

British School at Athens research on Byzantine Attica

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In 1890, W. Leaf, a member of the British School at Athens, created a photograph of the apse of the church of Hagios Andreas, in Hagia Philothei Street, near the Metropolis of Athens (FIG.13.1). The church was demolished in the same year together with the monastic complex, a drawing of which was made by R. Weir Schultz, another member of the British School (FIG.13.2). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, British architects, during their training at the Royal Institute of Architecture and the Royal Academy's School of Architecture, undertook an investigation of the art and architecture of Byzantine monuments.

In 1908, a Byzantine Research and Publication Fund was established in association with the British School at Athens, a step which was all the more welcome to the Committee of the School because they had long regretted their inability, on financial grounds, to publish much of the admirable research carried out in this field by their former distinguished students, Schultz and S.H. Barnsley. The drawings had been created from 1890 to 1903 by Schultz, Barnsley, F.W. Hasluck and H. Comyn, and the photographs were taken between 1890 and 1900 by Schultz, W. Leaf, R. Bosanquet and R.E. Smith.¹

Both the drawing and photograph bear witness to the architectural complex that had existed in that location before the building of a new church and before the erection of the buildings of the Athens Archdiocese on the site of the monastic complex. The same monument is closely related to the history of Athens during the Ottoman period, a period whose features are hardly visible in modern Athens. This piece of evidence becomes even more valuable, if we take into consideration that the monastery was founded in 1550 by one of the most significant families of Athens, the



Fig.13.1: East apse with fresco decoration, Hagios Andreas church, Hagia Filothei monastery, Athens; W. Leaf, 1888–90; BSA BRF–02.01.01.001.

1. Macmillan 1911. See also the website: www.bsa.ac.uk

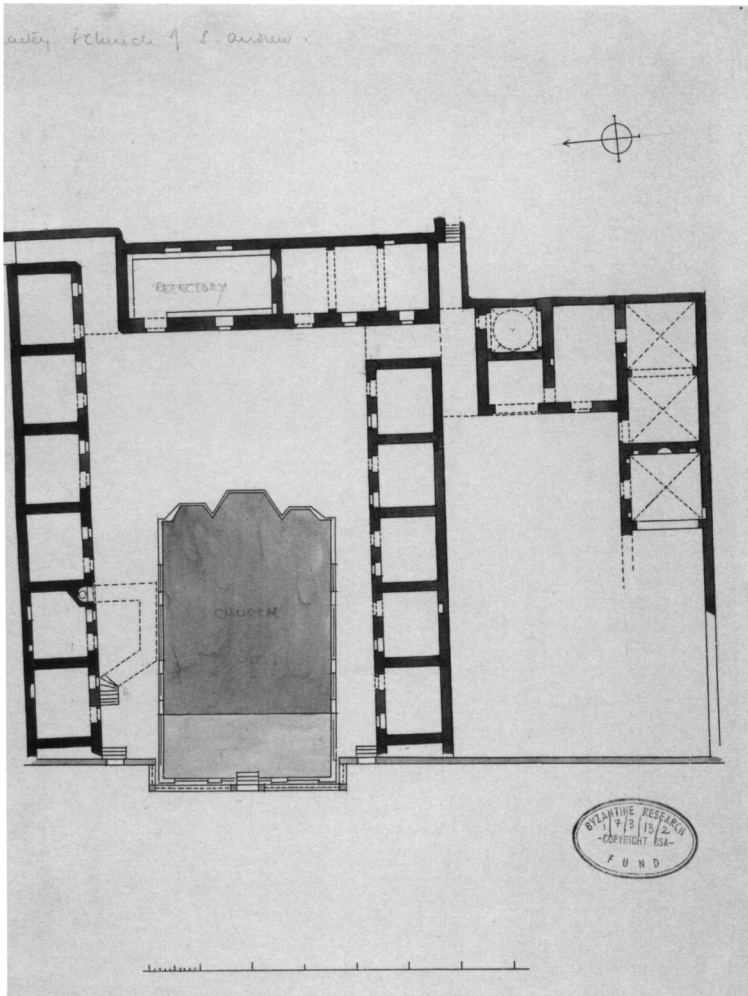


Fig.13.2: Plan of monastic complex, Hagia Philothei monastery, Athens; R. Weir Schultz & S. Barnsley, 1888–90; ink, pencil, watercolour; BSA BRF–01.01.01.002.

