

**JEREMY JOHNS**

**A TALE OF TWO CEILINGS  
THE CAPPELLA PALATINA IN PALERMO  
AND  
THE MOUCHROUTAS IN CONSTANTINOPLE**

**REVISED PRE-PRINT VERSION 14 APRIL 2016**

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forthcoming in

***Art, Trade, and Culture in the Near East and India:  
From the Fatimids to the Mughals***

edited by

Alison Ohta, Michael Rogers and Rosalind Wade Haddon

The Gingko Library 2016

## REVISED PRE-PRINT VERSION 14 APRIL 2016

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### A TALE OF TWO CEILINGS.

#### THE CAPPELLA PALATINA IN PALERMO AND THE MOUCHROUTAS IN CONSTANTINOPLE.<sup>1</sup>

JEREMY JOHNS

On 31st July 1201, John Komnenos "the Fat" (Fig. 1) was the protagonist of a coup against Alexios III Angelos (r. 1195–1203). John was proclaimed emperor by disaffected nobles, supported by the mob, and crowned in Hagia Sophia. The rebels led him to the Hippodrome and broke down the Karea Gate beneath the Kathisma to enter the southwest quarter of the Great Palace, through the garden known as the Covered Hippodrome (Fig. 2). John was installed on an imperial throne and carried with difficulty by six burley men from the Skyla to the Ioustinianos. From there John seems to have proceeded to the Chrysotriklinos, the ancient golden throne-room at the heart of the palace. The mob dispersed to loot and, as evening approached, returned to the city with their spoils, leaving John all but unprotected. Meanwhile, Alexios Angelos rallied his troops, who entered the Great Palace through the Karea Gate and advanced to the Chrysotriklinos. There, unnerved by the lack of opposition and fearing an ambush, they initially held back. The rebels took this opportunity to escape uphill to the Mouchroutas. There, John remained until the imperial troops rallied and fought their way up the stairs into the Mouchroutas, forcing him to flee through the back of the building into the "labyrinth" of passages that led up towards the imperial stables. He was soon caught, hustled back through the Mouchroutas, tumbled headlong down the stairs leading up to it, hauled into the Ioustinianos and stabbed in the belly. With intestines trailing, he was dragged to "the palace courtyard next to the Hippodrome" and there beheaded.<sup>2</sup>

Four principal sources give accounts of the coup.<sup>3</sup> The most circumstantial and detailed is by Nikolaos Mesarites (fl. 1200–1216), an eyewitness and participant. Mesarites's account contains the following literary description (*ekphrasis*) of the Mouchroutas and its decoration:<sup>4</sup>

"The Mouchroutas is an enormous hall, next to the Chrysotriklinos, located on its western side. The steps leading up to it are made from baked brick, gypsum and marble. The staircase bears serrated decoration on either side and turns in a circle. It is painted with dark blue, shining with deep red, dyed with green, blooming with purple from mixed, cross-shaped tiles joined together. The chamber was the work not of a Roman, Sicilian, Sybarite,

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<sup>1</sup> I am immensely grateful to Professor Scott Redford (School of Oriental and African Studies, London) and Dr Jeffrey Michael Featherstone (Centre nationale de la recherche scientifique, Paris) for their generous advice and assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Nikolaos Mesarites, *Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos*, ed. A.E.K. Heisenberg, Würzburg, 1907, pp. 19–20, 24–25, 27–28, 42–46. Nikolaos Mesarites, *Die Palastrevolution des Joannes Komnenos*, transl. F. Grabler, in *Die Kreuzfahrer erobern Konstantinopel*, Graz, 1958, pp. 272, 274, 279–282, 305–313.

<sup>3</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution* (see note 2 above). Primary sources: Nikephoros Chrysoberges, *Ad Angelos orationes tres*, ed. M. Treu, Breslau, 1892, pp. 1–12; Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. J.L. van Dieten, 2 vols., Berlin, 1975, vol. 1, pp. 526–528; Niketas Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, Berlin, 1972, p. 104; Tornikios: Jean Darrouzès, "Les discours d'Euthyme Tornikès (1200–1205)", *Revue des Études Byzantines*, vol. 26, 1968, pp. 66–67. Secondary sources: G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica II*, Leiden, 1983, p. 203; A.P. Kazhdan, "Komnenos, John", in A.P. Kazhdan (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols., Oxford, 1991, vol. 3, pp. 1146–1147; M. Angold, "Byzantine politics vis-à-vis the Fourth Crusade", in A.E. Laiou (ed.), *Urbs capta: the Fourth Crusade and its consequences*, Paris, 2005, pp. 55–68; C.M. Brand, *Byzantium confronts the West, 1180–1204*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1968, pp. 119–124; J-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Paris, 1996, pp. 443–445; A.P. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, "Nicephorus Chrysoberges and Nicholas Mesarites: a comparative study", in A.P. Kazhdan and S. Franklin (eds.), *Studies on Byzantine literature of the eleventh and twelfth centuries*, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 224–255.

<sup>4</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, pp. 44–45, paras. 27 and 28 up to l. 18. The translation is taken from Walker, "Middle Byzantine aesthetics", p. 100 (= Walker, *Emperor and the World*, pp. 175–176) with a few minor emendations.

Cypriot, or Cilician hand, but rather of a Persian hand, because it bears figures of Persians and their different costumes. Everywhere on the ceiling are scenes of various types applied to the heaven-like ceiling made of hemispheres. The recesses and projections of the angles are densely packed. The beauty of the carvings is extraordinary, the spectacle of the concave spaces is delightful, overlaid with gold, it produces the effect of a rainbow more colourful than the one in the clouds. There is insatiable pleasure — not hidden, but on the surface: not just for those who for the first time direct their gaze upon it, but also for those who visit it frequently [it evokes] amazement and surprise. This Persian house is more delightful than the Lakonian ones of Menelaus.

28. This Persian stage — the work of the hand of John's kinsman from his grandfather's family — framed the actor John. Although crowned, he was not dressed royally, sitting on the ground, a symbol of the suffering that had seized the wretch, and of the unbearableness of his misfortune. He was gulping his drink quickly and courting favour with the Persians painted on the house and drinking to them. Running with sweat, he sometimes wiped the sweat with a towel, sometimes flicked the sweat away with his crooked finger; already he was passing into a very deep sleep."

In 1907, August Heisenberg first suggested that elements of the architecture and decoration described in this passage must have derived from Saljūq palaces and, in 1972, Cyril Mango brought this to general attention. The implications for the history of Islamic art and architecture have since been extensively explored. The current consensus is that the Mouchroutas must have been a pavilion of the Saljūq type, a conical kiosk, covered with a *muqarnas* dome beneath a conical roof, and decorated with cruciform ceramic tiles and painted geometric designs.<sup>5</sup>

There are three fatal objections to this consensus: first, the Mouchroutas was not covered by a conical roof; second, the "enormous hall" described by Mesarites does not correspond to the compact form of a kiosk or pavilion; and, third, no example of the conical kiosk survives before the late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> century, so that the only example of the form that can be adduced from the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century is the putative Persian pavilion called the Mouchroutas.

I shall argue that Mouchroutas was the name that Mesarites, who alone uses the word, gave for literary purposes to the royal hall built by the emperor Manuel Komnenos in or before the late 1150s. The Manouēlites, as it was known in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, was a long, rectangular building of two storeys, running north-south. The upper storey consisted of a columned basilica with an apse in the south end to hold an imperial throne. Its walls were decorated with mosaics and it was covered by a wooden, coffered, *muqarnas* ceiling, resembling that of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. The carpenters who built both ceilings, and the artists who painted them, came from the Fāṭimid Mediterranean; indeed, I believe that the two ceilings may have been the work of the same workshop. Although the Mouchroutas

<sup>5</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 72. See also: J. Ebersolt, *Le grand palais de Constantinople et le livre des cérémonies*, Paris, 1910, pp. 149–150; R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Paris, 1964, p. 122; and R. Guillaud, *Études de topographie de Constantinople byzantine*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1969, vol. 1, p. 159. C.A. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, Englewood Cliffs (N.J.) 1972, pp. 228–229. P. Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 4, 1978, pp. 101–105; L.-A. Hunt, "Comnenian Aristocratic Palace Decoration: Descriptions and Islamic Connections", in M. Angold (ed.), *The Byzantine Aristocracy*, Oxford, 1984, pp. 141–142; C.M. Brand, "The Turkish Element in Byzantium, Eleventh–Twelfth Centuries", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 43, 1989, pp. 19–20; O. Grabar, "From Dome of Heaven to Pleasure Dome", in O. Grabar, *Islamic Art and Beyond: Volume 3*, Aldershot, 2006, p. 234; S. Redford, "Thirteenth-century Rum Seljuq palaces and palace imagery", *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 23, 1993, p. 219; N. Asutay-Effenberger, "'Mouchroutas': Der seldschukische Schaupavillon im Grossen Palast von Konstantinopel", *Byzantion*, vol. 74/2, 2004, pp. 313–329; A. Walker, "Middle Byzantine aesthetics of power and the incomparability of Islamic art", *Muqarnas*, vol. 27, 2010, pp. 79–101; A. Walker, *The Emperor and the World*, Cambridge and New York, 2012, pp. 144–164, 175–176; S. Redford, "Portable Palaces: On the Circulation of Objects and Ideas about Architecture in Medieval Anatolia and Mesopotamia", *Medieval Encounters*, vol. 18, 2012, pp. 395–402; S. Redford, "Constantinople, Konya, Conical Kiosks, Cultural Confluence", in A. Ödelam, N. Necipoğlu and E. Akyürek (eds.), *The Byzantine Court*, Istanbul, 2013, pp. 41–42.

was no Persian pavilion, the tiles and painted chevrons that decorated the staircase leading up to the hall may very well have come from Saljūq lands. Like the Cappella Palatina, the Mouchroutas deliberately juxtaposed a variety of imported exotic elements in order to demonstrate the range and universality of the ruler’s power. In both royal halls, the dominant aesthetic was cultural diversity, not homogeneity.

