

Defeating Solomon: Intertextuality and Symbolism in the Legend of Hagia Sophia

Vencer a Salomón: intertextualidad y simbolismo en la leyenda de Santa Sofía

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Summary

1. Introduction
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Abstract: One of the main literary topics of the Byzantine legend of Hagia Sophia is the comparison between the church built by Emperor Justinian and the temple of Solomon. Previous studies have shown that this topic is elaborated through an intertextual connection between the legendary description of the construction of Hagia Sophia and the biblical description of the construction of the temple of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24: 1, 25; 3 Kings 5: 15-9: 25; 1 Paralipomena 21: 1-8: 16). In the present article, we will argue that the legend also presents intertextual connections with other biblical texts (such as Ezekiel) and even parabiblical texts (such as the *Testament of Solomon*).

Keywords: Hagia Sophia; Solomon; legend; *Testament of Solomon*; Ezekiel

Resumen: Uno de los principales temas literarios de la leyenda de Santa Sofía es la comparación entre esa iglesia (re)construida por el Emperador Justiniano y el templo de Salomón. Estudios previos han demostrado que la elaboración literaria de este tema estuvo basada en

una relación intertextual entre la descripción legendaria de la construcción de Santa Sofía y la descripción bíblica la construcción del templo de Jerusalén (2 Reyes 24:1:25; 3 Reyes 5:15-9:25; 1 Paralipomena 21:1-8:16). En el presente trabajo propondremos que la leyenda presenta además conexiones intertextuales con otros textos bíblicos (como Ezequiel) e incluso para-bíblicos (como el *Testamento de Salomón*).

Palabras clave: Santa Sofía; Salomón; leyenda; *Testamento de Salomón*; Ezequiel

1. Introduction

As it is well known, the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, magnificently rebuilt by Emperor Justinian in the sixth century, became during the Middle Byzantine period the object of a legendary elaboration that would continue to develop for several centuries.¹ The first, and clearly the most significant expression of this legend² is the c. ninth century *Account of the construction of Hagia Sophia* (henceforth, the *Diegesis*), which presents a highly fictionalized narration of the circumstances surrounding the building of the church.³ The *Diegesis*

¹ For an analysis of the legend, see Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire. Étude sur le recueil des Patria* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 191-314; Cyril Mango, "Byzantine Writers on the Fabric of Hagia Sophia," in *Hagia Sophia from the age of Justinian to the present*, eds. R. Mark and A. S. Çakmak (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 41-56; Leslie Brubaker, "Talking about the Great Church: ekphrasis and the *Narration on Hagia Sophia*", *Byzantinoslavica* vol. 69, n.º. 3 (2011): 80-87.

² Previous sources regarding Hagia Sophia had already introduced some fictional elements (such as Procopius' depiction of Justinian's role in the construction process), but they were not as significant as those in the *Diegesis*. For an analysis of the early sources, see Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 271-2.

³ According to Dagron, the *Diegesis* can be dated to the second half of the ninth century, most likely to the reign of Basil I (867-886) (*Constantinople imaginaire*, 265-9). For the *Diegesis*' edition, see Theodor Preger, *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1901-1907); Evangelia Vitti, *Die Erzählung über den Bau der Hagia Sophia in Konstantinopel*.

proved quite popular in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods⁴ and continued to be copied, sometimes slightly reformulated, even after the fall of the Empire in the fifteenth century.⁵ A second fictional account, much shorter and clearly less widespread than the *Diegesis*, also existed since the Middle Byzantine period, as attested by the eleventh century testimony of Cedrenus and by the c. twelfth or thirteenth century *Vita Constantini* edited by F. Halkin.⁶ In addition, several minor details regarding the church circulated in written or oral descriptions that reached the numerous travellers who visited Constantinople throughout the centuries.⁷

Kritische Edition mehrerer Versionen (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1986). When necessary, we will follow the English translation by Albrecht Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople. The Patria* (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, Cambridge [Mass.]-London: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁴ This can be seen in the numerous manuscripts and in the incorporation of certain aspects of the legend into other sources, such as Michael Glykas' *Annales* (ed. Immanuel Bekker [Bonn, 1836] 495-8).

⁵ Interestingly, some of the post-Byzantine versions present certain differences with the ninth century *Diegesis*, which suggests that the legend continued to develop in Late Byzantine times and perhaps even after the fall of Constantinople. Throughout this article, we will take into account three of these post-Byzantine versions: the sixteenth century *Synopsis* of Pseudo-Dorotheus (Venice, 1818), and the seventeenth century accounts edited by Nicolas Banescu ("Un récit en grec vulgaire de la construction de Sainte-Sophie," *EEBΣ* 3 [1926]: 144-60) and Armand Delatte (*Anecdota Atheniensia*, I [Liège-Paris: University of Liège, 1927], 299-312).

⁶ George Cedrenus, *Compendium historiarum* (ed. Immanuel Bekker [Bonn, 1838-1839], 531, 676-7); François Halkin, "Une nouvelle Vie de Constantin dans un légendier de Patmos," *Analecta Bollandiana* vol. 77, issue 1-2 (1959): 63-107; *id.*, "Les deux derniers chapitres de la nouvelle vie de Constantin," *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 77, issue 3-4, (1959): 370-2).

⁷ There are also several non-Byzantine versions of the legend, which will not be included in this analysis.

Not surprisingly for a tradition dealing with an architectonic enterprise, the legend of Hagia Sophia particularly emphasized the notion that Emperor Justinian's magnificent construction represented a triumph over the temple built by King Solomon in Jerusalem.⁸ The symbolic rivalry between the two monarchs is eloquently expressed by the *Diegesis*' description of the inauguration of the church, in which Justinian is said to have proclaimed his own triumph from the ambo—«I have defeated you, Solomon!» (ch. 27)—and is ratified by the later testimony of Michael Glykas, according to which Justinian had a statue of Solomon set up in the Basilica Cistern that looked at Hagia Sophia and held his cheek in despair, for his temple had been surpassed by the emperor's great church.⁹ The same notion, expressed in similar terms, also reappears in later expressions of Byzantine literature.¹⁰

But what exactly was the nature of Justinian's «triumph» over the Jewish king? As is usually the case when this comparison arises, architectonic success is defined in terms of size and beauty¹¹—the

⁸ The comparison of a Christian founder with King Solomon is a common motif in Byzantine literature; see Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 303.

⁹ Glykas, *Annales*, 498. The anecdote is not originally from Glykas, since it is attested two centuries earlier in the collection of the *Patria* (II, ch. 40). Glykas, however, places it at the end of his account of the construction of Hagia Sophia, just after Justinian's triumphal cry («I have defeated you, Solomon!»), as a way of emphasizing the emperor's victory over the Jewish king.

¹⁰ In his *Thesaurus*, Theognostus devotes a long passage to the description of Solomon's temple, and, immediately afterwards, introduces a digression to describe how Emperor Justinian I had built the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and proclaimed his triumph over Solomon (Joseph A. Munitiz, *Theognosti Thesaurus* [Turnhout: Brepols, 1979], ch. 6, sec. 5).

