Creating the Sacred Space.
Hierotopy as a new field of cultural history

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The Concept of Hierotopy

The concept of Hierotopy was proposed by myself in 2001 and comprehensively discussed for the first time in 2004, at an International symposium in Moscow[1]. It was a logical development of the extensive research program of the Research Centre for Eastern Christian Culture, which led to the organization of five international Conferences and to the publication of the related Conference proceedings[2].

The problematic of sacred space has been touched upon in all research projects, yet gradually from a supplementary subject it became a focus of studies. It is now clear that the development of Christian culture was conditioned by creation of numerous and diverse sacred spaces, where miracle-working icons and relics, iconographic programs and liturgical devices (such as iconostasis), as well as all possible "jerusalems" found their genuine sense.

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1   See Lidov 2004, Lidov 2006. The present article, based on my paper at the conference in Padua 2012, is a new version of this topic.

2   Lidov 1994, Lidov 1996, Lidov 2000, Lidov 2003, Batalov – Lidov 2005.

The Concept in the Making

At that point the problem seemed unstudied and seemed to disappear behind innumerable descriptions of artifacts. The widespread term "sacred space" did not function well because of its too general nature, describing nearly the entire realm of the religious.

The term "hierotopy" (*ierotopia*) consists of two Greek roots [*hieros* (sacred) and *topos* (place, space, notion)], as well as many other words already established in our vocabulary in the last hundred years, among which the term "iconography". The notion might be expressed as follows: hierotopy is the creation of sacred spaces regarded as a special form of creativity, and a field of historical research which reveals and analyses the particular examples of that creativity.

According to the initial design, hierotopy should become a special section of humanities. It is important for different fields of research, but has particular significance for art history, since the creativity itself consisted in forming of spatial imagery, where architectural forms and sacred images, liturgical vessels and ritual gestures, dramaturgy of light and organization of fragrances, resounding words and recollections of miracle-stories were all woven together into one single whole.

The concept, since it was offered to the scholarly community as a developed research proposal in 2001, has been intensively discussed in communications at numerous seminars all over the world, in reviews, in the author's monograph and at five international symposia, which reflect a great interest for the subject and the modern trends in medieval studies[3].

Hierotopy is a fruitful field for interdisciplinary research, allowing scholars to discuss problems of some interest for all of them, which go far beyond strictly specialized subjects. In a way, this new research field spans art history, cultural history, archeology, anthropology and religious studies. It should be stressed that the sense of the hierotopical theory does not consist of philosophical abstractions, but rather in the possibility of another perspective and in posing new questions to the sources, which are capable of bringing unique historical information.

Hierotopy is deeply rooted in the studies of relics and miraculous icons. As a number of scholars recently realized, the most significant aspect of

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3   See Lidov 2006b; Lidov 2009a, Lidov 2009b, Lidov 2009c, Lidov 2011, Lidov 2013, Lidov 2014. The monograph and the proceedings are available on the site: www.hierotopy.ru

relics and miraculous icons was the role they played in the creation of particular sacred spaces[4]. In many cases relics and venerable icons were established as a core, a kind of pivot in forming a concrete spatial environment. This milieu included permanently visible architectural forms and various pictures as well as changing liturgical clothes and vessels, lighting effects and fragrance, ritual gestures and prayers, which created a unique spatial complex every time. Sometimes the environment could occur spontaneously, yet there are several examples when we are able to speak about deliberate concepts and elaborated projects, which should be considered very important historical documents.

Hierophany and Hierotopy

Probably, the most serious problem of hierotopy is the category of the sacred itself, which surmises the actual presence of God and cannot be separated from the miraculous. Mircea Eliade introduced the special notion of "hierophany", making a clear statement: «Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different»[5]. As an example of hierophany Eliade provides the famous biblical story of the Jacob's Dream about the Ladder connecting the Earth and the Sky, the Lord speaking from the Sky and the construction of an altar at the holy spot[6].

Using the same subject, let us try to separate "hierophany" and "hierotopy", articulating the specificity of our approach. In the biblical story the description of the hierotopic project starts with the waking up of Jacob, who, inspired by his dream-vision, begins to make a sacred space, which would convert a particular place into «the house of God and the gate of heaven»[7]. He took the stone that has been his pillow, and set it up as a monument, and poured oil on it. Jacob also renamed the place and took special vows. So, Jacob, and all his "successors" – the creators of churches and shrines – created a particular spatial milieu.

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4   Lidov 2003b.

5   Eliade 1959, p. 26.

6   *Gen* 28, 12-22.

7   *Gen* 28, 17.

The communion with the miraculous inspired the concept of a spatial image, but itself remained beyond the realm of human creativity. This creativity, nevertheless, was intended to actualize the memory of a hierophany by all possible means, embodying an image of the divine revelation. As it seems, the permanent relation and intensive interaction between hierophany (the mystical phenomen) and hierotopy (the actually made spatial milieu) determined the specificity of the creation of sacred spaces as a form of creativity. One may note that Eliade's approach, analyzing the structure of the myth and its profound symbolism, has a principally different focus which, however, can be used in some hierotopical reconstructions.

Hierotopy, Positivism and *Gesamtkunstwerk*

Hierotopy, as a type of creativity, is deeply rooted in human nature. In the process of self-identification as a spiritual being a Man, first spontaneously and then deliberately, creates a concrete milieu of his connection with the transcendental world. The creation of sacred spaces can be compared with pictorial creativity, which also belongs to visual culture and appears spontaneously at the very early stage of the shaping of personality. However, in the positivist ideology of the 19th century, most disciplines were bound to concrete material objects, either pictures or architectural monuments, folk rituals or written texts. The creation of sacred spaces, therefore, did not receive its place in the established scheme of humanities, the structure of which was determined by the "object-centered" model of the universe description. Respectively, the subject was not formulated and, as a logical consequence of this, a discipline did not occur, and a special terminology was not elaborated.

