Alexei Lidov

The Temple Veil and the Curtains at the Doors to Byzantine Sanctuaries

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In the presentpaperI would like to deal with a characteristic image-paradigm that played a great role in theJewish, Christian (Byzantine, Latin, Coptic) andIslamic cultures: the paradigm of the iconic veil at the door to the sanctuary.I will argue that the curtain which was a powerful vehicle of the visual culture and iconic imagery from the very beginning, goes back to the prototype of the Temple veil and to the Jewish and Christian tradition of its theologicalinterpretation (fig.5).

1 The first mention of the veil (*paroket*) of the Tabernacle's separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies and screening the Ark and the seat of God indicates that it was a kind of image, 'the skilled work', woven from blue, purple, crimson and linen and embroidered with cherubim. The Jewish tradition perceived the veil as a symbolic representation of cosmos and eternity[1].

In the first century Josephus stated that the veil, which had been embroidered with flowers and patterns 'in Babylonian work', depicted a panorama of the heavens. He explained that the colours woven together had symbolic meaning: the scarlet signified fire; the linen, earth; the blue, air; and the purple, sea. The veil thus represented thematter, the substance, of the visible creation and the universe. Later Jewish mystic theology suggested that the veil was also an image of the sacredtime simultaneously representing thepast, thepresent and thefuture. The Third Book of Enoch describes how Ishmael the high priest was taken up into heaven and shown all the history of the world on the reverse side of the veil, as on a great screen.

[1] *Barker M.* The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy. London, 2005, pp.202–228.

Philo gave the same explanation ofthe colours of the veil as symbolising the four elements of the world. A crucial point of his interpretation is that the veil was the boundary between the visible and the invisible creation. The world beyond the veil was unchanging and without a temporal sequence of events, but the visible world outside the veil was a place of change. This statement seems to me of great significance for the tradition of icon worship and deserves more careful analysis. Philo not only introduced an opposition between the earthly and theheavenly worlds, but also defined a concept of interaction between thesetwo sacred realms, the holy and the holiest, which belong to different ontologicalmodels. The holiest realm, placed beyond the veil and existing outside time and matter, creates the eternal pattern for the changing sacred environment in front of the veil. Some traces of Philo's vision can be found in the Byzantine theology of icons. The holy image, following the veil paradigm, is not just 'the door to heavens' (this traditional interpretation seems too simplified), but also the living spatial and transparent boundary connecting two heterogeneous sacred realms. It provides an explanation of the special concept of time and space that we may discover while contemplating icons. From this point of view, every icon could be interpreted as a curtain signifying the boundary between the dynamic space of prayer and the unchangeable space of divine presence, at the same time dividing and unifying the beholder and the divine realm through the holy image.

2 In the Christian tradition, the tearing of the temple veil at the moment of Christ's death becomes a new source of interpretation (Mathew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). According to Saint Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, the veil is designated the flesh of the Lord: '*The new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh*'(Hebrew 10:19-20). There are some important aspects derived from the Christian vision of the veil, called *katapetasma*in original Greek. The eternity of Christ, who passed beyond the veil and thus beyond time, has been confirmed. Through the veil torn in two he opened the Holy of Holies and a way to salvation to the faithful. The Temple Veil as the flesh of Christ became an image of his redemptive sacrifice and one of the most

influential and widespread symbols in Christian culture. A theological interpretation of the apocryphal story of the Virgin weaving the Temple veil became a popular theme of early Byzantine hymnography and homiletics, in which the weaving came to be compared with the incarnation of the Logos[2].

From early Christian times onwards, the veil was perceived as a powerful iconic image having various connotations, ranging from the idea of the incarnation to that of the Eucharistic sacrifice. In contrast to the Jewish tradition, a *topos*of the open curtain was highly emphasized. It seems quite natural, then, that in the period of iconoclasm, the Temple veil became one of the arguments of the icon worshippers presented at the Second Council of Nicaea: '*Thus, this Christ, while visible to men by means of the curtain, that is his flesh, made the divine nature—even though this remained concealed—manifest through signs. Therefore, it is in this form, seen by men, that the holy Church of God depicts Christ'*.[3] This vision was incorporatedinto the contemporary iconography.

The 'Parousia miniature' from the ninth-century Vatican manuscript of Christian topography provides the most characteristic example (fig.6), and has been recently discussed by Herbert Kessler[4]. The composition of the Second Coming is actually structured by the Tabernacle, following a two-part scheme used for the Ark of the Covenant in theJewish tradition and later in Byzantine iconography. The arched upper part represents the Holy of Holies; the rectangular lower part, the holy place, which is interpreted as a tripartite hierarchy of the heavenly, earthly and underground beings.