\* \* \* \* \*

August Heisenberg, the editor of the Greek text of Mesarites, consulted Theodor Nöldeke, the leading German Persianist of his day, about the origin of the word Mouchroutas, presumably because Mesarites claimed that the building was “Persian”. Nöldeke proposed that Mouchroutas derived from Arabic *makhrūt*, meaning “cone”, whence Persian, too, borrowed the word.<sup>6</sup> Although this derivation has since been almost universally accepted, the conical roof of the Mouchroutas is in fact a phantasm born of etymological error.<sup>7</sup>

In Arabic, *makhrūt* is the passive participle of the first form of *kharāṭa* – *yakhrīṭu*, originally “to strip a stem or branch of its leaves, bark, fruit etc.”, and thence “to plane”, “to turn on a lathe”, “to carve” and “to polish”, so that a thing that was *makhrūt* was “stripped”, “planed”, “turned (on a lathe)”, “carved” or “polished”.<sup>8</sup> *Makhrūt* has a specialised meaning of “a cone”, possibly because a round-based cone was most readily manufactured by turning on a lathe. While *makhrūt* is indeed used by medieval Arabic writers on astronomy, geometry, optics and other scientific genres to refer to any variety of pyramidal figure,<sup>9</sup> *kharāṭa* and its parts are used far more widely in medieval Arabic and Persian sources to refer to woodworking, especially with the lathe or the plane. They were applied not just to carving and turning wood, bone, ivory and the softer stones with metal tools, but also to wheel-carving, wheel-cutting, wheel-grinding and wheel-polishing glass and hard stones with the rotary devices and abrasive powders of the lapidary. *Kharāt* is a lathe, as are *makhrāṭ* and *makhrāṭa*. *Khīrāṭa* refers both to the process of turning wood, stone, ivory etc., and to its products. *Kharṭ* is turnery and the art of wheel-carving with abrasive powders. *Kharrāt* is a wood-turner, who uses the *qaws al-kharrāt* or turner’s bow to power the lathe, and manipulates the *mīkhrāṭ* or cutting tool, chisel, gouge, etc. *Khurāṭa* are the shavings produced by planing or turning wood. *Kharrāt* is also a lapidary and one who decorates glass or hard-stone vessels with wheel-ground facets, with wheel-cut incised designs, or with wheel-carved decoration in relief. And *makhrūt* is used to qualify a thing that has been turned, polished or cut.<sup>10</sup> *Khīrāṭa* and *kharrāt* more rarely refer to inlaid tablet-work, *opus sectile* and marquetry.

Most of the occurrences in the dictionaries and glossaries of *kharāṭa* – *yakhrīṭu* and its parts with reference to wood-working come from the timber-rich Mediterranean. Al-Bakrī

<sup>6</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 72. F.J. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, London, 1892, p. 1195 (see also the *Hudūd al-Ālam* in n. 18 below). J.W. Redhouse, *A lexicon, English and Turkish*, London, 1861, p. 164, s.v. “cone”. Nöldeke may have followed F. Miklosich, *Die türkischen Elemente in den südost- und osteuropäischen Sprachen*, 2 vols., Vienna, 1884–1890, vol. 2, p. 168, citing P. Papazapheroopoulos, *Perisynagōgē glōssikēs hylēs*, Patras, 1887, p. 462.

<sup>7</sup> See the works cited in note 6 above. Against this trend: Š. Čurčić, “Some Palatine Aspects of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo”. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 41, 1987, pp. 141–142, who rightly understood Mesarites to describe an “extraordinary carved wooden ceiling featuring ‘domes’ and stalactites, painted in vibrant colors and accented with gold leaf”, and compared it to that of the Cappella Palatina which “would seem to be much more in the mainstream of Middle Byzantine palatine art than previously thought possible”; and D. Knipp, “Image, presence, and ambivalence: the Byzantine tradition of the painted ceiling in the Cappella Palatina, Palermo”, in F.A. Bauer (ed.), *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft*, Istanbul, 2006, pp. 283–328. See also Walker, *Emperor and the World*, p. 146: “An alternative possibility for the origin of Mouchroutas is the Greek word Μουχρούτα (mouchrouta), meaning ‘a large bowl or vessel’ which is attested during the eleventh and twelfth centuries [citing E. Trapp, *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität*, 1994–, fasc. 5, p. 1050]. With this meaning in mind, we might understand ‘Mouchroutas’ to refer to the possibly rounded, bowl-like shape of the structure, or it could emphasize instead the connection of the hall with drinking and merrymaking.”

<sup>8</sup> E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 723–724; R.P.A. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 2 vols., Beirut, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 362–363; M.J. de Goeje, *Indices, glossarium et addenda et emenanda ad part I-III [Bibliothecae geographorum arabicorum]*, Leiden, 1879, p. 223; al-Idrīsī, *Description de l’Afrique et de l’Espagne*, ed. and transl. R.P.A. Dozy et M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1866, p. 293; F. Corriente, *A Dictionary of Andalusī Arabic*, Leiden, 1997, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> The only common use of *makhrūt* (pl. *makhrūtāt*) as an architectural term is specific and limited to the pyramids of Jīza (e.g. Abū Ja’far Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, *Kitāb Anwār ‘ulwī al-ajrām fī al-kashf ‘an asrār al-ahrām*, Beirut, 1991, pp. 14, 18, 19, 27, 106, 151).

<sup>10</sup> *Makhrūt* is also used metaphorically for something that looks as if it has been planed or carved, such as a long face, a scanty beard and something that has been cut short

(d. 1094) records that wood suitable for turning on a lathe (*al-‘ūd al-kharṭ*) was exported from the Jabal al-Raḥmān throughout Ifrīqiya and neighbouring lands. Amongst the markets and ports involved in this trade was Marsā al-Kharrāṭīn (“the harbour of the turners”).<sup>11</sup> Al-Idrīsī (fl. 1154) describes Ḥiṣn Qayshāṭa as “overlooked by a mountain where timber is felled for turning bowls, jars, plates and other things that are common in both al-Andalus and in most of the Maghrib”.<sup>12</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup>-century vocabulary of the Arabic dialect of Granada gives “to turn wood” (*bornear la madera, tornear*) for *kharāṭa*, and, for *makhrūt*, “turned wood, something turned on the lathe” (*borneada madera, torneada cosa a torno*).<sup>13</sup>

In the Mashriq, most occurrences of *kharāṭa* – *yakhrīṭu* and its parts refer to working glass and hard-stones. A much quoted story, first reported by al-Tanūkhī (940–994), opens with the grammarian nicknamed al-Zajjāj, saying: “I used to carve glass, but then I developed a craving for grammar” (*kuntu akhrūtu l-zujāja fa-shtahaytu l-naḥw*). The precise meaning of *kharāṭa* in this passage has proved problematic. Wadād al-Qāḍī translates the verb as “to clip”, and speculates that al-Zajjāj might have been responsible for the manufacture of glass weights for the government.<sup>14</sup> I have preferred to translate *kharāṭa* as “to carve”, because glass, once it has cooled, cannot easily be “clipped”. The verb generally refers to the “carving” of glass and hard-stones with a rotary device and abrasive powders, as when Ibn al-Bayṭār (d. 646/1248) says of malachite, “the lapidaries carve it” (*yakhrūtu-hu l-kharrāṭūn*),<sup>15</sup> and when al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 1038) reports that the Chinese are “extraordinary at carving statues” (*al-aghrābu fī kharṭi l-tamāthīl*).<sup>16</sup>

The passive participle *makhrūt* is used for glass or stone that has been “carved”. The *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, an anonymous Persian work finished in 982, lists “carved glass” (*ābgīna-yi makhrūt*) amongst the exports from Baghdad.<sup>17</sup> Al-Muqaddasī (d. c. 990) praises decorated wheel-cut glass produced in Tyre (*al-zujāj al-makhrūt wa-l-ma‘mulāt*).<sup>18</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal reports that the wealth of the local rulers of Armenia circa 955 permitted them to acquire, alongside gold and silver plate, and cameo glass (?), “costly carved rock crystal” (*al-billawr al-makhrūt al-thamīn*).<sup>19</sup> Al-Azdī (fl. late 10<sup>th</sup> century) describes how, in Baghdad, dainty *qaṭā‘if*, steeped in rosewater, were served “in cups of carved rock crystal and of cameo glass (?), and in bowls of many coloured china” (*fī jāmāti l-billawri l-makhrūṭi wa-l-muḥkami l-majrūdi wa-l-ṣuḥūni al-ṣīnīyi al-mulawwan*).<sup>20</sup> According to al-Birūnī (fl. 1040–1048), Muḥammad, the last

<sup>11</sup> al-Bakrī, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, ed. A.P. Van Leeuwen and A. Ferré, 2 vols., Beirut, 1992, vol. 2, p. 757, section 1269. J. al-Raḥmān is modern Ra’s Bū Qurūn (Cap Bougaroun), also known as Sab‘at Ru‘ūs, in the *wilāya* of Skikda, approximately 70km east of Jijal (Algeria).

