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Jews, Christians and Muslims along the Mediterranean Basin: an Archaeological Overview

Up to the Modern Age, the Mediterranean basin was the centre of the world, the place of History. Different people, languages, cultures were born and died along its shores. Its waters were a connecting bridge as well as a dividing wall between North and South, East and West. A diversity of cultures, languages and religions made the Mediterranean basin look like a huge mosaic composed by multicoloured tiles which sometime created a unified pattern, other times fragmented parts.¹

The breadth of the topic of my essay; *Jews, Christians and Muslims along the Mediterranean Basin: an Archaeological Overview*, allows at this time to outline just a brief picture of the meaning and the role played by the three monotheistic religions in the history of the areas around this sea.

At the end of classical antiquity, the Mediterranean basin still preserved its own cultural unity. From the shores of Asia Minor to those of southern Africa, Spain and Italy, goods and people circulated in a world that was still remained classical. Between the III and V century A.D. there was an hegemony of African exports (African exports were hegemonic), as documented by the pottery production (Amphorae fragments) found everywhere.² Such unity starts breaking down in the 5th century due to the invasions of the Vandals, seen by African church writers of this time as a threat to Roman institutions, enemies of the Roman- African civilization and identity.³

In the 7th century, this unity was definitely broken by the conquests of the Arabs who settled along the southern shores of the Mediterranean basin, creating a contraposition with the northern coasts of this sea. A sudden fracture created by the Arab conquest in the 7th century, as narrated by Pirenne in his work *Mohammed (Maom-*

¹ Y. ESSIDE, *Avant propos*, en H. AKKARI (sous la direction), *La Méditerranée médiévale Perception et représentations*, AIF- Les éditions de la Méditerranée, Tunis 2002, p. 11.

² A. VAZQUEZ DE LA CUEVA, *Sigillata africana en Augusta Emerita*, Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Merida 1985; P. J. VATIKIOTI, *The Middle East: From the End of Empire to the End of the Cold War*, London 1997, pp. 233-235.

³ CH. WICKHAM, *Per uno studio del mutamento socio-economico di lungo termine in Occidente durante i secoli V-VIII*, in «Dpm quaderni - dottorato 1» (2003), pp. 3-22.

etto) and Charlemagne,⁴ was indeed disproved by abundant archaeological documentation which shows how differences started already in the 5th century, long before the Arab conquest; and that commercial and human relationships were never cut off but instead continued undisturbed after the 7th century⁵ (fig. 1).

It is known that the three monotheist religions of the Mediterranean people have many common traits. First, they recognize Abraham as the founder of Monotheism. According to Hebrew tradition, he destroyed the paternal idols and asserted the existence of only one God; for the Christians, Abraham and Moses are the most cited in the New Testament.⁶ For Muslims, *Ibrahim* is the prophet, who introduced the cult of the true God. Together with Ismael he builds the *Kaaba* in Mecca. In the Islamic tradition, as for the Christian, Abraham and Moses are the most cited Bible figures.⁷ But the three monotheist religions found on the Mediterranean shores a deeply Hellenized cultural milieu which would greatly influence them.⁸ Diaspora Jews⁹ felt the need to translate the Bible into Greek long before the birth of Christ,¹⁰ and decorated synagogues with images not allowed in their world (fig. 2), as it is done at *Beth Alpha*, where only the hand of God not to be shown as an image is painted.¹¹

When the Roman Empire converted to Christianity, a renewed Hellenistic culture spread along the Mediterranean shores.¹² The fathers of the Church were Greek from Alexandria, Cesarea, Cappadocia, Antioch, and Gaza in Palestine. Before the Arab conquest, these cities were major Greek centres of culture and of theological

⁴ H. PIRENNE, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, Paris 1937.

⁵ P. ARTHUR - H. PATTERSON, *Ceramics and early medieval central and southern Italy: a "potted history"*, in R. FRANCOVICH - G. NOYÉ (a cura di), *La Storia dell'Alto Medioevo italiano (VI-X secolo) alla luce dell'archeologia*. Convegno Internazionale (Siena, 2-6 dicembre 1992), All'Insegna del Giglio, Firenze 1994, pp. 409-441.