At the same time it is not possible to say that the problematic of sacred space has not been touched in the humanities. Various aspects of the theme were discussed by archeologists, anthropologists, art historians and historians of religion. However, as a rule, they tried to solve the problems of their own disciplines, emphasizing a particular aspect without the consideration of the whole. Hierotopy cannot be reduced either to the world of artistic images, or to the combination of material objects organizing a sacred milieu, or to the rituals and social mechanisms which determined them. The ritual plays a great role in the hierotopical projects, but not less important are purely artistic, theological and liturgical aspects, usually neglected by anthropology.

Furthermore, the hierotopical concept cannot be interpreted in terms of the so-called *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the synthesis of arts, which acquired enormous significance in the age of Baroque period, and later in that of Art Nouveau. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* was operating with various forms of arts and art-objects creating an artistic space as a final result of combination. That approach seems a result of great reform after the Renaissance, when aesthetical values began to be perceived as a substitute of sacred ones[8]. At the matrix level it is quite opposite to hierotopic projects, based on a particular image of sacred space which determines all external forms. Though sometimes similar, the hierotopy deals with a principally different matrix.

The Dramaturgy of Lighting

Characteristically, all the forms of creativity could not be properly discussed beyond the hierotopical framework. For instance, such an enormous phenomenon as the dramaturgy of lighting occurs beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines[9]. At the same time we know from written sources how detailed was the practice of lighting, dynamically changing during the services according to a sophisticated scenario[10]. In particular moments the light accentuated concrete images or holy objects, organizing a perception of the entire space of the church as well as the logic of reading its most significant elements[11]. "Dramaturgy" is an appropriate word in this context since here the artistic and dramatic element was not less important than the ritual and symbolic one[12].

Paradoxically, however, from the point of view of cultural history fire and light remain little studied. The practice of using light effects and the dramatic art of fire to create sacred space is even less well known. The phenomenon has also been philosophically interpreted: in the Neoplato-

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8   This topic has been discussed in Sokolov 2009, pp. 203-206.

9   Lidov 2013.

10   A characteristic example is the *Typikon* of the *Pantokrator* Monastery in Constantinople: Congdon 1996, pp. 169-175, 182-184; on the kindling in Byzantine churches see Theis 2001.

11   On the use of natural light see Potamianos 1996.

12   On the symbolic and liturgical aspects as reflected in the Byzantine *ekphraisis* see Isar 2004.

nism – which underlies Christian theology – it is precisely a conception of light and its emanation which proves key to understanding the divine nature of the world. Plotinus describes this emanation of Light in the *Enneads*[13]. This Neoplatonic concept was so significant and influential that it allows us to understand not only some Christian theological issues, but also the extant Byzantine *ekphraseis* which describe Byzantine churches as environments of revolving light[14]. According to the description of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople by Paul the Silentiary (563 A.D.)[15], a huge circular chandelier with shining lamps of fire echoed the ring of sunbeams from forty windows under the cupola. Yet another gigantic ring of lamps was placed around the cornice which divides the cupola from the *naos* of the church. Silver discs bearing the image of the cross were positioned on the end of a hundred and fifty chains hanging from the cupola, at the centre of which was a huge shining lamp[16]. The slopes of the windows under the cupola, inlaid with golden mosaics, served as a sort of reflectors, mirroring the light of the moon and stars and creating the effect of a luminous cloud. All this was conceived as part of a grandiose spatial icon of light, which included a complex hierarchy of zones of light: in reference to them the architectural body of the church was perceived as a huge and richly decorated shell[17].

It is now clear that Hagia Sophia is not simply an outstanding architectural structure, but a great hierotopical project, a grandiose spatial icon created by the complex dramaturgy of fire and light[18]. Let us recall that – besides the sunbeams and lamp flames – the twinkling gold of the mosaic vaults, the marble inlay, the sparkling gold and silver of the altar, screen, ambo and also innumerable liturgical vessels all participated in this mystical dramaturgy. In Paulus the Silentiary's opinion, it is precisely in this idea of a spatial icon of the invisible God, created by light, that one must seek an explanation for an aspect which has remained puzzling for many years – the absence of two-dimensional figurative images on the walls of the Justinian era Hagia Sophia, which would have been

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13   Cf. Plot., *Enneads* IV 3, 17.

14   Lidov 2011b.

15   Isar 2004, pp. 215-242.

16   Bouras, Parani 2008, pp. 31-36; see also Fobelli 2005.

17   For the discussion of this phenomenon see Godovanets 2011.

18   Lidov 2011b, pp. 27-51.

clearly discordant with the simultaneously iconic and performative image of light.

It is notable that the iconography of the "Transfiguration of the Lord" emerged together with the appearance of the icon of light in Constantinople's Hagia Sophia. The most ancient surviving example of this icon is in a mosaic of the altar apse in the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, commissioned by the Emperor Justinian, the creator of Constantinople's "Great Church". The most important feature of the composition is the image of divine radiance emanating from Christ, in strong accordance with the Gospel tale: «and his face shone like the sun, his clothes became white as light»[19]. Following the Neoplatonic conception, the light is depicted as dark and pale blue, white concentric circles, halos thinning out from the centre to the edge and emergent emanating beyond them. However, in contrast to the abstract Neoplatonic "One", the source of light is Christ, transfigured and transfiguring the space of Mount Tabor. Following Christian anthropology the apostles not only contemplate but also participate in the "deification", since «a bright cloud overshadowed them».