Benizeloi.² The monastic complex, which was built on earlier Byzantine ruins, functioned as a nursing home, a poorhouse and an educational centre for the young ladies of Athens. All these were organized by Rigoula Benizelou, the later Saint Filothei, who bequeathed her property to these institutions and who was martyred in 1589. Also of great importance are the unpublished drawings of the Archive, made with ink and watercolour which include descriptions of the same demolished monastic church from the north, west and east, as well as a long section, where one can see sculptures above the gate at the east side.

2. See Sicilianos 1960.

Leaf's photograph of the same church, decorated with wall paintings from the 17th century that have obviously been damaged after the Greek Revolution, is also significant in that it shows the decoration of the monument. So far, we have been aware of some fragments of wall paintings only, which are now in the Byzantine Museum in Athens.³ This example, namely the information about the monastery of Hagia Philothei in the centre of Athens, whose existence is nowadays indicated only by the name of the street behind the Metropolis, aptly illustrates the significance of this archive for the Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments of Attica and especially Athens.

The archive includes altogether 268 drawings of 23 monuments in Attica,⁴ from 1890 to 1903, 100 photographs of the 1890s, and the notebooks of the research groups. This rich and unpublished material of the British School, which I came across while carrying out research in the summer of 2006 for the requirements of the present conference,⁵ adds valuable pieces to a puzzle which is difficult to reconstruct, that of the buildings of Athens in the Byzantine era and during the Ottoman occupation.⁶

The reasons for this difficulty are more or less known. The present image of Athens is mainly the result of buildings from two historical periods: antiquity, Greek and Roman, and the modern period, that is, the last two centuries. The long intermediary Byzantine and Ottoman periods are indicated by just a few monuments, mainly churches. It is known that not only before, but also after the liberation from the Turks and the creation of the independent Greek Kingdom, both the state and individuals were extremely interested in

3. See Soteriou et al 1927, A, 56–7; B, 107–9. Chatzidaki 2000, 258. Byzantino kai Christiniko Mouseio 2004, 103.

4. Hagios Andreas, Hagioi Apostoloi, Hagioi Asomatoi, Hagios Dionysios Areopagitis, Panagia Gorgoepikoos, Hagios Ioannis Theologos, Kapnikarea, Soteira Lykodimou, Panagia Pantanassa, Metamorphosis, Hagioi Theodoroi, Hagia Zoni kai Hagios Spyridon, Hypapanti, monastery of Daou Pendeli, Daphni monastery, Kaisariani monastery, Omorfoklissia, Phaneromeni (Salamis).

5. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Eleni Calligas and the Archivist Ms Amalia Kakissis for their cooperation and support during my research.

6. For the medieval history of Athens, see Kazanaki 2006b, 385–95, which also contains useful bibliographical information.

