INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF BYZANTINE STUDIES

Belgrade, August 2016

Round-table: **Icons of Space, Icons in Space, Iconography or Hierotopy?**

Moderator: **Alexei Lidov**

Alexei Lidov, Hierotopy and Iconicity. Spatial Icons versus Iconographic Devices

Michele Bacci, Sacred Spaces vs Holy Sites: On the Limits and Advantages of a Hierotopic Approach

Nicoletta Isar, Spatial Tropes of Iconicity: When Architecture Dissolves into Transparency

Jelena Bogdanovic, The Iconicity of Byzantine Architecture: Iconography or Hierotopy?

Maria Cristina Carile, The Great Palace as an "Icon of Space"? On the Iconicity of the Spatial Representation of Power in Byzantium

Fr. Maximos Constas, Rapture, Ecstasy, and the Construction of Sacred Space: Hierotopy in the Life of Symeon the New Theologian

Andreas Rhoby, Speaking Icons: The Mediation of Inscriptions in Byzantine Sacred Space

Annemarie Weyl Carr, Reference, Presence, Place: Seeing Toponymic Icons Hierotopically

Maria Lidova, The Adoration of the Magi: From Iconic Space to Icon in Space

Alexei Lidov

Hierotopy and Iconicity. Spatial Icons versus Iconographic Devices

The present round-table can be considered as the sequel to the session 'Sacred Space' chaired at the International Congress of Byzantine Studies in 2006. The paper presented then to the international community of Byzantine scholars introduced them to a new concept and research field of *hierotopy*. A number of monographs and studies have been published since then. Among them we can mention large collections of articles based on the papers given at various symposia dedicated to the subject of hierotopy, such as: *Hierotopy. Comparative Studies of Sacred Spaces*; *New Jerusalems. Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces*; *Spatial Icons. Performativity in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*; *Hierotopy of Light and Fire in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*; *Holy Water in the Hierotopy and Iconography of the Christian World* (most of them are available via the link: www.hierotopy.ru). Most speakers of the upcoming round-table actively participated in these research symposia and made considerable contributions to the development of the research field of *Hierotopy.* Thus, we rely on the already existing scholarly collaboration and discussions stemming from it, which have their own history. This time, we would like to discuss a number of methodological issues along with the new hierotopic concepts and the correlation between the hierotopic approach and the traditional realm of iconographic studies.

The issue of terminology and the linguistic research apparatus appears as crucial one due to the fact that most of our terms were elaborated to describe flat pictures, and are not adequate for the phenomena dealing with sacred spaces. The three new notions – *Hierotopy*, *Spatial Icons* and *Image-Paradigms* – were offered in the course of the recent fifteen years since 2001, when I coined the term *Hierotopy* and launched the research programme exploring this field. These three concepts have been gradually taking their shape since then. They are interrelated while at the same time separate and very specific. The term *Hierotopy* stands for the entire

framework, intending to intellectually register a special stratum of historical phenomena, which have previously eluded scholars' attention due to the absence of a specific terminology apparatus. The neologism *Hierotopy* (or *ierotopia*) consists, obviously, of two Greek roots: *hieros* (sacred) and *topos* (space), following the pattern of many other already established over the last hundred years scholarly terms, 'iconography' being one of them.

The definition of *hierotopy* given 15 years ago ran as follows: **Hierotopy is the creation of sacred spaces regarded as a special form of human creativity, and a field of historical research which reveals and analyses specific relevant examples of that creativity.** The term *Spatial Icons*, designating iconic imagery presented in space, was conceived to describe the most important part of hierotopic phenomena, existing beyond flat pictures or any combination of art objects. The term *Image-Paradigm* is an *instrumentum studiorum* for the analysis of this specific category of images which appeared as visions in space and differed radically from common depictions on panels and walls.

Several other terms and notions emerged following these three proposed by myself. Nicoletta Isar suggested that the term *chorography* might be very useful especially in description of the circular movement as the basic principle in the organization of Byzantine sacred spaces. Peter Brown invented the term *chorotopos*, inspired by Bakhtin's *chronotop*, which seems a helpful *instrumentum studiorum* for studies of imaginary spaces in written sources (Brown explored, as an example, such type of space described in the *Life of St Theodore of Sykeon* as compared with the actual archeological site). Nicolas Bakirtzis introduced a very practical term *hierotopos* to reveal the phenomenon of a particular monastery and its sacred environment. We can also refer to other terms but the ones already mentioned here seem to be sufficient to demonstrate the process of the ongoing formation of the new research language.

Let me turn to specifics now, addressing the most powerful Byzantine example – the view of the 'Great Church' of the Empire – the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople dating back to 6th century A.D. Even in its current state of preservation, when we are able to see only the material shell of the building, it is clear that we are not only dealing with a masterpiece of the world architecture or a mystical place of divine presence, but with a particular project of spatial imagery, which was created by concrete people in concrete historical circumstances. The project included immovable architectural forms and sacred images, as well as changing of liturgical vessels and ritual gestures, dramaturgy of lighting and olfactory effects (various incenses), resounding words and recollections of miracle-stories - all woven together into one single whole. This specific creativity consisting in formation of spatial imagery has been called *hierotopy*.

Characteristically, whole aspects and types of creativity could not be properly discussed outside hierotopic framework, which is not linked to positivist classifications of objects. For instance, such considerable phenomenon as the dramaturgy of lighting occurs beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines. As recent studies have convincingly demonstrated, within the space of Justinian's Hagia Sophia, which originally did not have any figurative images, the image of God was created by the most sophisticated system of lighting, including natural light of the sun, moon and stars, reflected by the golden mosaics, marble decorations, silver furnishings and vessels, as well as by the fire burning in innumerous, sometimes moving, lamps and in thousands of candles visible through the transparent smoke of incense.

There also existed a complicated system of artificial lights, which is now being reconstructed with the help of various archaeological and written sources. If we summarise the results of the most recent studies, we would see that the entire environment of Hagia Sophia was conceived by Justinian and his genius master

builders as the most powerful spatial icon of the Lord made of light. Moreover this was a fundamentally performative icon – that is, it existed in continuous fluidity and dynamics, its movement never solidifying or arresting itself. In addition, this ideal iconic image was not flat but fundamentally spatial.