Interestingly, in the space of the Sinai basilica the light depicted in the main mosaic harmonizes with a stream of sunlight which flows from the window above the apse and overshadows those believers who, like the apostles, have gathered for the morning liturgy[20]. "The Transfiguration" can be understood as an example of ideal hierotopy – the creation of sacred space by means of divine light which naturally moves from the iconic image of the miracle on Mount Tabor into the concrete environment of the church.

The number of examples of Byzantine hierotopy of fire and light may be multiplied *ad infinitum*, despite the lack of extant sources to reconstruct such medieval projects. A further difficulty is that ephemeral light effects disappeared with destruction and alterations. However, reconstructions are not only possible, they are also incredibly fruitful. Within the framework of hierotopy, research on philosophical-theological conceptions of fire and light may organically supplement the analysis of the ritual and liturgical practices which, in turn, are connected with the architectural projects and the material culture of flame kindling.

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19 *Mt* 17,2. For a detailed analysis of the scene see: Elsner 1994, pp. 81-102.

20 Nelson 2006.

It is of vital importance to acknowledge that the dramatic art of fire and light may, and should, be examined as a separate form of artistic creativity. Our knowledge of this art form has been lost to a significant degree, in some sense as a result of a positivist picture of the world which focuses on the description of material objects. Hierotopy permits a full and appropriate evaluation of this major phenomenon of world culture.

Fragrance in the Making of Sacred Space

The same is true for the realm of fragrance, which presents every time new combinations of incense, the smells of wax candles and aromatic oils in lamps. Christian culture inherited the great traditions of the Ancient East through the Roman imperial cult as well as through the sophisticated worship of the Old Testament Temple, which was conceived as an image of the lost Garden of Eden[21]. In Christian tradition, the various perfumes not merely transmitted the memory of the lost Temple, but, as in Jerusalem, marked different sacred zones related to particular rituals and the venerable relics and miraculous icons. As the lighting, the incense determined the perception of the space in dynamics, establishing a kind of moving hierarchy and a vibrant spiritual environment. Jewish and Ancient Roman sources do not leave doubts that individual dramaturgies of lighting and fragrance were an essential part of a particular concept of sacred space[22].

Creators of Sacred Spaces

I will argue that in our discussion of Byzantine artists and donors one might find some room for the creators of sacred spaces, who were responsible for an entire project of sacred space realised in a particular church, or any other environment. This figure should not be identified with the artisan making concrete art objects like walls and vaults, sculptural decorations and paintings, liturgical vessels and textiles. Neither can his role be limited to the financial support of the project. In a sense, the creator of sacred space is the artist whose role seems comparable with contemporary activity of film directors conducting the efforts of various "artisans".

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21   Caseau 1994, Heger 1997.

22   Barker 2009.

Some projects of sacred space were of high artistic character though created on a different level to the creation of art objects and architectural forms. Such figures are well known, though their true role was hidden under the general name of donors or commissioners. Yet not all the donors were creators of the sacred space.

A representative figure in the West is Abbot Suger, who in 1140s created the concept of the first Gothic space in the cathedral of Saint-Denis[23]. His functions could not be reduced just to the investment of the project, or to the casting of masters, or to the theological program, nor to elaboration of new rituals, artistic modeling, iconographical or stylistic innovations. He was engaged in all these activities. The case of Abbot Suger is well documented both by archaeology of the site and by written sources. As a main aim of his project Abbot Suger declares the creation of a spatial milieu in his specific terms. It was created by various sacred means including traditional artistic forms as well as particular presentations of relics, arrangements of candles and lamps, specific liturgical rites. Numerous religious poems, inscribed in the most significant parts of the church, served as a sort of commentary to his complex spatial concept. In these commentaries one may find a key to the symbolic meaning of the new dramaturgy of lighting, which determined an innovative architectural structure of the church and its principal visual effects[24]. It is noteworthy that Suger made clear references to his models in Jerusalem and Constantinople, especially to Hagia Sophia. It seems that the Byzantine imperial paradigms were his permanent source of inspiration.

Indeed, the example of Justinian as a holy "concepteur" of Hagia Sophia became for centuries a paradigm for Byzantine emperors who quite often played the role of creators of sacred spaces. The role of Justinian, selecting main master builders and conducting the efforts of thousands of artisans, has been convincingly demonstrated by his contemporary historian Procopius, and by the *Story of the Construction of Hagia Sophia*, reflecting both historical facts and "mythologems" well known in 9th-10th Century Byzantium[25]. Procopius especially emphasized Justinian's participation in the creation of the Great Church

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23   Panofsky 1979.

24   For a discussion of the Neoplatonist background of Suger's concept, see Harrington 2004, pp. 158-164.

25   See Dagron 1984.

not only by financial means, but also by means of his intellectual and spiritual virtues[26].

The *Story of the Construction of Hagia Sophia* has accomplished the semi-mythological imagery of the creator of a unique sacred space. The image of the Great Church has been shown to the Emperor by the angel of the Lord appearing in a dream vision in *Diegesis*, 8. In another episode the angel appeared as Justinian, dressed in royal garments and purple sandals, before a master builder, whom the emperor-angel instructed to make a triple window in the altar apse as an iconic image of the Holy Trinity[27]. According to the *Story*, Justinian was responsible for all the decorations of the church as well as for the arrangement of the sanctuary space[28], the system of numerous doors, and the division of the *naos* into four sacred zones by so called "rivers of Paradise"[29], the traces of which are still visible on the floor[30]. Moreover, he ordered to insert relics in the dome and the columns of Hagia Sophia, creating some specific areas (sacred spaces) inside the church by the translation of famous relics. A similar combination of activities one may find in the Bible describing Solomon's construction of the Old Testament Temple[31]. Characteristically, Justinian had this image in his mind: a striking episode of *The Story of the Construction of Hagia Sophia* concerns the appearance of Justinian in the cathedral at the day of consecration, when he unexpectedly left the patriarch, ran up to the ambon, and raising his arms, declared: «Praise to God who made me worthy to accomplish such a matter. I have surpassed you, Solomon»[32].