¹¹ These are, in fact, the terms in which the *Patria* and Glykas (according to the anecdote mentioned above) define Justinian's triumph: «The great statue which sits on a chariot there [i.e., in the Basilica Cistern] is Solomon, which Justinian the Great erected; Solomon is holding his cheek and looking at Hagia Sophia, as he was outdone by its size and beauty, which is greater than that of the temple he built in Jerusalem» (II, ch. 40). Glykas' version is shorter but conveys the same notion.

church is, therefore, greater in size and more beautiful than the temple—and, sometimes, also in terms of the expenses which the builder incurred to carry out the works—the Christian founder is, accordingly, more magnanimous than the Jewish king.¹² It would appear, however, that the legendary depiction of Justinian’s triumph over Solomon went beyond the conventional parameters defined by this literary motif. As we will argue below, certain traits of the legend suggest that the comparison was not only meant to praise the material qualities of the church, but also to symbolize, in more general terms, the spiritual triumph of Christianity over Judaism. If, as Gilbert Dagron has suggested, the first and most important literary piece devoted to the legend of Hagia Sophia (the *Diegesis*) originated upon the background of the anti-Jewish policies of Emperor Basil I (867–886), the fictitious rivalry between Justinian and Solomon would have likely had a theological-political connotation.¹³ It

¹² The *Diegesis* itself makes repeated allusions to Justinian’s liberality (see, for instance, ch. 15 to 21 and 23 to 25), and in some later versions, the emperor’s «expenses» are mentioned in the title of the account (see Banescu, “Un récit en grecvulgaire,” 47). As Preger has shown, the building expenses were the object of a special narrative (Theodor Preger, “Die Erzählung vom Bau der Hagia Sophia,” *BZ* 10 [1901]: 458-9, and the text at 474-5), and the importance of the topic is also illustrated by the existence of alternative versions regarding the funding of the church (Halkin, “Les deux derniers chapitres,” 370-2 explains the origin of the funds in different terms than the *Diegesis*).

¹³ Dagron has already suggested that the *Diegesis* should be understood upon the background of Basil I’s attempt to convert the Jews (*Constantinople imaginaire*, 307-9), but he believed that the legend was meant, in general terms, as a criticism of Emperor Justinian. This last aspect of his interpretation has been questioned by later scholars (see especially Ekaterina Kovaltchuk, “The founder as a saint: the image of Justinian I in the Great Church of St. Sophia,” *Byzantion* 77 [2007]: 205-37; *id.*, “The Encaenia of St Sophia: Animal Sacrifice in a Christian Context,” *Scrinium IV: Patrologia Pacifica* [2008]: 158-200), and, in fact, our own analysis will suggest that the legend was meant to exalt rather than to downplay Justinian’s figure. The possibility that the *Diegesis* (as well as other texts and traditions pertaining to the legend) was a resource in the polemic against Judaism is ratified, as Dagron himself noted, by the c. eleventh century Jewish *Chronicle of Ahimaaz*, in which Rabbi Shephatiah demonstrates to Basil I that

is quite possible, in fact, that the legend is allowing us a glimpse of the spirit that characterized the imperial efforts to convert the Jews by attempting to demonstrate—in this case, through a playful and humorous description of the construction of Christianity’s greatest church—the overcoming of the Old Covenant by the New.¹⁴ The literary elaboration of Justinian’s «spiritual triumph» relied on a number of intertextual connections which intended to invest the church of Hagia Sophia with the varied and complex symbology that Jewish and Christian traditions assigned to the sanctuary of God. Through out the following pages, we will explore the legend’s intertextuality in order to tentatively identify some of the sources that inspired it and gave it meaning.

2. The Emperor, the Angels and the Church

As Dagron has pointed out, the *Diegesis*’ description of the construction of Hagia Sophia was inspired by the biblical account of the building of Solomon’s temple.¹⁵ This intertextual connection is elaborated through

the building of the temple of Jerusalem had been costlier than the construction of Hagia Sophia. In fact, as R. Bonfil has pointed out, Basil’s cry after the discussion with the Rabbi («R. Shephathiah defeated me by his wisdom!») is «an inversion of that attributed by Byzantine Christian tradition to both Justinian and Basil upon the completion of the building of St. Sophia and the Νέα Ἐκκλησία: ‘Ενίκησάσε, Σολομών’»(Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle. The Family Chronicle of Ahima’az ben Paltiel* [Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009], 264-5 and note 198). The intertextual connections of the legend of Hagia Sophia with biblical and para-biblical literature, as we will see below, strongly support the polemic dimension of Justinian’s architectonic «triumph».

¹⁴ The Christian strategy of conversion involved a disputation aimed at convincing the opponent. In the *Chronicle of Ahimaaz* (p. 268) this is evoked by Basil I’s attempt to persuade Rabbi Shephathiah to «disavow his faith».

¹⁵ This inspiration occurred either directly, or through Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* (henceforth *Ant.*), which was a popular means of transmission of Old Testament literature in Byzantium. Josephus’ portrayal of Solomon has been widely studied. See, for

a number of parallel episodes. Firstly, according to both 1 Paralipomena and Josephus, King David took the necessary steps to provide his young son with the means to undertake the building of the temple: he bought the land, gathered the workmen, collected the materials and accumulated a substantial treasure in gold and silver talents (1 Paralipomena 22:1-5: 22:14-16: 29:1-5; Josephus, *Ant.*, VII.335-336, 339-340, 377); in a similar way, Justinian is said to have bought the land and to have spent seven years gathering the materials for Hagia Sophia.¹⁶ Secondly, according to 3 Kings, King Solomon wrote to King Hiram of Tyre to obtain from him cedar and cypress wood (3 Kings 5:15-26), he sent men to cut wood in Lebanon and quarry workers to extract stone of quality and he organized his workmen into teams under the direction of foremen (3 Kings 5:27-30); in a similar way, Justinian is said to have written to his «generals, satraps, judges and the tax officials of the themes» to request them to send «all the materials which are needed to build a church».¹⁷ Thirdly, according to Josephus, the foundations of Solomon's temple were laid with strong stones buried very deep in the ground (*Ant.*, VIII.62), and the building itself was constructed by binding blocks of stone with a special mixture that made them

example, Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus as an Apologist of the Greco-Roman World: His Portrait of Solomon," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. E. SchusslerFiorenza (Notre Dame IN-London: University of Notre Dame, 1976); *id.*, "Josephus' Portrait of Solomon," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 66 (1995): 103-167 (revised version in L.H. Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation of the Bible* [Berkeley, 1998], 570-628); *id.*, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden-Boston MA, 1998); Christopher T. Begg, "Solomon's Preparations for Building the Temple according to Josephus," *Rivista Biblica* 55 (2007): 25-40; Joseph Verheyden, "Josephus on Solomon," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition King, Sage and Architect*, ed. J. Verheyden (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 85-106.

¹⁶ *Diegesis*, ch. 2-5 (a similar description can be seen in Glykas, *Annales*, p. 496-7; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 300-3; Banescu, "Un récit en grec vulgaire," 148-150); Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 294-5.