Thus, the most complicated system of natural light was conceived here: it woke the imaginations of present day architects and conceptual artists. A living, changing and unbelievably rich environment of light was created within the church through the system of mirror reflections. Anthemios of Tralles and Isidoros of Miletus (by the way, not professional master-builders but the best optical engineers of that time) developed the system of reflections for the first cupola of Hagia Sophia, which was notably flatter than the cupola we see today. They used the mosaic window sills in the drum as reflectors, which refracted the light into the cupola and, more importantly, also lit up the cupola at night. When there was no sunlight, they reflected the light of the stars and moon, thus, creating the effect of a continuously illuminated cupola of the nocturnal Hagia Sophia. In other words, a glittering and blinking cloud of light hung over the cupola.

How can we understand the revealed phenomenon, what was the meaning of this luminous cloud? I have argued elsewhere that it was a visible embodiment of the famous biblical notion and symbol, the so-called *Kavod* in Hebrew, or *Doxa* in Greek, or *Slava Bozhia* in Church Slavonic (literally meaning "Glory"). According to the Bible, God reveals himself to the people in the form of a luminous cloud which hovered over the Ark of the Tabernacle, or led Jewish people through the Desert (Ex.16,10; 24,12-18; 34,5; 40,34). To the best of my knowledge, nobody has suggested before that it was an original Judeo-Christian proto-icon which did not break the Second Commandment and, therefore, was the ideal image of God. As it seems, it made a great impact upon the Christian visual culture. We all

remember that this luminous cloud appeared in the Gospels at the moment of Transfiguration, descending upon the Apostles in attendance.

In the Early Christian imagery the luminous and fiery cloud was combined with the anthropomorphic image of Christ. The characteristic example is the six-century mosaic in the altar apse of Sts Kosmas and Damian basilica in Rome, where we are able to see not just a merely triumphant image of Christ clad in the golden robe, but the luminous and fiery clouds resembling the Divine Ladder and the Sacred Way appearing with Christ from Heaven, as another image of God revealed in the Second Coming. So, the idea of the luminous cloud was significant and quite alive in the minds of the sixth-century people, when Hagia Sophia of Constantinople was being created.

There are some earlier examples when we are able to witness the process of formation of the subject in the Early Christian iconography which adopted and reflected the more powerful spatial imagery. The 'Hospitality of Abraham' from the early fifth-century mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome provides an eloquent example. There are three different images of the Divine Light in this composition: the luminous clouds in the left part, the *mandorla* of light around the central angel in the Meeting of the three angels in the upper right segment, and the golden background behind three angels at the table, which will later become commonplace but at that moment looks experimental, occupying only a small part of the image. The artist used three possible devices to represent the idea of the Divine light.

In the less known but very instructive fifth-century floor mosaic from the Louvre (originally, from the Near East) one may notice the same not established formative process. The luminous cloud is represented over the altar in the ciborium which itself is shown as the Tabernacle. The image of the *mandorla* with the Cross

appears in the centre of the fiery cloud, thus, indicating the origins of the mandorla motif.

In the sixth century, for the first time, we are able to see how the mandorla of light was established as the core of the Transfiguration scene – the earliest known example extant in the altar apse of the Sinai basilica. The idea of the Divine Light had already been fixed iconographically but even then the image was still an element of the hierotopic project. Above the apse there is a window from which the light streams into the church at morning liturgies; this naturally performative ray of sunlight appears in the space as visually proceeding from Christ in the Transfiguration, deliberately displayed beneath the altar window. In the church the sunlight comes through the fumes of burning incense and touches the heads of believers in the *naos* of the Sinai basilica, recreating the sacred moment when the luminous cloud covered the Apostles at the Transfiguration. It is noteworthy, that an echo of this practice can be experienced in the modern day Orthodox churches: during morning liturgies, at a particular moment when the luminous cloud (made of light and burning incense) comes out from the Royal Doors of the sanctuary to the congregation in front of the iconostasis as mystical appearance of the Divine Glory, certainly without any understanding of the Jewish origins of this performative image and the symbolic meaning of the *Kavod-Doxa.*

So, the luminous cloud in the cupola of Hagia Sophia was a most powerful and important spatial icon of the Empire which cannot be explored by the traditional iconographical apparatus. At the same time this spatial imagery was reflected in and adopted by flat pictures on the walls – sometimes it survived in a form of common icons. Since Early Byzantine period one may witness gradual decline and diminishing of spatial effects. However, even on a limited scale, they played a great role in the church space revealing some unique iconographic motives. Among others, the so-called Whirling Disc comes to mind. As I have argued

elsewhere, this was a symbolic image of the Byzantine Church as the Spatial Icon of the Whirling Light.

I have mentioned just one eloquent example of spatial icons in the Byzantine world. The recent study, in which the speakers of our round table actively participated, revealed several other phenomena in the Christian East and West. Many more should be explored in the future, for this is a vast field of research lying ahead of us. Most of these spatial icons were overlooked, neglected and excluded from the art history, or the history of culture in general, due to the lack of necessary concepts and terms, and the absence of hierotopic vision. The methods elaborated in the context of positivist ideology and directly shaping the studies of material objects, such as the much revered stylistic or iconographic analysis, were inadequate in the case of performative spatial iconic imagery, which played a considerable role in the Byzantine world. As a natural conclusion to this statement, the notions of *Hierotopy* and *Iconicity* should be introduced into the research field and receive their legitimate status in the art-historical education, especially in the field of Byzantine studies. Spatial icons might be studied along the iconographic devices and stylistic phenomena. However, we should also be aware, that such introduction would require general revision of the art history as a discipline.

Michele Bacci

Sacred Spaces vs Holy Sites: On the Limits and Advantages of a Hierotopic Approach

It should be acknowledged that the *hierotopy* notion, first proposed by Alexei Lidov in 2001 and later developed in an international congress held in Moscow in 2004 as well as in a number of later publications, has the merit of having elicited a number of questions that became a matter of scholarly debate at an international level in the last decade. Critics have laid emphasis on Lidov's reluctance to provide a wider and more grounded theoretical frame to his approach, which, I assume, should be basically interpreted as an intentional choice and a way to manifest distinctiveness vis-à-vis the often artificial scholarly trends that became so modish in the last years. Instead of launching a new label – why not a "hierotopic turn" after so many analogous turns (iconic, spatial, liturgical, material, etc.)? – he preferred to make use of a neologism that may draw the attention of art historians and invite them to shift their focus to an hitherto neglected field of interest – namely that of the ways in which Christian sacred spaces happened to be shaped by the interaction of different elements, not all of which belonging to the traditional categories of art history, such as liturgical rites, music, lighting effects, and fragrances. This indication proved to be fruitful, given that many subsequent studies have dealt with the performative aspects and multisensory devices associated with Byzantine and Medieval buildings.