<sup>12</sup> Modern Quesada in the province of Jaén, overlooked by the Sierra de Cazorla. al-Idrīsī, *Opus geographicum*, ed. A. Bombaci, Naples, 1970–1984, p. 569: *wa-‘alay-hi jabal yuqṭa‘u bi-hi mina l-khashab allādhī tukhraṭu min-hu l-qīṣā‘ wa-l-makhābi‘ wa-l-aṭbāq wa-ghayr dhālika mā ya‘ummu bilād al-Andalus wa-akthar bilād al-Maghrib*.

<sup>13</sup> F. Corriente, *El léxico árabe andalusí según P[edro] de Alcalá*, Madrid, 1988, p. 56. See also F. Corriente, *El léxico árabe andalusí según el ‘Vocabulista in arabico’*, Madrid, 1989, p. 95; Corriente, *Dictionary of Andalusī Arabic*, p. 154.

<sup>14</sup> al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥādara*, ed. ‘A. Shālji, 8 vols., Beirut, 1971–1973, vol. 1, p. 274. See also W. al-Qāḍī, “Al-Zajjāj and Glassmaking”, in B. Orfali (ed.), *In the Shadow of Arabic*, Leiden, 2011, pp. 221–224.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn al-Bayṭār, *Kitāb al-jāmi‘*, 4 vols. in 2, Baghdād, 1992, vol. 1, p. 405.

<sup>16</sup> al-Tha‘ālibī, *Laṭā‘if al-ma‘ārif*, ed. P. de Jong. Leiden, 1867, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> V. Minorsky (ed. and transl.), *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, London and Oxford, 1937, p. 138: “crystals turned on a lathe”, but rock crystal and even glass are too hard to have been turned on a lathe like wood. *Ābgīna* here almost certainly means “glass”, not “crystal”: see A. Shalem, “Medieval Islamic terms for glassware imitating vessels of carved precious stone”, in Y. Köse and T. Völker (eds.), *Şehrayin: illuminating the Ottoman world*, Wiesbaden, 2012, pp. 30–31.

<sup>18</sup> al-Muqaddasī, *Kitāb aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1906, p. 180. MS. C (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Aya Sofia no. 2971 bis) adds: *wa-akthar mā yu‘milu bi-l-Basra*, “and more than is made in Basra”. al-Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, transl. B.A. Collins, Reading, 1994, p. 151: “From Tyre come sugar, glass beads, and glass vessels both cut and elegantly formed”.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *Opus Geographicum auctore Ibn Ḥawqal*, Leiden, 1938–1939, p. 348. G. Wiet (transl.), *Configuration de la terre*, 2 vols., Beirut, 1965, vol. 2, p. 341, translates “...verre massif ... splendide cristal de roche façonné au tour”. The term may abbreviate *al-zujāj al-muḥkam al-majrūd*, and refer to cameo glass: see further n. 21 below.

<sup>20</sup> al-Azdī, *Hikāyat Abī al-Qāsīm al-Baghdādī*, ed. A. Mez, Heidelberg, 1902, p. 41; for *muḥkam*, p. LXII. P. Kahle, “Die Schätze der Fatimiden,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 14/89, 1935, pp. 341–342, 346, 355 and notes; C.J. Lamm, *Oriental Glass of Mediaeval Date found in Sweden and the Early History of Lustre-painting*, Stockholm, 1941, pp. 15–16. *Muḥkam* is often said to mean “solid”, “thick”, “well-made”, or “artistic” glass, and has even been thought to describe the so-called “Hedwig glass”: G. al-H. al-Qaddūmī (transl.), *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitāb al-Ḥadāya wa al-Tuḥaf)*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1996, pp. 314–314, citing B. Gray, “Thoughts on the origin of ‘Hedwig’ Glass”, in A. Raymond, M.J. Rogers and M. Wahba (eds.), *Colloque international sur l’histoire du Caire*, Cairo, 1969, pp. 191–194; Shalem, “Medieval Islamic terms”, *passim*. But I suspect that *al-muḥkam al-majrūd*, literally *muḥkam* that has been “peeled”, or “skinned”, refers specifically to

Ṭāhirid governor of Khurāsān (r. 862–873), kept in a special room in his treasury at Nīshāpūr the most precious pieces of carved and polished rock crystal (*al-billawr al-makhrūt wa-l-majrūd*); all were smashed by Ya‘qūb b. Layth al-Ṣaffār (“the Brass-maker”), who himself drank from a crude cup of unbreakable brass.<sup>21</sup> The Fāṭimid treasury held “an immeasurable quantity of carved backgammon pieces (*fuṣūṣ al-nard al-makhrūṭa*) of various precious and semiprecious stones, gold, silver, and other materials such as ivory and others”.<sup>22</sup> It also conserved “a large box of bowls, carved from a block of rock crystal, with its cover (*majma‘u sakārija makhrūtun min qiṭ‘atin billawrin bi-ghīṭā‘i-hi*), and in it were bowls of rock crystal”.<sup>23</sup>

*Makhrūt*, meaning a carved and polished treasure, was so well-established that it could be used figuratively in the *Romance of ‘Antar* to describe a peerless Byzantine knight as literally “carved from chivalry” — *wa-kāna dhālika l-baṭrīqu yusammā al-Baṭramūt / wa-hūwa mina l-furūsīya makhrūt* (“and that patrician was called al-Baṭramūt, / chivalry his most polished attribute”).<sup>24</sup>

The word Mouchroutas and its cognates are rare in medieval Greek. Only Mesarites gives this name to the hall in the Great Palace. The Arabic term may have entered Greek as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 957) reports that the Umayyad caliph al-Mu‘āwiya (r. 661–678) sent a Byzantine “patrician” diplomatic gifts, including “wheel-cut glass” (*al-zujāj al-makhrūt*), possibly made in Tyre.<sup>25</sup>

The earliest recorded occurrence of a cognate comes in 1083 from the *typikon* of Gregory Pakourianos for the monastery of the Mother of God Petritzonitissa (Bachkovo, Bulgaria): *Mouchroutia potēria dekaepta*, “Seventeen wheel-carved drinking glasses”. The six items following are: a ewer and a bowl (of unspecified fabric), another ewer of rock crystal; “another green ewer called *mēna*” (*mīnā*), a prized type of Islamic glass; other glass cups, and various lamps of unspecified fabric. That this is the only appearance in all the monastic inventories collected by John Thomas and Angela Hero of such imported Islamic exotica indicates that the *mouchroutia*, too, are exotic Islamic imports.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the

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cameo glass (S.M. Goldstein, L.S. Rakow and J.K. Rakow, *Cameo Glass: Masterpieces from 2000 Years of Glassmaking*, Corning, N.Y., 1982). *Muḥkam* is the passive participle of *aḥkama* – *yuhkimu* and means not only something that has been made “strong”, “solid”, “compact” etc., but also a composite artefact, the parts of which have been “firmly and closely joined or knit together” (Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 616). Ibn Ḥawqal’s reference (see n. 20 above) to *al-zujāj al-muḥkam* may well abbreviate the full term *al-zujāj al-muḥkam al-majrūd*, literally “composite glass [that has been] peeled” or “skinned”, i.e. cameo glass. Al-Azdī (*Hikāyat*, p. 47) uses *muḥkam majrūd* to describe cameo glass, in which the outer skin has been carved away to produce blue designs against a snowy white background (or vice versa): *yudīru-hā fī muḥkamin azraqa \* wa-abyaḍa ka-l-thalji majrūdī*, literally, “[the wine] circulated in a [vessel] of thickened blue, peeled [i.e. carved away] to reveal a snowy white”, referring either to a cup like that with ibexes and an augural inscription in blue relief on a colourless ground in the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art (inv. no. 2463), or to a jug like the Corning Ewer, decorated in green relief on a colourless ground with a pair of gazelles brought down by falcons (D. Whitehouse, “The Corning Ewer”, *Journal of Glass Studies*, vol. 35, 1993, pp. 48–56). *Majrūd* is also used of glass and rock crystal meaning “polished” (e.g. al-Bīrūnī in n. 22 below), and even “polished smooth”, to contrast with *munabbat*, “decorated in relief” (e.g. *Kitāb al-Dhakhā‘ir wa-l-Tuḥaf*, ed. M. Ḥamīd Allāh and Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Munajjid, Kuwait, 1959, p. 85, para. 105; al-Qaddūmī, *Gifts and Rarities*, p. 116: “Among the unusual vessels (*awānī*) were five unique, priceless rock crystal objects (*qiṭa‘ billawr*), which included a smooth large bowl (*bāṭiya majrūda*) ... [and] ... balance beams (or pans?), one smooth and the other in high relief (*qanāṭir mīzān, aḥad-humā majrūd wa-l-ākhar munabbat*)”.