The competition with the King Solomon as creator of the most glorious Temple was an established paradigm for medieval rulers working on any great project[33]. Byzantine emperors, having the intention of being compared with Solomon and even of surpassing him, remembered that the crucial role in the construction of the Temple, or any other sacred

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26 Proc., *De Aedificis*, 67.

27 *Diegesis*, 12.

28 *Diegesis*, 16,17.

29 *Diegesis*, 26.

30 Majeska 1978, pp. 299-308.

31 Scheja 1962.

32 *Diegesis*, 27. Koder 1994, pp. 135-142.

33 Gutmann 1976.

space, belongs to the Lord himself. Moreover, all creative rulers had in their minds the most powerful paradigm of the *Exodus* Book (25-40), where the Lord himself appeared as the creator of sacred space of the Tabernacle. Characteristically, the complex structure was named in the original Hebrew by a significant term *tavnit* (image-model-project). God has chosen the master Bezalel for the practical realization of his plan, creating for centuries a model-relationship between the creators of sacred space and creators of objects[34]. The creation of sacred spaces by earthly rulers can be considered as iconic behavior in relation to the cosmocrator.

One of these concepts I have discussed in detail in an article concerning Leo the Wise's project in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and his spatial program of the Imperial Door[35]. The emperor Leo combined in one program venerable relics and miraculous icons, mosaic murals and verse inscriptions nearby, special rites and images of the miracle-stories. All together they created a spatial milieu of the main entrance to the Great Church of the Empire. An invisible part of this milieu were miracles, as numerous pilgrims inform us. To some extent, the boundaries of the milieu were mystically marked by the zone of specific miracles. The protagonist of this spatial dramaturgy was the Jerusalem icon of the Virgin who spoke to Saint Mary of Egypt. Noteworthy, this icon – originally situated at the entrance to the *basilica* of the Holy Sepulchre – was located by Leo the Wise in the same place beside the Imperial Door of Hagia Sophia, thus establishing a mystical link between the sacred spaces of two great churches. It seems clear that the Emperor Leo was not just a donor providing money for the renovation of the Great Church. He was not an architect or an artist/artisan making the sculptural decoration or painting the murals. What he actually did was the detailed elaboration of a concept of particular sacred space, a kind of "spatial icon", which included, beyond material images and venerated holy objects, various rituals, and chanting, lighting, censoring effects. An integral part of this project was the invisible presence of literary associations connected with numerous miracle-stories, which existed in the mind of the Byzantine beholders coming to the Great Church and looking at the venerated images and relics.

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34   *Ex* 35-36.

35   Lidov 2004b.

The creation of an environment conducive to the irruption of the sacred is always complex, and not merely reducible to the genius of a single patron. The creators of sacred space should be considered among the artists and be included as a special phenomenon in the history of Christian art and culture. Not every donor nor every emperor was a creator of sacred space (for instance, it is not true for Basil I, the father of Leo the Wise, who ordered a lot of new buildings and decorations). At the same time the creation of sacred space was an integral part of the Byzantine imperial behaviour. As previously noticed, Leo the Wise inserted his project of sacred space into the framework made by Justinian some centuries before. In turn, Leo's spatial projects were later transformed by other emperors, or masters of hierotopy, developing his original concepts without, or with, direct memory of him.

A reflection of this phenomenon is to be found in some Middle Byzantine *Typika*: their authors clearly demonstrated the multifunctional role of the creators of particular sacred spaces. The *Typikon* of the *Kosmosoteira* monastery in *Pherrai*, written by Isaak Komnenos after 1152, provides one of the most striking examples[36]. The text suggests a model behaviour of the Sebastokrator Isaak as a Byzantine ruler and commissioner, who followed the paradigms of his royal ancestors. He was in charge of the location and arrangement of his tomb in the monastery, which he transferred from the original site in the Constantinopolitan *Chora* monastery to the especially constructed church-mausoleum in *Pherrai*. All details of the spatial environment were carefully fixed, including the display of marble plates, a cast bronze railing, an icon stand with the portraits of the donor's parents and a likeness of himself[37]. The lid of the coffin after the actual death of the donor had to be adorned by his personal precious *enkolpion* (reliquary) with the image of the *Theotokos*. Sebastokrator paid great attention to two venerable icons of Christ and the Mother of God, richly decorated with gold and silver, both affixed to an end of the tomb. He established special rituals in front of the icons: after Vespers the monks recited the *Trisagion* and forty times *Kyrie Eleison*. He also provided rules for instrumental sounds produced by bells and *semantra* (wooden beams), always creating unusual symbolic context as well as

36   The Greek text was published by Petit 1908; for an English translation see Ševčenko 2000.

37   All important details of the tomb's arrangement in Ševčenko 2000.

specific perception of the sacred space. Moreover, nearly all elements of Isaak's project of his tomb space and his foundation monastery had to be presented in dynamic state. They changed during the day and the year, acquiring more powerful meanings at particular liturgical moments, very often according to the scenario elaborated by the creator of sacred space. Isaak perceived the miraculous icons as living beings who, according to the text of the *Typikon*, might participate in the mystical spatial performance which was permanently happening around his tomb.