I assume that Lidov's primary concern was with showing an alternative way, a direction that was worth following after the first years of enthusiastic rediscovery of long underestimated fields of research that came after the publication of such ground-breaking books as David Freedberg's *The Power of Images*, Hans Belting's *Bild und Kult* and later on Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*. In many respects, both of these works can be now at least partly understood as monumental attempts at making sense of the digital globalization of images in its very beginnings and the

enormous change in cognitive praxis and communication processes it engendered. Religious, and more specifically cultic and miraculous images, were redeemed from their well rooted perception as artworks intended for the illiterate and came to be used as key-arguments for the principle that images, far from being mere outcomes of historical and cultural processes, also play an active role in the shaping of human groups, their self-awareness and their approach to both the social and the supernatural dimensions.

For many readers of these two books, anyway, their innovative character lay in their legitimization of the art historian's right to show interest in images previously seen as devoid of sufficient aesthetic qualities: icons, wax statues, ex-votos, advertisements and political monuments came to the fore as the primary, or most fruitful, focus of art-historical research. Increased emphasis on the cultic dimension of images elicited a number of new studies which gradually shifted their interest to other material objects being involved in cultic phenomena: these included both the foci of worship – tombs, bodily and contact relics, holy mementoes, *loca sancta*, and miraculous icons – and the various performative manifestations associated with them: rituals, liturgical and extra-liturgical ceremonies, processions, forms of private and collective veneration, votive offerings, meditation practices, and so on. The liturgy itself, viewed as shared technique to produce a sense of collective belonging and to mediate a group's relationship to God, also became a privileged topic. In this connection, sacred space started being investigated as something distinct from its architectural frame and came to be regarded as a context of interactions between multiple factors, including officiating priests, attending lay people, images inhabiting the decorated walls of a church, the multifarious ephemeral and permanent furnishings, and the divinity itself, which is made present by both the performative power of rites and different strategies of monumental "mise-en-scène". This shift from a static to a dynamic view of Christian, and especially Byzantine, sacred spaces paved the way to a much increased interest for the latter's most ephemeral aspects, namely

elements of church decorum, veils and textiles, carpets, lamps and lighting devices, light effects, fire and water, sounds and scents.

On account of all this, I think that Alexei Lidov will agree with a definition of the hierotopical approach as focusing on the different strategies by which the divine, supernatural dimension is spatially, visually, and materially evoked in specific ritual contexts. The evocation of the sacred in material contexts has been rightly understood as a hitherto neglected form of human "creativity" that deserves being investigated from an historical perspective and cannot be underestimated by art-historians: it would make no sense to reconstruct the art-historical meaning of single elements of a sacred space – such as lighting devices or frescoed cycles embellishing a church wall – without considering the latter as a whole. In anthropological terms, hierotopic creativity can be described as a set of specific techniques that enable the shaping of religious alterity and their materialization in a number of privileged spaces shared by single human communities. From a psychological viewpoint, it might be said that such techniques basically aim at exciting the beholder-believer's emotional perception of a material space as imbued with supernatural, otherworldly, and meta-human qualities: in this sense, they seem to be much akin to the techniques of "enchantment" that Alfred Gell attributes to magicians, shamans, priests, and artists.

Such an emphasis on hierotopy as a form of human creativity is perfectly legitimate, provided that its limits and conceptual boundaries are taken into account. One of the basic risks is that of substituting the traditional art-historical fascination for the Renaissance notion of an artist's *invenzione*, with a hypostatization of a new category of creators, including promoters and *concepteurs*. Secondly, one should be aware that the shaping of sacred spaces can be hardly thought of as exactly mirroring a well-structured, systematic project ascribable to the ingenuity of specific individuals: just on the contrary, it could consist in a long-standing, sometimes even centuries-long process, involving an

uninterrupted compromise between the intentions of the original planners, those of the clergy officiating a church and other agents, and the specific needs of viewers and believers, which lead to frequent alterations and change.

Moreover, if our aim is to understand the dynamics by which divine "otherness" is made present in material contexts, it is important that we work out a specific terminology that may be helpful for a more conscious analysis of the religious, social, and anthropological phenomena we are dealing with. In his 2004 programmatic study, Lidov manifested his indebtedness to Mircea Eliade's definition of sacred space, based on a reading of the Biblical episode of Jacob's dream at Bethel (*Gen* 28, 12-22), as a portion of natural environment that a community perceives as distinct from that of ordinary life inasmuch it comes to be invested with "hierophanic" qualities that manifest its belonging to a separate, divine sphere. In this way, Eliade described the sphere of the divine as something thoroughly alternative to what he designed as the "profane" dimension. Yet, this definition proves to be limitative for our understanding of the multifarious religious phenomena which, in Byzantium and the Middle Ages in general, associated the terrestrial and the divine worlds. In order to better understand our research topic it proves necessary to overcome the classical distinction between "sacred" and "profane" and introduce a number of more factors.

Indeed, the religious-historical discourse stands out for its rather indeterminate use of the word "sacred". This is largely due to the influential work by the German theologian Rudolf Otto, who made use of the German term *das Heilige* to generically hint at the divine/supernatural dimension, even if he was the first to point out that the latter can assume a great many forms in human experience. Most notably, given that the German adjective *heilig* can be used indistinctly to translate both "sacred" and "holy" or "saint" or "hallowed", Otto's work did not take into account the semantic shift between these two expressions, being characteristic of most European languages (cf. Greek ἱερός/ἅγιος, Latin *sacer/sanctus*, Russian

свяшенный/святой). Recent studies (M. Souza, D. Iogna-Prat) reconstructed the etymological developments of such expressions and their use between Roman antiquity and their rediscovery and transformations in early 20th century anthropological literature and pointed out their semantic shift, which remained valuable in Medieval times regardless of their occasional, yet certainly not infrequent use as synonyms: if "sacred" seems to imply an access to the divine that is mediated by some sort of human activity – such as a ritual of consecration that transforms an ordinary thing into something invested with religious meanings – "saint" basically indicates a divine attribute associated *per se* with a material object, which enables therefore a more immediate, direct contact with the supernatural sphere.

The distinction between "sacred" and "saint" can be investigated against the background of yet another conceptual shift, that between "space" and "site". Critics of hierotopy pointed out that a term including an explicit hint at the notion of "site" (according to the meaning of the Greek word *topos*) was used to describe a methodological approach that basically concerns sacred spaces, i.e. spatial contexts being instrumental to the performance of liturgical rites. In order to properly describe this research approach, the use of such expressions as, say, "hierochorology" would probably be much more accurate on etymological grounds but also admittedly much uglier from a pretty stylistic viewpoint. It is therefore not a matter here to criticize the term "hierotopy": it can be considered as one of many scholarly conventions which prove to efficaciously summarize the complexity of a methodology, whose limits and advantages deserve being more accurately evaluated, especially as concerns the distinction between "sacred spaces" and "holy sites".