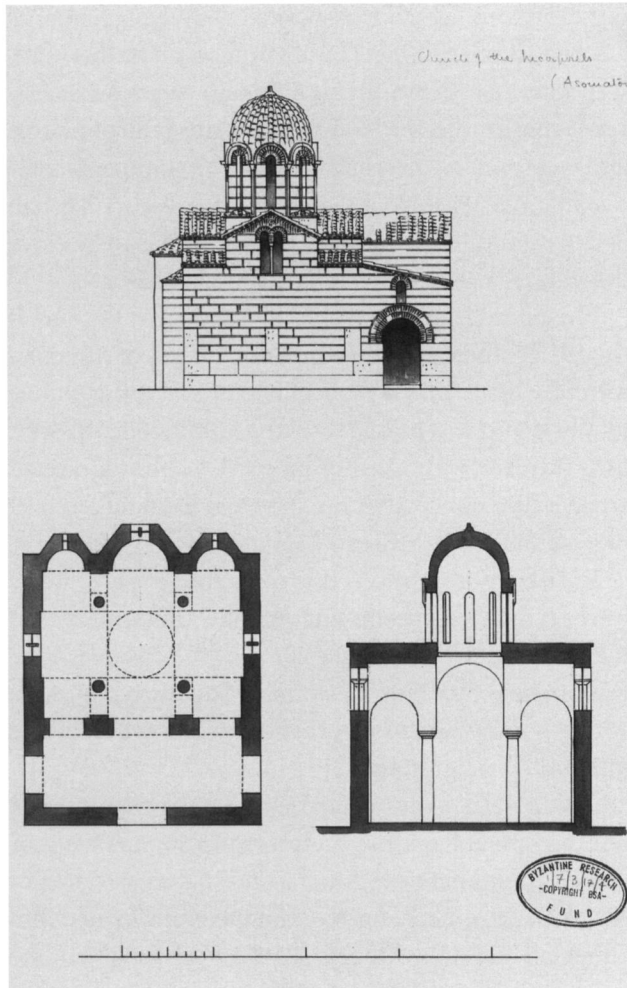


Fig.13.3: Clockwise from top: north elevation, transverse section, ground plan, Hagioi Asomatoi church, Athens; R. Weir Schultz & S. Barnsley, 1888–90; pencil, ink, watercolour; BSA BRF-01.01.023.

promoting and, consequently, conserving the ancient monuments, whereas modern buildings, fortifications, residences and many Christian churches were demolished for town planning and residential reasons, but also because their building materials were required for the construction of private buildings.⁷

Foreign travellers also were much more interested in ancient monuments than in medieval ones.⁸ It seemed as though everybody was looking for the city's illustrious past, like Michael Choniates, Metropolitan of Athens from 1192 to 1204 and a man of letters, who wrote:

7. See Mallouchou-Tufano 2000, 311–43.

8. See Tsigakou 2000, 280–307.

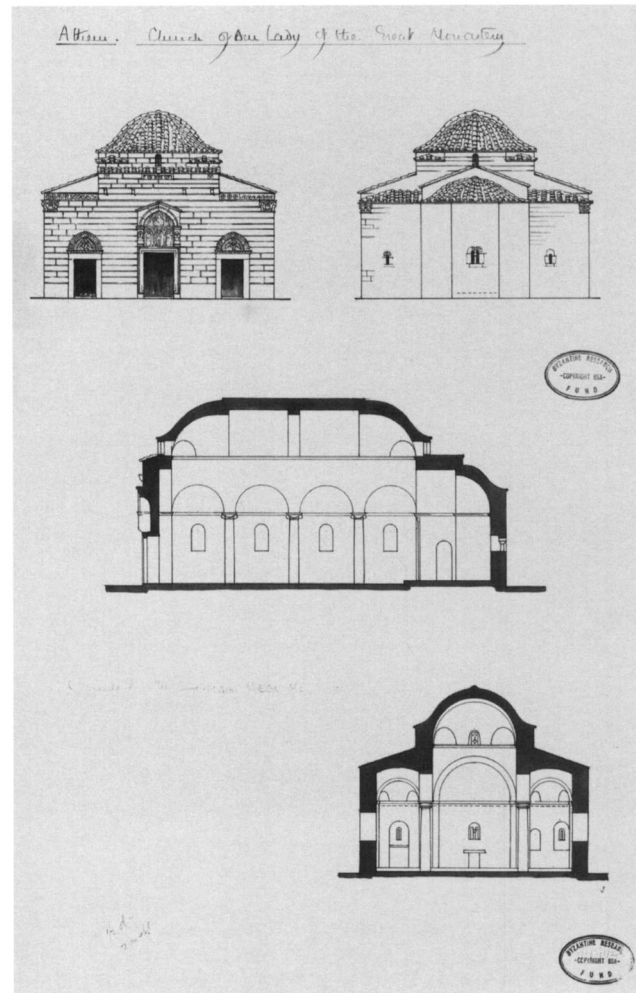


Fig.13.4: Clockwise from top left: west elevation, east elevation, longitudinal section, transverse section, Megalo Monastiri, Athens; R. Weir Schultz & S. Barnsley, 1888–90; pencil, ink, watercolour; BSA BRF-01.01.090.