⁶ P. G. BORBONE ET ALII, *Abramo padre di tutti i credenti: alle radici delle tre grandi religioni monoteistiche*, in C. LETTA (a cura di) *Atti delle conferenze del ciclo di incontri Cultura e università (Pisa, 13 gennaio-17 febbraio 2004)*, ETS, Pisa 2006, pp. 11-34.

⁷ W. M. BRINNER - B. H. HARY - J. LEWIS HAYES - F. ASTREN (eds), *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications, and Interaction*, Brill, Leiden 2000, p. 158; I. CANAN, *The message of Abraham: his life, virtues, and mission*, Light, Somerset N.J. 2007.

⁸ N. BENTWICH, *Hellenism*, The Jewish Publication, Philadelphia 1920, pp. 126-196.

⁹ E. S. GRUEN, *Hellenism and Jewish Identity in the Diaspora*, in «Mediterraneo antico: economie, società, culture» 9, 2 (2006), pp. 46-58; J. J. COLLINS, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids MI, 2000², pp. 16 ss.

¹⁰ P. LAMARCHE, *La Septante*, in C. MONDÉSERT (sous la direction), *Bible de tous les temps*, 1, Beauchesne, Paris 1984, pp. 19-35; M. HARL - G. DORIVAL - O. MUNNICH, *La Bible grec des Septante. Du judaïsme hellénistique au christianisme ancien*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1988, p. 107.

¹¹ J. ASSMANN - A. I. BAUMGARTEN, *Representation in Religion: Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch*, Brill, Leiden 2000, p. 150; R. HACHLILI, *Ancient mosaic pavements. Themes, Issues and Trends*, Brill, Leiden 2009, p. 250

¹² D. ABULAFIA, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, Oxford University Press, New York 2011, p. 152; L. BAECK, *The Mediterranean Tradition in Economic Thought*, Routledge, London 1994, p. 62; R. W. WINKS, *World Civilization: A Brief History*, Collegiate Press, San Diego 1993, p. 62; R. CANTALAMESSA, *Cristianesimo primitivo e filosofia greca*, in R. CANTALAMESSA (a cura di), *Il cristianesimo e le filosofie*, Milano 1971, pp. 28-57.

Christian elaboration.¹³ Eusebius from Cesarea, Gregorius from Nazianzo, Nemesius, Enea from Gaza and pseudo Dionigi the Aeropagita, showed in their works the best of the Neoplatonic thought, particularly of Plotino and Proclo.¹⁴ Aristotelianism was also present in Greek theology since the 5th century with Leonzio from Bisantium, Massimo and Anastasio the «Sinaita». The synthesis between Christian thought and Aristotelianism was achieved mainly with John of Damascus.¹⁵ In his work, *The Source of Knowledge* he succeeds in creating a synthesis between Christianity and Greek philosophy, six centuries before Thomas Aquinas (*Tommaso d'Aquino*).¹⁶

John of Damascus was the son of Serdjoun, a head of the Christian community and tax collector, but also Finance Minister for Caliph *Abd al Malik*.¹⁷ Perhaps John of Damascus played an important role at Court before his retirement in 725. It is obvious that the thought of Damascenus could have had a direct impact on the caliph and the intellectual Arab circle, as debates in the Islam world sparked over relationship between reason and faith seem to indicate.¹⁸ The idea that Muslim theology was associated with naturalistic concepts derived from the thought of John of Damascus. The Rationalism of Mutazilites, after a period of ephemeral triumph, were found heretical and expelled, but they paved the way for the birth of the Muslim theology.¹⁹ Greek Rationalism had a much deeper impact and it seeped into Arab philosophy, which in turn was inspired more and more by Plato and Aristotelian schools.²⁰

¹³ A. PAPADOPOULOU, *L'Islam et l'Art Musulman*, Éd. Mazenod, Paris 1976, p. 32; J. QUASTEN, *Patrology: The Golden age of Greek Patristic Literature III*, Newman Press, Westminster 1960, p. 541.