¹⁷ *Diegesis*, ch. 2 (Pseudo-Dorotheus, *Synopsis*, p. 249; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 300; Banescu, "Un récit en grec vulgaire," 148); Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 295.

immovable (*Ant.*, XV.398-399); in a similar way, Justinian is said to have laid the foundations of Hagia Sophia by placing on the ground a number of «big stones» that were held together with a special mixture that had exceptional adhesive qualities, which was implicitly also used for the construction of the rest of the church.¹⁸ In more than one way, therefore, Justinian was following in the steps of David, and, most particularly, of Solomon himself.

There is, however, one distinctive aspect of the legendary building of Hagia Sophia that cannot be traced back to the Old Testament: the assistance that Emperor Justinian received from angelic forces and from pious (and divinely inspired) Christians in the completion of his architectonic work. The supernatural element, it is true, is not completely absent from the biblical account—the angel of God indicates to prophet Gad the spot in which the temple should be built, and King David obtains the plan of the building through a divine revelation (1 Paralipomena 21:18; 28:19) —but these marginal references are hardly enough to explain the more complex role that supernatural forces play in the Byzantine legend. What, therefore, was the source of inspiration for the intervention of angels and pious Christians in the building process of Hagia Sophia? And, more importantly, what was their meaning in the context of the legend?

We must note at this point that even if the biblical Solomon was not particularly evocative of the supernatural order, the para-biblical Solomon (as well as the one known to Second Temple literature and to magical and hermetic writings) was in fact deeply associated with unearthly forces—specifically, he was reputed as a skilled exorcist and demonologist.¹⁹ Even more significantly, according to the c. third

¹⁸*Diegesis*, ch. 6 and 8 (Delatte, *Anecdota*, 303-4; Banescu, “Un récit en grec vulgaire,” 150-1); Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 295-6.

¹⁹ See Pablo Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King. From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2002); *id.*, “Solomon and Magic,” in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition King, Sage and Architect*, ed. J. Verheyden (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 107-125. Those traditions were widely popular in Byzantine times, as shown by McCown’s brief analysis in the introduction to his edition of the *Testament of Solomon* (see note below).

century pseudo-epigraphic *Testament of Solomon* (henceforth *T. Sol.*),²⁰ the circulation of which is well attested in Byzantine times,²¹ the Jewish king had used his control over demons to secure supernatural assistance for the building of the temple of Jerusalem. Even if the legendary construction of Hagia Sophia does not evoke *T. Sol.* in the same way

²⁰ Chester C. McCown, *The Testament of Solomon* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922). For an English translation, see Dennis C. Duling, “The Testament of Solomon,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J.H. Charlesworth (Garden City NY, 1983), 935–988. For *T. Sol.*’s origins, contents and influence, see Todd Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon: Tradition, Conflict and Identity in a Late Antique Pseudepigraphon* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Peter Busch, *Das Testament Salomos Die älteste christliche Dämonologie, kommentiert und in deutscher Erstübersetzung* (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2006); Philip S. Alexander, “Contextualizing the Demonology of the Testament of Solomon,” in *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie der israelitisch-jüdischen und frühchristlichen Literatur im Kontext ihrer Umwelt*, eds. A. Lange et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 613-35; Richard Kalmin, “The Demons in Solomon’s Temple,” in *Migrating Tales. The Talmud’s Narratives and Their Historical Context*, ed. R. Kalmin (California: University of California Press, 2014), 95-129; Sarah Johnston, “The *Testament of Solomon* from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance,” in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, eds. J. N. Bremmer and J. R. Veenstra (Leuven-Paris-Dudley: Peeters, 2000), 35-50.

²¹ The popularity of the document is not only attested by the number of manuscripts (there are at least 16 manuscripts, for which see McCown’s introduction to the edition of *T. Sol.* [pp. 10-28] and Duling’s introduction to the English translation [pp. 937-9 and notes 2 and 3], but also by references scattered in Byzantine literature (for instance in Glykas, *Annales*, p. 342; Pseudo-Gregentios [Albrecht Berger, *Life and Works of Saint Gregentios, Archbishop of Taphar* [Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2006], ch. 1, 1.357]; Nicetas Choniates [Johannes van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae historia, pars prior* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975], 146], Psellus [Dominique J. O’Meara, *Michaelis Pselli philosophica minora*, vol. 2 [Leipzig: Teubner, 1989], 164]; Dellaportas [Manousos Manoussacas, *Λεονάρδου Ντελλαπόρτα Ποιήματα (1403/1411)* [Athens: Academy of Athens, 1998], poem 1, l. 2084-2091]).

that it evokes the biblical books of Kings and Paralipomena,²² there are reasons to suspect that its author(s) may have drawn some inspiration—as well as some eloquent symbolism—from the para-biblical version of the construction of the temple. We will consider below some of the most remarkable resemblances.

i/ The Master Craftsman's Son

In *T. Sol.*, the king's first contact with the supernatural world occurs through the intercession of a young boy who, as specified by some of the recensions, was the son of the master workman (πρωτομάστορος) in charge of the building of the temple.²³ According to *T. Sol.*, King Solomon noticed that the boy was growing thinner every day, and, after interrogating him, he found out that the child was being harmed by a demon called Ornias, who came every evening after sunset to suck the boy's energy from the thumb of his right hand. Determined to help him, the king prayed to God for the means to neutralize the evil spirit and deliver the boy from his suffering. In answer to his prayer, God granted Solomon with a ring that conferred him the power to «imprison all demons», and, with the boy's help, the king was able to «seal» the demon Ornias and place him in the service of the building works of the temple.²⁴

²² *T. Sol.* and the *Diegesis* (as well as other texts pertaining to the legendary construction of Hagia Sophia) are, of course, very different in character. In *T. Sol.*, which is essentially a treatise of demonology and exorcism, the construction of the temple is little more than an excuse to present the different demons and their powers, while in the *Diegesis*, which does not have a specific interest in angelology, the construction of the church is the central issue at stake. As we will suggest below, however, the *Diegesis*' implicit allusions to *T. Sol.* were meant to evoke the complex and somehow dubious reputation of the para-biblical Solomon in order to exalt, by contrast, the piety of the Christian Justinian.

²³ *T. Sol.*, p. 7*. In Duling's translation: «Ornias the demon came as the sun was setting and took half the wages and provisions of the master workman's little boy» (p. 961), but cf. note f for alternative readings of the passage.

²⁴ *T. Sol.*, p. 6ff*.

Though quite different in details, the legendary traditions regarding the construction of Hagia Sophia recall some of the traits described in *T. Sol.* As in Solomon's case, the first contact of Emperor Justinian with the supernatural world occurs through the intercession of a young boy, who was the son of Ignatius, the engineer (ὁ μηχανικός)²⁵ in charge of the construction of the church. In this case, it was an angel (disguised as a eunuch) who appeared to the young boy when he was guarding the construction tools left by the workers.²⁶ The «eunuch» asked for the reason that the building activities had been interrupted, and, when the boy explained that the workers were taking a break to have breakfast, the angel requested him to summon them so that work could be immediately resumed. The boy reported the incident to the emperor, who suspected at once the angelic nature of the supposed eunuch and devised a plan to take advantage of the situation. With the boy's help, Justinian was finally able to secure his influence over the angel and place him in the service of the church (see subsection iii below).²⁷

The role played by the boy in this accounts may not be of special significance, for children are well attested as privileged intercessors with the supernatural world in treatises on magic, astrology and demonology²⁸ as well as in legends and patriographic traditions.²⁹ Yet,

²⁵ This figure is also called the «master» and the «chief of the builders». For the names given to Byzantine builders, see Robert Ousterhout, *Master Builders of Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 43-4. Despite the different terminology, both *T. Sol.* and the *Diegesis* imply that the father of the child was the man in charge of the building works.