3Christ is represented in the Holy of Holies in the background of a magnificent gold cloth decorated with a trellis pattern filled with fleurs-de-lis (fig.7). The ornamentation was probably inspired by Josephus's description of the Temple veil embroidered with flowers and patterns. The curtain is at once the background and the major iconic representation, symbolically inseparable from the

[2]*Constas N*. Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity. Brill, Leiden, 2003, chap. 6.
[3]JD Mansi (ed.), Sacrorum consiliorum nova et amplissima collectio, 13:340.
[4]*Kessler H*. Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2000, pp. 60–87.

image of Christ, because, in Pauline and patristic interpretation, it isthe flesh of Christ. Through Christ and the Temple veil, the viewer may gain access to heaven, represented by the blue background. This is a visual embodiment of the New Testament's words about 'the new and living way' thatChrist opened for us to the Holy of Holies when the veil was torn in two at the moment of the redemptive sacrifice. The idea of the entrance to heaven is emphasised by the Greek inscription above the Vatican Parousia: '*Come, enter and possess the kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made*'. The creator of the miniature suggests the fundamental idea of all icons perceived as mediating realms. In this respect, the image of the 'Christ as Veil' operates as an ideal icon. It is noteworthy that the curtain is closed and open at the same time. The idea of boundary seems crucial, but the possibility of crossing this threshold is no less significant. Open, the curtain is a sign of passage and transfiguration, in which the idea of *theosis*, or deification, is realised as a dynamic process, a dialectic interaction of the holy and the holiest realms with the active participation of the beholder. We may assume that the curtain as a potentially transparent sacred screen can be regarded as a basic principle of iconicity.

It is important to note that the iconic curtain has not received a formalized pictorial scheme in iconography. Most probably, Byzantine image makers deliberately avoided limiting the all-embracing symbolism of the veil to a particular pattern but rather used it as a recognizable paradigm appearing each time in anew form.

5The image-paradigm of the iconic curtain has been revealed throughreal curtains and veils hanging in actual Christian churches. In Syrian sources from the fourth century onwards, there are several testimonies to the use of altar curtains, which were conceived as an interactive system of veils concealing, respectively, the door of the sanctuary barrier, the ciborium and the holy gifts on the altar table. Theologians identified these curtains with the Temple veils—the symbolism is reflected not merely in commentaries but even in the terminology of the church

spaces divided by curtains[5]. The evidence of written sources is confirmed by archaeological data indicating traces of hangings in the Early Syrian sanctuaries.

In one of the oldest Byzantine liturgical commentaries, ascribed to Sophronius of Jerusalem, it is said that the *kosmites* (architrave of the sanctuary barrier) is a symbolic image of the *katapetasma* (Temple veil). Multiple sources mention curtains in different contexts, such as imperial ceremonies or miraculous events in Constantinople. The Byzantine accounts fit well with the contemporary evidence from the *Liber Pontificalis* on the numerous iconic curtains presented by Roman popes to the main basilicas of their city[6]. The most characteristic example is Paschal I (817–24) adorning Santa Maria Maggiore in 822–24[7]. He presented to this church several dozen textiles belonging to different types of decorations (among others 'the clothes of Byzantine purple'); most were for the altar area of the basilica. There were at least three different sets of iconic curtains decorating spaces between columns in the sanctuary barriers. A year later, Pope Paschal added an extra set of iconic curtains representing another cycle: Christ's passion and resurrection.

Another group of curtains displayed on that basilica's great beam was connected with the sanctuary barrier's decoration. The most significant among them was '*a great veil of interwoven gold, with 7 gold-studded panels and a fringe of Byzantine purple*'. According to Krautheimer, this large veil with seven images displayed beneath the triumphal arch was for the wider central opening of the sanctuary barrier; thus, it had to serve as an actual replica of the Temple veil over the sanctuary door[8]. This great curtain hung in juxtaposition to another placed at

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[5]*Mathews T*. The Early Churches of Constantinople. Architecture and Liturgy. University Park and London, 1980, pp.162─171.

[6]*Croquison J*. L'iconographie chretienne á Rome d'aprés le «Liber Potificalis» // Byzantion, no. 34, 1964, pp. 577–603 ;*Petriaggi R.*'Utilizzazione, decorazione e diffusione dei tessuti nei corredi delle basiliche cristiane secondo il Liber Pontificalis (514–795)' // Prospetiva. Revista di storiadell'arteantico e moderna, no. 37, 1984, pp. 37–46.

[7] Le Liber Pontificalis, ed. L. Duchesne, vol. 1. Paris, 1981, pp. 60–3; The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of Ten Popes from A.D. 817–891, trans. and commentary R. Davis. Liverpool, 1995, p. 27.

[8] R. Krautheimer (ed.), Corpus BasilicarumChristianorumRomae, vols 1–5. Vatican City, Rome and New York, 1937–77, 3. 52.

the entrance to Santa Maria Maggiore, '*a great Alexandrian curtain, embellished and adorned with various representations*'. The two veils engaged in a visual and symbolic dialogue with a third, situated on the same horizontal axis, probably, behind the throne in the opening of the central arcade. It is noteworthy that in many cases the *Liber Pontificalis* indicatesthe manner of making the curtains, emphasising their beingmanufactured from four different materials 'of fourfold-weave'. The symbolism of this technology seems quite clear: it connects Roman textiles with the Temple veil that was made of blue, purple, crimson and linen.

