical Imagination. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, 1814–1879*, Farnham 2014.

years later, in 1847, Hagia Sophia started to undergo its own monumental restoration under the Swiss architect Gaspare Fossati (1809–1883) helped by his younger brother Giuseppe (1822–1891). Trained in Switzerland and Italy but active in Russia and Istanbul for Tsar Nicholas I, Gaspare Fossati started the restoration as part of Sultan Abdülmecid I's ambitious modernization program [fig. 4].[32] Both projects, in their distinct political and cultural settings, reveal how the nineteenth century's fascination with the Middle Ages was inseparable from the broader narratives of empire, progress, and identity that defined modernity itself, and were led by key-figures of architects formed to the latest ideas and methods joining historical reception and modern technologies.[33]

If the restoration of the minbar and mihrab, as well the great roundels inscribed with Islamic calligraphy added during the Fossati restorations reaffirmed Hagia Sophia's status as a mosque, the reproductions that recorded their work and the techniques they employed simultaneously modernized and, in a sense, "Westernized" its image. Like Viollet-le-Duc's interventions at Pierrefonds and Notre-Dame, the Fossati brothers' restoration strengthened the structure with new technologies that were then used both in the conservation of historical monuments and the construction of contemporary historicist buildings. In their 1852 report, the Fossatis described how "the most compromised parts" of the monument were rebuilt, the lead roof repaired, and the dome released from its four massive external buttresses, which they replaced with a double iron ring encircling the base of the dome. These iron tie-bands and ring anchors typify mid-nineteenth-century European restoration practices and closely parallel Viollet-le-Duc's emphasis on visible structure and the notion of modern prosthetics for historic architecture.[34] Viollet-le-Duc himself would praise Hagia Sophia as an exemplar of structural ingenuity, with the church occupying a central place within his genealogy of architectural types as part of a broader reflection on the influence of Byzantine architecture in the evolution of Western forms.[35] Viollet-le-Duc's vision of this modernity of Byzantine forms would, in time, foster what Anthony Cutler

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32   See the recent contributions of Asli Menevse, "The Monument of the Present: The Fossati Restoration of Hagia Sophia (1847–9)", in *Hagia Sophia* (n. 29), pp. 197–239; and Beatrice Daskas, "The Fossati Brothers, the Ottoman Capital and the 'Superb Imperial Mosque of Hagia Sophia'", in *İstanbul'dan Bizans'a: Yeniden Keşfin Yolları, 1800–1955 – From Istanbul to Byzantium. Paths to Rediscovery, 1800–1855*, Brigitte Pitarakis ed., Istanbul 2021, pp. 20–39; for a broader framework, see Ahmet A. Ersoy, *Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary. Reconfiguring the Architectural Past in a Modernizing Empire*, Farnham 2015; Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*, Seattle 1986.

33   Gaspare Fossati was acquainted with some of the major French architects of that time such as Viollet-le-Duc, Labrouste, or Vaudoyer, see Isabella Palumbo Fossati Cassa, "À la recherche de Sainte-Sophie: Gaspare et Giuseppe Fossati", *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 154/1 (2010), pp. 293–299.

34   On the notion of prosthetics in architecture, see Martin Bressani, "Prosthetic Fantasies of the First Machine Age: Viollet-le-Duc's Iron Architecture", *AA Files*, 68 (2014), pp. 43–49.

35   Tulay Atak, "Abstraction's Economy: Hagia Sophia in the Imaginary of Modern Architecture", in *Byzantium/ Modernism. The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*, Roland Betancourt, Maria Taroutina eds, Leiden/Boston 2015, pp. 135–162. Viollet-le-Duc had been impacted by De Verneilh, *L'architecture byzantine* (n. 10).

[fig. 3] Alfred Delauney, view of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris as restored by Jean-Baptiste Lassus and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, etching, 1867–1890 / Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.)

described as the "tyranny of Hagia Sophia," the enduring dominance of its image across modernist architecture, from Frank Lloyd Wright's Church of the Annunciation to synagogues and churches of the mid-twentieth century.[36]

The parallel between Hagia Sophia and Notre-Dame extends to a shared mid-nineteenth-century fascination with historical imagination. A telling

36   Cutler, "The Tyranny" (n. 11). On the architecture of synagogues and the pervasiveness of Hagia Sophia's model, see Robert S. Nelson, "The Byzantine Synagogue of Alfred Alschuler", *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture*, 11 (2018), pp. 5–42; and *Idem*, "'That Domed Feeling': A Byzantine Synagogue in Cleveland", in *Hagia Sophia* (n. 29), pp. 169–196.

CONSTANTINOPLE : VISITE DE SA MAJESTÉ A LA MOSQUÉE DE SAINTE-SOPHIE. — (Voir page 339.)

example of this imaginative impulse is the painting attributed to Gaspare Fossati, which the museum labels as Richard the Lionheart's first mass in Hagia Sophia (though he never visited Constantinople), but which might in fact depict the first mass of the Latin emperors in 1204 [fig. 5].[37] In any case, the scene's reconstruction of Hagia Sophia's Christian interior — complete with a massive iconostasis reminiscent of nineteenth-century Orthodox churches — belongs to the same vein of speculative historical reconstruction cultivated by Viollet-le-Duc and other historicist painters. Such paintings are not only fantasies but are frequently politically charged: the theme of the Crusades, and particularly of the Latin domination of the Morea and of Constantinople in the wake of the Fourth Crusade, formed, at least since the 1820s and the Greek War of Independence, part of a broader discourse that viewed medieval

[fig. 4] Illustration of the inauguration ceremony of the mosque of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople after the restoration by the Fossati, 13 July 1849, from *L'Illustration*, 13 (1849), p. 405

37   The painting is briefly commented upon in Daskas, "The Fossati" (n. 32), p. 35.

crusading as a proto-colonial enterprise anticipating France's and other empires ambitions across the Mediterranean.[38]

During the restorations, the mosaics of Hagia Sophia has been temporarily uncovered, documented, and then covered again, a condition that would persist until the restoration campaigns under the direction of Thomas Whittemore in the 1930s. The Fossatis had sought to publish their drawings but chose the most inopportune setting to do so: the Russian Empire. Their attempt came at a time of mounting tension between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the 1840s, that would soon culminate in the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878). For Russians, whose narrative of conversion to Orthodoxy was anchored in Hagia Sophia, it was inconceivable to publish on the church's restoration when it was being carried out by the political and religious adversaries of Orthodoxy. Only a generation earlier, Catherine the Great had conceived a grand design to wrest Hagia Sophia from Ottoman control and to place her grandson, appropriately named Constantine, on the throne of Constantinople.[39] While invisible, the interior decoration nevertheless became known through a sumptuous volume by Wilhelm Salzenberg.[40] This publication direct inspired the Neo-Byzantine fantasies of the Bavarian kings, notably in the *Allerheiligenhofkirche* in Munich, and the Prussian emperors, both in Germany but also in the German Fountain in Istanbul.[41]

Hagia Sophia crystallizes the nineteenth century's conflicting visions of the past and the modern. Around its image of the Byzantine and the inspiration it provided for the Neo-Byzantine coalesced the rival ambitions of nations seeking to define their own genealogies of civilization: Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant powers alike projected onto its domes and mosaics their competing claims to empire, faith, and modernity.