¹⁴ J. J. CLEARY, (ed.), *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, University Press, Leuven 1997; D. J. O'MEARA, *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, II, New York 1982; S. RAPPE, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2000 (titolo orig. *Agnets Bozbyi*, YMCA Press, 1933).

¹⁵ S. N. BULGAKOV - B. JAKIM, *The Lamb of God*, Grand Rapids 2008, pp. 443 ss.

¹⁶ F. H. CHASE, *The fathers of the church: St. John of Damascus, writings*, New York 1999³; A. C. DULLES, *A History of Apologetics*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Oregon 1999², pp. 92-95; B. MONDIN, *La metafisica di S. Tommaso d'Aquino e i suoi interpreti*, ESD, Bologna 2002.

¹⁷ CH. F. ROBINSON, *Abd Al-Malik*, London 2007; KH. Y. BLANKINSHIP, *The End of the Jihād State: The Reign of Hishām Ibn 'Abd al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads*, SUNY Press, Albany 1994; M. GIL, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 92, 841.

¹⁸ F. E. AL-BOUSTANI, *Le Rôle des Chrétiens dans l'établissement de la dynastie omeyyade*, in «*Orientalia Christiana*» 36 (1934), p. 142.

¹⁹ I. M. N. AL-JUBOURI, *Islamic Thought*, Dartford 2010, pp. 125-172; L. SACCHETTI, *Ebraismo e cristianesimo. Sguardo critico sulle origini*, Pendragon, Bologna 2010, p. 180; A. SAEED, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*, Routledge, New York 2006, pp. 60-84.

²⁰ P. ADAMSON, *Al-Kindi and the reception of greek philosophy*, in P. ADAMSON-R. C. TAYLOR (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, pp. 32-51; TH. TAYLOR, *A Dissertation on the Philosophy of Aristotle, in Four Books*, London 1812, pp. 403-417 (reprint Kessinger Publishing 2003); A. PAPADOPOULOU, *L'Islam et l'Art Musulman*, cit., pp. 33-34; I. M. N. AL-JUBOURI, *History Of Islamic Philosophy: With View Of Greek Philosophy with view of Greek philosophy and early history of Islam*, Authors On Line Ltd 2004, pp. 45-85.

The work of pseudo-Dionigi²¹ with its Neoplatonic and mystic conceptions, would also have a significant influence over the entire Muslim thought.²² The Sufi thesis, the conception of the Shiite theology, and that of philosophers such as Avicenna were deeply influenced by the thought of Plato and Plotino, who became known thanks to «Mystic Theology» and other works by pseudo-Dionigi.²³

Contacts between Muslim culture and Greek thought became closer and closer thanks to translations into Syriac and Arabic of works by Greek theologians.²⁴

Neo-Pythagorism developed also in Alexandria and influenced theology and Christian gnosis, Monophysitism, and the Judeans.²⁵ Later it passed on to Muslim culture. One of the most renowned works from the 10th century, known under the name of «الصفاء حي الإخوان رسائل» («Letters of the Brothers of Purity»), represents the syncretism of platonic, neo-platonic, Gnostic, and neopythagoric influences, which was accomplished in the Muslim culture. Above all, the Sufism was influenced by this esotericism and symbolic Hermeticism, which implies a transmission of secrets through different degrees of knowledge.²⁶

On a larger scale, the esoteric spirit percolated in the Muslim culture, affecting literature, philosophy, and also politics where secret societies flourished.

To summarize, it can be stated that the three monotheist religions met the Greek cultural substrate on the Mediterranean shores and were deeply influenced.

²¹ J. M. RIST, *Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the weakness of the soul*, in H. J. WESTRA (ed.), *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought : Studies in Honour of Edouard Jauneau*, Brill, Leiden 1992, pp. 135-162; E. D. PERL, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, SUNY Press, Albany 2008; R. ROQUES, *L'Universo dionisiano. Struttura gerarchica del mondo secondo ps. Dionigi Areopagita*, trad. di C. Ghielmetti e G. Girgenti, Presentazione e revisione di C. Moreschini, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1996 (titolo orig. *L'Univers dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys*, Aubier, Paris 1969).