It should be namely stressed that, with these two expressions, we are speaking of two basically distinct phenomena. Churches, synagogues, and mosques can be rightly described as "sacred spaces" inasmuch they work as meeting places

intended for the performance of rites, individual and collective prayers, processions and ceremonies, yet they are not, or not necessarily, also holy sites. In Christian tradition, the latter emerge since the third/fourth century as specifically site-bound manifestations of both individual and public worship: they take the form of martyr's tombs and memorial sites working as visual witness to some major events of both the Gospels and the saints' heroic lives. In such places the spatial element plays a minor or accessory role and, in some specific cases – for example, the rock of Moses on the top of Mount Sinai or the stone marked with Jesus' footprints in the Garden of Gethsemane – it can be even thoroughly absent. The worship of both tombs and memorial sites can take place only *in situ* and cannot be efficaciously transported elsewhere. Unlike the evocation of Christ's body in the Eucharistic rite, the "locative" experience of a holy site cannot be repeated or multiplied throughout the Christian world: it is associated with cultic foci that, unlike objectified bodily relics or icons, are grafted onto the soil. This is true with the Palestinian *loca sancta* but also with empty burial places, such as that of Saint Stephen in the Zion Basilica in Jerusalem: even if the first martyr's relics were housed there for a very short period – between 415 and 439 – his sarcophagus was made the object of the pilgrims' veneration until the Crusader period.

In her 2009 book *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean*, Ann Marie Yasin made efforts to nuance André Grabar's and Richard Krautheimer's distinction between "martyria" and "basilicas", by pointing out the numerous architectural strategies that, between the 4th and the 6th century, aimed at physically associating ritual spaces with holy sites. In my view, this process indicates, on the contrary, that both functions kept being perceived as distinct until very late. The diffusion of the practice of inserting relics into altars and other architectural elements did not really transform churches into *loca sancta*: relics were then used as objectified bodily remains that contributed to enhance the prestige of some specific ritual spaces, but this was not enough to turn them into cultic foci and goals for pilgrimages. Holy sites and ritual spaces could be

variously juxtaposed, connected, located one close to or above the other, but they rarely merged. The various ways in which they happened to be associated should be considered as a fundamental topic for hierotopic investigation: for example, it would be promising to understand how the sumptuous appearance of the Nativity church in Bethlehem established a visual dialogue with the unappealing, dark and tiny appearance of the underground grotto, axially located under the main altar and its elevated bema.

The site-specific quality of *loca sancta* implies that their worship could take place independently from any definite strategy of spatial or architectural arrangement. Yet, a spatial "mise-en-scène" could be used to orientate and mark the physical experience of a site-bound, locative manifestation of the holy. In such contexts as the early Christian martyria or the Jerusalem Holy Sepulchre, architecture worked as a monumental frame whose function was not to delimit the boundaries of the Christian *ecclesia* participating in the Mass and communicating with God, yet rather to structure the pilgrims' access to holy sites deemed to be grafted onto the soil. A number of "hierotopic" devices could be used to manifest the "placedness" of the divine in the holy site: for example, the accumulation of ornaments and votive offerings, the presence of specific lighting devices, the use of baldachins and frames to enhance and stimulate the contemplation of the holy site. In some contexts, "hierotopic" strategies could contribute to lay emphasis on the site's diminutive size and unattractive appearance: the lack of ornaments and a scant illumination could turn out to be a most efficacious way of evoking the holy *per absentiam*. A case in point, among others, is the rock of Golgotha, which originally stood in an open-air context, in a corner of the triporticus laid between the Anastasis and the Martyrium basilica. It looked like a thin, vertically standing dark stone whose red veins could be interpreted as traces of the blood poured out from Christ's side during the Crucifixion. Its exposition in a public space was instrumental to its use as a cultic focus and an object of contemplation.

In the course of time, a number of ornaments contributed to orientate its perception: the monumental *crux gemmata* erected on its top by Theodosius II visualized the triumph of Christ (and Christianity) upon death and the glory of Resurrection. Later on, the cross was included within a marble baldachin and a number of precious mementoes, including the horn used for the unction of King David and King Solomon's ring, hanged from it. This sort of "installation" enabled viewers to associate Golgotha with eminent figures of the Old Testament and to immediately acknowledge the role of Christ as the real King of Israel. Finally, the erection of an altar in its vicinity was not so much instrumental to the use of the nearby space as a ritual context, yet rather to its perception (as witnessed by the Piacenza anonymous around 570) as a memorial site marking the very place where Abraham had tied his son Isaac: this contributed to make visible the characterization of the rock of Golgotha as the new stone of Alliance. The subsequent step was the transformation of the site, on the initiative of Patriarch Modestos in the early 7th century, into a chapel working as an architectural frame to the top of the rock, made accessible via a flight of steps carved in its surface. When the Crusaders reconstructed the Holy Sepulchre, between 1100 and 1149, the whole stone was hidden within a massive, elevated, two-storey building that worked as a simulacrum of the holy mountain it encircled and evocated, in its use of two double arcades, the appearance of yet another holy landmark of Jerusalem, the Porta Aurea of the Temple Mount. In this way, visual and spatial devices were combined to efficaciously evoke the very site-specific qualities of Mount Golgotha.

Nicoletta Isar

Spatial Tropes of Iconicity: When Architecture Dissolves into Transparency

The Byzantine Church is the mystical body of Christ – a figure of the Incarnation. The church walls separate the outer from the inner space in which the liturgical service takes place in circular dynamism. The presence of a vast iconographical program, usually painted inside the church wall, on the external walls of the Post-Byzantine churches from Moldova (16th c.), is unique in the Byzantine tradition. It generates a semiotic break in the understanding of the architectural space, reflected in the response of the human agent facing such an unexpected vision. This paper aims to revise, and adjust the concepts to address this unique phenomenon in the Byzantine studies.

Vision of the Sacred

In his semiotics of the icon, B.A. Uspensky insists on the fact that the Byzantine icon is defined by the look of an internal observer, that is to say, a viewer imaginarily placed within the image. His perspective is that of God, or of the iconographer. By contrast, Renaissance painting is conceived as a "window to the world," a vision projected in the eyes of an external observer, who is the non-participative viewer of the painting in the transfigured world of image. While the Renaissance perspective is constructed as a means of separation between the image and the spectator, the reverse perspective operative in the Byzantine icon does not separate the icon from the viewer. It allows instead the participation of the viewer (the faithful) in the icon, and even invites him to partake in the experience of the image.