38 See, e.g., Hervé Mazurel, "Les guerriers de l'Ailleurs. De la croisade philhellène aux guerres lointaines du xixe siècle", *Écrire l'histoire*, 7 (2011), pp. 53–62; see also Christine Peltre, "Les Croisades et l'orientalisme du xixe siècle", in *L'Oriente. Storia di una figura nelle arti occidentali (1700–2000). I. Dal Settecento al Novecento*, Loretta Innocenti, Paolo Amalfitano eds, Naples 2007, pp. 427–434.

39 Emily Bryant, "A Third Rome?: Catherine the Great's 'Greek Project'", *Crimson Historical Review*, 5/1 (2022), pp. 54–63; Foletti, *Russian Imperialism* (n. 22), pp. 13–14, showing the medal celebrating the birth of Grand Duke Konstantin Pavlovich in 1779 bearing a depiction of Hagia Sophia in the background.

40 Wilhelm Salzenberg, *Alt-christliche Baudenkmale von Constantinopel vom v. bis xii. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1854.

41 For Bavaria, see Albrecht Berger, "Byzantium in Bavaria? Ludwig ii and the Great Palace of Constantinople" in *The Emperor's House. Palaces from Augustus to the Age of Absolutism*, Michael Featherstone *et al.* eds, Berlin/Boston 2015; for Prussia, see Philipp Niewöhner, "'Byzantinisch' oder 'germanisch'? Zur Ambivalenz wilhelminischer Mosaiken am Beispiel der Erlöserkirche in Bad Homburg", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 113/3 (2020), pp. 905–922; Nicolas Bock, "Art and the Origins of Authority: Prussia, from Ravenna to Byzantium and the Romanesque", in *Re-thinking, Re-making, Re-living Christian Origins*, Ivan Foletti *et al.* eds, Rome 2018, pp. 191–208. The fountain itself combines motifs drawn from Salzenberg's plates with those inspired by the mosaics of Ravenna, see Lorenz Korn, "The 'German Fountain' in Istanbul: Object of Transfer in the Age of Historicism and Diplomacy", Der Islam, 95/2 (2018), pp. 549–595; and the article by Semra Horuz in this volume, pp. 202–222. On mosaic as inspiration, see Patrick Brunet, *L'Art byzantin ou la conversion du regard. Les voyageurs français au xixe siècle en Italie*, Paris 2024 and Barbara Schellewald, "'Le byzantinisme est le rêve qui a bercé l'art européen dans son enfance.' Byzanz-Rezeption und die Wiederentdeckung des Mosaiks im 19. Jahrhundert", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 52/1 (2008), pp. 123–148.

[fig. 5] Gaspare Fossati, *Richard Lionheart receiving communion inside Hagia Sophia in the twelfth century, or the First Mass of the Latin Emperors in Constantinople*, 1849 / Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum (Zurich)

[fig. 6] Photochrom print of the Cathedral of Sainte-Marie-Majeure (La Major) with the Port de la Joliette, Marseille, 1890–1905 / Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.)

FRANCE AND THE POLITICS OF THE NEO-BYZANTINE

France offers a telling example of the entanglements between the political, religious, and cultural dimensions of the Neo-Byzantine phenomenon. French architects and theoreticians were amongst those who most intensively engaged with the issue of historicism, and the country is the first in which the idea of restoration was institutionalized and instrumentalized.[42] Of course,

42 On French Neo-Byzantine, see Palladino "Byzance à Conques?" (n. 10); Francesco Lovino, "East or West? Byzantine Architecture and the Origins of French Medieval Architecture in the Scholarly Debate, Nineteenth Century", in *Byzantium in the Popular Imagination. The Modern Reception of the Byzantine Empire*, Markéta Kulhánková, Przemysław Marciniak eds, London *et al.* 2023, pp. 33–44; Magouliotis, "French Architects" (n. 21); Karydis, "Discovering" (n. 21); Simona Talenti, "De Viollet-le-Duc à Choisy: les historiens de l'architecture français face à Byzance", in *Auguste Choisy: 1841–1909. L'architecture et l'art de bâtir,* conference proceedings (Madrid, November 19–20, 2009), Javier Girón, Santiago Huerta eds, Madrid 2009, pp. 405–421; Bullen, *Byzantium* (n. 18), pp. 56–105; Maria

each city in which Neo-Byzantine projects arose must be read within its own constellation of local conditions, where ecclesiastical ambition, civic identity, and regional politics intertwine. At the same time, the Neo-Byzantine in France operated within a broader national framework structured around two principal axes. On the one hand, the Byzantine reference functioned within a discourse of religious triumphalism: an ecclesiastical art whose recourse to the venerable prestige of Byzantium guaranteed the authenticity of faith within a wider project of religious and political revival. On the other hand, Neo-Byzantine architecture intersected with a network of Orientalist idioms that combined climatic theories, racialized conceptions of architectural form, and the ideological apparatus of French colonialism.