²² P. MOREWDGE, *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Theories of Mysticism*, in R. BAINE HARRIS (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought*, SUNY Press, Albany 2002, pp. 321-352; ID., *The Neoplatonic Structure of Some Islamic Mystical Doctrines*, in P. MOREWDGE (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Islamic*, cit., pp. 51-74; D. GIORDANI (a cura di), *As-Sulamî, Introduzione al Sufismo*, Il leone verde, Torino 2002.

²³ TH. E. GASKILL, *The complementarity of reason and Mysticism in Avicenna (IBN SÎNÂ)*, in J. J. CLEARY (ed.), *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, University Press, Leuven 1997, pp. 443-456; S. VANNI ROVIGHI, *Storia della Filosofia Medievale. Dalla Patristica al secolo XIV*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2006, pp. 14-16.

²⁴ A. GRAFTON - G. W. MOST - S. SETTIS, *The classical tradition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 468; A. PAPADOPOULOU, *L'Islam et l'Art Musulman*, cit., pp. 32-41.

²⁵ D. SEWARD, *Jerusalem's Traitor: Josephus, Masada, and the Fall of Judea*, Da Capo Press, Cambridge 2009, p. 15; R. GOULET, s.v. *Héron d'Alexandrie*, in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, sous la direction de R. Goulet, vol. III suppl., Paris 2003, pp. 87-103; G. ARGOUUD, *Héron d'Alexandrie et les Pneumatiques*, in G. ARGOUUD - J.-Y. GUILLAUMIN, *Sciences exactes et sciences appliquées à Alexandrie*, Publications de l'Université de Saint Etienne, Saint-Étienne 1998, pp. 127-146.

²⁶ E. B. EASTWICK, *Ikhwanu-s-Safa, Or, Brothers of Purity*, Sampson Low, London 1869; F. GABRIELI, *Recenti studi sulla tradizione greca nella civiltà musulmana*, in «La Parola del Passato», LXV, 1959, pp. 147 ss.; M. STEINSCHNEIDER, *Die arabisch zungen aus dem Griechischen*, Graz 1960; A. BADAWI, *La trasmissione de la philosophie grecque au monde arabe*, J. Vrin, Paris 1987.

Not only philosophy, literature and the theological process were influenced, but monumental works as well to the point that in Islamic painting appear subjects from the Greek world, such as Solone (fig. 3) or Alexander the Great and sometimes Biblical themes (fig. 4).

We now examine archaeological findings, focusing on some examples which will document peculiarities of the three religions. Starting with the Jews, the construction of the First (1st) Temple is dated around 1000 BC (*a. C.*) and Jerusalem became the only center of the sacrificial cult.²⁷ At a certain point in their history they moved on to animal sacrifices, as symbolically shown in the Sacrifice of Isaac (fig. 5), which could be seen as the beginning of this custom.²⁸ The construction of the First Temple becomes the symbolic reference of the union of different tribes that up to that point freely practiced their cults. After the destruction of the Second (2nd) Temple in 70 A.D., the sacrificial cult was definitely replaced by the Synagogal one, which didn't require any sacrifice.²⁹ Synagogues had typically a rectangular or square floor plan, facing Jerusalem, where the community gathered to pray. Numerous evidence of synagogues is present in many sites of the Mediterranean basin.³⁰

Early Christians, instead, after initial reunions in the room where Christ had his Last Supper with his Disciples, gathered in simple houses which were named «Houses of Community» (*Domus ecclesiae*).³¹ Later, the word «community» (*ecclesia*) was used to indicate the gathering place and was not related to people. When Emperor Constantine proclaimed Christianity the State religion in the 4th century, the Basilica was chosen as the building where to celebrate the new religious rites. It is known that the Basilica was used by people to gather and to administrate justice long before Constantine. During the 4th century, countless basilicas were built and adapted to the Christian cult in Rome, in the Holy Land, in Africa and in many other parts of the Empire.³² In the course of centuries, the building was subjected to many modifica-