²⁶ The angels usually appear on Saturday. The reason for this is not clear, but it is possible that it was just another means of taunting Jewish religious beliefs.

²⁷ *Diegesis*, ch. 10 (Glykas, *Annales*, p. 497; Pseudo-Dorotheus, *Synopsis*, p. 250-1; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 305-6; Banescu, "Un récit en grec vulgaire," 152-3).

²⁸ See Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 56-8, 197, 219, 223; Richard Greenfield, "A Contribution to the Study of Palaeologan Magic," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington D.C: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 147.

²⁹ According to a story recalled by Nicephorus Kallistos

the way in which the young lad is presented in each of these cases —i.e., as a son of the head of the builders— and the sequence of events that structures both narratives suggest that there is more to the boy's role than a simple coincidence of literary motifs. It is likely, in fact, that the boy's mediation with the supernatural forces and his assistance in putting those forces to work in the service of the building should be considered the first indicator of a relationship between *T. Sol.* and the legend of the construction of Hagia Sophia.³⁰

ii/ The Supernatural Construction

After securing control over the demon Ornias, King Solomon is said to have ordered him to bring other evil spirits to his presence. As they appeared, the king «sealed» each one of them with his ring and gave them specific tasks to perform in the construction of the temple. Ornias was made to cut stone; Beelzeboul and the Winged Dragon were to cut blocks of marble; the Head of the Dragons was to make bricks; the seven heavenly bodies were to dig the foundations of the temple; Lix Tetrax was to pick up stones and carry them to the heights of the temple for the workmen to put them in place; the lion-shaped demon was to carry wood, saw it up as kindling and throw it in the burning kiln; the 36 heavenly bodies were to bear water;³¹ the female demon Onoskelis was

Xanthopoulos (*PG* 146, col. 1217 CD), a child who was miraculously elevated into the air during an earthquake in fifth century Constantinople heard the angels sing the *Trisagion*, and, after he descended unharmed to the earth and revealed what he had heard, the hymn was officially adopted by the Church. Although very different in nature, the account illustrates the same mediatory role of children between the earthly and unearthly spheres. Anthony of Novgorod (in B. de Khitrowo, trad., *Itinéraires russes en Orient* [Genoa: Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1889], 89-90), for his part, attests a tradition regarding the death of Saint Athenogenes' child that highlights the angels' deep concern for the innocent souls of children.

³⁰ Dagrón offers an explanation for the motif of the child's encounter with the angel in Hagia Sophia that differs, yet does not contradict, the one we have suggested above (*Constantinople imaginaire*, pp. 231-2, note 90). It is possible, in fact, that the same literary motif evoked several symbolic referents.

³¹ *T. Sol.*, pp. 14-5*, 27*, 30-31*, 34-5*, 41-2*, 46*, 59*. The tasks assigned to the demons change depending on the recension.

to spin hemp for the ropes used in the construction; Asmodeus was to mold clay for the vessels of the temple; the headless demon named Murder and the doglike demon called Scepter were to carry an emerald stone day and night as a «light for the working artisans»;³² and the demon named Ehippas, finally, was ordered to lift and put in place the cornerstone of the temple.³³ Sometimes, the evil spirits would assist in the construction work on their own initiative. The demon called Scepter offered to provide the king with an emerald stone that could be used to adorn the temple, and, when the stone was brought in, Solomon took from it «200 shekels for the support of the altar».³⁴ Finally, the demon Ehippas revealed to the king that, with the help of another demon named Abezethibou, he could find and lift «the pillar of air» that lay in the Red Sea and place it where Solomon wished, which he eventually did upon the king's request.³⁵

Not unlike Solomon's demons, angels were thought to have participated in the construction of Hagia Sophia by training the workmen, adjusting the architectonic design and even by building certain structures themselves. According to a Middle Byzantine description of the church preserved in Greek and Latin versions, an angel was seen (ὄρατῶς) during the construction process «teaching the workmen» (τοὺς τεχνίτας διδάσκοντος) how to carry out their work.³⁶ The *Diegesis*, moreover, states that an angel (disguised as Emperor Justinian) appeared to the master craftsman and gave him precise instructions regarding the building of the vaults of the presbytery —he wished the apse to have «three lights by means of the three galleries, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit»— rectifying in this way previous orders

We have mentioned here a few examples, but this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 20-21*, 24*, 38-9*.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 69-70*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 38-9*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 72*.

³⁶ Krijnie Ciggaar, “Une description anonyme de Constantinople du XIIe siècle,” *REB* 31 (1973): 339.

given by (the real) Justinian himself.³⁷ Finally, the altar of the church was also thought to have been the work of an angel. The *Diegesis* states that the emperor, desiring to make the altar table «better and more precious than gold», consulted many experts, who advised him to follow a special procedure: the craftsmen were to throw metals (gold, silver, bronze, electrum, lead, iron, tin, glass, etc.) and various types of precious stones into a melting furnace, so that the elements were knit together, and then to pour the mixture into a casting mold.³⁸ This peculiar technique, which has the undertones of an alchemical procedure,³⁹ soon came to be regarded as the product of a supernatural intervention. By the late Middle Byzantine period, the author of the *Vita Constantini* edited by Halkin affirmed, probably echoing a popular tradition, that the altar was the work of «a divine force» (θεῖα δύναμις).⁴⁰ In later centuries, reformulated versions of the *Diegesis* explicitly affirmed that the construction of the altar had been carried out by an angel.⁴¹

Justinian's supernatural assistants did not behave, of course, in the same way in which Solomon's demons did. Unlike the evil spirits, who mostly worked because they were compelled by the king's power of exorcism, the angelic figures acted on their own free will (or on God's command), and their involvement was always subtle, or outright elusive. Yet, the notion of supernatural involvement in the construction process is equally well-represented in both traditions, as is also the idea that some of the most meaningful structures of the developing sanctuaries—the «aerial

³⁷ *Diegesis*, ch. 12 (Delatte, *Anecdota*, 307-8; Banescu, "Un récit en grec vulgaire," 154-55).

³⁸ *Diegesis*, ch. 17. Cedrenus' description mentions the dedication inscribed in the altar by Justinian and Theodora (*Compendium historiarum*, 677), also reproduced by Pseudo-Dorotheus (*Synopsis*, 251).

³⁹ For the «Christian alchemy», see Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 284 and note 87.

⁴⁰ *Vita Constantini*, 104-5.