The Neo-Byzantine between Modernity and Gallican Triumphalism

The Gallican orientation of the French Church gave France's engagement with Byzantium a distinctive inflection, making the country a place where some of the most symbolically resonant monuments adopted a Byzantine architectural language. Foremost among them is the Cathedral of Sainte-Marie-Majeure in Marseille, the first cathedral to be built in France since the Revolution [**fig. 6**]. It was thus a Neo-Byzantine church, desired by bishop Eugène de Mazenod and designed by Léon Vaudoyer, that came to embody a broader project for the renewal of France's religious architectural landscape. Ultramontane Bishop de Mazenod, educated by the Sulpicians in Paris and influenced by Romantic Catholicism, envisioned a monumental building to replace the modest twelfth-century structure known as the Vieille Major. As Bergdoll has shown, Mazenod's ambition was, above all, to endow the city with "a cathedral proportionate to the greatness and importance of Marseille."[43] The chosen style thus bore a dual responsibility: to evoke the venerable antiquity of Marseille, an ancient Christian city on the Mediterranean, while also responding to the realities of a modern metropolis whose population had grown exponentially between the 1840s and 1860s. Secondly, the port of Marseille had, since 1830, assumed a position of major importance in the Mediterranean. This was due not only to France's occupation of Algeria but also to the Saint-Simonian ideology embraced by Napoleon III, who envisioned the Mediterranean's free exchange as centered upon Marseille. The foundation stone of the cathedral was laid by Emperor Napoleon III himself and the building's symbolic position dictated its unusual north-south orientation, ensuring that its monumental

Kampouri-Vamvoukou, "L'architecture de style néo-byzantin en France", in *Byzance en Europe*, Marie-France Auzépy ed., Saint-Denis 2003, pp. 87–100; see the fundamental article of Jean-Michel Spieser, "Hellénisme et connaissance de l'art byzantin au xixᵉ siècle", in *ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΣ. Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grecque*, conference proceedings (Strasbourg, October 25–27, 1989), Suzanne Saïd ed., Leiden *et al.* 1991, pp. 337–362. See also Francesco Lovino's article in this volume, pp. 42–58.

43   Bergdoll, *Léon Vaudoyer* (n. 12), p. 215.

façade would be one of the first sights to greet those arriving in Marseille by sea. The style followed both the idea of the venerable late antique tradition, but also that of Vaudoyer arguing, following similar Saint-Simonian ideals, that France was uniquely placed to absorb and project foreign influences. The Neo-Byzantine was, in this sense, a means of asserting France's place within a broader civilizational narrative. Vaudoyer's Byzantium was not archaeological but visionary, shaped less by historical fidelity than by a Mediterranean imaginary. This is most evident in his use of polychrome masonry, a defining feature of the cathedral's exterior. The horizontally banded stonework, often described as Byzantine yet equally rooted in the Islamic *ablaq*, linked the cathedral to a lineage of striped architecture from the Great Mosque of Córdoba to Ottoman building traditions.[44] In Marseille, the banded masonry, in echo with the same decoration adopted at Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde facing it, reinforced the city's role as a gate to the Mediterranean, blending Byzantine, Islamic, and Renaissance elements into an expression of both local identity and transregional aspiration.[45]

A comparable logic also informed the conception of the Sacré-Cœur on the hill of Montmartre in Paris. Today among the most visited monuments in Paris, the basilica's legitimacy has long been subjects of debate, to the point that in 1987, art historian François Loyer wrote that the basilica is "despised by art historians" and "object of an ostracism whose origins are both cultural and ideological."[46] Undoubtedly, the Sacré-Cœur is the most overtly political of all Neo-Byzantine monuments in France.[47] It originated from a national vow proposed by Alexandre Legentil, a wealthy Parisian Ultramontane Catholic during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Inspired by the vow made by the people of Lyon, Legentil pledged the erection in Paris of a sanctuary dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.[48] He rallied his stepbrother, the painter Hubert Rohault de Fleury, along with the episcopate, numerous religious congregations, Catholic charities, and even the pope, to support his initiative. Formulated at the beginning of 1871, the vow promised to erect a grandiose basilica in Paris in expiation for the nation's faults, guilty in their view of having distanced itself

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44 Ashley Paine, "The Problem of Stripes", *AA Files*, 63 (2011), pp. 70–73.

45 In Lyon, Pierre Bossan's Romano-Byzantine basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière, a votive monument of the Franco-Prussian War, likewise epitomizes this ambition, see Philippe Dufieux, "Fourvière, l'Orient et la Méditerranée", in *L'Orientalisme* (n. 17), pp. 177–194; *Idem, Le mythe de la primatie des Gaules. Pierre Bossan (1814–1888) et l'architecture religieuse en Lyonnais au XIXᵉ siècle,* Lyon 2004.

46 "*Totalement méprisée par les historiens de l'art, la basilique parisienne du Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre est l'objet d'un ostracisme dont l'origine est à la fois culturelle et idéologique.*" François Loyer, "Le Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre. L'Église souffrante et l'architecture triomphante", *Le Débat,* 44/2 (1987), pp. 144–155, p. 144.

47 On the role of the Sacré-Cœur as public architecture, see Markus Dauss, *Identitäts-Architekturen. Öffentliche Bauten des Historismus in Paris und Berlin (1871–1918),* Dresden 2007, esp. pp. 231–342.

48 Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart. An Epic Tale for Modern Times,* Berkeley / Los Angeles / London 2000, esp. pp. 177–197.

[fig. 7] Henri Michel Antoine Chapu and Alphonse Dubois, Medal for the construction of the basilica of the Sacré-Cœur at Montmartre, copper, 1875 / Musée Carnavalet (Paris)

from the Church. Such idea must be replaced within the wake of the First Lateran Council, at a moment when the papacy of Pious IX was trying to recover its power. France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 which led to the collapse of Napoleon's Second Empire and the Siege of Paris had, likewise, been interpreted as a divine punishment for France's moral decline since the 1789 Revolution. The project gained renewed momentum in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, the intense civil conflict that unfolded in the capital between 1870 and 1871.[49] The insurrection, led by revolutionary and socialist forces in Paris, was violently suppressed in May 1871 by troops of the national army under the authority of the conservative and Catholic National Assembly of the newly founded Third Republic. During the Semaine Sanglante, the "Bloody Week," it is estimated that ten to fifteen thousand Commune soldiers were killed in combat or executed, while at the same time, the Commune executed about one hundred hostages, amongst which two army generals, the archbishop of Paris and several priests on the hill of Montmartre. Coupled with France's military defeat and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Prussia, these events strengthened among conservative circles the conviction that the nation required collective atonement. The memory of this penitential vow is inscribed within the basilica and on a commemorative medal produced during the fundraising campaign. Both bear the emblematic motto "GALLIA POENITENS ET DEVOTA" (France penitent and devoted) which encapsulated the ideological ideal underpinning the entire project [fig. 7].