²⁷ J. M. CAHILL, *Jerusalem at the time of the United Monarchy: The archeological evidence*, in A. G. VAUGHN-A. E. KILLEBREW (eds), *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology. The first Temple period*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2003, pp. 13-80; M. D. KNOWLES, *Centrality Practiced. Jerusalem in the Religious Practice of Yehud and the Diaspora During the Persian Period*, Society of Biblical, Atlanta 2006, pp. 1-19; R. DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, tr. John McHugh, McGraw-Hill, New York 1961.

²⁸ M. G. AMADASI GUZZO, *Sacrifici e banchetti. Bibbia ebraica e iscrizioni puniche*, in C. GROTTANELLI - N. F. PARISE, *Sacrificio e società nel mondo antico*, Laterza, Bari 1988, pp. 97-122.

²⁹ A. SHEAR-YASHUV, *The Theology of Salomon Ludwig Steinheim*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1986, p. 56; G. GARBINI, *Storia e ideologia nell'Israele antico*, Paideia, Milano 2001.

³⁰ C. HERSELLE KRINSKY, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 5-21; R. HACHLILI, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel. Third-Seventh Century*, B.A.R., Oxford 1989; V. CORBO - ST. LOFFREDA - A. SPIJKERMAN, *La sinagoga di Carfarnao dopo gli scavi del 1969*, Jerusalem 1970; R. POLACCO, *L'antica Sinagoga ebraica di Aquileia*, in *Atti dell'Accademia di scienze, lettere e arti di Udine*, s. VIII, I, 1973-75, Udine 1974, pp. 123-148.

³¹ F. W. DEICHMANN, *Archeologia Cristiana*, L'Erma di Bretschneider, Roma 1993, pp. 71 ss.; G. VALENTINI-G. CARONIA, *Domus ecclesiae*, Pàtron ed., Bologna 1969.

³² G. ROMA, *Uso e trasformazione degli spazi culturali tra paganesimo e cristianesimo*, in A. COSCARELLA-P. DE SANTIS (a cura di), *Martiri, santi, patroni: per una archeologia della devozione*.

tions. In the Eastern Empire a building with a central floor plan was developed. The best known prototype with this shape is Hagia Sophia (fig. 6) in Istanbul.³³ After the Turkish conquest of the city in 1453, Hagia Sophia was transformed into a mosque.³⁴ The mosaics were covered with a thick layer of plaster³⁵ and minarets were built, and the structure was reinforced with buttresses by the great architect Sinan, the same one who later would build in Constantinople the beautiful Mosque (fig. 7) Suleymanye' (1550-1557), inspired by Hagia Sophia.³⁶ This type of Mosque would be built in the Byzantine territories conquered by Turks: Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Maghreb.³⁷ This development was not due to the influence of Muslim architecture, but by the presence in these countries of imperial officials who ordered the construction of Mosques similar to the ones found in their country.³⁸ In this case, we cannot speak of a direct influence of a specific architectural form as the *muqamas from Iran*.³⁹

Originally, the word *masjid* was used to indicate the house of Mohamed in Mecca where the community of the faithful gathered to pray. The house of Mohamed became the archetype of all Mosques. The house had a sequence of small rooms overlooking a big square courtyard. Three entrances were placed on the east, west and south side, of the *qibla*, the mandatory orientation for the prayer, which was still facing Jerusalem. Along the north wall, the *qibla* wall, the believers arranged themselves on Friday at noon to pray and to discuss.⁴⁰

Atti X Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana. Università degli Studi della Calabria. Arcavacata di Rende, 15-18 settembre 2010, Università della Calabria, Arcavacata 2012, pp. 87-106; R. KRAUTHEIMER, *Architettura paleocristiana e bizantina*, Einaudi, Torino 1986, pp. 218 ss.; B. M. APOLLONJI GHETTI, *Problemi relativi alle origini dell'architettura paleocristiana*, in *Atti del IX Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana (Roma, 21 - 28 settembre, 1975)*, Roma 1978, pp. 3-14.