I have mentioned just a few examples of the elaborate system of curtains creating a multi-layered structure of sacred screens, dynamic, changing and interacting. We can imagine that Santa Maria Maggiore, as well as other Roman churches, looked much more like a cloth tabernacle than astone church. A good impression of this imagery can be found in the seventh-century miniature of the Ashburnham Pentateuch, representing the Old Testament Tabernacle as a Christian church with the eight different types of curtains arranged as a system of sacred screens (fig.8)[9]. The evidence of the *Liber Pontificalis* allows us to see in this iconographic pattern a reflection of contemporary church interiors, embodying the most powerful image-paradigm, which for centuries played such a great role in the Mediterranean visual culture, extending beyond the fluid borders of the West and East. It was not an illustration of a particular theological notion, although it had several symbolic meanings deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and its Christian interpretation, revealing in every church the imagery of the Tabernacle.

6 The all-embracing symbolism of the iconic veil can be found in almost all church decoration, presented on different levels, from a concrete pictorial motif to a general structure. In this connection we should examine the well-known iconographic theme of curtains in the lower register of church walls. Curtains appeared in early Byzantine art (in the murals of the Bawit monasteries and of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome), and they became an established device in the

[9] Ashburnham Pentateuch, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, cod. Lat. 2334, fol. 76r.

middle Byzantine period (fig.9). Scholars have suggested different interpretations of this motif. In my view, however, its connection with the Temple veil symbolism seems the most probable.

7 Some new arguments can be provided. The representations of curtains were accumulated in the sanctuary area, while in the naos, plates imitating marble were depicted. An example on the screen is the twelfth-century ossuary church in Bachkovo where a striking combination of curtains and fresco icons is represented (fig.10).

8 On the curtains, represented in the sanctuaries of some twelfth-century Russian churches, we find a pattern in the form of menorah - a candlestick with seven branches, an iconography pointing to the Tabernacle and the Temple service. However, the most striking example is in the decoration of the mid-thirteenth-century upper church of the Boyana monastery near Sofia, Bulgaria.

9 An original inscription that has survived on the curtains in the lower register of the northern wall clearly identifies the meaning of the image (fig.11): '*kourtinarekomazavesa*' *(*'curtain called the veil').

10 So, the curtains in the lower zone are not ornamental margins but an integral part of an ancient symbolic concept that goes back to early Byzantine church iconography. Going a step further in our interpretation, the holy figures above the curtains can be viewed as the images on the veil and beyond the veil, coming from heaven and becoming visible and accessible because the Temple veil was opened forever by the sacrifice of Christ. In this way, the entire pictorial space of the church can be identified with the iconic veil, as I have earlier suggested, in the case of Justinian's Hagia Sophia, with the mosaic vaults recalling the ornamental veils. (fig.12).

The Catapetasma of Hagia Sophia

11Hagia Sophia provides the most striking exampleof the curtain as the symbolic door to the sanctuary. I mean the Catapetasma over the main altar table of the Great Church in Constantinople. Although it was an outstanding and unique work of Byzantine culture, and the most important liturgical object of the Empire's main cathedral, the Catapetasma has never become a particular subject of scholarly discussion. Suffice it to say that in numerous articles on the inner decoration of the "Great Church" (by Cyril Mango, Robin Cormack, and others), the Catapetasma has not been mentioned at all. It will be shown here, that the Catapetasma played a crucial role in a kind of installation around the main altar table of Hagia Sophia, where nothing survives at the present moment (fig.1), but where a special system of diverse crosses, votive crowns, veils, and other liturgical objects was deployed in the Middle Ages.

Let us turn to the existing data. There are only two testimonies of the Catapetasma surviving in the written sources. One of them is in *The Book on Statues of the City of Constantinople (De Signis)*, created after the Crusaders plundered the city in 1204 and sometimes ascribed to the Byzantine historian NiketasChoniates: "They also pulled down the catapetasma of the Great Church which counted up to several tens of thousands of minas of pure silver and covered with thick gold"[10]. A more detailed testimony was left by DobrynyaYadreikovich, later the Archbishop of Novgorod Anthony, in his famous *Pilgrim's Book*, which preserved unique data on the decoration of Constantinople churches before the Fourth Crusade[11]. In 1200, this Russian pilgrim saw in Hagia Sophia an object

[10] Niketas Choniates, De Signis, ed. J.A. Van Dieten, NiketasChoniatesHistoria, Berlin 1975; O City of Byzantium. Annals of NiketasChoniates (Byzantine Texts in Translation),trans. H. Magoulias, Detroit 1984. Antony Cutler, De Signis of NiketasChoniates. A reappraisal, in American Journal of Archeology, 1972/2 (1968), pp.113-118.