‘Although I live in Athens, I do not see Athens anywhere... All the glory of the city is lost... So forgive me for having constructed a fictitious graphic image of her since I am unable to see the celebrated city of the Athenians’.⁹ It appears that Choniates overlooked the Byzantine aspect of the city as much as foreign visitors and, unfortunately, Greek architects and archaeologists did centuries later. During Choniates’s period, at the end of the 12th century, many churches had already been built in Athens by capable Byzantine architects. The

9. Οικίων Αθήνας ουκ Αθήνας που βλέπω ... όλωλε σύμπαν των Αθηνών το κλέος... συγγνωστός ουκούν, είτερ ουκ έχων βλέπειν των Αθηναίων την αοίδιμον πόλιν, ίνδαλμα ταύτης γραφικόν εστη-σάμην, Lampros 1879–80, 397–8.

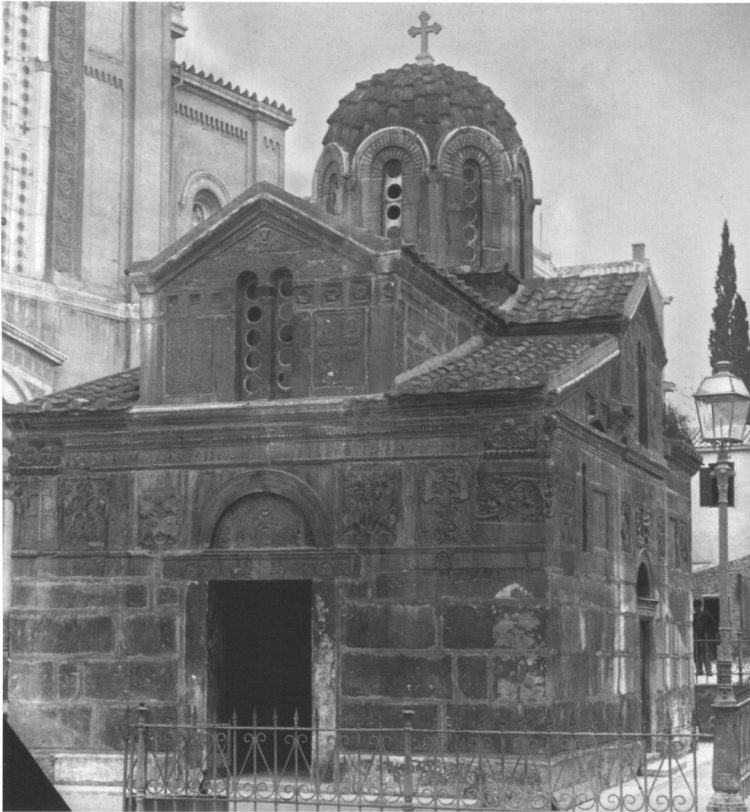


Fig.13.5: View from west, Panagia Gorgoepikoos church, Athens; R. Weir Schultz & S. Barnsley, 1888–90; BSA BRF–02 .01.01.007.

members of the British School studied and depicted these same churches at the end of the 19th century.

Information about monuments that underwent modifications in later periods is especially valuable as the following examples illustrate: the church of Hagioi Asomatoi of the 11th century before its restoration in 1960 (FIG.13.3), the 11th century Panagia Pantanassa in Monastiraki before the alterations that took place in 1907 when the square was rebuilt and before the significant changes it underwent in 1911 (FIG.13.4), as well as the Metamorfosis tou Sotiros of the same century, one of the earliest churches in Athens, whose appearance was altered following extensive repair work between 1908 and 1917 (PLATE XIV).¹⁰

What is also significant is the aesthetic value of these drawings. Examples such as the Kapnikarea church, the Church at Omorphi Ekklisia, the Panagia Gorgoepikoos and the small Metropolis alongside the modern Metrop-

10. For the Byzantine churches of Athens see Soteriou et al 1927–33; Megaw 1931–32; Chatzidakis 1958.

olis of Athens, which is associated with the activities of Michael Choniates (PLATE XV),¹¹ demonstrate this value. It appears that the British research teams were particularly preoccupied with the last church. It was built of marble and incorporated in its outside walls, in a unique decorative manner, 90 ancient Greek, Roman, early Christian and Byzantine reliefs, of which the archive has 14 excellent drawings and 27 photographs (FIG.13.5; FIG.13.6).

The photographs of the archive, taken at the end of the 19th century, constitute rare documents of Athenian monuments.¹² This is especially true when the photographs depict lost moments of the monuments' history, as is the case with Daphni monastery, photographed when it functioned as a church before the final removal of its iconostasis (FIG.13.7).