New Jerusalems/Translations of the Holy Land

As noticed before, the translation of sacred space was a key element in the various projects of creation of sacred spaces, consisting of a main direction of the medieval hierotopy. A complex problem of the definition of the "holy place" as distinct from the "sacred space" occurs in this context[38]. The translation of a spatial image did not mean the disappearance of the *locus*; moreover topographical material concreteness stimulated the power and miraculous efficacy of a spatial image. The hierotopical creativity established a sophisticated system of interaction between the static place-matrix and the flying space, which at any moment can be materialized on new place.

In this context, a set of projects on the recreation of the Holy Land in various countries of the East and the West can be remembered. Among them one might recall the *Pharos* chapel in Constantinople, functioning not merely as an imperial storage of main Passion relics, but as the Byzantine Holy Sepulchre – a sacred centre of the Empire[39].

In the West the most striking example is the famous *Campo Santo* in Pisa: according to tradition, in the 12th Century the crusaders and the archbishop of Pisa Ubaldo Lanfranchi (1108-1178) brought the "holy soil" from Golgotha (Jerusalem) and covered a large field with it, a century later surrounded by the gallery-cemetery. They made a "New Jerusalem" in Tuscany, where selected people were to be buried in expectation of the Second Coming and the Last Judgement[40].

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38 Cf. Smith 1987.

39 Lidov 2012.

40 On other Toscana projects related to the Holy Land, see Cardini 1982.

The 17th Century "New Jerusalem complex" near Moscow should also be mentioned. The monastery was founded by the patriarch Nikon and the tsar Alexei Mikhailovich in 1656. This New Jerusalem is the largest project of its kind, designed to re-create topography of the Holy Land on a vast territory stretching as far as 10 km from north to south and 5 km from east to west. From the point of view of its concept, the project of New Jerusalem near Moscow may be acknowledged as a unique architectural and historical complex. Nevertheless, it can be also seen as a continuation and a reflection of the centuries long tradition in creation of "New Jerusalems". Here I refer both to numerous replicas of the Holy Sepulchre, known since the 4th century[41], and to several Franciscan New Jerusalems – sacred architectural landscapes, which appeared as a special project around 1500 (the earliest instances in Varallo, North Italy, and San Vivaldo, not far from Florence)[42]. The creators of the Muscovite "New Jerusalem" combined in their project a Byzantine iconic imagery[43] and an idea of a precise copy, presenting both Eastern and Western hierotopical traditions[44].

The Network of Sacred Spaces and Performativity

It is interesting to note that in the framework of one "large space", projects belonging to different periods could co-exist. The whole environment of Hagia Sophia has been filled out by the concrete projects of sacred spaces. It concerned the space around the altar-table, with its various crosses, votive crowns, liturgical covers and the *Catapetasma*, which had to be perceived in a single spatial image-installation, not be reduced to any flat picture[45]. Spatial images appeared also at the Samaritan's well in the south-east compartment, or around an icon-reliquary with Saint Peter's chains in the northern aisle, or nearby the north-west pillar containing relics of Saint Gregory the Wonderworker. The latter was covered by gilded brass plates and adorned by a venerable icon of this saint. On

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41   Neri 1971.

42   Piccirillo 2009.

43   Lidov 1997-1998.

44   See Ousterhout 1998. About this and many other projects (East and West), see Lidov 2009c.

45   Lidov 2014b.

certain days a moving altar-table was installed in front of the pillar and special services took place. Deliberately modeled micro-spaces were activated in particular moments of the daily or annual liturgical services, becoming temporary protagonists in a grandiose spatial performance.

The dynamic feature was of great importance in hierotopical projects: we should recognize that the material forms were just a part, and not always the most important, of a spatial whole in a permanent movement. Performativity, dramatic changes, the lack of a strict fixation shaped the living environment, spiritually intensive, and concretely influential[46].

Hierotopic Notions

In Byzantium this phenomenon had a special system of notions describing the performative paradigms[47]. Sometimes they were reflected in iconographical programs as, for example, the early 14th Century mosaics of the *Kariye Camii* (the *Chora* monastery in Constantinople) suggest. The concept of the sacred space, as well as of the iconographic program, belonged to Theodore Metochites, who clearly pointed out on the origins of his imagery, symbolically connected with the dedication of the monastery to the *Chora*. Along the western-eastern axis, over the entrance and to the right of the sanctuary barrier, there are different images of the Virgin with the Child inscribed by the words «Meter Theou Chora tou achoretou»[48]. The inscription indicated the miracle of Incarnation, when the earthly Virgin contained uncontainable God, and at once established a spatial dimension of the divine being. The images of the Mother of God were co-related with three images of Christ above the entrances to the narthex and to the *naos*, and to the left of the sanctuary space – in all cases inscribed as «IC XC Chora ton zonton». It seems clear that *Chora*, a notion related to a fundamental Plato's category[49], developed by neo-Platonism and by the Church Fathers, means here the most important theological notion and is one of the names of God. In the theology of icon-worshipers the notion of *Chora* became an argument against icon-

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46   On the phenomenon of performativity in contemporary scholarship, see Lidov 2011c.

47   It concerns, first of all, notions of *Chora* and *Choros*: see Isar 2006.

48   Ousterhout 1995, Isar 2000.

49   In the dialogue *Timaeus*, describing the creation of the universe, Plato names *Chora* one of three major categories appearing separately before the birth of heaven.

oclasts, explaining the principal difference between the "icon" and the "idol". According to this view, an ideal icon is always spatial and at once absolutely concrete – like Christ at the same time eternally dwells on Heavens and offers his flesh in the Eucharisty.

