

Patricia Blessing

## Introduction:

### Architectural Models, Mobility, and Building Techniques Modes of Transfer in Medieval Anatolia, Byzantium, and the Caucasus

In recent years, Byzantine, Saljuq, Armenian and Georgian architecture have been increasingly studied in a cross-cultural perspective that takes into account the varied geography and cultures of the region. The historiography of Anatolia, particularly, has received close attention as the medieval history and architecture of this period are reevaluated.<sup>1</sup> Within this complex historical context, the connections between architecture in the various regions are often blurred by divided historiographies, and by the limits of primary sources. Bringing together studies on various aspects of architecture opens fruitful avenues for cross-regional comparisons that are difficult to maintain in a single study. The articles in this volume engage with recent scholarship by investigating case studies from these regions.

While in a recent special issue of *The Medieval History Journal*,<sup>2</sup> the transfer of Islamic motifs to Christian art stood at the center, the question of religion as a driving force behind artistic production is not a focal point here. More important, in fact, is the seeming absence, in many cases, of a clear distinction in the workforce between Christians and Muslims - building techniques and types of ornament etc. are much more regionally defined than by religion (whether it be that of the patron, workforce, or the building in the sense that churches and mosques can be built using the same techniques). In another recent volume, *Mechanisms of Exchange*, the focus lies on means of transfer in the arts and architecture of the Islamic world and beyond, from Central Asia to Scandinavia, from the eastern Mediterranean to central Europe.<sup>3</sup> In this volume of *Funūn – Transcultural Perspectives*, transfer of knowledge, techniques, and motifs are discussed specifically with regard to architecture, in an area defined as Anatolia and neighboring regions, from the twelfth to the fourteenth century.

During the period in question, complex historical developments complicate an analysis of the cultural and artistic transformations. In the late eleventh century, the various Turko-Muslim confederations, among them the Saljuqs, began entering Anatolia from Iran. Over the following decades, they conquered large parts of the region as the Byzantine Empire retreated. The slow, yet steady Islamization of Anatolia began. Throughout the twelfth century, several Muslim dynasties rivaled for power in Anatolia while the Byzantine Empire tried to maintain its hold at least in the western parts of the region. The beginning of the Crusades in 1095 added further tension to the situation and during the Fourth Crusade in 1204, Constantinople fell to the Venetian and Crusader forces created a Latin Kingdom in the former capital of the Byzantine Empire. Fragmentary Byzantine states maintained the imperial claim in Trebizond, Nicaea, and Epiros until 1261 when the Empire was restored in Constantinople. The stability of Saljuq rule was shaken in 1243, when the Mongol conquest brought new overlords who gained influence throughout the late thirteenth century. The complex shifts in rule, population movements, and cultural transformations that took place at the time affected architecture on multiple levels. When the Mongol empire broke up into four distinct, if interdependent realms (the Ilkhanate, the Golden Horde, the Chaghatay Khanate, and the Yuan dynasty) beginning in the 1250s, Anatolia became part of the Ilkhanid realm with its center in Tabriz in western Iran.

Articles in this volume explore the relationship between the architecture of Anatolia, northern Mesopotamia, Iran and the Caucasus from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. A particular focus is placed on the transfer of building techniques and decoration, size and scale, and representations of architecture in two- and tri-dimensional form. The central question of

this volume evolves around means of transfer in architecture. Drawings, architectural representations, and models but also builders' and workmen's travels and texts could be means by which architectural practices in Anatolia, the Caucasus, northern Mesopotamia and Iran were connected and transformed. The essays show a multitude of traces of such transfers, that are often not easy to fully understand in the absence of detailed evidence, yet that allow for a better understanding of exchange and transfer between specific architectures, across religious boundaries. Maria Cristina Carile addresses the use of sculpted donor models in Armenia and Georgia, showing the complex dynamics involved in these scenes and their relationship to Byzantine pictorial programs. Maxime Durocher addresses the complex historiography of the study of small-scale constructions for Sufis in Anatolia, and proposes new avenues for research. Armen Kazaryan presents a study of the Armenian monastery of Horomos, a site now located in northeastern Turkey and difficult to access, in the context of connections that reached as far as Jerusalem and Iran. Richard McClary studies the use of brick *muqarnas* in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Seljuk architecture in Anatolia, proposing a reassessment of the connections between this region and Iran before the Mongol conquest. Sophia Vassilopoulou considers the use of spolia in late thirteenth-century Anatolia, comparing to the same phenomenon in Byzantine architecture, on the one hand, and in northern Mesopotamia, on the other hand. Overall, the five essays in this volume demonstrate the range of scholarship on architectures that are related to Anatolia and its wider region, including both Christian and Islamic traditions.

## Endnotes

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1. See particularly: Sibel Bozdoğan and Gülru Necipoğlu, eds., *History and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the "Lands of Rum"*, thematic issue of *Muqarnas* 24 (2007).
2. Vera Beyer and Isabelle Dolezalek (eds.) *Contextualising Choices: Islamate Elements in European Arts*, special issue of *The Medieval History Journal* 15.2 (October 2012).
3. Heather E. Grossman and Alicia Walker (eds.) *Mechanisms of Exchange: Transmission in Medieval Art and Architecture of the Mediterranean, ca. 1000–1500*, special issue of *Medieval Encounters* 18/4–5 (2012).

## Author

Patricia Blessing received her Ph.D. in Art and Archaeology from Princeton University in 2012. Her forthcoming book, *Rebuilding Anatolia after the Mongol Conquest: Islamic Architecture in the Lands of Rūm, 1240-1330* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, fall 2014) investigates the relationship between patronage, architecture, and style in the context of trans-imperial networks stretching from Anatolia to Central Asia. Her recent publications include: "Recording the Transformation of Urban Landscapes in Turkey: The Diaries of Kurt Erdmann and Ernst Diez," *Studies in Travel Writing* 16.4 (October, 2012); "Allegiance, Praise, and Space: Monumental Inscriptions in thirteenth-century Anatolia as Architectural Guides," in: Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Cemil Schick (eds.) *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 431-446; and entries in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter). In addition to her expertise in art history, Blessing has worked on archaeological excavations in Syria, Uzbekistan, and Turkey. Blessing works at the Stanford Humanities Center and teaches courses on Islamic art and medieval history at Stanford University.

## Title

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