In these photographs it is clear that the architects were trying to represent not only the monument itself but also its surrounding area, as is the case with the Kapnikarea church or the dome of Soteira Lykodimou, which now is the Russian church, with the Lycabettus hill in the background.

The material is completed with 12 drawings and 14 photographs of marble sculptures from surviving or ruined monuments of Athens and the greater area of Attica and from ancient monuments transformed into Christian ones (Erechtheion, Parthenon). Finally, in the notebooks one can find a lot of detailed information about the condition of the monuments and their decoration.

The majority of the drawings and photographs of the Attica Byzantine Archive — 86 drawings and 45 photos — relate to the Daphni monastery, the history of which is connected with the great French Byzantinist Gabriel Millet, who was responsible in 1888 for the restoration of this important 11th century monument. The drawings of the Daphni monastery offer valuable information about a monument that has undergone substantial alterations since 1899,¹³ especially after a series of earthquakes in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The work of Gabriel Millet at Daphni and Mount Athos, and the work of other foreign scholars such as

11. Chatzidakis 1958.

12. Kaisariani monastery, Hagioi Theodoroi, Hagios Andreas, Hagioi Apostoloi, Kapnikarea, Soteira Lykodimou, Papagia Gorgoepikoos, Daphni monastery.

13. Millet 1899.

the Frenchmen Gailhabaud and Couchaud, published in the mid 19th century, and the drawings of Danish architects and of the French doctor Paul Durant published much more recently,¹⁴ should be seen as part of the 19th century western Romantic movement with its powerful leaning towards medieval thought and art. This movement brought to light the individual characteristics of each people, in contrast to the imposition of a classicist uniformity. The result of this tendency was the systematic study and recording of the Byzantine monuments of Greece — in which the Romantic scholars recognized the structural elements of their contemporary monuments — in a way that sometimes was amateur and sometimes scientific.

The material of the BSA for Attica is distinguished by the professionalism, precision and authority of its specialized scholars.

The creator of most of the drawings of Attica was the architect Robert Weir Schultz,¹⁵ who began working in Greece in 1887 on the advice of Lethaby, having won a Royal Academy Gold Medal and Travelling Studentship. He continued working in Greece as a member of the British School at Athens.

It appears that the intervention of Lethaby was decisive owing to his own relation to medieval art in general and especially to the Byzantine monuments. Lethaby was founder and first principal of the London Country Central School of Arts and Crafts. He was a personal friend of the Arts and Crafts Movement¹⁶ pioneers William Morris¹⁷ and Philip Webb and became a significant member of their circle. He was also an influential writer on architectural subjects with a specific interest in medieval and especially Byzantine art, as his books *The church of Sancta Sophia Constantinople: a study of Byzantine building* (1894) and *Medieval Art* (1904) indicate.

Lethaby's encouragement of Schultz and of the other travelling student of the Royal Academy, Sidney Barnsley, another British architect and member of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, bore excellent fruit in the form of their admirable monograph, which includes abundant