In assessing the unusual external decoration of the Moldavian churches, one should note that, at first sight, its perception seems to be dictated by the internal logic of perception of the monument, which requires primarily to be read as architecture. In order to perceive the quasi-totality of the architectural volumes looming in the

space, one needs a dynamic point of view continuously rotating around the walls. To look at the architecture and the decoration while allowing the eyes to slide on the surface of the walls is a specific Byzantine attitude. Each object of vision has its own perspective, so that the eye cannot rest upon what one sees; it cannot freeze the vision. The habit of staring at the decorated surface is, perhaps, mostly Western. Byzantine *ekphraseis*, descriptions and panegyrics repeatedly emphasize that the looks should not be fixed on its object of vision, excluding the existence of a detached spectator, but it must wander, scanning the image. The intention of the designers of the Moldavian decorated walls to encourage the wandering gaze upon the architecture and the decoration is evident. From near, as well as, from afar, the decoration of the walls constantly challenges the eye to move in a continuously circular manner: from inside to outside, and from outside to inside. This ritualized vision, which involves the viewer and the energy of semiosis, could be seen as a first degree in the reading of this image.

We may thus conclude that the specificity of the semiotics of the image of the Moldavian exterior painted walls seems to consist in bringing simultaneously two perspectives, belonging to an outside viewer, and to an internal observer. This juxtaposition of two positions relative to the image, which requires two specific modes of perception, derives from the premises and the novelty of this project: on one hand, the vision of the architecture viewed as painted surface, and on the other hand, the vision relative to the vast decoration that covers the walls viewed as mass-volume painted architecture. But the exterior painting is inseparable from the architecture; it manifests itself as both surface and mass-volume, from the depth of which another world is made visible. Once painted, the wall "disappears" as architecture, in semiotic terms. We do not see it anymore in its first materiality. The wall is, as it were, set into the abyss. This apparent physical dissolution of the church wall suggests the abolition of the dividing wall, the body of Christ, evoked by St. Paul.

Iconography

Viewed from the east, the outside image of the main apse of the choir shows striking similarities with the image represented inside the altar. The iconographical composition of the apse follows the disposition of the iconostasis displaying a series of superimposed friezes hierarchically articulated: angels, prophets, apostles, bishops, monks and martyrs that converge in procession to the central axis of the apse. The procession of the bishops on both sides of the image of Christ-Child lying on a paten (*Amnos*) is the most sacred image usually represented within the sanctuary on the hemicycle, marking the centrality of the apse. The open Gospels carried by the bishops display inscriptions which transcribe the secret prayers of the liturgy. At the church of Sucevita (1599), as a concrete example, the inscriptions represented outside the apses correspond to the liturgy of the catechumens (the incipit prayers, the three antiphons, and the Little Entrance) and the beginning of the liturgy of the faithful; one of the prayers at the end of the liturgy is also reproduced. Following the liturgical ceremonial, the reading of the secret prayers would begin outside the church, and continue inside the sanctuary, ending outside the apses on the north and south counterforts, where the last bishops display the secret prayers at the end of the liturgy. The disposition of the prayers of the inscriptions is circular, according to their placement, present sometimes outside, sometimes inside the church.

What interests us here is the presence outside the protective church walls of the procession of the bishops carrying the mystical prayers, pronounced secretly within the altar where they are also represented on the walls, but hidden from the audience's eye. This is, no doubt, a major shift in the horizon of the image. The liturgical center, normatively placed inside the sanctuary, is now displaced outside the church. The space of the main apse once concealed by the opaque walls of the altar and the iconostasis is now revealed in full light. The liturgical prayers, of which some are silently proffered, are exposed now beyond the walls of the church. The consequence of such situation is vast, on a liturgical level, as well as

on the level of perception. The walls seem to dissolve into transparency, letting something of the mystery flare-out from the interior of the sanctuary. The effect of this image is overwhelming. It creates the illusion that the wall has been de-materialized. Like a vast transparent veil, the eastern façade of the church reveals on its exterior surface the hidden mystery performed behind the altar, which results into a liturgy without walls. The choral (boustrophedon) disposition of the secret prayers suggests metaphorically a "perichoretic" movement. Unlike the ancient veil or the *katapetasma* of the Byzantine iconostasis which conceals the sacred vision, allowing only on certain occasions for the holy image to be revealed, here, in this remote part of Christianity, an open and lasting vision is offered to the eyes. The outside eastern apse displays the Mystery in full light.

This unprecedented iconographical project in the history of Byzantium, the Moldavian external decoration, illustrates perhaps for the first and only time that which has been theologically viewed as the Christian aim: the definitive abolishment of the middle wall. That is to say, there should be no more 'sacred space' or 'sacred time' for all time and space has been sanctified in Christ. The novelty of such iconographical project consists in showing how the liturgical mystery performed inside the church could permeate the physical wall, breaking it, and undoing with the traditional architectural principle which divides the inner from the outer space, thus offering a new vision by which sacred image sanctifies the whole cosmos. But such a project shows also the limits of iconography itself; the limits of the iconographical discourse to assess this overwhelming space image. It finally shows that in order to fully assess such phenomenon one needs a new trope of spatiality to define it. Henceforth the question: Iconography or Hierotopy? This is where the concept of sacred space Hierotopy seems to be instrumental as a tool of research to assess this iconography in act, or architectural enactment of iconography as sacred space.

There is however one more aspect concerning this unprecedented Moldavian project to be addressed, and one more question to be asked, in our search for tropes

of spatiality in post-Byzantium. What's happen when the external wall carries on its outer surface the mystery in its written form, suddenly exposed outwardly? What are the consequences of such visual statement in linguistic and theological terms, or in terms of the iconicity of sacred text? At this point, I believe, the iconography will reveal once more its limits.

The Iconicity of the Sacred Text

The language of the written inscriptions on the bishops' Gospels carried in procession outside the walls of the sanctuary will lead us towards the problematic of the iconicity of the text, and eventually to the iconicity of space of their representation. One should agree that in the wall paintings, as in the icons, one could distinguish a figurative image (a pictorial, or an iconic sign) and a written text or inscription (a verbal sign). There are basically two types of inscriptions in the field of the image: the inscriptions of identification (the name of the saint represented, or the Biblical event); and the inscriptions of representation, painted on different objects such as the scroll (phylactery), the open book (the Gospel), or the clothing. It should be said that the inscriptions present on the Moldavian walls are written in Old Slavonic, which is a liturgical language, distinct from the vernacular language. While some monks, perhaps even all of them, could read Old Slavonic, it is certain that the ordinary viewer did not comprehend this language. Yet, inscriptions were displayed on the walls, inside and outside the church, to the eyes of those who could read them, and of those who could not comprehend this language. What was then their function? Why were they there?