This example proves not only the deep roots of the hierotopical approach in the medieval mind, but also the existence of a quite well articulated system of notions, which is sometimes ignored in our discussions[50]. It concerns, however, a pivotal principle of Byzantine "theology in images".

In Byzantine minds the icon was not merely an object and a flat picture on panel or wall, but a spatial vision emanating into the environment and existing between the picture and its beholder. This basic perception determined the iconic character of space.

Spatial Icons

A significant phenomenon of spatial icons became evident in some late medieval projects, such as the "Procession on the donkey" in the 16th-17th Century Muscovy. The tsar led the patriarch, seated on a donkey in remembrance of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem, from the Kremlin to Saint Basil's cathedral on the Red Square. A hierotopical concept seems quite obvious and concerns a reproduction in the centre of Moscow of the space of Jerusalem, and the creation of the iconic image connecting the actual Russian city with the earthly Jerusalem and the Heavenly City. The ritual should be interpreted as a "living picture" and a dynamic (one may add, and spatial) re-enactment of the icon of "The Entrance into Jerusalem" – a very popular subject in Byzantine and Russian Medieval art[51].

In Byzantium the relations could be more sophisticated, when a miraculous icon, with its own image and iconographical program, participated in the creation of a sacred space[52]. The Tuesday miraculous performance

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50 In this context one may pay attention to an interesting term *hieroplastia*, which appeared in the texts of Pseudo-Dionisius Areopagite and meant the visual presentation of spiritual phenomena. From a hierotopical point of view, this term could reflect the creation of spatial imagery.

51 Flier 1992, p. 66.

52 Lidov 2004c.

with the *Hodegetria* of Constantinople is one of the most documented events in Byzantine history, reflected in several written records by pilgrims from various countries and in number of representations in iconography. The focal point was the weekly reproduction of the miracle. It consisted in the carrying of the extremely heavy icon, placed by several people on the shoulders of one man, who showed himself able to carry it effortlessly. The man was a member of a special family of "servants of the icon". He carried the icon round the market square several times, probably carving out thereby a sacral space within the profane environment of the square. With this rite an urban procession started traversed the entire city, most probably ending up at the *Blachernai* church, in the north-west corner of Constantinople. The major Byzantine church of the Virgin was located in that place with its most famous protective relic of the Virgin's Robe. Along the way other miraculous icons and relics from many Constantinopolitan churches joined the procession, which probably became an enormous religious demonstration, engaging a considerable part of the Byzantine capital's population. Through the procession the miraculous power emanating from the *Hodegetria* icon spread through the entire city, expressing its status of an earthly embodiment of the Heavenly Jerusalem. The weekly Tuesday rite may well have functioned as an important supplication, ritually reproducing and continually renewing a mystical link between the townspeople and their main intercessor, the Mother of God. It was available pratically in every church where the Heavenly City was not formally depicted but spatially present as a vision, created by various media which included architecture, iconography, particular rites, liturgical prayers, the dramaturgy of lighting and olfactory elements.

What we have here is a special type of Byzantine spiritual creativity, which one may call a "liturgical performance". We may suppose that the network of rituals with images in space, that I call "spatial icons", was one of the most important forms of spiritual life for the Byzantines: the most sacred values were open to everyone and divine energy consecrated everyday life and the usually profane urban environment.

It is noteworthy that in such cases the image on the panel was perceived as animated, becoming an inseparable part of the iconic spatial milieu, where the miraculous icon was actively participating and interacting with beholders.

The most characteristic feature of hierotopic phenomena, however, is the participation of the beholder in the spatial image: he finds himself

within the image as its integral element, along with various representations and effects created by lights, scents, gestures and sounds. Furthermore, the beholder, as endowed with collective and individual memory, unique spiritual experience and knowledge, somehow participates in creating the spatial imagery. Simultaneously, the image exists in objective reality as a dynamic structure, adapting its elements according to an individual perception, some aspects of the spatial entity being accentuated or temporarily downplayed.

The significant phenomenon of spatial icons stands for iconic (mediating) images not figuratively but spatially presented as a kind of arrangement, going beyond the realm of flat pictures and their ideology still dominant in our minds, thus preventing us from an adequate perception of the hierotopical projects[53].

It is noteworthy, that Byzantine "spatial icons", mostly unusual in modern European context, have a typological parallel in the contemporary art of performances and multi-media installations, which have nothing to do with the Byzantine tradition from a historic or symbolic point of view. What they share is a basic principle of absence of a single source of images, while the imagery is created in space by dynamically changing forms and the beholder actively participates in the re-creation of the spatial imagery. Such an aspect shows how far we can go in our analysis of the hierotopical approach.

Image-Paradigms

Recent studies of spatial icons and of hierotopy have urged for the serious reconsideration of existing methodology and elaboration on the newly introduced terminological and conceptual apparatus. Some phenomena can be properly interpreted only on the level of image-ideas – I prefer to call them "image-paradigms", which do not coincide with the illustrative pictures or ideological conceptions.

The image-paradigm is not tied up to or illustrates any specific text, although it does belong to a *continuum* of literary and symbolic meanings and associations. It belongs to visual culture – it is visible and recognizable – but it is 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

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53   Lidov 2007.

may somehow resemble a metaphor that loses its sense in retelling or in the process of deconstruction into its parts. It does not require any type of mystic perception but rather a special mould of consciousness, in which our distinct categories of artistic, ritual, visual and spatial are woven into the inseparable whole. This form of vision gives shape to a range of symbolic structures and numerous separate figurative motifs. Moreover, it challenges our fundamental methodological approach to the image as illustration and flat picture.