[11]KnigaPalomnik. SkazaniemestsviatykhvoTsaregrade Antonia, ArkhiepiskopaNovgorodskogo (The Pilgrim's Book. Narration on the Holy Places in Tsar-grad by Anthony, Archbishop of Novgorod in 1200, Ed. Ch.M. Lopariov, in: SbornikPravoslavnogoPalestinskogoObschestva

which he called by a Greek word *catapetasma*— the word was used in the Greek Bible for the veil that separated *the Holy*from *the Holy of Holies* in the Old Testament Temple. Later, in the Orthodox liturgy, the term was used for the curtain of the Royal Doors in the sanctuary barrier;[12].the curtain Anthony of Novgorod described was not, however, in the Royal Doors but over the main altar table. The Catapetasma amazed the Russian pilgrim who had not seen anything of the kind before.

At first reading, the preserved description seems discrepant; it is possible to interpret the Catapetasma both as a canopy and as a curtain. It is clear from the text that it was hanging in the upper part of the ciborium, not covering the altar table; perhaps, it changed the traditional curtain from that time forward. Anthony noted: "Earlier hierarchs served [behind] a curtain (catapetasma) of costly stuff suspended from the ciborium"[13], which seemed made of gold and silver (embroidered?), thus harmoniously integrated with all the gold and silver decoration of the altar space of the Great Church. At that, Anthony mentioned "columns of the Catapetasma" — possibly, silver columns of the ciborium, and these words evoke an image of a kind of a canopy.

From the Russian pilgrim's description, it is clear that the Catapetasma was a symbolic center of the cathedral complex and most precious installation around the altar table. Beneath the Catapetasma, over the holy great table and in the middle of it, there was suspended the votive crown of Constantine (the Great); it

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(Collection of Orthodox Palestinian Society). Vol. XVII. Iss. 3. St. Petersburg, 1899, p. 9-11 (further: Pilgrim's Book). The English translation of this most important text has been preparing by George Majeska for many years (but not completed). The description of the sanctuary was discussed in: George Majeska, A Description of the Sanctuary of St. Sophia in Constantinople from medieval Rus', in Palaeoslavica, 10 (2002), pp. 249-54. See also: P. Riant, Exuviaesacraeconstaninopolitanae, Vol. II.
Geneva 1878, p. 221; B. de Khitrowo, Intineraires russes en Orient, Geneva
1889, p. 92; M. Ehrhard, Le livre de Pelerin d'Antoine de Novgorod, Romania, 58 (1932), p.52

[12] G. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon.Oxford 1961. For Old Russian use, see: IzmailSreznevskij, MaterialydliaSlovariadrevnerusskogoiazyka (Materials for the Dictionary of Old Russian Language), t.1. St. Petersburg 1893, 1198-1199 (katapetazma).

[13]Here and further I quote the Pilgrim's Book in unpublished translation by George Majeska who kindly provided me this part of his work

symbolized not only a precious gift of the first Christian Emperor, but also his unseen presence in his Great Church. Near the crown a cross hung and from it was a descending golden dove, which recalled the Holy Spirit descending onto the Eucharist Gifts. Flanking the Catapetasmawere the crowns of other emperors. Moreover, thirty small crowns hung around the ciborium evoked, according to Anthony, the thirty coins and Judas's betrayal[14].

We learn from Anthony's description that behind the altar table were two more crosses:'a golden cross encrusted with pearls and precious stones, taller than two men', and another gold cross, hanging in the air, of one and a half cubits high, with three lamps attached to the three arms of the cross[15]. This particular cross-lamp, inserted there purposefully by "the great Tsar Justinian", was connected with a wonder that happened in Anthony's presence on May 21, 1200: it flew upward without human effort — over the huge cross — and then returned to the former place so that not one lamp went out[16].

Onemayguess that all the objects (the Catapetasma, the crowns, the dove, and the crosses) were seen at once through the columns of the ciborium — alltogethertheypresentedmulti-layeredstructure, whichcouldbeperceivedasasinglespatialimage, where the crown of

[14]'The crown of Constantine, decorated with pearls and precious stones, hangs in the center under the ciborium over the holy table in the main chancel. A cross hangs from it with a golden dove under the cross and the crowns of the other emperors are also hung around the ciborium The ciborium
is all of silver, decorated with gold, and the altar columns and ambo are [also] of silver. The thirty small crowns hung around the ciborium are to remind all Christians of the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas betrayed the Lord God Christ…' (trans. G.Majeska)

[15]Pilgrim's Book, p.13.

[16]'In front of this (a big cross – AL)) hangs a gold cross one and a half cubits high, with a golden lamp in which oil burns hanging from each of the three arms (and it is all hung from above by the fourth arm). The emperor Justinian the Great, who built St. Sophia, erected these lamps and the cross. These three lamps and the cross were raised by the Holy Spirit above the great tall cross and lowered again gently without [the lamps] being extinguished. This ascension occurred during matins, before the beginning of the liturgy, and everyone in the sanctuary and in the church saw it and said, with awe and great joy… God revealed this holy and venerable wonder in my lifetime, during matins on Sunday, the twenty-first day of the month of May, the feast of the holy emperor'.