⁴¹ Pseudo-Dorotheus, *Synopsis*, 251; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 309-10; Banescu, "Un récit en grec vulgaire," 156.

pillar» in Solomon’s temple, the altar in Justinian’s Hagia Sophia—could not have been put in place without an unearthly intervention.

iii/ The Long-Lasting Supernatural Presence

Both *T. Sol.* and the legend of Hagia Sophia convey the notion that the supernatural forces remained associated with the sanctuary even after the construction works had concluded. King Solomon had entrusted two evil spirits of exceptional power, Ehipphas and Abezethibou, with the task of lifting and supporting the «aerial pillar» that had been brought from the Red Sea. The exact connotation of the aerial pillar is difficult to pin down. It certainly evokes the pillar of cloud that accompanied the Hebrews during their wandering in the wilderness, but at least one of the recensions of the account specifies that it was a structure of stone.⁴² In any event, the narrative makes clear that the aerial pillar was a key element for the temple. King Solomon is said to have taken special precautions in sealing Ehipphas and Abezethibou—he sealed them «all around», due to their extraordinary power—and to have ordered them to «keep watch» over the pillar «until the end» (ἕως τῆς συντελείας). Compelled by Solomon’s command, the demons swore to obey: «We will never let loose of this pillar until the end of the age. But on whatever day this stone should fall, then shall be the end of the age» (ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος).⁴³ The demons had become, therefore, deeply connected with the temple’s destiny. They were responsible for its preservation—the fall of the aerial pillar would be the end of the temple itself—and their eventual departure was understood as a sign of misfortune.

In his own manner, the legendary Justinian was believed to have taken similar precautions for the protection of his church. He could not, of course, exercise power over the angels in the way that Solomon had done with the demons, so he resorted to a stratagem in order to trick one of the angels into complying with his own plans. The story is probably the most popular of all those connected with Hagia Sophia. According to this tale, the master craftsman’s son told the angel (the «eunuch») who

⁴² The demons in charge of holding the pillar claim: «But on whatever day this stone (ὁ λίθος οὐρανοῦ) should fall, then shall be the end of the age», *T. Sol.*, p. 72* (MSS PQ, Rec. B).

⁴³ *T. Sol.*, p. 72* (see especially the MSS PQ).

had instructed him to summon the workmen (see subsection i above) that he could not leave the construction site «lest all of the construction tools disappear», for he had been entrusted to guard them; in reply, the angel promised that he would keep watch until his return. When Emperor Justinian heard the boy's account and realized that the eunuch was in fact a supernatural being, he decided to take advantage of the promise made to the boy. He decided that the lad should never return to the building site—in fact, he was exiled to the Cycladic islands—so that the angel, bound by his promise, would be forced to keep permanent watch over the church.⁴⁴ The decision to «trick» the angel was not made lightly—Justinian is said to have consulted with the senators and the bishops—yet it was deemed justifiable, as it would ensure protection for the church «on God's behalf until the end of the world» (ἕως τέλους κόσμου).⁴⁵ Like Solomon, Justinian had secured a deep connection between his sanctuary and the supernatural world, to the point that their dissociation came to be understood as an omen of the church's eventual fall.

iv/ The Hidden Treasure

T. Sol. does not provide specific information about the funding of the temple, but it implies that some of the resources had been obtained with the help of the demons themselves. According to the text, a demon named Head of the Dragons revealed to Solomon the presence of «a high quantity of gold» (χρυσίον πολύ) which lay buried below the foundations of the temple, and encouraged the king to dig it up and confiscate it. On Solomon's instructions, one of his servants dug in the indicated place and found a treasure, just as the evil spirit had predicted.⁴⁶

Justinian also received the assistance of the supernatural forces for the funding of his church. According to the *Diegesis*, the emperor became quite worried after the workmen had reached the point of building the

⁴⁴ *Diegesis*, ch. 10 (Glykas, *Annales*, p. 497; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 305-6; Banescu, “Un récit en grecvulgaire,” 152-3).

⁴⁵ *Diegesis*, ch. 10. In Banescu's edition (*ibidem*, pp. 152-3) the text introduces the same expression as *T. Sol.* (ἕως τὸν καιρὸν τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος).

⁴⁶ *T. Sol.*, p. 42*.

dome, because he did not have enough gold to continue the project. It was then that an angel (again disguised as a eunuch) appeared before Justinian and promised him to provide «as many gold coins (χρυσίου χάραγμα) as he wanted» for the construction of the church. The following day, the angel led the emperor's men to a palace located in the Tribunal, near the Golden Gate, where an impressive treasure was revealed to them. They filled their leather bags with 80 hundred weights of gold and went back to the emperor with enough resources to continue the construction.⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, the angels had come to perform a role in the context of Hagia Sophia's legend that was traditionally associated with demons.⁴⁸

v/ The Foreign Benefactress

In addition to the assistance provided by the evil spirits, Solomon's building project was also said to have benefited from the support of Sheeba, the Queen of the South. Although clearly inspired by the biblical episode (3 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Paralipomena 9:1-12), the visit of the Queen of the South is described by *T. Sol.* in a very different light. Firstly, the arrival of the queen to Jerusalem does not take place after the temple had been finished and consecrated, as it happens in the biblical account, but in the course of the construction, when the work was still being undertaken. Secondly, the queen is said to have given King Solomon «10,000 copper shekels», which were not gifts intended to honour the king, as in the biblical account, but a specific donation to be

⁴⁷ *Diegesis*, ch. 11 (Glykas, *Annales*, pp. 497-8; Pseudo-Dorotheus, *Synopsis*, pp. 249-250; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 306-7; Banescu, “Un récit en grec vulgaire,” 153-4).

⁴⁸ The demons are repeatedly connected with the discovery of treasures. In *T. Sol.*, another devil reveals to Solomon the existence of a precious green stone that the king uses to build the altar of the temple (p. 38*), and Jewish legends preserve other anecdotes on the matter (see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, I [Philadelphia, 2003], 974). An alternative version of the legend of Hagia Sophia attributes the founding of the church to a treasure discovered by a pious monk, apparently through divine providence (and, in fact, the same motif reappears in the legend of the building of the Holy Apostles, in which the Apostles themselves reveal to Empress Theodora in a dream the location of a treasure). Despite the different formulation, the motif is always the same.

spent in the building of the temple. Thirdly, the queen is presented as a sorceress, which is a common trait in para-biblical literature and rabbinic traditions related to her figure, but has, of course, no scriptural basis.⁴⁹ The way in which *T. Sol.* presents the queen's visit to Jerusalem is, in fact, quite meaningful, because the interest that she is said to have taken in Solomon's project and her economical contribution to it tacitly imply that she was materially and symbolically associated with the construction of the temple.

According to the legend of Hagia Sophia, Emperor Justinian also received the support of a wealthy foreign lady for the construction of his church. This lady, a pious widow named Markia who resided in the city of Rome, sent the emperor eight Roman columns of «equal length, equal diameter and equal weight» that she had received as her dowry. The donation was accompanied by a letter in which Markia employed a popular dedication formula —«for the salvation of my soul»— that highlighted her religious devotion.⁵⁰ By accepting her contribution, in fact, the emperor was tacitly accepting Markia's association with the construction of Hagia Sophia in a way that recalls Sheeba's previous involvement with Solomon's temple project. Both monarchs, therefore, had benefited from the material support and the symbolic prestige of a foreign benefactress who became an active participant of the construction of the sanctuary.

vi/ The Objects and the Formulas

Both Solomon and Justinian, finally, were thought to have made use of special objects and formulas in order to influence or control the supernatural forces. King Solomon relied on the magical ring that

⁴⁹ *T. Sol.*, p. 64*.