<sup>21</sup> al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Jamāhir fī l-jawāhir*, ed. Y. al-Hādī, Tehran, 1995, p. 299. See also Shalem, “Medieval Islamic terms”, pp. 27–28.

<sup>22</sup> *Kitāb al-Dhakhā‘ir*, p. 257, para. 390 (read *al-makhrūṭa* for *al-makhrūṭa*); al-Qaddūmī, *Gifts and Rarities* pp. 235–236, and p. 396, para. 390, n. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Kitāb al-Dhakhā‘ir*, p. 270, para. 404; al-Qaddūmī, *Gifts and Rarities*, p. 238, para. 404, mistranslates “A large box (*majma‘*) for [keeping] appetizer-saucers (*sakārij*) [was found] with its cover (*ghīṭā‘*) cut with a lathe from a [single] block of rock crystal”.

<sup>24</sup> A.P. Caussin de Perceval (ed.), *Extraits du roman d’Antar (texte arabe)*, Paris, 1841, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. and transl. C. Barbier de Meynard and A. Pavet de Courteille, 9 vols., Paris, 1861–1877, vol. 8, pp. 75–87, and especially p. 80.

<sup>26</sup> P. Gautier, “Le typikon du Sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos”, *Revue des études byzantines*, vol. 42, 1984, p. 125, l. 1748: “Dix-sept verres mouchroutia” (p. 124), but the fabric is not specified. J. Thomas and A.C. Hero (eds.), *Byzantine monastic foundation documents*, 5 vols, Washinton (D.C.), 2000, vol. 2, p. 554 and p. 559 n. 62, translate “Seventeen conical glasses”, citing L. Bouras, “Byzantine lighting devices”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, vol. 32/3, 1983, p. 481 and n. 54, who suggested that they may have perhaps been “conical glasses related to the seventeen polycandela” listed four items above in the same inventory; for their “conical” shape Bouras cites Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 228 (on the “conical” domes of the Mouchroutas!). Trapp, *Lexicon*, p. 1050b, citing this *typikon*, lists τὸ μούχρoutov, and translates “Trinkschale. Becher”. For *mīnā*’ glass (and enamel): M. Aga-Oglu “The origin of the term *mīnā* and its meanings”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 5/4, 1946, pp. 249–251; al-Bīrūnī, *al-Jamāhir*, pp. 367–368; al-Nīshābūrī, *Jawāhir nāmah-i Nīzāmī*, Tehran, 2004, pp. 104, 110,

*mouchroutia* listed alongside various vessels of glass, copper and unspecified fabric in the will of Sabbas, *cathēgoumen* of the Monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos, dateable to September 1127–1128, were most probably also imported Islamic wheel-carved beakers.<sup>27</sup>

In the *Ptochoprodromos*, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century collection of poems with notoriously challenging vernacular vocabulary, *mouchroutin* appears thrice and the augmented noun *mouchrouta* once, always in the context of wine-drinking. The modern editor-translator renders all as “jug” (*Weinkrug, Krüge*), but the context would better fit a capacious beaker: “After eating the cheese and the sausages, he gives himself four times the large *mouchroutin*, drinks and belches...”; “He downs the sweet wine from the large *mouchroutin*...”; “[Might] I but eat these excellent things, slurp their sauce, down four times a *mouchrouta* of Chian [wine], belch and go sleepily to bed...”; “and a tray with full *moukhroutin* of sweet wine”.<sup>28</sup>

When the word *mouchroutia* can next be traced, in Cyprus from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it is used for locally made earthenware beakers, and not for imported Islamic wheel-cut vessels.<sup>29</sup>

Mesarites says just enough about the images of the ceiling of the Mouchroutas for us, with one eye on the Cappella Palatina, to reconstruct the decorative programme: the “figures of Persians and their different costumes” must have been depicted in the act of drinking, because John was “courting favour with the Persians painted on the house and drinking to them”. Exactly such scenes can still be seen in the Cappella Palatina, where the framing theme is the royal *majlis al-sharāb*, in which the ruler is shown drinking with his *nudamā*’ or cup-companions, each dressed in a different costume (Figs. 3 and 4). We can also reconstruct the “scenes of various types” on the model of the Cappella Palatina, where the royal *majlis* is entertained by musicians and dancing girls, attended by servants and guards, and surrounded by exotic and auspicious royal beasts, while mnemonic scenes evoke the stories of war and the hunt, and the popular tales, that would have entertained the company.<sup>30</sup>

194, 210, 324, 341, 343–350; al-Tūsī, *Tansūkh nāmah-i Īlkhānī*, Tehrān, 1969, pp. 58, 59, 148, 218; and Shalem, “Medieval Islamic terms”, pp. 31–33. Al-Azdī, *Hikāyat*, p. 45, lists the varieties of “perfect ‘glass’: carved rock crystal, cameo glass [see n. 21 above], green *mīnā*’ [glass], and large bowls [of glass] inlaid with gold” (*zujājan malīhan mā bayna billawrin makhruṭīn wa-muhkamīn majrādīn wa-mīnā’ in akhdara wa-quṭūlīyīn mujran bi-l-dhahab.*) (For *quṭūl* see al-Khwārizmī, *Majāṭīh al-’ulūm*, ed. I. al-Ibyārī, Beirut, 1984, p. 203; Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 1392a; W. Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte*, Leiden, 1955, pp. 34–35; a *quṭūl* might have had a capacity of approximately 0.3 of a litre.)

<sup>27</sup> F.R. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*. 6 vols. Vienna, 1860–1890, vol. 6, pp. 241–246 (at p. 245, l. 7): a copper jug, kettles for water and soap, *mouchroutia*, twelve bowls and twelve dishes of unspecified fabric, two small glass bowls, a large bowl (*pinákin*) of unspecified fabric, a dish of blue glass, three glass jars, and jugs and beakers of unspecified fabric and various sizes.

<sup>28</sup> *Ptochoprodromos*, ed. and transl. H. Eideneier, Cologne, 1991: pp. 123/193, III.120–122 (D.C. Hesseling and H.O. Pernot, *Poèmes prodromiques*, Amsterdam, 1910, p. 75, IV.54–56); 124/193, III.134 (Hesseling and Pernot, *Poèmes prodromiques*, p. 76, IV.70); 148/204, IV.180–182 (Hesseling and Pernot, *Poèmes prodromiques*, p. 55, III.156); 150/205, IV.215 (Hesseling and Pernot, *Poèmes prodromiques*, p. 56, III.185); and 254. Hesseling and Pernot, *Poèmes prodromiques*, p. 205, list *mouchroutin* as a variant and synonym of *misourin* (i.e. *minsourion* “dish, plate”), on the authority of G. Meyer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der albanesischen Sprache*, Strassburg, 1891, p. 288, and also refer to A. Sakellarios, *Ta Kupriaka*, 2 vols, Athens, 1890–1891, vol. 2, p. 669. Meyer lists Albanian *muchrute* “deep plate”, from Greek, and, in addition to the *Ptochoprodromos*, cites S. Iōannidēs, *Historia kai statistikē Trapezountos*, Constantinople, 1870, p. 22 of the glossary (“*Machourt, to mouchraton*, a cup of brass, also of earthenware”). See also P. Koukoules, *Vyzantinōn vios kai politismos*, 5 vols., Athens, 1948–1957, vol. 5, pp. 154, 155, 159 and 165.

<sup>29</sup> (1) K. Sathas (ed.), *Asizai tou basileiou tōn Ierosolumōn kai tēs Kuprou*, in idem, *Mesaiōnikē bibliothēkē*, 7 vols, Venice, 1872–1894, vol. 6, p. 494, ll. 19–22. I am grateful to Professor Marc Lauxtermann (Exeter College, Oxford) for this reference, and for his English translation. See also: S. Varela, *Language contact and the lexicon in the history of Cypriot Greek*, Bern, 2006, pp. 27–32; N. Coureas (transl.), *The Assizes of the Lusignan Kingdom of Cyprus*, Nicosia, 2002, p. 289 and p. 223 for the other version of the same text. E.H. von Kausler (ed.), *Les livres des assises et des usages dou reyaume de Jerusalem, sive Leges et instituta regni Hierosolymitani*, Stuttgart, 1839, p. 283, Article 238. (2) A 15<sup>th</sup>-century collection of magic recipes and spells: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Grec. 2316, f. 370v, l. 3. A. Delatte, *Anecdota Atheniensia*, 2 vols., Liège, 1927, vol. 1, p. 553, l. 2. (3) A 15<sup>th</sup>-century “potter’s wife”: Leontios Makhairas, *Recital concerning the sweet land of Cyprus, entitled “Chronicle”*, ed. and transl. R.McG. Dawkins, 2 vols, Oxford, 1932, vol. 1, pp. 672–673, para. 695; vol. 2, pp. 229–230, n. 695.2. (4) See also: E. Kriaras, *Lexiko tēs mesaiōnikēs Hellēnikēs dēmōdous grammateias, 1100-1669*, 14– vols., Thessalonica, 1968–, vol. 11, pp. 78–79; Trapp, *Lexicon*, fasc. 5, p. 1050; and the discussion of *mouchroutin* in *Artefacts and Raw Materials in Byzantine Archival Documents / Objets et matériaux dans les documents d’archives byzantines*, University of Fribourg <<http://elearning.unifr.ch/apb/typika/synthese/405>> (accessed 5th October 2015).