Constantinople's founder and the cross-lamp of the church's creator Justinian were interwoven into a whole symbolical unity, perceived from the outside as a spatial icon.

It is clear that the altar installation was not limited to the objects described by Anthony; it also included an iridescent altar table made of an alloy of precious metals and a tower-crowned canopy of the ciborium, which were mentioned by Robert de Clari, as well as numerous textiles and liturgical vessels, 'decorated with stones and pearls" in Anthony's words. Besides, the spatial composition included dynamically changing performative elements, which added additional symbolical meanings to the general image and which were linked with concrete moments of the liturgical service. Anthony mentioned a procession bearing 'shining Jerusalem' to the altar table[17], obviously, a model of the kubouklion (aedicula) over the Holy Sepulcher, a particular liturgical vessel with an unknown function. Some examples from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries survived in Russia, where they usually were called "Jerusalems" or "Zions". They had be put on the altar table to stress the connection with the place of Christ's burial and of the resurrection[18]. Anthony emphasized that in that moment of the service there was the culmination of the repentance ('crying happened among people because of their sins') and of the perception of the church as the Heavenly Kingdom ('what sense and what soul don not remember then the Kingdom of the Heavens and the eternal life')[19].

It is interesting, that in this dynamic spatial complex it was the Catapetasma that performed the most important and at the same time the most mysterious object for an educated and experienced Orthodox pilgrim. The future archbishop of Novgorod asked the Byzantines about the Catapetasma's function and received the following answer: 'So that they could offer the service to the most high God,

[17]Pilgrim's Book, p.13.

[18] On 'Jerusalems' see: Irina Sterligova I.A. Jerusalems as Liturgical Vessels in Ancient Russia, in Jerusalem in Russian Culture, ed. Andrei Batalov, Alexei Lidov. New York-Athens, 2005, pp.51-72.

[19]Pilgrim's Book, p.13

Creator ofheaven and earth, with hearts and minds untroubled by the sight of women and the whole congregation' (trans. G. Majeska)[20]. Such an answer supposes an iconography of the Catapetasma, creating an integral image of all sacrament.But we can not exclude the possibility that the object itself, full with symbolical meanings, would have been perceived as a kind of the major icon concentrating the attention of believers during the liturgy.

It is especially important that the Russian pilgrim compared and even identified the Catapetasma of the Great Church with that of the Temple of Jerusalem, which was torn in two at the moment of the Crucifixion. In one version of Anthony's book there is an added passage with the identification of the Catapetasma of Hagia Sophia with the real Old Testament relic — it is perceived as historical reality. It is said that the relic of the veil had been brought to Rome by Titus together with other trophies, and afterwards it was donated by emperors to Hagia Sophia of Constantinople[21]. The authenticity of this passage, which is sometimes regarded as a later interpolation in Anthony's text, finds support in other historical sources claiming that the booty of the Jerusalem Temple had been transferred by Constantine the Great and later by Justinian from Rome to Constantinople[22].

It is known that the Jerusalem relics were venerated in the Byzantine capital. The golden menorah is a typical example— the Temple's seven-branched lampstand which was displayed in the so called dome of *heptalychnos* (or the Rotunda of eight pillars) in the Great Palace[23]. The Menorah, adapted in Christian tradition as a prototype of the Cross, was to be lit for festive processions in the

[20]Pilgrim's Book, p.10

[21] "*And when Jerusalem was captivated by Titus, many church vessels and curtains captivated were to Rome, and from tsars' treasure were given to the church of Hagia Sophia*" Pilgrim's Book, p.46.

[22] Leon Yarden,The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus. A Re-Investigation, Stockholm 1991, p. 30-31, 64-65.

[23] R. Guilland,Etudes de topographie de Constantinople byzantine. Berlin-Amsterdam, 1969, pp.27-29.

tenth century. One may also note that Moses' tablets and the vessel with the Manna, originally preserved in the ark in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple, were also transferred from Rome to Constantinople; they were venerated by the Byzantines as the genuine relics and were kept in the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia beside the Catapetasma[24].

The Temple veil has been kept in Rome where Jews coming to the city venerated it[25]. It is known that it was presented to the temple of Zeus in Olympia and then, perhaps, was transferred to New Rome, Constantinople, as a part of the imperial program of establishing of a special sacred state of new Christian capital. But nowhere, except in the *Pilgrim's Book*, is there any mention of the relic of the Temple veil in Hagia Sophia. Nevertheless, Anthony's testimony seems very important, even if it was a later medieval interpolation (not later than the sixteenth century). It reflects an ancient — or, at least, medieval — tradition that ties the Catapetasma of Hagia Sophia with one of the most important Old Testament relics and thus creates a very powerful image of the altar of the Great Church as the new Holy of Holies in the new "Solomon's Temple".