As the linguists know well, a so-called "dead" language exists only in its written form. Nothing is known about its phonetic qualities. The conviction that its script brings us to the "voice" who speaks refers only to a "living" language, that is to say, the language in which spoken words mediate between people. By contrast, the function of the "dead" language is strictly hieratic. Written signs do not represent the natural words, they do not have the function of reproducing the speech. This

type of sign is similar to what could be called "iconicity." For most art historians, following the traditional principles of iconography, the inscriptions of identification are instrumental, they help classify the figure or the event represented. But the inscriptions of representation may be secondary and redundant in the image. For them, iconography provides no entry; neither are they taken as manifestation of the iconicity of writing.

This paper aims to go exactly beyond these limits of iconography in the attempt to examine the iconic function of these inscriptions. The function of the inscriptions might be apparently determined by the distance from the viewer. From far away, it is difficult to even distinguish the inscriptions; one could only perceive the ground on which they are depicted, the scroll or the book, which appears as a white space. When one is near enough to read the inscriptions, one is too close to be able to reconstruct the iconic figure. We could talk about a bi-focalization in the viewer's perception. While the scientist – to take the present situation of the visitors in the monasteries – wants to come close to the image, the tourist and the aesthete keep their distance, essentially "illiterate" in liturgical matters. Although all these speculations appear to belong exclusively to contemporary thought (structuralism and semiotics), as performed by Saussure, Greimas, Barthes, and Derrida, we must point out that such ideas were somehow familiar to the Byzantine and post-Byzantine civilizations. These cultures were able to maintain the parity between word and image, to understand that linguistic sign and graphics were identical, as opposed to Western Europe. The Old Slavonic, as a sacred language, was the instrument of divine revelation. Consequently, the graphic signs of the Scripture have been seen not only as symbols of the Truth, but also as components of the Truth. Graphic sign did not bear the language, but itself incorporated it.

The relationship between the written text and the spoken language is essential to understand the conception of the sacred in the monastic (hesychast) environment in which our images have been conceived. There was a disjunction between the

spoken language and the language of the Church, which was the language of the inscriptions as well. For the hesychast monks the written text alone was able to carry the sacred Word and the revelation of Light. This puts us in the context of a culture in which the graphic sign, its nature and function, could be explained only from the point of view of the iconicity of the language. From this perspective, the inscriptions appear to be the immanent divine presence. On this matter, B. A. Uspensky has something interesting to say, which is relevant for the status of the inscriptions written in an incomprehensible language for the viewer. Although they are not designed specifically to be understood, argues Uspensky, the inscriptions are there precisely to establish an internal identification, mystical, and to affirm the ontological connection between the image and the name. This seems to be true for the inscriptions represented on the walls of the Moldavian churches: their function cannot be separated from the monastic linguistic conception, showing a mystical reverence to the letters, perceived as icons and as "written incarnation." This externalization on the façade of the church of the holy Word must be read in this monastic key, in which the inscription of the holy Word is transferred from the acoustic to the visual register. The secret prayers stood there in front of an audience that did not understand them, yet, just as the Gospel was revered, praised and kissed by the people, these inscriptions had to be there in order to establish and affirm the ontological connection between sacred image and sacred text, between figure and word. It was at this point that the iconicity of text was manifested. While remaining incomprehensible, the inscriptions were contemplated and revered in the pure materiality of their graphic sign performing thus their iconic function. The immanent presence of the sacred letter is perhaps illustrated here in the most provocative way. From this new perspective, the hierotopic vision of the transparent wall, membrane-like proves to be a hierographic vision as well, where the parity between word and image was maintained, the linguistic sign and graphic sign were both iconic and identical. From the dilemma "Hierotopy or Iconography" we moved already into a new possibility: Hierography.

One thing remains however clear about the Byzantine and post-Byzantine mentality and spirituality in that which concerns the conception of sacred space. This conception, modernity seems to have forgotten, namely, that there was no sacred text as such before its "tongue" takes the shape of an icon; and there was no truly definition of sacred space in all its manifestation unless one could go beyond the confines of the traditional iconography, making room for the iconicity of sacred text. This was invested as a new trope of spatiality in its full rights.

As a contemporary thinker astutely observes, it is modernity that separates the text from the image. Only modernity operates with a fixed distinction between image and text, reading the text without being able to perceive the image. This has not been always the case, as we have tried to show in this paper. Text and image have both been designed to be "read," as they both were probably intended to be written and looked at as images. In this regard, the Greek *graphein* admits little distinction between what is painted and what is written; there is absolute unity of what we now take for separate activities, writing and graphing, the pictorial, the textual. In its exemplary form illustrated by the Moldavian outside-painted walls, the post-Byzantine image shows how text and image merged into an undivided whole that has not been restored since. Its vision still provides us with a glimpse of what has once been a hierotopic vision, iconic in its manifestation, as well as "hierographic" in its spatial inscription, in which the walls dissolved into transparency. Falling down around the church like a curtain, its transparency drapes the body of the edifice, as well as it unveils a spectacular vision of the Church symbolically imagined as the mystical body of Christ. In the experience they share, the people of the community could imagine how the whole universe become the stage of sacrifice and redemption, how the whole world was created as a temple of God where nothing could remain anymore profane in the Creation.

Jelena Bogdanovic

The Iconicity of Byzantine Architecture: Iconography or Hierotopy?

The interpretation of Byzantine architecture, or rather the search for the meaning of Byzantine architecture, has relied heavily on the methodological approaches used in iconography and iconology as branches of art historical research. Both iconography and iconology are critical as they shift studies of Byzantine art from investigations of the unstable stylistic features as carriers of meaning to analyses of specific works as icons. Framed by the modern intellectual discourse rather than by the medieval devotional or religious context, icons can be identified with signs that physically (visually) resemble what they stand for. In Byzantine art almost without exception icons are equated with religious icons, visual images that represent holy figures (such as the Mother of God), sacred events (such as the Baptism of Christ), or holy objects (such as the True Cross). Iconography provides sophisticated tools for describing Byzantine icons and interpreting them based on their specific content, which usually stems from biblical references and the life of the Byzantine church. Iconology, as established by Erwin Panofsky, further aims to give meaning to such works by examining them through the lenses of history. In that context, iconicity provides the conceived similarity between art accomplishment as a sign and its meaning.