49   Kristin Ross, *L'imaginaire de la Commune*, Paris 2015.

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[fig. 8] François Marius Borrel, *The Montmartre hill with the Sacré-Cœur in construction,* oil on canvas, 99.5 × 59.5 cm, second half of the 19th century / Musée Carnavalet (Paris)

For the conceptors and promoters of the basilica, the choice of site was deeply symbolic. It was the place where Saint Denis, the first bishop of Paris and national saint, was believed to have been martyred alongside his companions. To this ancient layer of sanctity was added a more recent one: the memory of the hostages executed during the Paris Commune. Montmartre still appeared as a rural hill dotted with windmills and sparsely inhabited [fig. 8]. In reality, the area had become a refuge for the urban poor pushed to the margins by Baron Haussmann's vast redevelopment. The Sacré-Cœur thus emerged both as a monument of expiation and as a triumphant statement against the perceived sins of the Commune, while simultaneously casting off the legacy of the Revolution and its anticlericalism. Given symbolic violence of the basilica's placement, the Sacré-Cœur has remained a symbol of the Church's domination over a contested site of memory. Throughout its protracted construction until its consecration in 1919, the basilica continued to embody these tensions [fig. 9]. The building's classification as a historical monument in 2022 reignited these public debates. For many on the political left, its protection under national heritage law is seen as an affront to the
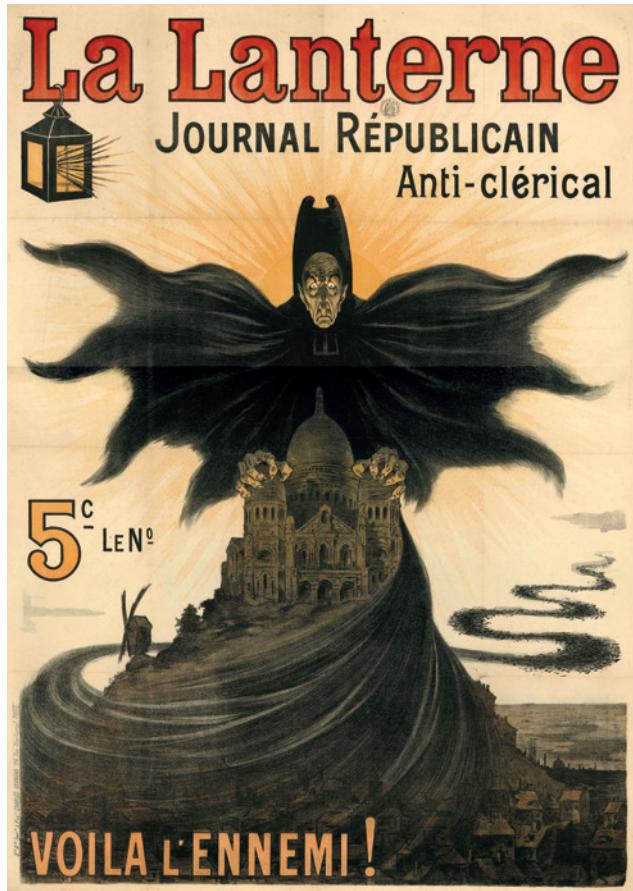
[fig. 9] Eugène Ogé, "Voilà l'ennemi" [Here is the enemy], poster for the anticlerical Republican journal *La Lanterne*, 1902

memory of the Commune and its thousands of victims. As Pierre Nora has observed, to this day the Sacré-Cœur remains "one of the main symbolic stakes in the passionate conflict that has divided the two Frances since the Revolution — the followers of the 'eldest daughter of the Church' on one side, and the partisans of the republican France born of the Revolution on the other."[50]

The building's style plays a key-role in this reception history. If the place, so symbolic, was chosen by 1872, the public competition for the creation of the basilica took place from February to June 1874.[51] While no style was specified in the competition, the building had to fulfil two criteria: that of a votive and pilgrimage church. The ground plan was conditioned by the terrain which did not favor an elongated basilica plan but rather a central plan, which at

50   *"Elle a été un des enjeux symboliques principaux du conflit passionnel qui a divisé les deux France depuis la Révolution, les fidèles de la 'fille aînée de l'Eglise' d'un côté, et de l'autre, les partisans de la France républicaine issue de la Révolution."* Pierre Nora, "Classer le Sacré-Cœur monument historique, c'est le sortir de son purgatoire", *Libération*, October 9 (2022).
51   On the competition, see Anne Richard-Bazire, "Le concours pour la construction du Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre, une désillusion", *Livraisons de l'histoire de l'architecture*, 36 (2018), pp. 31–49.

CONCOURS POUR LA CONSTRUCTION DE L'ÉGLISE DU SACRÉ-CŒUR A MONTMARTRE. — Quelques-uns des projets exposés au palais de l'Industrie. — (Dessin de M. H. Clerget.)
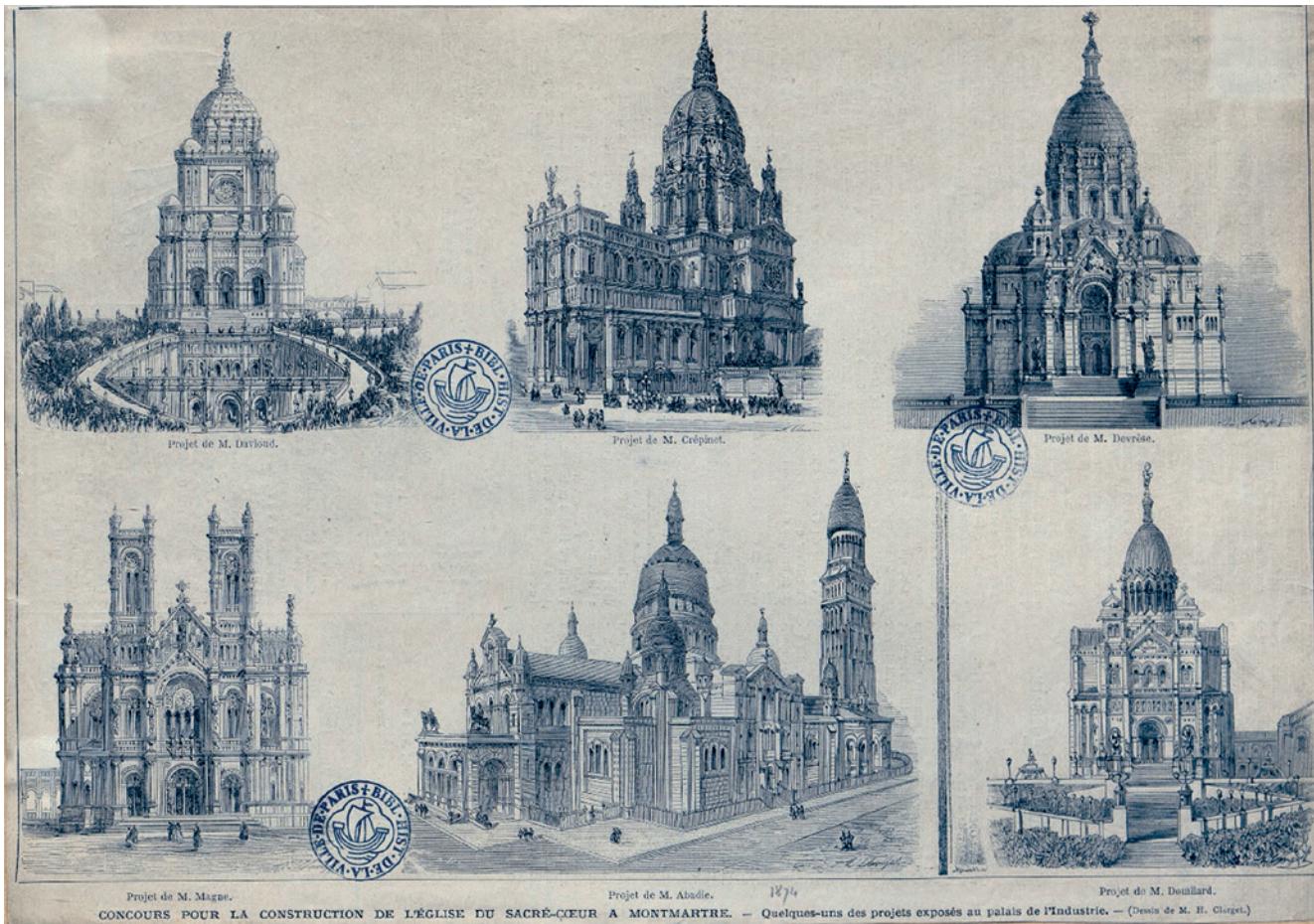
[fig. 10] Projects for the construction of the Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre exhibited at the Palais de l'Industrie, Paris, 1874