<sup>30</sup> J. Johns, “Le pitture del soffitto della Cappella Palatina”, in B. Brenk (ed.), *La Cappella Palatina a Palermo*, 4 vols, Modena, 2010, *Atlante I*, figs. 158–194, pp. 133–147, figs. 369–384, pp. 286–303; *Atlante II*, figs. 473–1220, pp. 384–823; *Saggi*, pp. 353–407; *Schede*, pp. 429–456, 487–510, 540–665.

The seated-drinkers in the Cappella Palatina imbibe from a wide variety of vessels. The *Crowned Ruler with Attendants* in the middle of the south side of the *muqarnas* holds a beaker with a convex rounded base and flaring sides, decorated with a horizontal band of circles with central dots beneath the rim, and with parallel vertical wavy lines on the sides (Fig. 3). The artist intended to represent a vessel of clear glass or rock crystal because bright red wine could once be seen in the beaker; for reasons undisclosed, the red pigment was largely removed by the recent restoration.<sup>31</sup> Decoration is indicated on most of the vessels, — bands of circles and of scrolling, with palmettes and half-palmettes, zones of cross-hatching, and parallel horizontal and vertical lines, both straight and wavy (Fig. 5) — all designs attested in medieval Islamic cut glass. The beakers held by the *nudamā'* in the Cappella Palatina — and, I imagine, in the Mouchroutas — thus represent the sort of Islamic wheel-carved wine-beakers that appear under the name of *mouchroutia* in Byzantine monastic inventories and in the *Ptochoprodromos*.

Mesarites's name for the Mouchroutas was thus coined from the Greek word borrowed from Arabic for wheel-carved wine-beakers, and not from the Persian — still less the Turkish — word for a cone. Indeed, Mesarites's description of the structure of the ceiling cannot have applied to a single vault beneath a conical roof, and much better fits a wooden, coffered, *muqarnas* ceiling (Figs 6 and 7). This is most clearly demonstrated by means of comparison of Mesarites's account of the ceiling of the Mouchroutas with the description of the wooden, coffered, *muqarnas* ceiling of the Cappella Palatina by Philagathos Kerameos.<sup>32</sup>

#### Mesarites

Everywhere on the ceiling are scenes of various types applied to the heaven-like ceiling made of hemispheres. The recesses and projections of the angles are densely packed. The beauty of the carvings is extraordinary, the spectacle of the concave spaces is delightful, overlaid with gold, it produces the effect of a rainbow more colourful than the one in the clouds.

#### Philagathos

As to the ceiling, one can never see enough of it; it is wonderful to look at and to hear about. It is decorated with delicate carvings, variously formed like little coffers; all flashing with gold, it imitates the heavens when, through the clear air, the host of stars shines everywhere.

Both ceilings imitate the heavens, a common literary trope. Both are gilded. Philagathos describes the central section of the nave ceiling as formed of little basket-like coffers; Mesarites describes the Mouchroutas ceiling as "made of hemispheres", indicating not a single dome but multiple domed coffers, just as in Palermo. The *muqarnas* frieze that effects the transition from the central coffered zone of the ceiling to the vertical walls of the chapel is not described by Philagathos, but can still be seen. From the perspective of the Cappella Palatina, "the recesses and projections of the angles" described by Mesarites can only refer to the multifaceted units of *muqarnas*, while the "concave spaces" may be hemispherical coffers in the central section, or niches in the *muqarnas*, or both.

It may be significant that both Mesarites and Philagathos perceived the multifaceted, three-dimensional forms of the coffers and the *muqarnas* to be "carvings" (respectively, *ai glyphides* and *ai glyphai*), although they were in fact assembled from many thin wooden panels. This was a common misapprehension. The late twelfth-century author of the *Epistola ... de calamitate Siciliae* claimed that the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina was remarkable for "the outstanding elegance of the carving" (*celature*, i.e. *caelaturae* < *caelo*, *caelare*, "to

<sup>31</sup> Johns, "Le pitture", *Atlante II*, Fig. 853. A very similar decorative scheme is found on other beakers depicted in the ceilings: *Atlante I*, figs 160 (C11a, C14a, C33a, C34a), 370 (C10a); *Atlante II*, figs 673, 834, 894. For a complete list of *nudamā'*, see *Schede*, No. 485, pp. 557–559.

<sup>32</sup> Philagathos Kerameos, *Omēlie per i vangeli domenicali*, ed. G. Rossi Taibbi, Palermo, 1969, pp. 174–175. J. Johns, "The Date of the Ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo", in E.J. Grube and J. Johns, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, Genova and New York, 2005, p. 13.

carve"), a phrase echoed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Tommaso Fazello.<sup>33</sup> It is thus just possible that Mesarites had sufficient knowledge of the Arabic root from which *mouchroutia* was borrowed — *makhrūt*, "something that has been carved" — to hazard a learned pun upon the "carved" wine-beakers held by the royal cup-companions who were painted on the "carved" ceiling of the Mouchroutas.

Be that as it may, Mesarites's principal motive for coining the name Mouchroutas was to establish the persona of John the Fat as an oriental. Mesarites claims that the building was "the work of John's kinsman from his grandfather's family". Although John's maternal grandfather was Alexios Komnenos, there can be little doubt that Mesarites is here referring primarily to the usurper's paternal grandfather, John Axouch (Fig. 1). The latter was a Turk — Choniātēs and Kinnamos both call him a "Persian"<sup>34</sup> — captured as a child in June 1097. When Mesarites first catches sight of John enthroned in the Triklinos of Justinian, he remarks on his "straight, black, rough hair, characteristic of his race, inherited from his grandfather" — a clear reference to John Axouch.<sup>35</sup> Mesarites does not reveal precisely which of John's kinsmen he had in mind; his principal purpose was to establish that he was an oriental. At the same time, Mesarites's ambiguous phrase may also conceal a knowing reference to the emperor Manuel, the brother of his paternal grandfather (Fig. 1).

Mesarites repeatedly stresses that the Mouchroutas was an oriental building. It was "the work ... of a Persian hand", a "Persian house" and a "Persian stage". Koray Durak argues that, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, Byzantine writers distinguished between "Persians" (*Persikoi*), a term reserved for the Great Saljūqs, and "Turks" (*Tourkoi*), meaning the Saljūqs of Rūm. But Mesarites wrote in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, after the decline of the Great Saljūqs, when these same terms came to be used interchangeably to mean not only "Persians" and "Turks" but also, more generally, "Muslims" or "things Islamic".<sup>36</sup> For example, Tornikios calls John the Fat both a "Persian" and "the ungrateful seed of Ishmael", that is a Muslim, or more precisely an Arab Muslim.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that we should not take too literally Mesarites's insistence that the Mouchroutas was Persian; his main purpose was not ethnographic but literary — to set the scene, what he calls the "Persian stage", on which John could play the oriental. In that role, Mesarites has the drunken John, seated on the floor in the oriental manner, toast the "Persian" *nudamā* depicted on the ceiling, as if he were the ruler in the oriental *majlis* painted above his head.

Jean Ebersolt suggested tentatively, and Rodolphe Guillard asserted with absolute conviction, that the Mouchroutas was identical to the ancient Lausiakos, a massive hall originally built in *circa* 694 by Justinian II.<sup>38</sup> That Mesarites does not mention the Lausiakos may well indicate, as Ebersolt cautiously suggested, that this part of the Great Palace had been extensively altered after the *Book of Ceremonies* was revised in the 960s.<sup>39</sup> Paul Magdalino authoritatively rejected Guillard's assertion that the Lausiakos and the Mouchroutas were the same, and it seems to me that he must be right. However, I cannot accept his conclusion that the Ioustinianos must have lain between the Mouchroutas and the

<sup>33</sup> S. Tramontana, ed. and transl., *Lettera a un tesoriere di Palermo*, Palermo, 1988, p. 136. T. Fazello, *De rebus Siculis*, 2 vols., Palermo, 1558, vol. 1, pp. 172–173 (dec. I, lib. VIII, cap. 1). See also J. Johns, "Muslim Artists and Christian Models in the Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina", in R. Bacile and J. McNeil (eds.), *Romanesque and the Eastern Mediterranean*, London, 2015, p. 83, n. 18.