⁵⁰ *Diegesis*, ch. 2 (Delatte, *Anecdota*, 301; Banescu, "Un récit en grec vulgaire," 148). The contribution of a «pious widow» to the building of an imperial church may have been a literary motif, for it is also attested among the miracles of Saint George (Johannes B. Aufhauser, *Miracula Sancti Georgii* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1913], 2-9). Unlike Justinian, however, the emperor in Saint George's miracle refuses to accept the donation of the widow (and, tacitly, her involvement in the building project) until the saint intervenes. It is possible that the motif was adapted in the legend of Hagia Sophia under the influence of the biblical (or, as we have suggested above, para-biblical) episode of the queen of the South.

allowed him to «seal» the demons and on an exorcistic formula («Who are you?») that helped him to identify the evil spirits, to know what their powers were and to establish which angel could thwart them.⁵¹ When faced with demons of exceptional power, such as the sea-horse demon Kunopegos or the wind demon Ephippas, Solomon also used special vessels or flasks that allowed him to keep the devils under control.⁵²

Justinian's approach to the supernatural forces relied, of course, on propitiation rather than control, but he did not hesitate to use apotropaic formulas to secure the safety of his church. According to the legend, the emperor had relics of different saints inserted into holes that had been dug in the arches that supported the dome, one every 12 bricks; he was also thought to have had relics inserted inside each of the 12 columns that supported the altar, inside the lower and upper columns of the Holly Well, and, in general, in the «thousand columns» that supported the structure of the church, as a way of securing it.⁵³ He was thought to have invited patriarch Eutychios to say a prayer for the construction when the foundations were laid⁵⁴ and to have had the priests say a prayer after every 12 bricks that were put in place during the construction of the arches that supported the dome, as a propitiation of the divinity.⁵⁵

⁵¹ For the exorcistic formula, see Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 55ff.

⁵² *T. Sol.*, pp. 49*, 66-8*.

⁵³ *Diegesis*, ch. 14, 22; Banescu, “Un récit en grec vulgaire,” 157; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 309; Stephen of Novgorod, in George Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 30. A c. tenth or eleventh century description of Constantinople adds that there were also relics placed in the capitals of the columns, the walls and the ceiling (Krijnie Ciggaar, “Une description de Constantinople traduite par un pèlerin anglais,” *REB* 34 [1976]: 249).

⁵⁴ *Diegesis*, ch. 6 (Banescu, “Un récit en grec vulgaire,” 150; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 303). This is most likely a historical fact, except for the name of the patriarch (the patriarch at the time of the dedication was Menas [536-552]). For prayers of dedication, see Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, pp. 224-5, note 52.

⁵⁵ *Diegesis*, ch. 14.

Apotropaic formulas were also engraved in the bricks of clay used to build the arches that supported the dome —«God is within her, and she shall not be shaken. God shall help her at break of day» (Ps 45 [46]: 5)— in order to strengthen them,⁵⁶ and the dedicatory inscription allegedly made by Justinian and Theodora in the altar of the church was in itself meant to put the church under the protection of God.⁵⁷

Unlike the biblical account, *T. Sol.* was not meant to provide a narrative parallel for the legend of Hagia Sophia, but rather a symbolic contrast to it. Where as the para-biblical Solomon had built his temple with the assistance of dark forces, such as devils and witches, Justinian had built his church with the support of angels and pious Christians. Where Solomon had resorted to incantations and exorcisms to aid the development of his project, Justinian had relied on prayers, relics and devotional formulas. This contrast expressed another dimension of the rivalry between the Christian emperor and the Jewish king —one that was defined in terms of purity and spirituality rather than on material splendour⁵⁸ — and tacitly recalled that Solomon’s methods had been outdone by Christianity.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*. This is probably a historical fact, for the use of apotropaic formulas in buildings is confirmed by archaeology; see Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 237.

⁵⁷ Cedrenus, *Compendium historiarum*, pp. 676-7; Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, p. 242, note 139.

⁵⁸ The exorcistic rivalry between Solomon and Jesus, attested since an early date, remained well-known in Byzantine times (Evald Lövestam, “Jésusfils de David chez les Synoptiques,” *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology*, 28:1 [1974]: 104-5; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 19, 69ff, 114). It is probably no coincidence that the *Chronicle of Ahimaaz* presents Emperor Basil I requesting Rabbi Shephatiah to perform an exorcism on his daughter, which the Rabbi does successfully with a procedure that recalls Solomon’s techniques as described by *T. Sol.* (i.e., by trapping the demon in a vessel and sealing it). In this way, the *Chronicle* was tacitly arguing that Jewish exorcistic practices were superior to Christian practices, for Basil I confesses that he had been unable to find a cure for his daughter before secretly seeking the assistance of the Rabbi (*Chronicle of Ahimaaz*, 264-8).

⁵⁹ It is possible that the cross that was preserved in the treasury of

3. Hagia Sophia, the Final Temple

As Dagron has also shown in his analysis of the *Diegesis*, the final structure and the decoration of Hagia Sophia are presented in the legend as being quite similar to those of the temple of Solomon. Firstly, the plan of Solomon's temple comprised three enclosures of increasing sanctity: the porch, the temple itself, and the Holy of Holies (3 Kings 6:2-22; 2 Paralipomena 3:3-9, 30-35; Josephus, *Ant.*, 64-68). In a similar way, the plan of Hagia Sophia was also said to comprise three enclosures of increasing holiness, as illustrated by the material in which each door was allegedly made: the first door, made of electrum, gave entrance to the atrium and the first narthex; the second door, made of ivory, gave entrance to the second narthex; and in the middle of the second narthex there was a central door of gilded silver, which was made with wood from the Ark of the Covenant.⁶⁰ Secondly, the interiors of Solomon's temple were completely covered in gold and the walls were decorated with vegetal motifs (3 Kings 6:22, 29; 2 Paralipomena 3:4-5); in a similar way, the galleries, the ceiling and the columns of Hagia Sophia were said to have been gilded «with perfectly pure gold» and the walls were decorated with vegetal motifs.⁶¹ Thirdly, Solomon's temple was provided with special sources of water, such as the «sea», which lay over 12 sculpted oxen, and 10 brazen lavers decorated with

Hagia Sophia —a cross that, according to the legend, had the power to «drive away demons»— was another playful evocation of the same spiritual triumph. Despite their popularity, in fact, use of Solomon's exorcistic formulas was discouraged by certain Christians who were keen to recall that Jesus' power over demons was, after all, far superior to the one of the Jewish king (Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 114).

⁶⁰ *Diegesis*, ch. 18 (Delatte, *Anecdota*, 310; Banescu, “Un récit en grec vulgaire,” 156); Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 245, note 148, 300. In fact, the name «Holy of Holies» given to the inner and most sacred part of Solomon's temple was preserved in Hagia Sophia, for the semi-circular bench under the *synthronon* of the church was also known as «Holy of Holies» (*Diegesis*, ch. 16; Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, p. 240, note 132; pp. 269, 300).