the same time could recall the shape of the late antique martyria. This meant that a domical structure would be favored, with very little Neo-Gothic projects where one could have expected them [fig. 10]. The style of the building finds its roots in Paul Abadie's specific dream of Byzantine architecture, one that was heavily impacted by de Verneilh's proposed reconstruction of Saint-Front of Périgueux. In Périgueux, following the principles of Viollet-le-Duc, Abadie had reimagined Saint-Front in an idealized state, detached from strict historical accuracy, a church covered in white stone and crowned with scaled domes which recall, much more than anything genuinely Byzantine, visions of a dreamed Orient.[52] Abadie's Sacré-Cœur project is marked by the same style, with its large dominant dome surrounded by other smaller cupolas and, again, by its color: the building is not made of the characteristic beige Paris stone, but of a type of white travertine with an extremely fine grain that comes from quarries eighty kilometers south of Paris.

52   See Palladino "Byzance à Conques?" (n. 10), with bibliography.

The competition for the Sacré-Cœur reveals a profound rupture between the idea of erecting a church within the conservative Catholic project and the modern eclectic fusions praised, in the second half of the nineteenth century, notably by the architects from the Beaux-Arts.[53] In the debates surrounding the competition, we clearly see an openly hostile attitudes to the style chosen by Abadie, which reveals that the use of the Neo-Byzantine was in fact not to the taste of many. Negative judgments of the Byzantine style as both decadent but also inappropriate for France were thus prevalent in the debates surrounding the competition. Painter Claudius Lavergne, for example, argued that:

"[It is not surprising, after Saint-Front de Périgueux] that Abadie had the idea of renewing the Byzantine migration by trying to implant and acclimatize it to the center of France, right in the heart of Paris [...] It might have been acceptable if it was for the cult of St John Chrysostom or some Oriental saint; but for the Sacré-Cœur, no, it's a mismatch of style and appropriation [...] neither the archaeologists, nor the Commission of the National Vow, nor popular sense can conceive of anyone thinking of dislodging the windmills of Montmartre for the pleasure of imposing in their place the domes of Trebizond."[54]

The critique led to the publication of a short pamphlet-like brochure titled *Will the Church of the Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre be in our National Style or in a Foreign Style?*[55] The booklet gathers a series of reactions published in the press during the previous months but also an abrasive text by abbot Carle, a conservative abbot from Nîmes. It openly opposes what the author calls the proper French national style, the Gothic, to foreign ones, betraying a geographically embedded thought justifying that "Byzantine," "Muslim," or "Pagan" architecture should not be used under a Gallic sky. Thus, Carle writes that many veterans who were in Crimea and visited the projects for the Sacré-Cœur recognized only the Muslim or Russian style, conferring "the name of mosque to most of these church projects."[56] In a similar vein, abbot Carle writes:

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53 Richard-Bazire, "Le concours" (n. 51).

54 "[*Il n'est pas étonnant après Saint-Front de Périgueux*] *qu'Abadie ait eu la pensée de renouveler la migration byzantine en essayant de l'implanter et de l'acclimater au centre de la France, en plein Paris [...] Passe encore s'il s'agissait du culte de saint Jean Chrysostôme ou d'un saint oriental quelconque ; mais pour le Sacré-Cœur, non, c'est une discordance de style et d'appropriation [...] ni les archéologues, ni la commission du Vœu national, ni le sens populaire ne sauraient concevoir que l'on pense à déloger les moulins à vent de Montmartre pour le plaisir de faire régner à leur place les coupoles de Trébisonde,*" Claudius Lavergne, "Concours pour la construction de l'église du Sacré-Cœur à Montmartre", *L'Univers*, 2512 (1874), pp. 1–2.

55 Anonymous committee, *L'église du Sacré-Cœur à Montmartre sera-t-elle de notre style national ou sera-t-elle d'un style étranger?*, Paris 1875; The title almost seems to reference Heinrich Hübsch's pamphlet *In welchem Style sollen wir bauen?*, Karlsruhe 1828.

56 "*Le dernier dimanche de l'exposition, bien des anciens militaire qui ont été en Crimée disaient en voyant ces projets d'églises : nous prend-on maintenant pour des Turcs ou des Russes? En effet, c'est le style musulman et russe, que ces militaires reconnaissaient dans ces projets, et ils donnaient le nom de mosquée à la plupart de ces plans d'église.*" *L'église du Sacré-Cœur* (n. 55), p. 13.