12Moreover, this identification is in line with ideas of ancient liturgical commentators, according to whom the curtains of Christian ciboria over altar tables were identified with the Old Testament Catapetasma[26]. One finds a rare iconographic confirmation of this statement on the twelfth-century ivory plate with the Crucifixion from the State Hermitage in Saint Petersburg (fig.2).[27]. Beside the Crucifixion, there is a quite unusual image of a ciborium with a closed curtain which obviously was intended to recall the Temple veil torn in two at the moment

[24]Pilgrim's Book, p.12.
[25] Leon Yarden, The Spoils of Jerusalem, p.64.
[26] This tradition was summarized in the interpretations by Symeon of Thessalonike a.1400: Nicholas Constas, Symeon of Thessalonike and the Theology of the Icon Screen, in Thresholds of the Sacred. Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West , ed. Sharon Gerstel, Washington 2006, pp.163-184.
[27] Alice Bank, Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums, Leningrad 1977, fig.143, p.297.

of Christ's death. The Catapetasma in Hagia Sophia could have been the source of such an image.

That said, it should be noted that the object Anthony of Novgorod described did not look like an ordinary curtain. Trying to explain all peculiarities of Anthony's description, I have come to conclusion that the Catapetasma of Hagia Sophia could be identified neither with a regular curtain nor with a common ciborium baldachin. Most probably, it looked like a combination of both — a short curtain attached to the baldachin.

13 This reconstruction is based not only on texts but also on Byzantine iconography. The preserved images of ciboria with a special curtain, as far as I know, have not yet attracted scholarly attention. An eloquent example of the sixth century is the miniature of the Meeting of Abraham and Melchisedech of the Vienna Genesis with(Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, MS gr. 31, fol. 7) which depicts the altar behind the 'king and priest' with a short curtain hanging under the baldachin (fig. 3).

14 The motif was wide-spread and recognized as an established model in the following centuries, as a miniature with St John the Evangelist in the eleventh-century Gospels manuscript (Vatican, BAV, MS, .gr.1229, fol.213v) convincingly demonstrates (fig.4)[28]. This iconographic detail provides a clue to understanding some written evidence. In the sixth century, John Moschos described a miracle happened in the town of Romilla: at the Episcopal mass a catapetasma, situated above the altar table, miraculously descended and closed the view to the altar (chapter 150). Apparently this story concerns the same liturgical object represented in the miniatures from the sixth to the eleventh century.

15 Yet, the most striking example is the symbolic image of the Heavenly Kingdom in the Christian Topography which was included in the lost eleventh-century manuscript of the Smyrna Physiologus(Evangelical School, Cod. B.8, fol.

[28] I Vangeli dei Popoli. La Parolo e l'immagine del Cristo nelle culture e nella storia, ed. F. D'Aiuto, G. Morello, A. Piazzoni. Citta del Vaticano, 2000, cat.no.51, p.240.

94v)[29]. It represents an ideal model of the Christian universe (inscribed as the Heavenly Kingdom) in the form of the Ark-shaped ciborium with a short curtain fixed in the upper part of it (fig.5 a,b). It is possible to understand the idea of this image through Byzantine liturgical comments, according to which the ciborium is the image of the Ark of Covenant appreciated as an ideal model of the universe, and the very word KIB-OURIN was translated by theologians as "ark of God's light". As Germanus of Constantinople claimed in the eighth century: 'The ciborium represents here the place where Christ was crucified; for the place where he was buried was nearby and raised on a base. It is placed in the church in order to represent concisely the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ. It similarly corresponds to the ark of the covenant of the Lord in which, it is written, is His Holy of Holies and His holy place. Next to it God commanded that two wrought cherubims be placed on either side (cf Ex 25:18) – for KIB is the ark, and OURIN is the effulgence, or the Light, of God'[30].

It is noteworthy, that the curtain in the ciborium bears, in the center, the icon of Christ, which was identified with the Temple Veil torn at the moment of the Crucifixion. It seems probable that the miniature reflects a tradition of Byzantine curtains with iconic images displayed in the ciboria; and it gives us a chance to understand better Anthony of Novgorod's testimony on the iconic character of the Catapetasma in Hagia Sophia.

16Moreover, there is not only iconographic but also an archaeological evidence of the existence of such objects. A late medieval wooden ciborium with an icon on leather with an image of the Lamentation is preserved in the cathedral of the monastery Deir-al-Sourian in Egypt (WadyNatron), which usually was presented on liturgical veils (fig. 6). It could be a reproduction of an earlier model,

[29] Massimo Bernabò, Il Fisiologo di Smirne. Le miniature del perduto codice B.8 della Biblioteca della Scuola Evangelica di Smirne. Firenze, 1998, fig.88, p.64.
[30] St. Germanus of Constantinople. On the Divine Liturgy, the Greek text with trans., introd. and comment. by Paul Meyendorff, Crestwood, New York, 1984, pp.58-59.

even a reflection of an ancient practice, which survived in this distant area that preserved diverse Early Christian traditions.