The absence of the image-paradigm as a notion in contemporary scholarship does not allow us to reveal a number of phenomena which determined both symbolic structures and concrete pictorial motifs. One point seems clear: this phenomenon is quite distinct from what one may call an iconographic device. In reference to most glorious model-shrines, like the Holy Sepulchre, or Hagia Sophia, medieval *concepteurs* usually reproduced not the planning, the architectural forms or the decoration, but an image-idea of the particularly venerated sacred space, recognized by their contemporaries and included in the new context. We still do not have a proper language to operate with image-paradigms that challenge our fundamental methodological approach to the image as illustration and flat picture.

In some papers, I have previously tried to reconstruct particular image-paradigms existing in the Byzantine world[54]. Among them the image-paradigm of Heavenly Jerusalem was the most evident and the most powerful image-paradigm but, certainly, not an isolated one.

Comparative Hierotopy

It is quite obvious that the hierotopical issue can't be limited to the Byzantine tradition. The history of religious cultures in various countries consists of numerous hierotopical projects, which might become a subject of comparative studies. In this context it seems correct to pose the question of different layers or levels in each sacred space. This concerns the archetypical background shared by all traditions: for instance, an archetype of the Holy Mount, existing in completely different cultures, historically not related to each other.

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54 Lidov 2009a, Lidov 2006c, Lidov 2007b, Lidov 2012, Lidov 2009d, Lidov 2011b (for all papers see www.hierotopy.ru).

One may pose the question of hierotopical groups, as it was made many years ago for the language families. The elucidation of the Indo-European tradition in the creation of sacred spaces looks a quite fruitful direction of studies. At least, the existence of such a tradition allows us to explain a very similar structure of the inner space in Hindu temples and Christian churches, difficult to understand in terms of historical influences.

Not less important is the issue of religious and national models of hierotopy. The Islamic approach is quite distinct from the Christian one, though both religions, having roots in Judaism, are much closer to each other than to Buddhism. The first evident problem is the "Temple consciousness", recently revealed by some scholars. It implies the discussion on different models of the temple space in the framework of the so called "Abraham's tradition"[55].

Some striking typological differences might be noticed by comparative analysis of the Christian hierotopy in the West and in the East. As already said above, in Byzantium we see the iconic vision of the spatial imagery destroying a barrier between the stable church (its material body) and the dynamic external *milieu* outside any physical borders. The inner space of the church could be displayed and re-created on squares and streets, in fields and mountains, which should, at least temporarily, be transformed into an icon of the sacred universe, created by God himself. This re-creation of the spatial proto-image is one of the essential meanings of all rites and processions happening outside the church. The church itself is considered a transparent structure and moving spiritual substance: one may recall the relics inlaid in walls, pillars and cupolas of Byzantine churches[56]. We can see an example of a manifestation of that vision in post-Byzantine churches in Romania, where the altar-iconography is reproduced on the facades and the sacred liturgical program is open to the external world.

Byzantium had created basic models of the arrangement of sacred spaces, adopted and transformed in different countries according to their national features and even climatic conditions. It is quite clear that the ice

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55 I mean, first of all, some works by Henry Corbin and his conception of "themenology". See also Shukurov 2002 (in Russian), where the author suggests an approach to the discussion of the temple space different from the hierotopical one: his attention is focused on the phenomenology and poetics of the Temple, developing Henry Corbin's ideas.

56 Teteriatnikova 2003.

architecture, which framed Russian hierotopical projects for the Epiphany and other winter festivals, simply could not exist in Constantinople or on the Balkans[57]. This case shows also how sublime Constantinopolitan patterns have been re-worked in the folk *milieu*: the well established, "academic" hierotopy was naturally combined with the spontaneous sacralisation of the human environment.

Hierotopy and the Religious Art-Objects

As a living being, a hierotopical project could change in time: the original concept-matrix was subject to developments and additions and the concept itself sometimes was transformed according to new "ideologems". The cathedrals of the Moscow Kremlin provide a good example: their spatial imagery considerably changed in different periods. As recent studies of some late medieval inventories have shown, by late 17th Century most of the liturgical textiles, previously covering the icons and great parts of walls, were removed from the cathedrals: this created a different image of sacred space, that we sometimes wrongly consider the ancient one[58].

A careful research of different historical layers of sacred space can be compared with the restoration of an icon. As in that case, quite often we have only minor remains of the original hierotopical projects; yet these remains should be recognized as an unique source of historical information, capable of giving a clue to understand the surviving features of the ancient complex (architecture, frescoes, icons, liturgical vessels or particular rites).

The hierotopical approach regards not merely the sacred spaces of churches, cities or landscapes, but also the research of spatial imagery in minor forms of art and in written texts. The problematic of sacred space in Byzantine manuscripts, for instance, looks nearly unstudied. On one hand, the spatial concept is quite evident: in several manuscripts the frontispieces are similar to solemn gates to the sacred space of the book; sometimes they represent an icon of the heavenly city made up of churches (i.e., the 12th Century Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos from Vatican and Paris, and the Sermons of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus

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57   Beliaev 2009.

58   Sterligova 2003, pp. 63-78.

from Sinai, of the same century)[59]. On the other hand, a method of description of this phenomenon was not elaborated. Probably, in many cases we may speak about a particular concept, generating an individual spatial imagery and connecting a manuscript with its liturgical function and its concrete environment (specific rituals, lighting, sounding words and various liturgical vessels).