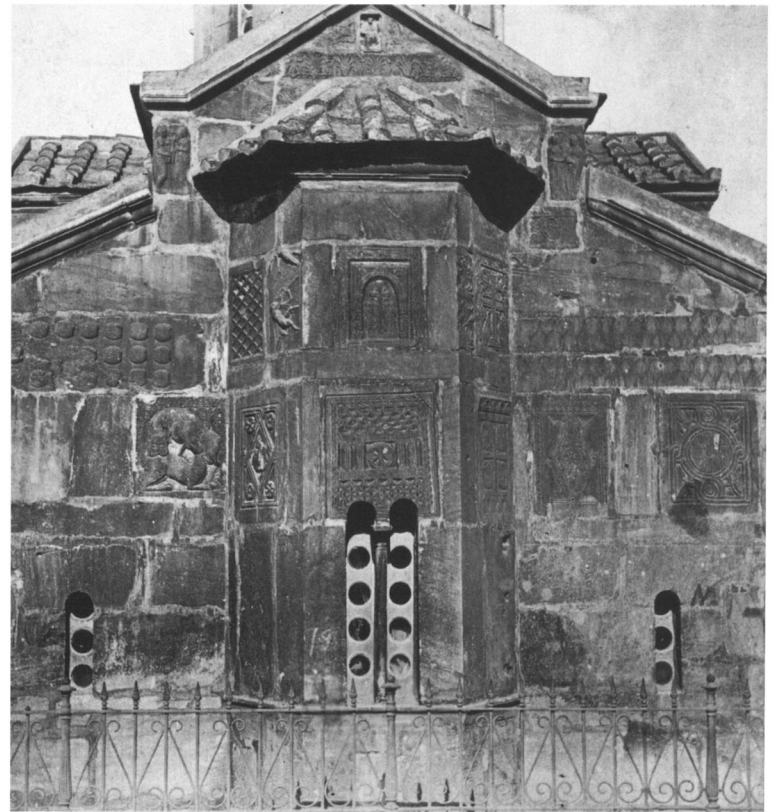


Fig. 13.6: East façade (central apse), Panagia Gorgoepikoos church, Athens; R. Weir Schultz & S. Barnsley, 1888–90; BSA BRF-02.01.01.026.

illustrations, in colour as well as in black and white, of the monastery of Hosios Loukas in Phocis.¹⁸ Unfortunately, as Macmillan notes in the short history of the School, the publication of more valuable material on the Byzantine churches of Greece and Salonica, and also of a series of full size drawings of Greek moldings made by Schultz, was prevented at the time by lack of funds.¹⁹

Some samples of Schultz's unpublished works in the BRF Archive reveal a technical perfection and an aesthetic approach that verge on artistic creation. In the Daphni monument, in 1900, Schultz recorded with patience and skill not only the architectural features but also the marble decorations, the wall paintings and the mosaics. He copied the decorative subjects of the mosaics (PLATE XVI) and many representations such as the Baptism, the Nativity, or the Transfiguration, with great care. He even copied the whole iconographic

14. Gailhabaud 1850; Couchaud 1842; Papanikolaou–Christensen 1985; Bendtsen 1993; Kalantzopoulou 2002.

15. See Robert 1979; Stamp 1981.

16. Kaplan 2004; Cumming 2006.

17. Thompson 1993.

18. Schultz and Barnsley 1901. See also Kalligas 2006.

19. Macmillan 1911, 2.



Fig.13.7: View of the interior of the katholikon looking north-east, Daphni monastery, Attica; R. Weir Schultz & S. Barnsley, 1888–90; BSA BRF–02.01.01.089.

programme for example of the Kaisariani monastery.

In his attempt to reconstruct the Byzantine mosaics and the wall paintings in the painter's manner, he demonstrates not only his academic interest in scientific recording, but also his deeper interest in the way in which the Byzantine craftsman worked.

Indeed, the medieval past and the working conditions of medieval craftsmen were at the centre of interest for the architects of the Arts and Crafts Movement, where Schultz belonged, as well as for the Pre-Raphaelite painters — especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti,²⁰

20. Prettejohn 2000.

who collaborated closely with William Morris in creating works of medieval inspiration. The architects and painters of these movements in England endorsed the same socialist ideology and preferred the working conditions of the medieval craftsman to the inhumane working pace imposed by industrialization.

By drawing and painting with patience, precision, and high aesthetic sensibility, Schultz tried to penetrate the way in which the Byzantine and post-Byzantine painters decorated churches. In the same spirit, with immense patience and precision, he followed the course of the work of the craftsman of the past, taking meticulous notes about the colours and the detailed creation of the faces (PLATE XVII), taking photographs, and then producing pictorial copies of high aesthetic quality of the 11th century mosaics in Daphni (PLATE XVIII).

His work on Byzantine techniques influenced his course as an architect and decorator and is obvious in his later works in England and Scotland, especially in church decoration and the conservation of monuments: e.g. his work in 1910 in the Chapel of St Andrew in Westminster Cathedral. He published this work as *Designs for the mosaic decoration of St Andrew's chapel, Westminster Cathedral* ten years after the study of the Daphni mosaics.

The study and publication of this very rich Byzantine Archive of the British School at Athens will throw light, when completed, on the history of the ruined and reconstructed Byzantine monuments of Attica, thanks to the high quality and accuracy of the drawings and especially of the photographs. At the same time, it will reveal the influences of Byzantine architecture and decorative art on British architects of the 19th and early 20th century. Once more we are in front of the phenomenon of interaction among the European cultures.

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