17 All these data allow us to consider once again the initial function of the whole group of Old Russian liturgical textiles from the twelfth to fifteenth century. Their iconic program and purposefully monumental character, as well as the obvious connection to the altar space seem unquestionable, although the question of their usage is still open[31]. The earliest of them is a two-meter-long gold embroidered veil with the Crucifixion from Novgorod, dated broadly to the twelfth – beginning of the thirteenth centuries (fig. 7)[32].

18 Another example is the so called Veil of Maria of Tver, precisely dated to 1389, with the Holy Mandylion in the centre of the Deesis (fig. 8)[33]. Its religious and political program, which includes images of four holy metropolitans of Moscow, was designed for frontal presentation and attentive observation, which corresponds poorly to the function of the covering veil. One more example is the veil from Suzdal with the Communion of the Apostles and the Virgin cycle on the margins, dated to the early fifteenth century (fig.9)[34]. All these textiles perform the Eucharistic program of the great importance which was clearly related to the altar sacrament. Although we have not enough data for a certain and unquestionable answer about the destination of these objects, it seems possible that they could be used as icon-curtains hanging in ciboria and would reflect the tradition of the Catapetasma of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

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[31] Recent discussion on this issue with the account of main contemporary publications see: Alexei Lidov, The Byzantine Antependium. On the Symbolical Prototype of the High Iconostasis, in Iconostasis: Origins-Evolution-Symbolism, ed. by Alexei Lidov. Moscow,1999, pp.174-178.

[32] Altar Podea, in Medieval Pictorial Embroidery. Byzantium, Balkans, Russia. Catalogue of the Exhibition. XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantinists, Moscow 1991, pp.20-21, cat.1. Some scholars tried to connect the object with Anthony of Novgorod and his pilgrimage to Constantinople.

[33] Alexei Lidov, The Byzantine Antependium, pp.175-177.

[34] Medieval Pictorial Embroidery. Byzantium, Balkans, Russia, pp.54-55, cat.13.

For understanding of the meaning of the Catapetasma, it is important to remember that, in Christian tradition, the veil of Old Testament Temple was interpreted as the flesh of the Lord and the most powerful symbolic image of Christ as the Door to another world.The both ideas of boundary and of crossing this threshold were equally significant in this main spatial icon of the Ideal Door.

19 In my opinion, this paradigm played a crucial role in the concept of the Hagia Sophia sanctuary with its dominating Catapetasma. It is worth noting that the Catapetasma over the altar table of Hagia Sophia was connected with several other Byzantine veils that marked the most significant boundaries in the space of the Great Church. Only vestiges of these are preserved today, the iron hooks that are visible on the bronze frame of the Imperial Door from the narthex to the nave dated not later than the tenth century. (fig. 11 a,b). On this frame above the Doorone may find a relief with the image of the Hetoimasia representing an open Gospel. The book bears a Greek inscription, an adapted quotation from the Gospel according to John 10:7-9: "*So said the Lord: I am the door of the sheep. By me if any man enter, he shall go in and out, and find pasture*".

20 The similar hooks for curtains were made over the Door of the south-west vestibule leading to the narthex. The door curtains, placed at the main entrances along the processional way to Hagia Sophia, were certainly symbolically connected to the imperial rite and interacted with actual icons and relics in the spaces around as well as with the mosaic images above the doors[35]. In this symbolic and ritual context, the presence of the third curtain in the sanctuary barrier seems quite possible. Together, the curtains created a kind of Sacred Way leading to the Catapetasma above the main altar.

Observing the space of Hagia Sophia, one may argue that the issue of icon-curtains cannot be restricted to a fixation of the archaeological data or written

[35]See :Alexei Lidov,Leo the Wise and the Miraculous Icons in Hagia Sophia, in The Heroes of the Orthodox Church. The New Saints, 8th to 16th century, ed. EleonoraKountoura-Galaki. Athens, 2004, pp.393-432, 402-404, 425-427.

testimonies. It seems that the veil and tabernacle imagery determined the symbolic concept of the decoration as a whole. We already mentioned that the vaults of Justinian's Hagia Sophia were covered with golden mosaics with wide ornamental bands, which probably must have recalled not merely the heavenly realm but also the precious veils of the Tabernacle. In this context the entire space of the Great Church could be perceived as a single icon-curtain.