Speaking of the iconicity of Byzantine architecture raises at least two critical issues. One, that architecture is likened to signs, two-dimensional images, i.e. icons. Second, that it is possible to "read" architectural accomplishments in the way we "read" or interpret the icons by using the tools of iconography. By extension, if we extend the visual context of Byzantine architecture to its spatial, physical qualities, we could examine Byzantine architecture as "spatial icons" by using "spatial iconography" with expanded tools essentially based on the traditional approaches of (visual) iconography.

This paper highlights the shortcomings of the iconographic approach that insists on a singular reading, i.e. the meaning of architecture and the potentials of hierotopy that allow for the multiplicity of meanings and investigations of architecture not only as an image dependent on visual physical properties. The assumption that buildings are means of conveying meaning is not new.   By focusing on architectural form, we may successfully use iconographical approaches to give meaning to specific accomplishments. For example, the domed basilica of Hagia Sophia conveys the meaning of "Heaven on Earth" as the dome represents the heavenly realm and the box-like basilica, the earthly realm. Yet, it has been shown how, due to the complexity of architecture as a process and object, architectural meanings cannot be simply likened to the process of decoding by "reading" specific forms—a dome or an oblong-planned box-like basilica in case of Hagia Sophia.   Architectural meanings change from the conception of the structure through its construction, and then various interpretations, as both the intention of the creator(s)—architects and donors—and the meaning comprehended by the interpreters—church goers, pilgrims, visitors, and other beholders—may change in the process.

Addressing questions of architectural formalism, William Whyte has already proposed that instead of "reading" architecture, it seems more appropriate to speak of various "translations", or series of transpositions of meanings related to each of the media (images, sound, light, construction), which are used to organize an architectural structure. Hierotopy—the creation of sacred spaces, as defined by Alexei Lidov—most closely merges the tools of iconography and innovative interpretation methods for searching for the meaning of sacred space through a series of meaningful relations between created sacred spaces (buildings or the larger settings) and users/interpreters. In that context, meanings are derived from the relations between the physical objects, which gain their significance also

through the non-physical aspects of built structures, as well as the changing dynamics of the rituals (the performative and rhetorical capacities of specific settings when they are in use). Hence, Hagia Sophia became a "spatial icon" of the holy land when pilgrims venerated the miraculous icon of the Mother of God or the relics of the True Cross displayed in the church. It also became Jerusalem and Rome, when, for example, the chains of St. Peter were displayed for veneration. Then again, it could be the space of primordial creation and the parting of heavens, earth, and waters, as described in Genesis, when the priest delivered the words of God from the ambo. The ambo structure of Hagia Sophia was originally set within the church nave as a mountain-tower; its raised platform, from which the priest would perform the segments of the Cathedral service, enhanced the acoustics, visibility, and various evocative meanings as it was set in the mid-air—below the glittering golden dome, representing the heavens, and the floor covered in Prokonessian marble with veins, which the Byzantines likened to the sea. Numerous other meanings emerge from the specific place-making based on the establishment of other evocative relations between the sacred space of the church and its users in specific historical or ritual contexts.

This paper highlights the potential interpretation of Hagia Sophia and a few other examples of sacred architecture as "spatial icons" in the Byzantine context. Within the discussion at the round-table, it aims to investigate the limits of iconicity of Byzantine architecture by asking a question as to whether simplified, generic, or monumental (iconic) forms of architecture are preconditions for considering specific Byzantine accomplishments as "spatial icons." Another question this paper aims to raise is the potential of both iconographic and hierotopical research tools to better understand the transposition of meanings of individual architectural accomplishments in denoting accomplishments of the same or different types and scales. In other words, how can we properly analyze the spatial networks when, for example, an individual church or its memorable architectural elements, such as

an ambo, visually (spatially) denote the same or different type of a setting—another ambo, but also a tomb or a tower depending on the given expanded context of the service and the setting; or how can a church with its memorable architectural elements within a given service denote entire architectural frameworks on different scales, for example cities or essentially un-built environments such as Jerusalem or the holy land. Last but not least, this paper also aims to instigate discussion on the spatial relations between the beholders and "spatial icons" of monumental scale, i.e. thoughts on beholders' perceptions once in front of them (such as when in front of an ambo) or within them (such as when inside the church).

Maria Cristina Carile

The Great Palace as an "Icon of Space"? On the Iconicity of the Spatial Representation of Power in Byzantium

According to Procopius, the imperial palace of Constantinople rebuilt by Justinian after 532 was indescribable (*De Aed.*, I.10.10). Words could not possibly render its enormous dimensions and magnificence, this being a conception shared by Libanius in his fourth-century oration on Antioch (*Or.* XI, 206-207). This impossibility to describe the palace results in a paucity of information about the appearance of its structures. Subsequent Byzantine and foreign writings are equally scant of information regarding the palace of the Byzantine emperors. Occasionally, certain halls are celebrated in poems or *ekphraseis* that give evidence of the great building activity of new emperors, but generally, palatine rooms are mentioned as a setting for ceremonies, events, and stories linked to members of the court. With a few rare exceptions, within written sources the imperial spaces of the palace remain in the background of what happens between their walls. Similarly, the visual evidence is sparse, stereotyped, and repetitive. Architectural representations of what we have ascertained to be the imperial palace are especially found in manuscript illumination, and these appear formed by basic and anonymous elements, which are of little help to the modern viewer in visualizing the appearance of the Great Palace of the Byzantine emperors. Even the remains recently brought to light of a small percentage of the palatine structures give us only a glimpse of its great dimensions and grandeur. Being that the internal apparatus almost totally disappeared, the modern eye confronts an immense loss: that of the Great Palace, which today can be imagined only through vague mentions or pictures in sources. As a series of conferences and miscellaneous books demonstrate, in recent years the scholarly community has shown an increased interest in the Great Palace, or more generally in the imperial palaces of Byzantine Constantinople, clarifying its image, internal disposition and conceptual role through studies that are mostly based upon written sources.

This contribution will attempt to show that, although few and not detailed, the *ekphraseis* and visual representations of the imperial spaces of the Great Palace are images with a strong iconic character. This is due to the fact that the palace itself was conceived as an iconic space of power representation – especially in the period between the age of Justinian (527-565) and the end of the eleventh century. Here, ceremonies expressing the Christian context of the earthly *basileia* as a power endowed to the emperor by God were enacted and found their natural location. Furthermore, the palace iconicity entailed that, within its premises, different kinds of "icons" – such as imperial images and saintly panel portraits and even "living icons" – cooperated in the expression of the earthly *basiliea* and of the palace itself as a material realization of the imperial power.