<sup>34</sup> Choniātēs, *Historia*, p. 9; Niketas Choniātēs, *O city of Byzantium*, transl. H.J. Magoulias, Detroit, 1984, p. 7. Iōannēs Kinnamos, *Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, ed. A. Meinecke, Bonn, 1836, p. 5; Iōannēs Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, transl. C.M. Brand, New York, 1976, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 28, ll. 6–8; Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, transl. Grabler, p. 283.

<sup>36</sup> K. Durak, "Defining the 'Turk'", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, vol. 59, 2009, pp. 65–78.

<sup>37</sup> Darrouzès, "Discours d'Euthyme Tornikès", pp. 54 and 66–67, para. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Ebersolt, *Grand palais*, p. 214, n. 1. Guillard, *Études de topographie*, vol. 1, pp. 158–159, 351–352.

<sup>39</sup> Ebersolt, *Grand palais*, p. 214, n. 1. Earlier alterations to the Lausiakos are certainly attested. Theophanes Continuatus reports that Theophilos (r. 829–842) redecorated both the Ioustinianos and the Lausiakos with golden mosaics, "and, transporting the coffered ceiling (*kalathōsis*) from the palace of the usurper Basiliscus, he put it up in the Lausiakos". *Kalathōsis* is cognate with *kalathiskoi*, the term used by Philagathos for the little coffers in the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina. Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Libri I–IV*, ed. and trans. J.M. Featherstone, J. Signes Corderoñer, and C. de Boor, Berlin and Boston, 2015, p. 211. Guillard 1969, pp. 154 and 162 n. 67.

western edge of the palace.<sup>40</sup> The Ioustinianos ran southeast from the Skyla to the Tripeton, the western vestibule of the Chrysotriklinos.<sup>41</sup> There would have been insufficient space for the enormous Mouchroutas hall to have been built between the Chrysotriklinos and the southeast end of the Ioustinianos. The Mouchroutas must thus have lain to the west of the Ioustinianos and, it follows, cannot have been identical to the Lausiakos, which lay to the east of the latter.

The Mouchroutas clearly stood at a higher level than the Chrysotriklinos. When John's shield-bearers fled from the throne room, "they went up to the Mouchroutas".<sup>42</sup> Again, when the loyal troops attacked the rebels from the Chrysotriklinos, they had to fight their way up the stairs in order to enter the Mouchroutas.<sup>43</sup> And, after John was captured, he was tumbled headlong down the stairs of the Mouchroutas, and then dragged into the Ioustinianos.<sup>44</sup> From the Skyla to the Marmara shore, the land fell away steeply to the south, dropping some thirty metres over a distance of less than three hundred (Fig. 2), so that the buildings of the Great Palace were built on six terraces. The Chrysotriklinos probably stood on the terrace at 16m above sea level, a little to the west of Sinan's Kapı Ağası Mahmut Ağa Külliyesi.<sup>45</sup>

A glance at the modern contour map (Fig. 2) suggests that the Chrysotriklinos stood on the southern flank of a low spur that ran southwest towards the Sea of Marmara above the "House of Justinian" and the Maritime Gate. If Mesarites's testimony is accepted, that the Mouchroutas lay both to the west and on higher ground than the Chrysotriklinos, then it can only have stood upon this spur, perhaps at about 20m above sea level. It cannot have stood any further to the west because there the land falls away steeply and the western wall of Nikephoros Phokas delimits the area within which the Mouchroutas must have lain.<sup>46</sup>

Having established the approximate position of the Mouchroutas, it remains to ask under which emperor was it built? The vague phrase of Mesarites identifying the builder of the Mouchroutas as a member of the family of John Axouch merely narrows the field to one of the emperors John II (r. 1118–1143), Manuel I (r. 1143–1180) and, conceivably, Isaac II Angelos (r. 1185–1195).<sup>47</sup> Guillard had no doubt that Manuel had built the Mouchroutas, and he may well be right,<sup>48</sup> but he did not make use of the record of the Council of 1166 which reports that Manuel presided and "occupied the imperial throne in the upper floor, on the seaward side, of the hall recently built by the Emperor in the Great Palace over the western wall; the hall which takes its name from the appellation of Manuel, in which the artist's craft, taking but a few of the Emperor's innumerable achievements, has portrayed these, as best it could, in golden tesserae mixed with others of various colours". Manuel is said to have sat "in the apse (*tropikē*) in the south end of the upper floor of the *Porphyromanouēlatos triklinos* in the Great Palace".<sup>49</sup> This hall is clearly identical with the *Manouēlites basilikos triklinos* of the Great Palace in which the festivities following the coronation of Michael IX Palaiologos

<sup>40</sup> Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos", pp. 107–108.

<sup>41</sup> *Constantine Porphyrogenetos, The Book of Ceremonies*, ed. and transl. A. Moffatt and M. Tall, 2 vols.. Canberra, 2012, vol. 1, p. 123 (I:21), vol. 2, p. 524 (II:2). Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos", p. 113 and note c. Featherstone, "Chrysotriklinos", pp. 836, 840.

<sup>42</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 44; Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, transl. Grabler, p. 309.

<sup>43</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 45; Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, transl. Grabler, p. 311.

<sup>44</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 46; Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, transl. Grabler, p. 312.

<sup>45</sup> E. Bolognesi Recchi-Franceschini, "The Great Palace Survey. The first season", in W. Jobst (ed.), *Neue Forschungen und Restaurierungen im byzantinischen Kaiserpalast von Istanbul*, Vienna, 1999, Fig. 1; E. Bolognesi Recchi-Franceschini, "The Great Palace 1999", *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı*, vol. 19/1, 2001, pp. 157–160 and 163 fig. 6 (= N-S section through terraces near to the Chrysotriklinos); and E. Bolognesi Recchi-Franceschini, "The Eleventh Survey of the Great Palace", *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı*, vol. 20/1, 2002, pp. 115 and 121. See also the admirably clear contour plan in J. Bardill, "The Great Palace of the Byzantine emperors and the Walker Trust excavations", *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol. 12, 1999, p. 216, fig. 1, on which Fig. 1 above is largely based.

<sup>46</sup> For the walls of Phokas and the location of the Mouchroutas, see C.A. Mango, "The Palace of the Boukoleon", *Cahiers Archéologiques*, vol. 45, 1997, pp. 41–50.

<sup>47</sup> See the discussion by Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos", pp. 108–109.

<sup>48</sup> Guillard *Études de topographie*, vol. 1, pp. 158–160. As demonstrated above, however, Guillard erred in identifying the Mouchroutas with the Lausiakos.

<sup>49</sup> A. Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio*, 10 vols, Rome, 1825–1838, vol. 4 pp. 36–37. Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos", pp. 106–108.

in 1295 were celebrated.<sup>50</sup> From the crest of the spur to the west of the Chrysotriklinos, the Mouchroutas would have overlooked both the sea to the south, and the wall of Nikephoros Phokas that ran north-south no more than 100m to the west, a position which corresponds closely to that of the Manouēlites according to the conciliar report. There can be little doubt that the Mouchroutas and the Manouēlites are one and the same building.

If so, then we may combine the scanty accounts of the Manouēlites with Mesarites's description of the Mouchroutas to arrive at a more detailed composite picture of the building. It was an enormous, rectangular hall, running north-south, and built on two storeys.<sup>51</sup> A circular masonry staircase led up to the *piano nobile*. The upper registers of the walls of this stair were covered with *mīnā'ī* tiles, set as an interlocking pattern of crosses and eight-pointed stars, while the lower register or dado was painted with parallel bands of polychrome painted chevrons.<sup>52</sup> The staircase led up to "a long columned hall" (*epimēkistos kai peristylos andrōn*),<sup>53</sup> at the south end of which was an apse containing an imperial throne.<sup>54</sup> Its walls were decorated with polychrome and golden mosaics depicting the deeds and triumphs of the emperor Manuel. These must have been set soon after the Italian campaign of 1155–56, and were still visible in 1166, although Kinnamos (d. post 1185) hints that they may have been removed to allay criticism.<sup>55</sup> As we have already seen at some length, the hall was covered by a wooden, coffered, *muqarnas* ceiling, painted with stock scenes from the Islamic palatial repertoire, including images of the ruler and his *nudamā'* at a *majlis al-sharab*. At its northern end, a door opened into the dark labyrinth of passages that ran uphill toward the imperial stables.<sup>56</sup>

The ceiling of the Mouchroutas belonged to a tradition of Islamic palatial ceilings of which only that of the nave of the Cappella Palatina survives. The latter was built and decorated by a co-ordinated workshop of carpenters and painters from Fāṭimid Cairo, who had already collaborated in the construction of similar ceilings over palatial halls before they came to Palermo.<sup>57</sup> This highly specialised workshop most probably emerged in response to demand from Cairo during the heyday of the Fāṭimid caliphate. But, as the wealth and patronage of the Fāṭimid court declined during the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the workshop sought new commissions overseas. In the 1130s and '40s, in Norman Palermo, it participated in one of the greatest artistic enterprises of the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Mediterranean. I believe that the same workshop went on from Palermo to Constantinople to make a similar ceiling over the great hall built for Manuel. The latter ceiling must have been finished before work began on the wall mosaics, which celebrate the Italian campaign of 1155–56, giving *terminus ante quem* of the late 1150s for the construction and painting of the ceiling. Half a century later, Mesarites called the Manouēlites, the Mouchroutas.