⁶¹ *Diegesis*, ch. 15-16 (Delatte, *Anecdota*, 309; Banescu, “Un récit en grec vulgaire,” 155); Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 296-7.

figures of lions and oxen (3 Kings 7:27-39); in a similar way, Hagia Sophia had a «sea», «12 waterspouts and stone lions around the fountain house» and a «cistern or rainwater» in which 12 lions, leopards, deer, eagles, hares, calves and crows that spouted water had been carved.⁶²

The similarities between the two buildings suggest, once more, that the legend of Hagia Sophia was trying to duplicate the description offered by the books of Kings and Paralipomena. However, there are certain traits of the church's structure that cannot be satisfactorily explained in the light of Solomon's temple, and this raises, yet again, the possibility that the author(s) of the legend had another literary model in mind. It is interesting to note that most of the architectonic characteristics that seem to evoke the temple of Solomon can in fact be equally understood as evoking the «future temple» that had been foretold by the prophet Ezekiel; and, more importantly, Ezekiel's description of the future temple can satisfactorily explain those features of Hagia Sophia that cannot be traced back to Solomon's temple. This identification of Hagia Sophia with the «third temple», as apparently suggested by the legend, is hardly surprising. Since Ezekiel's prediction still awaited fulfilment, it was legitimate to interpret it as referring to a Christian sanctuary—and no Christian sanctuary would fit the terms of the prophecy better than the church of Hagia Sophia.⁶³ We will consider below some of the literary details that support this interpretation.

i/ The Revealed Plan

In Ezekiel's vision, an angel reveals to the prophet both the plan and the measurements of the future temple (Ezekiel 40:3ff).⁶⁴ Similarly, the

⁶² *Diegesis*, ch. 17 and 26 (Delatte, *Anecdota*, 310; Banescu, "Un récit en grec vulgaire," 156, 158); Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, p. 243, note 142; p. 255, note 19; pp. 296-7, 300.

⁶³ In fact, it would not have been the first time in which Ezekiel's prophecy was applied to a Byzantine church, as suggested by Jonathan Bardill's analysis of the church of Saint Polyeuktos in Constantinople (Jonathan Bardill, "A new Temple for Byzantium: Anicia Juliana, King Solomon, and the Gilded Ceiling of the Church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople," *Late Antique Archaeology*, vol. 3, issue 1 [2006]: 339-70).

⁶⁴ In the biblical account (1 Paralipomena 28:11, 19), David is also said to have received the model of the temple by divine revelation,

legend of Hagia Sophia affirms that Justinian had received «in a dream» the instructions for the temple that he was meant to build. In the early version of the *Diegesis*, an angel reveals to the emperor the «outline of the church» (τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ ναοῦ), and, in the post-Byzantine versions, an angel shows him «the size of the temple, how much it should cost and how it should be built» (τὸ μέζοντοῦ Ναοῦ, πόσον να γένη καὶ πῶς), «the place and the measurements» (ἔδιξεντὸν τόπον καὶ τὸν ἐμέτρησεν) or simply «the length and the width» (ὄληντὴν ποσότητα τοῦ μάκρους καὶ τοῦ πλάτους).⁶⁵ The legendary episode appears to evoke the «angel with the measuring tape» of Ezekiel’s vision, suggesting therefore that the prophet and the emperor had been shown one and the same plan for the future sanctuary.

ii/ The Deep Fountain

After showing him the plan of the temple, the angel of Ezekiel’s vision reveals to the prophet the presence of a stream of water that issues from under the porch of the temple and flows eastwards. When Ezekiel, guided by the angel, begins to follow the stream, he becomes aware that the water gets increasingly deep, to the point that it is not possible for him to pass over (Ezekiel 47:1-6). Similarly, Hagia Sophia was thought to be the origin of a body of water that streamed towards the east.⁶⁶ According to the testimony of the *Diegesis* (in its Byzantine and post-Byzantine versions) and the descriptions generated by pilgrims and travellers who visited the church during the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, the water accumulated below Hagia Sophia in a number of

but the circumstances are quite different. For other accounts of Hagia Sophia’s plan in Greek folklore, see Dagon, *Constantinople imaginaire*, p. 226, note 60.

⁶⁵ *Diegesis*, ch. 8 (Pseudo-Dorotheos, *Synopsis*, p. 249; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 304; Banescu, “Un récit en grec vulgaire,” 151). The motif may not be special in itself, for it is attested in other sources (for instance, in Paul Van den Ven, *La Vie ancienne de Saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, vol. 1 [Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962], 73-4), but it becomes meaningful in the wider context.

⁶⁶ Some of these aspects (and those described below, in subsection iii) have already been discussed by Dagon, but he does not consider the possibility of an intertextual connection with Ezekiel (*Constantinople imaginaire*, 282-3).

cisterns, flowed around the church through a complex circuit of channels and sprang into the building through the «sea» (θάλασσα), the «Holy Well» (ἅγιον Φρέαρ), the fountain house and the 12 waterspouts for the common people, the pool and the special waterspouts for the priests, as well as through numerous basins and pitchers.⁶⁷ The «fountain» of Hagia Sophia was integrated by all the existing types of water —«fresh water», «sea water», «rain water»— and, as in Ezekiel’s vision, it got increasingly deep.⁶⁸ Ruy González de Clavijo, a Spanish diplomat who visited Constantinople at the beginning of the fifteenth century, believed that the cistern below Hagia Sophia was so immense that «a hundred galleys might easily float in it», and Guillaume Grelot, a French traveller who visited Constantinople in the seventeenth century, noted a popular belief according to which it was possible to go «by boat from Hagia Sophia to the sea through underground channels».⁶⁹ More importantly, the stream that originated in the church did not simply flow eastwards: it was believed to be part of a flux that connected Constantinople to Jerusalem. The symbolic link to the holy land is already suggested by the *Diegesis*, in which the four strips of the nave are said to have been known as «the four rivers that flow out of Paradise»,⁷⁰ but such a connection would have soon become more than a literary allusion. According to the Russian pilgrim Stephen of Novgorad, who visited Constantinople in the fourteenth century, the waters that flowed below Hagia Sophia came from the river Jordan. The proof of this was that certain fellow pilgrims who were visiting Constantinople identified a cup which was retrieved from the Holy Well of Hagia Sophia as the

⁶⁷ Ciggaar, “Une description anonyme,” 339; Anthony of Novgorad, pp. 88, 101; Stephen of Novgorad, p. 32; *Diegesis*, ch. 17, 22-3 and 26 (Delatte, *Anecdota*, 310; Banescu, “Un récit en grec vulgaire,” 156, 158). For the water and vegetal motifs in general, see Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 282-3.

⁶⁸ Ciggaar, *Une description anonyme*, 339; Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 282.

⁶⁹ Guy le Strange, trad., *Ruy González de Clavijo, Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406* (London-New York: Routledge Courzon, 2005; first. pub. 1928), 42; Guillaume Grelot, *Relation nouvelle d’un voyage de Constantinople* (Paris, 1680), 111.

