

Manuel d'Art Byzantin

(1st edition 1910; 2nd-1925)

By Charles Diehl

This book is of use primarily as a general introduction to the subject. The author lays a background for his account of the development of Byzantine art by tracing its debts to Syria, Egypt, and Anatolia, discussing in each case the native architecture, sculpture, and painting, and indicating in which particular field the influence was ^{most} straight and most direct. The remainder of the book is devoted to a chronological account of the development in its main periods, the First Golden Age, the period of the iconoclastic controversy, the Second Golden Age, and the last period ^{of} Palaeological Renaissance. Within these large divisions he takes up first the architecture both religious and civil, describing general features and citing numerous specific instances all ^{over} ~~en~~ the Byzantine world; ⁱⁿ ~~thus~~ painting (mosaics, frescoes, icons, miniatures), textiles, sculpture, and metalwork of all sorts, similarly treated.

Without entering too deeply into controversial matters, or committing himself to any violently partisan position, Diehl does nevertheless include some of the more problematic issues, — the "Orient oder Rom" question is summarized, Kondakov's theory of the prototype as the basis for the study of manuscripts is explained; the "Byzantine question" in the 8-9th centuries and again in the 10-11th, is exposed; and the influence of Byzantine art on occidental is entered into somewhat. On the whole, however, the main pattern and the generalizing character of the book is not disturbed by complicated arguments.

A book of this sort has its very obvious limitations. The most striking is a tendency toward too great generality in the

discussion of monuments of major art, particularly painting. There is a good deal of that type of appreciation which Professor Pope of Harvard has so aptly called "vague gushing". (I am thinking particularly of the very mediocre passages on the Mistra frescoes, where the French love of generalizing adjectives leaves one with almost no definite impression.) The interweaving of Hellenistic and Oriental influences that produced Byzantine art are constantly referred to, and we are told wherein each period made an advance over, or differed from, the preceding, but so many concessions and exceptions have to be made that the result is apt to be rather confusing. On the other hand the treatment of the minor arts is very ably managed and convincing; and a clear impression is given of the importance of these smaller objects not only as works in themselves, but also as means of transporting motives and methods elsewhere and thus diffusing Byzantine influence.

Diehl is also to be praised for his inclusion at some length of lesser-known monuments, such as the Cappadocian frescoes, the Armenian, Georgian, Macedonian etc. churches, the latter group with their very significant frescoes for the last period. Throughout, his remarks, though often unsatisfactory in themselves, provide a basis for further work, and full references are given in the footnotes, in addition to a useful general bibliography in the front. Quite aside from its intrinsic qualities the recent date of the work gives it a great value, since this means an inclusion of modern discoveries and a broader outlook.

It is rather disappointing in view of all that has gone before to note that in his conclusion Diehl shows his lack of conviction as to the greatness of Byzantine art. It may be this defensive

attitude that makes his general remarks seem often weak and meaningless. The necessity for justification has little place in a work that deals with the development of art, and the author has allowed it to weaken his arguments.

However, within these limitations, and taken for what it is, the handbook is a very useful piece of work. It is amply illustrated with photography^s, plans, and drawings, the main periods are made clear and the main groups of monuments described. Moreover the material in itself is interesting enough to carry on the reader, curiosity is stimulated and after finishing it one feels inclined to go further with the subject.

La Miniature Byzantine

by Jean Ebersolt

Paris, 1926

In the history of Byzantine painting the illuminated manuscript plays an important and unique part. Though more easily destructible than other forms of painting, the manuscript, if preserved at all, retains its outlines and colors comparatively fresh and unmarred by subsequent retouching. Miniature painters, though in the sphere of religious representation always more or less restricted, were nevertheless freer to invent and enrich than were workers in monumental art. In the domain of secular art the Byzantine miniature comes nearer to completing our knowledge of this nearly-extinct field than do the few remaining fragments of mosaic and wall-painting. The constant interplay of influences between the miniature and major art makes comparison valuable for all periods, while in many cases the miniature preserves the earliest known representation of a given iconographical ^{subject} representation, often copied or adapted from a monument afterward destroyed. Thus the Byzantine miniature plays a vital part in the study of the formation of iconography.

Outside its own limits the miniature is important too for its large part in diffusing Byzantine influence all over Europe. It falls into the same class as ivories, enamels, textiles etc., in other words easily-transportable objects bearing the impress of Byzantine art and inevitably noticed and copied by the receivers.