> "To legitimize the commission's unfortunate choice, reference has been made to Hagia Sophia, Saint Mark's in Venice, and Saint Front in Périgueux. [...] do you believe that what could be beautiful in Constantinople would have the same chances of being beautiful in Paris?"[57]

And further:

> "Because in Marseille, the regrettable Espérandieu abused this alternating technique, under a sky that was nonetheless full of radiance, under the rays of an almost oriental sun, do you think you'll be able to do better than him under the mists of northern France?"[58]

Carle goes on to denounce the very models, arguing that even with the extensive budget of seven million francs, no architect could hope to rival Justinian's Hagia Sophia. Nor could one emulate the marble- and mosaic-covered splendor of San Marco in Venice. As for Saint-Front in Périgueux, he dismissed it as a feeble, misconstrued imitation of a foreign monument, further disfigured by Abadie. What Paris needed, he concluded, was unmistakably an ogival church, the only form that truly embodied France's national and religious heritage and harmonized with its climate. It is this final point, the question of geography and climate, to which I now turn.

Colonizing with Style: Climatic, Racial, and Colonial Dimensions of the Neo-Byzantine reference

The appeal to geography and climate as determinants of architectural choice is particularly revealing. In the nineteenth century, climate was elevated to a principle of historical causation and, for theorists such as Viollet-le-Duc, became a key explanatory tool: architectural forms were understood as products of environment, their logic rooted in the adaptation of structure to climate. Regional architecture, they argued, could and should be understood as the product of local climatic particularities. For Abbot Carle, the rejection of foreign styles rested, therefore, on a rational and scientific foundation rooted in geography and climate. Unsurprisingly, the Neo-Byzantine idiom appeared justified in the South of France, where it implicitly countered the Northern attachment to the Neo-Gothic. Even architects strongly identified with the Neo-Byzantine mode, such as Henri-Jacques Espérandieu — who completed Sainte-Marie-Majeure and designed Notre-Dame de la Garde in

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57 *"Pour légitimer ce malheureux choix de la commission, on a parlé de Sainte-Sophie, de Saint-Marc de Venise, et de Saint-Front de Périgueux [...] croyez-vous que ce qui pouvait être beau à Constantinople, aurait les mêmes chances de l'être à Paris."* Ibidem, p. 50.

58 *"Parce qu'à Marseille le regrettable Espérandieu a abusé de cette alternance dans ses appareils, sous un ciel pourtant plein d'éclat, sous les rayons d'un soleil presque oriental, pensez-vous obtenir mieux que lui sous les brumes du nord de la France?"* Ibidem, p. 64.

Marseille — contributed to this line of thought. In 1872, he published *"Le sentiment et l'architecture,"* a notorious exercise in nineteenth-century climatic determinism that Laurent Baridon aptly described as a *"sottisier théorique,"* a theoretical compendium of follies linking architecture, race, and climate.[59] In this text, Espérandieu ventures into speculative territory, suggesting, for example, that the supposed aversion to convex forms in Islamic architecture derived from an alleged Arab aesthetic preference for fuller female bodies, or that architectural forms directly echoed local garments such as the turban. Beyond its evident absurdity, this linkage of geography, climate, and architecture did not remain confined to theoretical speculation. It migrated into practice notably during the French colonial expansion, where such notions were deployed to rationalize and aestheticize domination, most visibly in North Africa following the French conquest of 1830.[60]

Under the direction of French colonial architects, historicist projects proliferated across North Africa in a first wave of colonization that manifested itself through the wholesale transplantation of European monumental idioms.[61] By the late nineteenth century, Haussmannian façades rose incongruously in Algiers, Constantine, and Sétif to the east, and in Oran and Sidi Bel Abbès to the west. This new art of building imposed an urban physiognomy entirely foreign to the local landscape and soon gave rise to Neo-Byzantine projects as well: Algiers' first cathedral of Saint-Philippe, built on the site of the former Ketchaoua mosque; the cathedral of Notre-Dame d'Afrique; the basilica of Saint-Augustin in Annaba; and the Grand Séminaire of Kouba, among others.[62] The French Catholic Church, working hand in hand with architects, became the driving force behind these projects, combining echoes of French architectural forms with selective borrowings from Middle Eastern, North African, and Islamic Iberian traditions. To their designers and patrons, steeped in colonial ideology, the use of Oriental motifs signified an aesthetic gesture of accommodation, a symbolic acclimatization of French architecture to an unfamiliar land. In reality, however, the rhetoric of conciliation masked an assertion of dominance: these buildings sought not only to blend with their surroundings, but to monumentalize the presence of empire in stone.

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59   Henri Espérandieu, "Le sentiment et l'architecture: De la forme et de la coloration des édifices", *Revue générale de l'architecture et des travaux publics*, 29 (1872), pp. 12–18. On the text, see Laurent Baridon, "La théorie à l'épreuve du lieu commun. 'Le sentiment de l'architecture' d'Henry Espérandieu (1872)", in *Lieux communs. L'art du cliché*, Itzhak Goldberg ed., Paris 2019, pp. 103–123; and Estelle Thibault, "Constructing Emotions. The Scientific Aesthetics of Architecture in France 1860–1900", in *The Companions to the History of Architecture*, vol. 3, Martin Bressani, Christina Contandriopoulos eds, Hoboken, NJ, 2017, n. p.; see also Estelle Thibault, "La confection des édifices: analogies textiles en architecture aux xixᵉ et xxᵉ siècles", *Perspective*, 1 (2016), pp. 109–126. See also Lovino in this volume, p. 46.

60   On the colonialization, see William Gallois, *A History of Violence in the Early Algerian Colony*, Basingstoke 2013.

61   For an excellent overview, see Ateliers d'Alger *et al., Habiter l'indépendance : Alger, conditions d'une architecture de l'occupation*, Marseille 2022; Çelik, *Urban Forms* (n. 24); Oulebsir, *Les Usages* (n. 24).

62   See the bibliography cited in note 24.

[fig. 11] Basilica of Notre-
-Dame d'Afrique, architect
Jean-Eugène Fromageau,
1858–1872

This vision is clearly embodied in the conception of Notre-Dame d'Afrique, built between 1858 and 1872, a basilica that still crowns the northwestern slopes of the Bay of Algiers, poised dramatically above the Mediterranean. Designed by the French architect Jean-Eugène Fromageau in a Neo-Byzantine style, it recalls the contemporary monumental experiments unfolding across the sea in Marseille [fig. 11]. The ideological underpinnings of the project were laid out in 1862 by the Bishop of Algiers Louis-Antoine-Augustin Pavy, who issued a fervent appeal for the basilica's construction [figs 12–13].[63] The text operates as a consummate exercise in missionary rhetoric: Pavy starts by presenting the dedication to the Virgin Mary, venerated by both Christians and Muslims, as a potential figure of reconciliation. Yet in the same text, he