³³ R. L. VAN NICE, *Saint Sophia in Istanbul: An Architectural Survey*, Dumbarton Oaks Publ., Washington 1995; C. MANGO, *Architettura bizantina*, Electa editrice, Milano 1978, pp. 55 ss.

³⁴ T. BURCKHARDT - S. H. NASR, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, Commemorative Edition, Bloomington 1995, pp. 156-178.

³⁵ N. B. TETERATNIKOV, *Mosaics of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul: The Fossati Restoration and the Work of the Byzantine Institute*, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington 1998; TH. WHITTEMORE, *The mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul*, Oxford 1933; S. BETTINI, *I mosaici di Santa Sofia a Costantinopoli e un piccolo problema iconografico*, in «Felix Ravenna» (1939) pp. 5-25.

³⁶ J. M. ROGERS, *Makers of Islamic Civilization: Sinan*, I. B. Tauris Publ., London 2006, pp. 41 ss.; G. NECIPOGLU *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J. 2005; J. FREELY, *A History of Ottoman Architecture*, Wit Press, Ashurt, Southampton 2011, pp. 215-311.

³⁷ R. ANDRÉ, *L'architecture dans le pays arabes à l'époque ottoman*, in R. MANTRAN (ed.), *Histoire de l'Empire ottoman*, Éditions Fayard, Paris 1989, pp. 683-694; G. GOODWIN, *A History of Ottoman Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London 2003; M. BOUHLELI, *Tunisia: storia, società e tradizioni, arte e cultura, religione*, Edizioni Pendragon, Bologna 2000, pp. 68 ss.; U. VOGT-GÖKNIL - E. WIDMER, *Architettura Ottomana*, Roma 1965, pp. 56 ss.

³⁸ A. BOMBACI - J. S. SHAW, *L'impero ottomano*, UTET, Torino 1981, pp. 382-383.

³⁹ A. PAPADOPOULOU, *L'Islam et l'Art Musulman*, cit., pp. 250-251; D. HILL - L. GOLVIN, *Islamic architecture in North Africa*, London 1976, pp. 86-90.

⁴⁰ M. B. AHMAD BAGVI, *Determination of the direction of Qibla and the Islamic timings*, Anjuman Khuddam-ud-Din, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1970; D. KUBAN, *Muslim Religious Architecture*,

In early times since its arrival to Medina, praying was made facing Jerusalem, which was the first sacred orientation (*qibla*). The orientation toward Mecca was introduced only after few years and at Medina there still is a Mosque called of the two *qibla* (*masjid al-qiblatayn*). I should be remembered that generally Christian churches are oriented toward the East.⁴¹ In some cases, though, churches have two apses and two opposite orientations. These are examples not yet fully studied, but hypothetically could be associated to a dual orientation toward two holy cities.⁴² We have mentioned previously how Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was transformed from a Christian church into a Mosque. Previously, examples were found of pagan temples turned into Christian churches,⁴³ as it was done in Rome where the church of the Madonna was built over Minerva's temple⁴⁴ or in Calabria, where in the area of Hera's temple the Madonna's church was built. Even in the Islamic world there are examples of mosques built over preexistent cult places, like in Damascus (Syria), where the «Big Mosque» was built over the temple of *Jupiter*, which was erected over a previous temple dedicated to the God *Hadad*.⁴⁵

Countless other similar cases could be named for all the Mediterranean countries.

E. J. Brill, Leiden 1985², pp. 1-18; A. PAPADOPOULOU, *L'Islam et l'Art Musulman*, cit., pp. 218 ss.

⁴¹ M. M. DAVY, *Il simbolismo medievale*, Roma 1999, pp. 203 ss. (titolo orig. *Initiation à la symbolique romane*, Flammarion editions, Paris 1964 e 1977); A. MARSON, *Archetipi di territorio*, Alinea Editrice, Firenze 2008, p. 142; A. DI BENNARDO, *Pietre orientate: la luce nelle chiese di Siria e Sicilia (V-XII secolo)*, Meltemi editore, Roma 2005; A. KEPPEL - C. CAMERON, *Early Islamic Architecture*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford 1932.