Ebersolt's account, given chronologically in periods is an intelligent commentary with full notes and notices. He does not attempt a thorough analysis, but brings out salient points and is

particularly valuable for his remarks on the ornamental motives, which followed their own fascinating evolution. The collection of seventy-two plates, ranging from the Joshua Rotulus in the Vatican to the theological works of the latest period, is well-chosen and beautifully reproduced.

La Peinture Byzantine

by Charles Diehl

Paris, 1933

The great value of this work resides primarily in the fine series of plates. The preliminary discussion, treating broadly and generally the chronological development of Byzantine painting in their divisions, mosaics, and frescoes, miniatures, and icons, is a useful summary but adds little new to the remarks made by the author in his handbook. But indeed he attempts nothing more than an introduction. This section is followed by a description of the plates, with provenance, date, and a short notice. The plates themselves are selected with a view to illustrating the development ad outlined in the text, so for the most part they are obvious and familiar choices, but they form a useful collection and the full-page size and fine printing makes them of great value.

Byzantine Mosaics in Greece

by Ernst Diez and Otto Demus

Cambridge, 1931

Most writers on Byzantine art when referring to its aesthetic and spiritual content do so in complimentary but vague and generalizing terms. We meet often such phrases as the "clear and brilliant color", "the mystical and superhuman quality" in the figures, the "attainment of impersonal grandeur through renunciation", etc., etc. A more searching enquiring into the peculiar spiritual intensity of Byzantine art is seldom presented. It is in large part the bold invasion of the difficult and dangerous region of metaphysical analysis that gives this book on the Greek mosaics its particular interest.

The discussion centers around the mosaics at Hosios Lucas and Daphni, with references to the Church of Nea Moni at Chios for purposes of comparison. The two authors have divided up the material and their combined contributions present a well-rounded view of the pictorial art of the Middle Byzantine period and the important place held in it by the two Greek monuments. First there is a general chapter on the art of this period, including architectural forms both religious and secular, architectural decoration, illumination, icon painting, sculpture, minor arts; and the expansion of the style. The chapter on iconography presents a fairly complete idea of the arrangement and significance of the figure representations in the middle Byzantine church, and ^{contains} an analysis of each of the figure subjects in Hosios Lucas and Daphni, noting the interplay of Eastern and Western motives, the difference

from earlier representations, comparisons with other forms of art, etc. The figure composition is analysed, ~~both~~ type, attitude and drapery, and the color discussed, its religious symbolism, the gradual enrichment of the color scale, the development of linear drawing (particularly the Demiurges in the dome at Daphni), and ^{the} Chiaroscuro treatment of certain passages at Hosios Lucas, occasioned by ~~a regard~~ the necessity for overcoming unequal lighting. Lastly the subject of individual masters and the development and dissemination of the middle Byzantine mosaic style are considered.

But I must refer to the second chapter for what I consider the great interest of this book! This chapter is entitled "Origin and Evolution of the Hieratic Style" and it unites ^{the} art of Hosios Lucas and Daphni with an Eastern pre-Christian "magian" art whose earliest representation in historical form occurs in the paintings at Dura, dated 75 A.D. and representing a magian sacrifice. The magian attitude, based on a consciousness of being bound either to a god or to an abstract cosmic system, but with an emphasis on the mechanical technique of the cult by which the individual might attain a degree of freedom, had prevailed in Egypt and India and its influence permeated Christian art of the first millenium. Its art is characterized by frontality and ranking of the figures, and their tendency to "hover" rather than stand. Breasted in his book on Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Painting ^{*} had already noted the striking similarity between the Dura paintings and the Justinian and Theodora mosaics in San Vitale at Ravenna. Diez traces this so-called hieratic style further, noting its presence in the Salonikan churches of St. George, St. Demetrios, and Santa Sophia, ⁱⁿ Hosios Lucas, and its final

* Chicago, 1924

supreme embodiment, in iconic form, in the Demingos^w in the dome of Daphni. This leads to a short examination of the "magian" qualities ~~of~~ in panel icons and their very probable influence on wall paintings and mosaics. One dare not speculate too much in abstractions and this metaphysical sort of analysis is too abstruse to provide the soundest kind of approach to art, but as presented by Diez it opens a wide field for thought and sheds light on surely one of the most engrossing aspects of Byzantine painting.

The book is plentifully illustrated with monochromatic plates at the end, a full series of Daphni and Hosios Lucas, with a few subjects from Chios, Santa Sophia at Kief etc., and, scattered through the text, a series of colored photographs remarkable for their fidelity to the originals. It is in every way one of the worthiest recent contributions to Byzantine studies.