A comparison with liturgical vestments can be also provided: first of all the well-known 14th and early 15th Century embroidered Byzantine *sakkoi* of the Metropolitan *Photios* of Moscow[60]. Bearing a sophisticated system of images, these liturgical robes created a micro-cosmos of the church space, included into the sacred milieu of the Moscow cathedral, and revealed their true meaning in the liturgical gestures. The icons embroidered with gold were permanently changing on the moving clothes, becoming a sort of living beings in the atmosphere of unstable lighting of natural sources, various fires, reflections of gold and silver vessels, in the multi-layered environment of smoking incenses. This concerns a dynamic, performative, spatial imagery, which includes the officiating person and the entire liturgical context. It is quite clear that a traditional approach, without consideration of the spatial background of this imagery connected with a particular hierotopical project, will keep us far away of a proper understanding of the original concepts of the so called "museum objects".

The same is true for liturgical vessels and numerous reliquaries. For instance, in the Constantinopolitan stone chalice from the treasury of San Marco in Venice, tracing back to 10th Century (the "Chalice of Patriarchs"), there is a gold medallion with the enamel *Pantocrator*, appearing on the bottom of the semi-transparent bowl made of sardonix[61]. At the moment of communion the image had to appear in the fluctuating liquid as a visible testimony of the transubstantiation of the vine into the blood of Christ. Yet more striking indication to the spatial context of the image are to be found in the eloquent juxtaposition of the liturgical chalice and the cupola of the Byzantine church, also bearing the Pantocrator image. These two images had to be perceived as interrelated parts of the same hierotopical concept.

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59   *Vaticanus*, gr. 1162, f. 2r and *Sinaiticus*, gr. 339, f. 4v See Lidov 1997-1998, pp. 351-353.

60   Piltz 1976, *Medieval Pictorial Embroidery* 1991, pp. 38-51, Woodfin 2012.

61   *Il Tesoro di San Marco* 1986, n. 16, pp. 167-173.

Another example is the famous Limburg *staurotheka* (968-985)[62]: the central part, with a piece of the True Cross, is framed by fragments of ten other relics, most of which were kept in the church of the Virgin of the *Pharos* – the major reliquary, belonging to the Byzantine emperors. The complex of relics created a sort of icon of the Passion[63]. As we know from Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *Book of Ceremonies*, reliquaries of the True Cross used to be carried on the battle fields in special imperial rituals[64]. The personal link of the reliquary with the emperor was stressed by all means: it was not merely a demonstration of imperial omnipotence and of his direct connection with the Ruler of universe, but also an indication to the sacred space of the *Pharos* chapel, from where the relics were borrowed[65].

If the hierotopical concept of the Limburg *staurotheka* needs for its proper understanding some additional evidence, in some cases we should just look carefully on objects themselves. So, Byzantine reliquaries of Saint Dimitrios reproduced not merely an iconography of this saint[66], but the arrangement of his shrine in Thessaloniki, represented by sequence of flat and volume images, gradually appearing in the process of the opening of a reliquary.

These examples show the importance of evaluating the possibility of a hierotopical approach to objects of minor arts, not only to spaces: the intention of re-creating in small forms an iconic concept of a particular sacred space reflects, in my opinion, an essential principle of the Eastern Christian visual culture.

Hierotopy and Literary Texts

Finally, it seems appropriate to pose the question of sacred spaces in literary texts[67]. In medieval writings, and particularly in the hagiographical

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62 *Ševčenko* 1994 pls. 166-167, pp. 289-294.

63 On the iconic representation of the transportable "*Pharos* Chapel", see Wolf 2003, pp. 285-286.

64 *De Ceremoniis*, I, 484.24-485.6; Haldon 1990, p. 124.

65 For a detailed discussion of this aspect, see Lidov 2012.

66 Grabar 1950.

67 Spatial aspects of Russian literature became a subject of several important studies written by an outstanding philologist: see Toporov 1994.

texts, there is quite often a description of a sacred *milieu*: a dwelling place of a Saint partly created by himself. In some cases there is a chance to compare these descriptions with archaeological remains and features of a natural environment[68]. A medieval author usually presents a recognizable, but iconic, image of the space, existing beyond our system of values. Having in mind a classical notion of the "chronotope" by Mikhail Bakhtin[69], Peter Brown named recently "chorotope" such a hierotopical approach to the modelling of space by words-images. It concerns not merely any direct description of sacred spaces (the Paradise, a monastery or a church), but an attempt to present, by literary means, an image of a specific sacred milieu – which, from an external perspective, could be devoid of common "sacred" characteristics.

A hierotopical approach has been applied to modern literature and discussed in conjunction with classical novels by Leo Tolstoy and Fedor Dostoevsky[70]. The use of sacred language and ritualistic gestures in a secular space can be seen as a reference to the events traditionally taking place in the church and thus as a metaphoric reconstruction of sacred space. In the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky the "sacred chronotope" can be created without mentioning a church. In Dostoevsky's novels confessions, sermons and transfigurations paradoxically take place in the "underground" and its analogues. Language becomes the major instrument of modeling spatial features. Tension is created by the contrast between sacred language (Old Church Slavonic) and emphatically profane space.

In the large spaces of the church and the city, in minor arts and in literary texts we recognize the same type of creativity, determined by the idea of spatial imagery, which is born in particular minds, and the iconic perception of the world.

In this article I have attempted to highlight a problem and to present a description of the hierotopical research field. Deliberately, I did not make a strict distinction between "hierotopy as a form of creativity" and "hierotopy as subject of cultural history". It seemed more important to reveal the phenomenon in general terms, leaving for the future several structural and terminological corrections of subject and method.

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68   A good example has been provided by Bakirtzis 2006.

69   Brown 2006.

70   Blank 2009.

In conclusion, one might notice that hierotopy is not a philosophical concept, which needs a sophisticated theory. It can be considered as a vision that helps to recognize the presence of a special layer of cultural phenomena, which have to be historically reconstructed in detail. As all other forms of human creativity, hierotopy is a historical matter ant it changes under the influence of many factors*.

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