⁴² N. DUVAL, *Les églises africaines à deux absides*, I, *Les basiliques de Sbeitla à deux sanctuaires opposés* (Basiliques I, II et IV), E. de Boccard, Paris 1971; R. CORONEO, *Problematica delle chiese biabsidate. Contributo del tipo in area tirrenica*, in *Medioevo: Arte e Storia. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Parma 2007)*, Electa, Milano 2008, pp. 61-72; P. PIVA, *Chiese-sanctuario ad absidi opposte coeve (gli esempi italiani dell'XI secolo)*, in *Le vie del medioevo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Parma 1998)*, Milano 2000, pp. 141-155.

⁴³ G. ROMA, *Usi e trasformazione degli spazi culturali*, cit, pp. 87-106; C. MANGO, *The Conversion of the Partenon into a Church: The Tübingen Theosophy*, in «ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ», 18 (1995), pp. 201-203; A. BRACCILI, *I templi pagani trasformati in chiesa in Umbria: la chiesa di S. Isacco e S. Anzano a Spoleto*, in G. BINAZZI (a cura di), *L'Umbria meridionale fra tardo-antico e alto medioevo. Atti del convegno di studio. Acquasparta 6-7 maggio 1989*, Assisi 1991, pp. 125-137; A. FLICHE - V. MARTIN (a cura di), *Storia della Chiesa*, Cinisello Balsamo 2000, vol. III/2, p. 748; vol. VI/3, p. 24.

⁴⁴ S. GRUNDMANN, *The Architecture of Rome: An Architectural History in 400 Presentations*, Axel Menges ed., Frankfurt 1998, pp. 96-97; F. BORSI, *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*, Roma 1990; R. SPINELLI, *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*, Roma 1928; P. T. MASETTI, *Memorie storiche della chiesa di S. Maria sopra Minerva e de' suoi moderni restauri*, Roma 1855.

⁴⁵ E. S. WOLPER, *Khidr and the Changing Frontiers of the Medieval World*, in J. CASKEY - A. COHEN - L. SAFRAN, *Confronting the Borders of Medieval Art*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 2011, pp. 132-132; J. FINEGAN, *The Archeology of the New Testament*, Frederick A. Praeger Publ., Boulder-Colorado, 1981, p. 58; M. DUMPER - B. E. STANLEY, *Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: a historical encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara CA 2006, pp. 120 ss.; R. BURNS, *Damascus: A History*, New York 2007, pp. 11 ss.

In addition to these examples where the cult for a religion was continued and changed by another religion, there are cases where the cult of two different religious groups was being practiced in the same place: for example, the early Christians who continued to attend Jewish synagogues. Apostle Paul himself, converted to Christianity on his way to Damascus, preached in Asia Minor, in Greece, in the islands, in Italy and in Jewish synagogues attended by early Christians as well.⁴⁶ Even Christians and Muslims occasionally shared the same cult place. It was Mohamed himself who authorized Christians to pray in the Mosque which was also his house.⁴⁷ Even later on, Christians and Muslims shared the same place of cult, as it happened after the capture of Damascus by the Arabs in 625, as reported by Arab sources, when Christians and Muslims shared the same church consecrated to Saint John the Baptist, separating it with a wall. There are other cases when Christian and Muslim cultures worked together to create religious buildings.⁴⁸

In Palermo, Sicily, during the Norman Conquest in 1140, the Palatine Chapel (fig. 8) was inaugurated. It was a structure built like a courtyard church, where Christians and Muslims had worked together. Christian artists made the architectural structure and the wall mosaics, while the Muslims decorated the ceiling and paved the floor.⁴⁹ The walls of the Palatine Chapel were decorated with mosaics portraying scenes from the Bible and the Gospels.⁵⁰ Some scenes were very peculiar since they could be associated to pre-Islamic Arab poetry which greatly flourished in the 6th century and praised wine and love as the best things in life.⁵¹

The figure of the *drinker* who enjoys life has been represented many times;⁵² the same is for the female dancer whose iconography was brought to Islamic artists by Classical art. The same iconography (fig. 9-11) was used by Christian artists in

⁴⁶ *Atti* 18,8; 19,5.