In coining the name Mouchroutas, which he alone employs, Mesarites sought to create a plexus of allusion. By rejecting the name of Manouēlites, he avoided all explicit reference to the Komnenan parentage of John the usurper, although he does seem to have risked a knowing, if ambiguous and veiled, reference to the building being "the work of the hand of John's kinsman from his grandfather's family". By coining a new name for the building from an Arabic loanword, he added an exotic backdrop to the "Persian stage" that he was setting for John the Fat to play the oriental. By punning on *mouchroutia*, referring to the Islamic relief-carved beakers from which John and his "Persian" cup-companions drank to

<sup>50</sup> Georgios Pachymeres, *De Michaele et Andronico Palaeologis libri tredecim*, ed. I. Bekker, 2 vols., Bonn, 1835, vol. 2, p. 197.

<sup>51</sup> Mai, *Scriptorum veterum*, vol. 4 pp. 36–37. Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 310; trans. p. 44.

<sup>52</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 310; trans. p. 44. See also the secondary works cited in note 5 above.

<sup>53</sup> Choniātēs, *Historia*, p. 206; Choniātēs, *O city of Byzantium*, pp. 117.

<sup>54</sup> A. Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio*, 10 vols, Rome, 1825–1838, vol. 4 pp. 36–37; trans. Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenus", pp. 106–108.

<sup>55</sup> Choniātēs, *Historia*, pp. 114, 206; Choniātēs, *O city of Byzantium*, pp. 65, 117. Kinnamos, *Epitome*, pp. 171–172; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel*, pp. 131–132: the passage continues "If there are inscribed there more than these, it is excessive flattery and a servile fashion of those who laid claim to the deeds, such as is usually the case with the multitude, on which account I once heard the emperor himself express his anger. Whether they were removed, I am unable to state unreservedly".

<sup>56</sup> Mesarites, *Palastrevolution*, p. 311; trans. p. 45

<sup>57</sup> Johns, "Muslim artists", pp. 59–65, with full bibliography.

each other, Mesarites reinforced the image of John as oriental drunkard. And, perhaps, depending upon his understanding of the Arabic root, he may even have intended a reference to what he perceived to be the "carved" wooden structure of the ceiling.

The Mouchroutas and the Cappella Palatina had more in common than just their ceilings (Fig. 8). Both were royal halls with a royal throne at one end. Both were raised on the *piano nobile* and reached by a monumental staircase. Both were decorated with mosaics. Both were covered by a wooden *muqarnas* ceiling, painted with scenes from the Islamic palatial cycle, framed within a depiction of a royal *majlis al-sharāb*. Above all, both juxtaposed elements that had been deliberately assembled from a variety of exotic cultures.

Through the creation of a deliberately syncretising material and visual culture for the new Sicilian monarchy, King Roger and his ministers sought to proclaim not only his place in the international community of kings and his mastery of Arab, Greek and Latin cultures, but also how the unifying power of the Norman king could "harmonize the inharmonious and mix together the unmixable ... blending and uniting into a single race disparate and incongruent peoples", creating a single Sicilian *populus trilinguis*.<sup>58</sup> This Sicilian policy was in part inspired by the manner in which contemporary Byzantine emperors manipulated exotic elements in order to display the nature of their imperial power.<sup>59</sup> But cultural diplomacy in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Mediterranean spread ideas in all directions. Byzantine mosaicists helped carry the idea of royal Christomimesis to Norman Sicily. Fāṭimid painters carry the profuse and infinitely rich imagery of the royal *majlis* to Palermo. And, there, this type of Islamic ceiling seems to have become established as a desirable accessory for palaces inhabited even by Christian members of the family of kings. And therefore, when the carpenters and painters had finished the ceiling of King Roger's royal hall, some time before the late 1150s, they were sent, or summoned, to Constantinople to cover a new royal hall of the emperor Manuel Komnenos.

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<sup>58</sup> Eugenius of Palermo, *Versus iambici*, ed. and transl. Marcello Gigante, Palermo, 1964, No. 24, ll. 65–69, text pp. 127–131, Ital. trans. pp. 162–164. Peter of Eboli, *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, ed. and transl. T. Kölzer and M. Stähli, Sigmaringen, 1994, p. 45, l. 56.

<sup>59</sup> Walker, *Emperor and the World*, passim.

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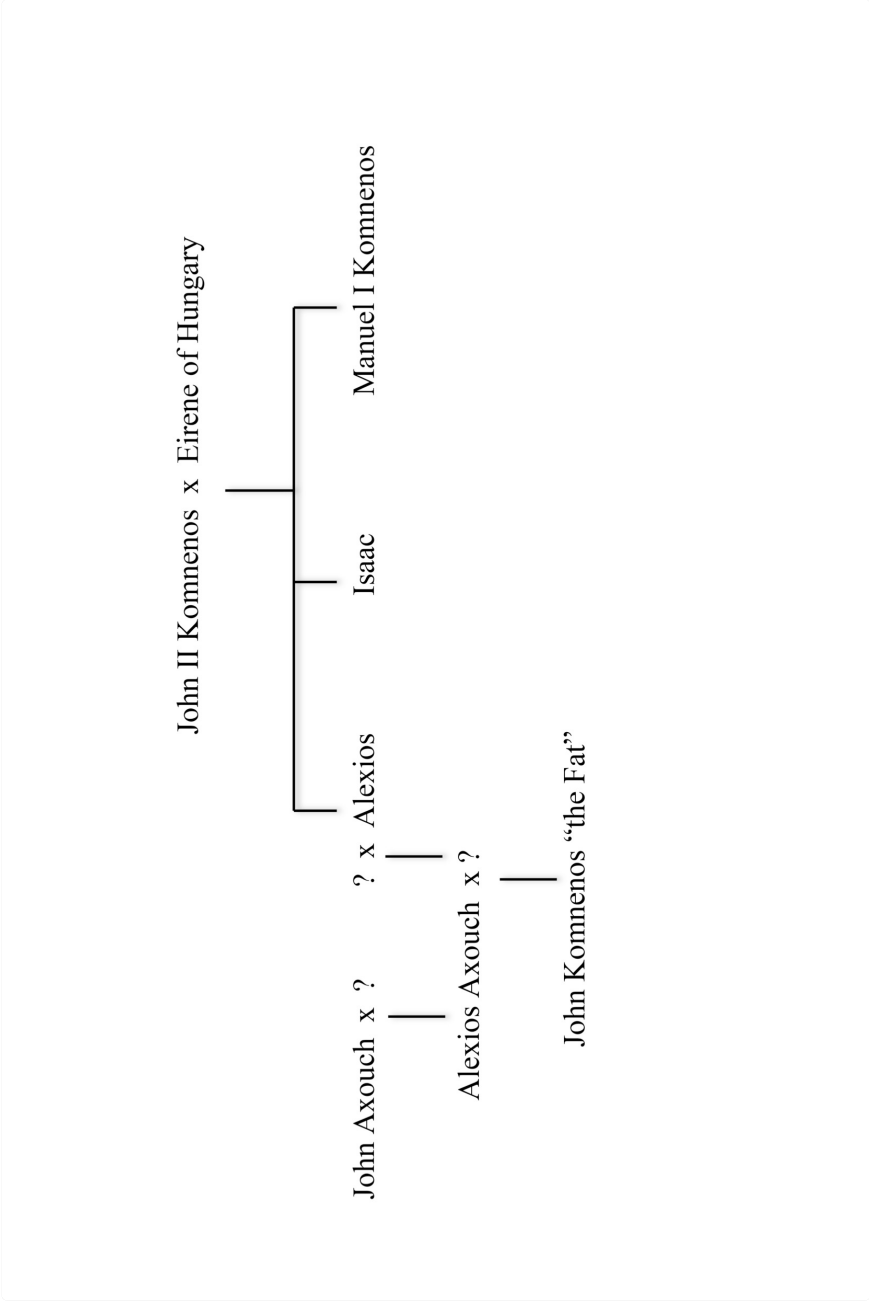