21 An embodiment of this vision might be found in the symbolic concept behind the *opus sectile* panel on the western wall of the nave above the so-called Imperial Door (fig.14 a,b)[36]. It presents an iconic image of the triumphant cross on the pediment flanked by curtains in the aedicula. The canopy is performed as a kind of ribbed dome by means of eight strips that converge on the top. As has been already noticed, this unusual architecture reproduced the aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre — a proto-church erected over the first altar (the Tomb of Christ). Two parted curtains, suspended between the two columns at the back, are knotted in the centre and are fringed at the bottom. One might be quite sure that it is not just a decorative motif of antique origin but a powerful element of the symbolic concept, comparable with the jewelled cross. As the cross revealed the memory of Golgotha and the monumental triumphant cross erected there, the open curtains, incarnating the idea of the Temple Veil (the Flesh of God and the Living Way), present another image of Christ. The symbolic aspects of the church, the cross and the curtain were fused in a single whole, creating a dominating icon of the ideal temple the Holy of Holies, which, characteristically, was represented above the main entrance and just opposite the major altar installation in the sanctuary of the Great Church. In my opinion, the *opus sectile* icon-panel could be conceived as a counterpart and a kind of schematic reflection of the spatial imagery of the altar-ciborium with the Catapetasma in Hagia Sophia. These two images on the eastern

[36] A detailed description see: Underwood P. Notes on the work of the Byzantine Institute in Istanbul: 1957-1959, in: Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 14 (1960), pp. 206-208.

and western edges unified the entire space of the Great Church as an iconic image of the Tabernacle and Christ as the veil.

In conclusion allow me to sum up our discussion in two theses:

1.The Temple Veil was a crucial image-paradigmdeterming the symbolism of the doors to Byzantine sancturies. The Catapetasma of Hagia Sophia, which we tried to reconstruct with all possible sources, was the most strikingembodiment of this vision. It was venerated simultaneously as the ideal boundary (an image of Christ as Door), the proto-icon and the holy relic, corresponding with another great relic of the Imperial Door itself ,which, according to tradition, was made of the Holy Timber of the Noah's Ark. It is noteworthy that this spatial image was performative, i. e. it was constantly changing in connection with the liturgical service and transferred symbolical accents of that dynamic iconic image. At the same time, the altar installation had a stable focus bearing the conceptual meaning — the Catapetasma identified with the Old Testament Temple veil. It seems quite probable that this particular 'spatial icon' existing beyond flat depictions was the most powerful icon of the Great Church, i.e. of all the Empire, which could serve an influential model in the Eastern Christian world.

2. The imagery that I attempted to reveal in the present paper leads to an important methodological issue. In many cases, the discussion of visual culture cannot be reduced to a positivist description of artifacts or to the analysis of theological notions. Some phenomena can be properly interpreted only on the level of images-ideas, I prefer to term them "image-paradigms". It is a new concept which does not coincide with the illustrative pictures or ideological conceptions. This special notion seems to be a useful *instrumentumstudiorum,* which helps to explain a layer of phenomena. The image-paradigm of the iconic curtain was not connected with the illustration of any specific text, though it is a part of a continuum of literary and symbolic meanings and associations. It is hard to see in this paradigm just an embodiment of a theological concept though the depth and complexity of its structure is quite obvious. The image-paradigm belonged to

visual culture, i.e. it was visible and recognizable, but at the same time, it was not formalized in any fixed state, either in a form of the pictorial scheme or in a mental construction. In this respect the image-paradigm looks similarly to the metaphor that loses its sense in re-telling, or in a de-construction into its separate parts. For the Byzantines such an irrational and at once ‘hiero-plastic’ perception of the world could be the most adequate reflection of its divine essence. In that, it does not concern any mystical form of consciousness but a rather a special type, in which our modern categories of the artistic, ritual, are intellectual were interwoven into an inseparable whole.

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[37]On Image-Paradigms see: Alexei Lidov, 'Image-Paradigms' asaNotionofMediterraneanVisualCulture: a Hierotopic Approach to Art History, Crossing Cultures. Papers of the International Congress of Art History. CIHA 2008. Melbourne, 2009, pp.177-183; Alexei Lidov,Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History’, in Alexei Lidov(ed.), *Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, Moscow 2006, pp. 25-26. Alexei Lidov, Hierotopy. Spatial Icons and Image-Paradigms in Byzantine Culture. Moscow 2009 (in Russian with English summary). Examples of image-paradigms were discussed in my articles: Holy Face-Holy Script-Holy Gate: Revealing the Edessa Paradigm in Christian Imagery, inIntorno al SacroVolto: Genova, Bizansio e ilMediterraneo (secoli XI-XIV) , ed. A.R. Calderoni, C. DufourBozzo, G. Wolf. Venezia, 2007; A Byzantine Jerusalem. The Imperial Pharos Chapel as Constantinopolitan Holy Sepulcher, in Jerusalem as Narrative Space, ed. A.Hoffmann, G. Wolf. Leiden, Brill, 2012, pp.63-104; Eastern Christian ‘Image-Paradigms’. A hierotopic dimension of medieval art history, in Georgian Art in the Context of European and Asian Cultures. Tbilisi 2009; The Whirling Church. Iconic as Performative in Byzantine Spatial Icons, in Alexei Lidov(ed.). Spatial Icons. Performativity in Byzantium and Medieval Russia. Moscow, 2011, pp.27-51 (all papers see: www.hierotopy.ru).