⁴⁷ F. E. PETERS, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*, vol. I: *The peoples of God*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2003, p. 99; A. PAPADOPOULOU, *L'Islam et l'Art Musulman*, cit. pp. 219 ss.

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, p. 235.

⁴⁹ K. MALLETT, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100-1250: A Literary History*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2005, pp. 24-25; Y. TABBAA, *The Muqarnas Dome: Its Origin and Meaning*, in O. GRABAR (ed.), *Muqarnas: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture* 3, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1985, p. 73; G. ROSSI TAIBBI, *Omelle per i vangeli domenicali e le feste di tutto l'anno*, vol. I: *Omelle per le feste fisse*, Palermo 1969, pp. VII-XXV.

⁵⁰ W. TRONZO, *Byzantine Court Culture from the Point of View of Norman Sicily: The Case of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, in H. MAGUIRE (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D. C. 1997, pp. 101-114; E. KITZINGER, *The Mosaic of the Cappella Palatina: An Essay on the Choice and Arrangement of the Subject*, in «Art Bulletin» 31 (1949), pp. 269-292; E. BORSOOK, *Messages in Mosaic. The Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily 1130-1187*, Oxford 1990.

⁵¹ A. SCHIPPERS, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arab Literary Tradition: Arabic Themes in Hebrew Andalusian Poetry*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1994, pp. 105-112; E. J. GRUBE, *La pittura islamica nella Sicilia normanna del XII secolo*, in C. BERTELLI (a cura di), *La pittura in Italia. L'Altomedioevo*, Milano 1994, pp. 1-27.

⁵² D. AMALDI, *Le Mu'allaqāt: alle origini della poesia araba*, Marsilio ed., Venezia 1991, pp. 21 ss.

two churches: in Santa Maria of Anglona in southern Italy, which shows *Eve* bringing food to *Adam* and in S. Marco, Venice, showing *Salome*' bringing on a plate the chopped head of *Saint John*. In the church of S. Maria of Anglona it can be seen a possible work of Islamic artists who painted some scenes such as the Wives of Noah's sons (*le Mogli dei figli di Noé*).⁵³

It might not be necessary to add examples to show the many interconnections among Mediterranean cultures of the past, and agree with the words of an ancient writer (Socrates) who defined people settled around the Mediterranean Sea like *Frogs in a pond*.

In a time when differences are emphasized, perhaps it would be better to improve knowledge exchanges and to know the connections among people in this area.

Archaeological research backed by new technologies can contribute to the knowledge of the true History of the three cultures and start a dialogue among the sons of Abraham.

⁵³ G. ROMA, *S. Maria di Anglona*, Effesette ed., Cosenza 1989, pp. 96-98.

Appendice iconografica



Fig. 1. Pottery with Islamic influence (XII Century) found in southern Italy.



Fig. 2. Damascus, Archaeological Museum: Mosaic with Menorah and a Greek inscription (Aron).



Fig. 3. Solon speaks to the Islamic wise men (from Papadopoulo 1976).



Fig. 4. Le Caire, Bibliothèqe Nazionale: Joseph tempted by Putiphar's wife.



Fig. 5. Beth Alpha, synagogue: the Sacrifice of Isaac.



Fig. 6. Istanbul, Haghia Sophia.



Fig. 7. Istanbul, Suleymanye Mosque.



Fig. 8. Palermo, Palatine Chapel.



Fig. 9-11. a) Palermo, Sicily, Palatine Chapel: The female dancer; b) Tursi, Santa Maria d'Anglona, Italy: Eve bringing food to Adam; c) Venice, Italy San Marco Chapel: Salome' with the chopped head of Saint John.