Fig. 1: John Axouch and his descendants

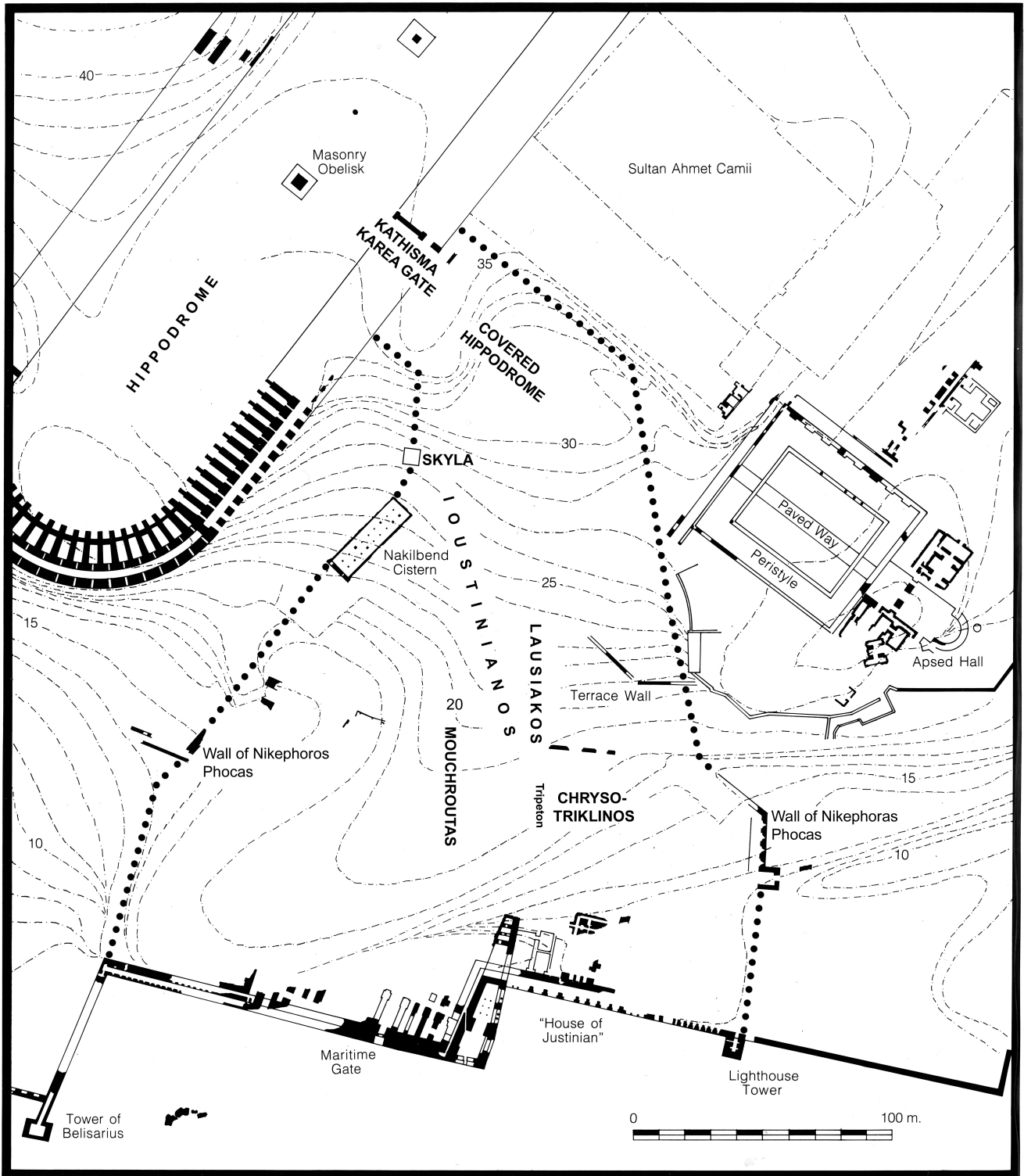


Fig. 2: Constantinople, Great Palace: plan of the southwest corner, showing the Byzantine structures and contours above sea level as in 1992, and also indicating the approximate positions of the principal structures mentioned in the text (after Bardill, "Great Palace", fig. 1, and Mango, "Boukoleon", fig. 5, with additions and modifications by the author).



Fig. 3: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, Cappella Palatina, nave ceiling, *muqarnas* frieze, south side, large unit 15: Seated ruler with wine-cup in right hand, flanked by a cupbearer (*sāqī*) and a musician playing the flute (*nāy*): Khalili Research Centre Image Archive, slide ISL15422 (© Barakat Trust and University of Edinburgh). See also Johns, "Pitture", *Atlante 2*, p. 618, Fig. 853 and *Schede*, pp. 626–628, no. 853.



Fig. 4: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, Cappella Palatina, nave ceiling, *muqarnas* frieze: Six royal cup-companions (*nudamā*): clockwise from top left: KRC Image Archive, slides ISL15037, 15013, 15525, 14997, 15534 and 15010 (© Barakat Trust and University of Edinburgh). See also Johns, "Pitture", *Atlante 2*, figs. 650, 673, 775, 693, 769 and 679.



Fig. 5: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, Cappella Palatina, ceilings of nave and two aisles: Selection of details of fifteen of the drinking vessels held by the royal cup-companions (*nudamā'*) depicted in the ceilings of the nave and the two aisles: KRC Image Archive (© Barakat Trust and University of Edinburgh).



Fig. 6: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, Cappella Palatina: the three painted wooden ceilings of the side aisles and the central nave from below. After Johns, "Pitture", *Atlante 2*, frontispiece (photograph Gigi Roli © Cosimo Franco Panini Editore Spa).



Fig. 7: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, Cappella Palatina: the ceiling of the nave from the east, showing the mosaics and platform for the royal throne on the west wall. After Johns, "Pitture", *Atlante 2*, fig. 473 (photograph Gigi Roli © Cosimo Franco Panini Editore Spa).

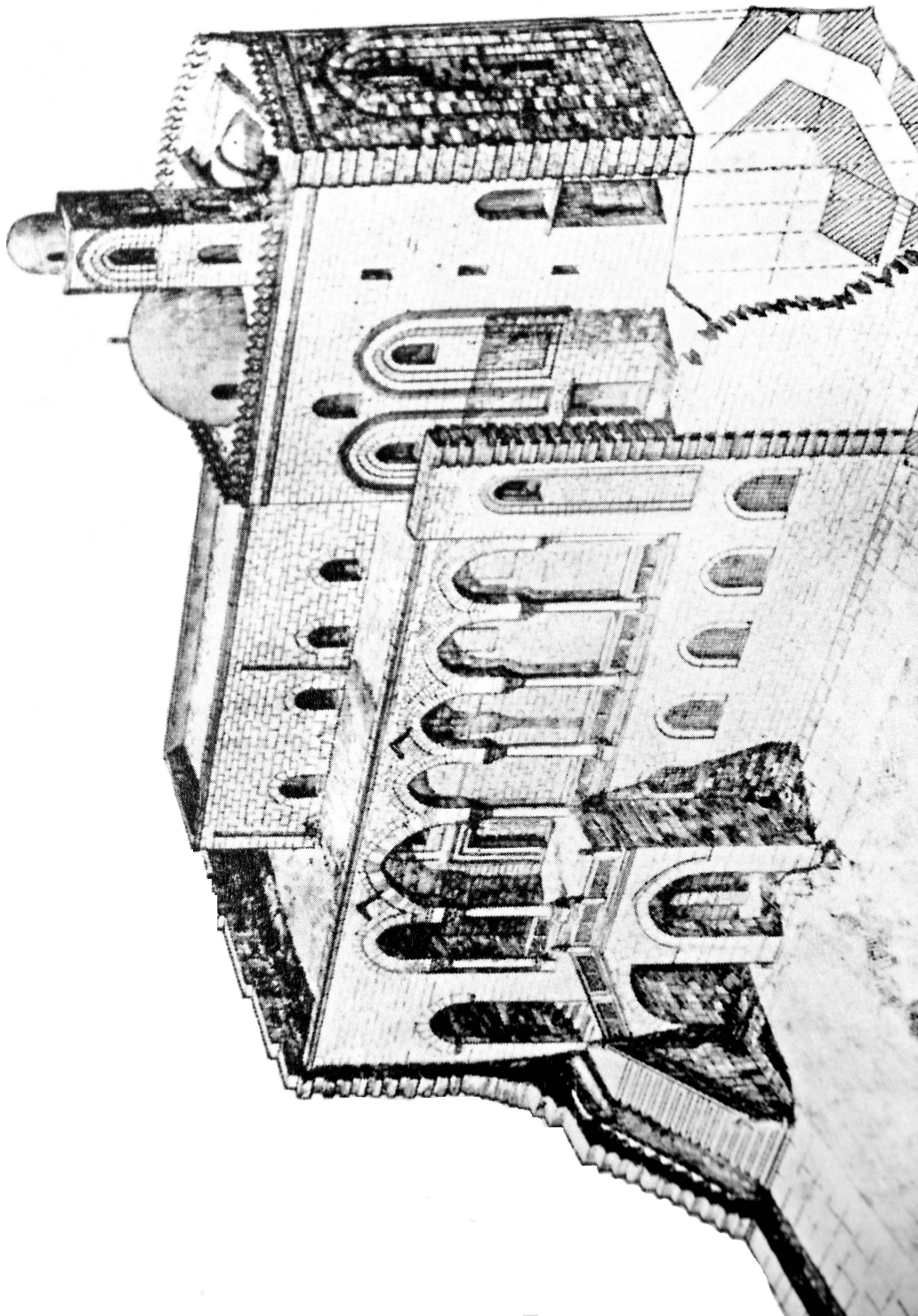


Fig. 8: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, Cappella Palatina: hypothetical reconstruction of the view from the southeast in the 12<sup>th</sup> century of the exterior, showing the stair leading to the colonnaded gallery and royal hall on the upper floor (drawing by Pietro Loiacono under the supervision of Francesco Valenti, Palermo, 1931).