⁷⁰ *Diegesis*, ch. 26 (Delatte, *Anecdota*, 312).

same cup that they themselves had lost while bathing in the Jordan during their visit to Jerusalem.⁷¹ As suggested by these various testimonies, the legend of the water source of Hagia Sophia consistently evokes the main traits of the «fountain» of Ezekiel's temple.

iii/ The Fertile Garden

After showing him the stream of water, the angel of Ezekiel's vision reveals to the prophet the presence of numerous trees on each side of the watercourse and announces that «every fruit tree» would grow by the sides of the river, and that those trees would «never decay and their fruit never fail», for they would flourish thanks to the water that «came from the sanctuary» (Ezekiel 47:7, 12). Similarly, Hagia Sophia was thought to have been built over a fertile ground, or, in the words of the *Diegesis*, a «soft and marshy place».⁷² The floor of the church, in fact, was designed to resemble «the earth» and «the rivers that flow into the sea», while the green columns bloomed as if they had «grown out of the ground just there».⁷³ The fourteenth century testimony of Ibn Batoutah suggests, moreover, that the «fertile garden» of Hagia Sophia had turned into more than just a symbolic evocation of Ezekiel's temple. The traveller claims to have witnessed a stream of water that flowed from the church, on each side of which there were trees «planted with symmetry», and, further on, other vegetation, such as «jasmine and odoriferous plants».⁷⁴ Like the temple in Ezekiel's vision, Hagia Sophia

⁷¹ Anthony of Novgorad, 32.

⁷² *Diegesis*, ch. 6.

⁷³ *Diegesis*, ch. 28. There was also a tradition according to which Justin II would have filled the church with water in order to repair the fallen dome (see ch. 29). Cyril Mango and John Parker, «A Twelfth-Century Description of St. Sophia», *DOP* 14 (1960): 238. The image of the blooming columns was known from an early date, as illustrated by the sixth century description of Paul the Silentarius (Otto Veh, *Prokop, Werke*, vol. 5 [Munich, 1977], 1.555 ff).

⁷⁴ Charles Defrémery and Beniamino Sanguinetti, trans., *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*, II (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1854), 434. Some Turkish versions of the legend mention «eight cypresses» planted near the font, which could allegedly still be seen in the fifteenth century (Felix Tauer, «Les versions persanes de la légendesur la

was adorned with a flourishing garden that tacitly expressed the blessing that the foretold sanctuary had brought to the people of God.

By interpreting Hagia Sophia as the fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy, the legend was tacitly stating, once again, Justinian's triumph over Solomon: the construction of the last and most glorious sanctuary of God had been reserved to a Christian emperor and not to a Jewish king.⁷⁵ It is possible, in fact, that the angels—those same angels that played such an important role in the symbolic dimensions of the legend—were themselves intended as a reminder that Hagia Sophia was nothing less than the temple foretold by Ezekiel. Most likely, the angels depicted on the columns that flanked the bema vault of Hagia Sophia were meant to evoke the «cherubim of the sanctuary», the same ones that had been present in the tabernacle of Moses and in the temple of Solomon, and that were expected to be present in the temple revealed to Ezekiel.⁷⁶ It is worth recalling, in fact, that Ezekiel's text does not

construction d'Aya Sofya," *Byzantinoslavica* 15 [1954]: 14).

⁷⁵ And, not less significantly, it solved the complex problem of the «third temple» (that is, of the temple that had been foretold yet had also been forbidden). As it is well-known, Ezekiel's prediction of a «third sanctuary» (after those of Moses and Solomon) was rather problematic. In Christian terms, it was complex to interpret the prophecy as referring to an apocalyptic temple, for the New Testament had made it explicit that there would be no temple in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:22). Yet, it was equally difficult to interpret it as referring to an earthly temple, because the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem was understood as a sign of the end of time (Wilhelm Reischl and Joseph Rupp, *Cyrolli Hierosolymorum archiepiscopi opera quae supersunt omnia*, 2 vols. [Munich, 1:1848, 2: 1860; repr. Hildesheim, 1967], catech. 15, ch. 15; PG 33, col. 889-892). By interpreting the prophecy as referring to a Christian church, however, it was possible to acknowledge the prediction of a «third sanctuary» without the undesired eschatological connotations.

⁷⁶ The presence of the cherubim in the sanctuary of God, as described by the Old Testament, was probably a meaningful evocation in Middle Byzantine times, because it had been a key element in the theological defence of images during the iconoclastic controversy. The Old Testament passages referring to the cherubim had been discussed by John Damascene in his treatise on the holy images (Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes*

present the cherubim as a simple «likeness» of the heavenly powers, but as an embodiment of the heavenly powers themselves. In his account of the destruction of Solomon's temple, the cherubim are depicted as animated beings who «deploy their wings» and fly away in anticipation of the imminent fall of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 10:18-22, 11:22-23). If we are to read between the lines of the legend of Hagia Sophia, the same cherubim (turned into the angels of the church) had returned to oversee the fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy (that is, the construction of a sanctuary «such as had never been built since Adam's time»)⁷⁷ and to guard this third and last temple until the day in which the New Jerusalem would also fall.

4. Conclusions

The previous analysis suggests that the literary symbolism of the legend of Hagia Sophia relied on a number of intertextual connections. Certain aspects of the legendary account, as Dagrón has shown, were clearly meant to evoke the biblical description of the construction of Solomon's temple (as presented in 3 Kings and 1-2 Paralipomena, later resumed by Josephus) as a way of demonstrating that Justinian had not fallen short of the accomplishments of the Jewish king. Yet, the formulation of the emperor's triumph over Solomon required symbolic elements that could not be provided exclusively by that biblical narrative. This would have led the legend to introduce (and develop over time) various subtle but eloquent allusions to other biblical and non-biblical texts devoted to the construction of the sanctuary of God. In our previous analysis, we have tentatively identified two of them. The first one is the para-biblical *T. Sol.*, which would have helped to exalt Justinian's pious construction

von Damaskos, vol. 3 [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975], 1.15-16, 1.20, 2.9, 2.14, 3.73, 3.84, etc.) and quoted in the acts of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 (J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* [Florence-Venice, 1759-1798], vol. 13, col. 4 DE and 5 AB). Furthermore, they were incorporated into the Old Testament lectionary for the liturgical commemoration of the same council, which would have given them widespread circulation (Gudrun Engberg, *Prophetologium. Lectiones anni immobilis*, vol. I [Munksgaard, 1980], 34-9).

⁷⁷ *Diegesis*, ch. 1 (Banescu, "Un récit en grec vulgaire," 148).

methods by contrasting them with the questionable methods of the Jewish king. The second is the biblical book of Ezekiel, which would have allowed for the portrayal of the building of Hagia Sophia as the fulfilment of the prophecy of the final temple. Both the theological and the political connotations of this elaborate symbolism —thanks to which Justinian’s church had come to represent the spiritual triumph of Christianity over Judaism— would have been deeply meaningful for a Byzantine (and even post-Byzantine) audience, and should therefore be taken into account when attempting to understand the origins and the lasting popularity of the legend of Hagia Sophia.

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Recibido: 11 de noviembre de 2017.

Aceptado para su publicación: 14 de febrero de 2018.