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63   Mgr. Louis-Antoine-Augustin Pavy, *Appel en faveur de la chapelle de Notre-Dame-d'Afrique*, Algiers 1862.
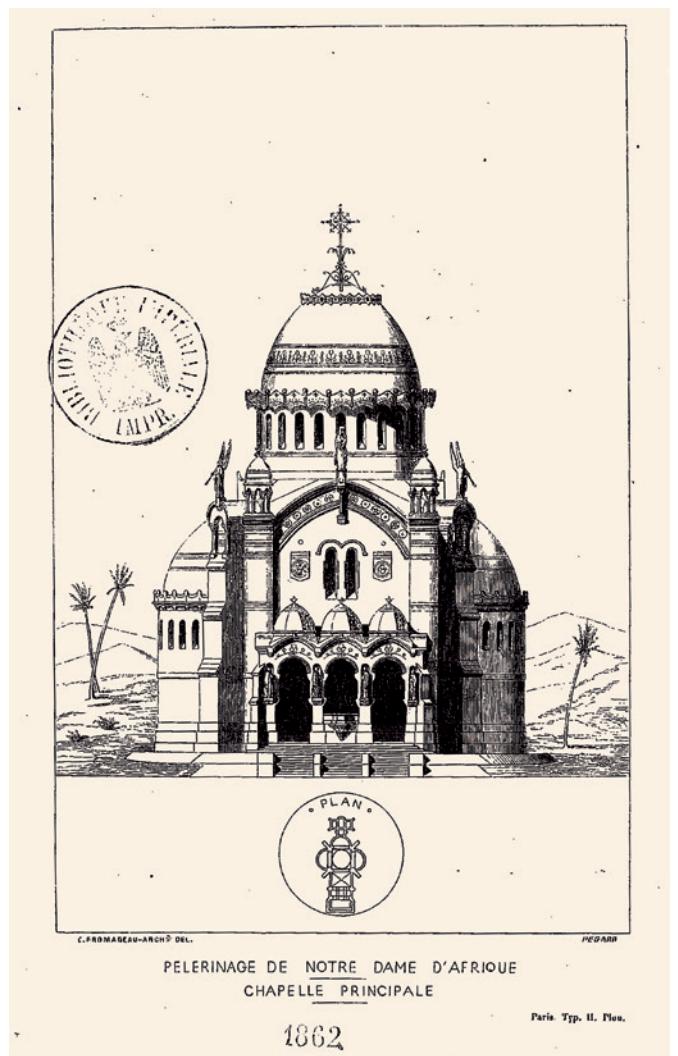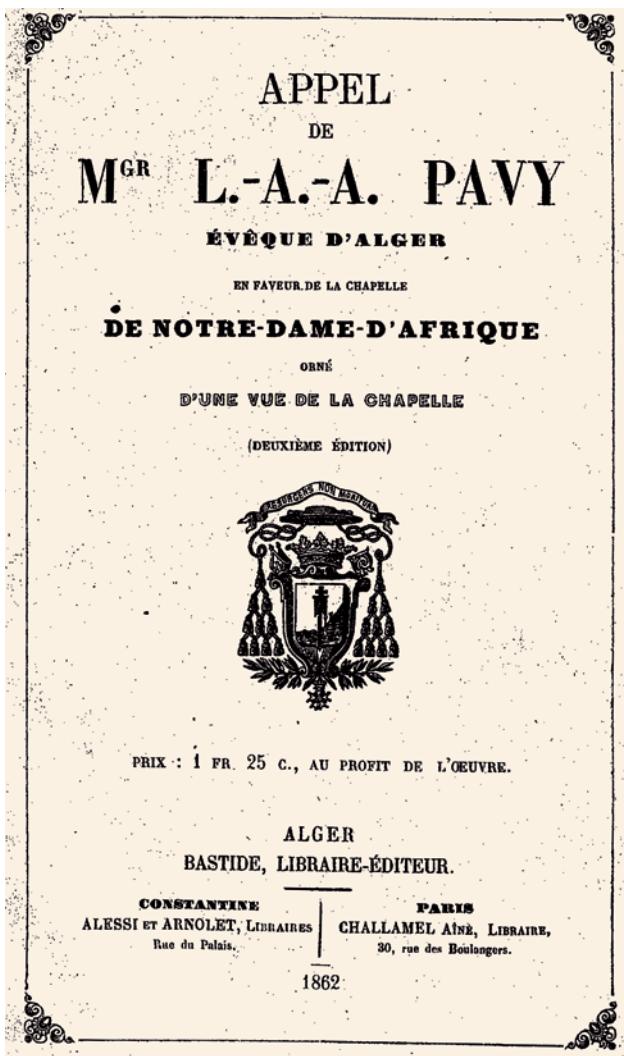
frames the French conquest of 1830 as the redemptive close of a long history of Muslim atrocities against Christians, a narrative of deliverance that cast the French colonization as both civilizing and sacred. Like his successor Charles Lavigerie, founder of the missionary orders of the White Fathers and White Sisters, Pavy belonged to the militant Catholic elite sent to Algeria to carry out a dual mission: the conversion of Muslim populations and the revival of an imagined ancient Christianity of North Africa.[64] Notre-Dame d'Afrique thus stood not merely as a church, but as a monumental assertion of France's self-appointed role as the restorer of lost Christendom and the spiritual heir to Rome and Byzantium on African soil. It is in this sense that the historicist

[fig. 12] Cover page of Louis--Antoine-Augustin Pavy, *Appel en faveur de la chapelle de Notre-Dame d'Afrique*, Algiers 1862

[fig. 13] Elevation plan of the Basilica of Notre-Dame d'Afrique, from Louis--Antoine-Augustin Pavy, *Appel en faveur de la chapelle de Notre-Dame d'Afrique*, Algiers 1862

64   See Kyle Francis, "Catholic Missionaries in Colonial Algeria. Faith, Foreigners, and France's Other Civilizing Mission, 1848–1883", *French Historical Studies*, 39/4 (2016), pp. 685–715.

Byzantine style must be understood: as a language poised at the intersection of religious triumphalism and geographically grounded discourse. As Bishop Pavy himself wrote:

> "There could be no doubt as to which architectural style was best suited to the future chapel. It is, in essence, the Byzantine style, but with ornamentation appropriate to the country, the climate and the particular purpose. The Byzantine style is, so to speak, traditional in Africa; it has the merit of reconnecting our young Church with the primitive Church; [...] it combines Romanesque solidity with Moorish grace."[65]

This passage encapsulates the ideological elasticity of the Neo-Byzantine style, presented here as both climatically appropriate and historically legitimizing, as a bridge between the geographical territory of North Africa and the spiritual heritage of early Christianity. Just as in France, where the Neo-Byzantine idiom was often reserved for sites of high symbolic resonance, in Algeria it became a vehicle for reviving the "Byzantine," understood in the 1850s as ancient and venerable, roots of Christianity in the region. This revival was actively championed by French bishops who cast themselves as modern Augustines of Hippo, heirs to the early Church fathers and custodians of a reclaimed Christian Africa. Archaeology and architecture together served as instruments of this narrative: through new constructions such as Notre-Dame d'Afrique, Algeria was framed as an integral extension of French territory, its ancient spatial legacies overwritten and reinterpreted within a new colonial genealogy.[66] Within this reconfigured landscape, the Byzantine reference occupied a privileged place as the transposition of a discourse first elaborated in France since the 1820s onto Algerian soil. The "Arab period," construed as a historical regression from the Roman and Roman-Christian (that is, Byzantine) age, could thus be erased, allowing the colonizers to resume the thread of a supposed "civilizational" continuity.[67] It coincided with the emergence of an imperial archaeology that read the Roman (and early Christian) remains of Algeria as both the justification and the symbolic return of French conquest. For French scholars and administrators alike, archaeology provided the historical foundation for France's presumed right to colonize the region. Rome and Byzantium, consequently, returned as both motif and measure, a paradigm through which the ruins of ancient Africa were absorbed into the familiar

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65 "*Le style d'architecture qui convenait à la future chapelle ne pouvait être douteux ; c'est, au fond, le style byzantin, mais avec une ornementation appropriée aux circonstances du pays, du climat et du but particulier que l'on se propose. Le style byzantin est, pour ainsi dire, traditionnel en Afrique; il a le mérite de renouer notre jeune Église à l'Église primitive ; [...] il peut associer la solidité romane à la grâce mauresque,*" Pavy, *Appel* (n. 63), p. 74.

66 On the role of art and archeology in the creation of this idea, see Nabila Oulebsir, "Rome ou l'Orient? Exploration, appropriation, recomposition (1830–1880)", in Les Usages (n. 24), pp. 25–157; *Eadem*, "La découverte des monuments de l'Algérie. Les missions d'Amable Ravoisié et d'Edmond Duthoit (1840–1880)", *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 73–74 (1994), pp. 57–76. Recently, see Pierre Singaravélou, *Fantômes du Louvre. Les musées disparus du xixe siècle*, Paris 2023, pp. 72–84.

67 *Ibidem.*

order of a self-proclaimed Latin, and Christian, Mediterranean world. The use of the Neo-Byzantine in regions such as Martinique in the 1920s with the Sacré-Cœur of Balata or in China, likewise in colonial contexts, revealed how adaptable the style had become. The Sacré-Cœur of Balata near the capital city Fort-de-France built between 1923 and 1925, is the work of the architects Charles Wulffleff and Aloïs Verrey. A smaller-scale copy of the Sacré-Cœur of Montmartre, it combines reinforced concrete, local andesite, and rich mosaics, making it at once foreign and yet an integral part of the Martiniquan architectural landscape [fig. 14].[68] While expending the chronological frame of this volume, such monuments carried with them the long history of the Neo-Byzantine in France, becoming portable idioms of authority that could be deployed wherever France sought to anchor its presence in a fabricated lineage of civilizational descent, transforming distant territories into extensions of a mythologized Mediterranean sphere.

[fig. 14] Basilica of the Sacré-Cœur of Balata in the hills above Fort--de-France, Martinique, architects Charles Wulffleff and Aloïs Verrey, 1923–1925

68   Christophe Bourel Le Guilloux, *Église du Sacré-Cœur de Balata*, Bordeaux 2019.

These few examples show how in France, the Neo-Byzantine crystallized the dual ambitions of the century: to reclaim a sacred past and to project a modern empire. Whether as a language of penance on the heights of Montmartre or of domination in the colonies, the style's hybrid vocabulary, Roman, Oriental, and Mediterranean, embodied the very contradictions of a nation that sought in Byzantium both its origins and its "Others."

A BYZANTINE CENTURY

On a broader scale, the studies gathered in this volume reveal how widely Byzantium could be reimagined across the nineteenth century. In its many permutations, the Neo-Byzantine idiom exposes the malleability of Byzantium as a modern myth.

The essays themselves — from Paris to Moscow, Dublin, Tbilisi, and Istanbul — trace this phenomenon across a striking range of contexts. Francesco Lovino revisits the very category of Romano-Byzantine architecture, questioning its conceptual boundaries in France. Dimitra Kotoula turns to the *Arts and Crafts* movement, showing how Byzantine building became a touchstone for rethinking artistic practice. Giovanni Gasbarri probes the modernist fascination with abstraction and mediation, revealing how Byzantine art became a resource for reimagining the visual field. Niamh Bhalla examines Byzantinism in Irish architectural imagination through the case of Newman University Church. Other contributions chart how the style was adopted, negotiated, or instrumentalized within specific imperial and national settings. Fani Gargova analyzes the adoption of the Neo-Byzantine in Central European reform synagogues, where architectural form intersected with religious reform and civic identity. Dragan Damjanović explores the search for an appropriate national style in the southern regions of the Habsburg Empire, while Ivana Mance Cipek interrogates how the Byzantine style was mobilized within nineteenth-century South Slavic cultural discourse. Ivan Foletti and Margarita Khakhanova consider Russia's imperial ambitions and wars, showing how Neo-Byzantine architecture became an instrument of political theatre between the Crimean War and the First World War. Irene Giviashvili and Anna Mgaloblishvili offer the Georgian perspective, tracing how local historiographies and architectural practices negotiated the legacy of Byzantium within emergent national narratives. Cross-regional dynamics come to the fore in Semra Horuz's study of nineteenth-century Istanbul, where Byzantine forms were rediscovered, rebuilt, and displayed within a rapidly transforming Ottoman capital. Thomas Kaffenberger follows the trajectories of Caucasian cross-arched vaults, situating them within the architectural idioms of diaspora communities and interwar modernism. Finally, Iñigo Salto Santamaría investigates Berlin's Prussian Neo-Byzantine churches on

both sides of the Berlin Wall, revealing how Byzantium could be revived to articulate competing visions of confession and urban identity.

Taken together, these essays show that to study the Neo-Byzantine is to confront far more than a stylistic repertoire. It requires engaging with the politics of memory, the archaeological imagination of empire, and the manufacture of cultural genealogies that continue to shape how Europe and the Mediterranean envision their pasts. What ultimately emerges is not a singular genealogy but a mosaic in which Byzantium appears less as a fixed origin than as a field of aspirations, tensions, and reinventions across a long century.

ARTICLES