In the past, I have demonstrated that in Late Antiquity the perception of the imperial palace equated it to an image of the heavenly kingdom of God. As part of the representation of the holy Roman *basileia*, the palace was conceived as a sacred place mirroring on earth the Heavenly Jerusalem. Such a conception appears to have spread during the Middle Byzantine period, both in terms of the imperial propaganda of the Byzantine state and in common thought. If the palace as a whole was conceived as an earthly reflection of the heavenly kingdom, its structures and apparatus vivified and realized its sacrality through the use of materials that reproduced to the eyes of the viewers those characteristics commonly attributed to the Heavenly Jerusalem: above all, its brightness. Starting from John's *Revelation* and continuing through hagiographical visions of the otherworld, heaven was characterized by its resplendent light. Similarly, in the imperial palace metals and precious materials had a high reflective power that amplified the resplendent effect of its structures, impressing the viewers with the brightness of its interiors – especially when enlightened by the presence of the emperor – and even of its exteriors, such as on its roofs. The brightness of the palace is one of its major characteristics, emphasized by poets and orators, and can be considered as an iconic element of the imperial palace. In fact, it is not only a

major attribute consistently celebrated in relation to the palace but a visual feature bearing meaning: through its brightness, the palace conveys its sacrality – the light being a manifestation of God, from the Scriptures, in a long tradition absorbed by Byzantium – to the viewers.

Precious materials were themselves constant features of all the imperial spaces, where they had functions other than embellishing and decorating. As Procopius clearly states, materials served to honor the emperor. In his *ekphrasis* of the decorative programme that adorned Justinian's *Chalké*, we are told that the cubes of mosaic "bestowed upon the emperor honors equal to those of God" by their gleaming colors (*De aed.*, I.10.18-19). Similarly, but in reference to the church of the Anargyroi restored by Romanos IV (1034-1041), Michael Psellos recalls in the eleventh century the wonderful mosaics and paintings which enlightened the church, adding that there images "filled the sacred edifice with glory" (*Chron.* IV.31). Thus, materials and *eikones* were believed to glorify the emperor and the imperial spaces. The exalting power of precious stones and materials was well known to Niketas Choniates, according to whom the emperor Isaac II (1185-1195) adorned the icons of the *Theotokos* with gold and jewels, to show his devotion and to offer them to public veneration. It is not a coincidence that visual sources often depict the imperial palace as a compound of structures – hence emphasizing its great dimensions – with colorful decoration, reproducing gold and marble architectural components (e.g. Madrid Skylitzes, f. 206v). The great treasures housed in the palace were evidence of the wealth of the empire and of the pomp of the imperial house, if not of the greed of certain emperors. However, gold and precious stones had also an intrinsic power: they glorified the space and, according to the belief on their inherent magic properties, they bore metaphysical and prophylactic powers that might express further meanings depending on the context.

Furthermore, in the eleventh century Psellos lists the major elements of the rooms of the palace, referring to thrones, scepters and purple hangings (*Chron.* III.15).

Indeed, these elements are also mentioned in other texts and commonly found as basic components of miniatures representing the palace or the court in scenes set within the palace. Although materials and objects typical of the court were used by Psellos in a *kaiserkritik*, simply as characteristics of the courtly wealth, the visual evidence attests to their meaning as attributes of the *basileia* and of the imperial palace. Indeed, if the emperor and the imperial palace were deprived of such elements, they would lose their very essence. In the artistic evidence they work as visual convectors of the idea of *basileia*. Hence, they become iconic elements of the manifestation of the imperial power.

However, instead of describing the appearance of the palace's rooms, court writers often focus on works of art that adorned them. Descriptions of the *pentapyrgion*, a towered piece of furniture housed in the *Chrysotriklinos* during the reign of Theophilos (829-842) or of the fountains decorating the gardens of the *Mesokepion* at the time of Basil I (867-886) are among these. Particularly, while describing the building activities of the emperors, court writers often draw attention to imperial representations. The idea that the very act of depicting someone signified honoring him or her was recurrent since Late Antiquity, when it also served to thank the person depicted in a memorial for posterity. Conversely, the Theodosian Code clarifies that images of the emperor were *ornamenta*, a Latin term that implies the concept of glorification (*Cod. Theod.* XV.4.1). Thus, imperial images were not meant to embellish or decorate the places in which they were set, but to augment their value as glorious spaces. Procopius repeats this conception in his *ekphrasis* of the mosaics representing Justinian and Theodora together with their court and the generals, in the vault of the *Chalké* (*De aed.* I.10.15). Later, in the tenth-century the *Vita Basilii* reports that a portrait of Basil I and his family was set into the ceiling of the emperor's bedchamber, around a golden cross. An inscription declared the meaning of these images as a thanksgiving of the imperial family to God. Clearly, the royal bed-chamber of the palace was intended to present the imperial family as a dynasty of rulers worthy of administering the empire in the

name of God. While imperial images set in the palace entrance or in spaces reserved to the court ceremonies reminded the court of the power and grandiosity of the imperial house, the private bed-chambers could not be accessed by all members of the court and were the most private spaces in the imperial palace.

Therefore, these imperial portraits may be intended to remind the viewer – but in this case the reader of the *Vita Basilii* and perhaps the emperor himself – that Basil, a man of non-imperial origins, reached the empire in the name of God, and that it is precisely in the name of God that his family was destined to reign in the future. The *De Cerimoniis*, makes reference to an icon of Basil I, depository of a cult set in a chapel within the premises of the *Nea Ekklesia* (*De Cer.*28 (19) and 29 (20)). The icon of the emperor was venerated during the ceremonies for the celebrations of St. Elias and the anniversary of the *Nea*'s dedication, and included a specific stop before the icon, during which emperors had to light candles. Although the cult of this imperial icon appears to have had a short life, and was probably undertaken only by Constantine VII, it reveals the importance of dynastic membership and the need to elevate the status of certain imperial figures by instituting and formulating a cult within the imperial court. Later in the twelfth century, a series of poems mention several imperial representations that were probably set in the spaces of the Great Palace or of the Blachernae palace, which at that time started replacing the Great Palace as the major setting for courtly life. Among these were portraits of victorious emperors and religious images set in judicial rooms that included the emperor as a figure within the scene. Thus, imperial images may be intended as reminders of the long-lived *basileia* and of its Christian origins: they served to perpetuate the glory of past emperors, and at the same time to glorify new dynasties.

Furthermore, the iconicity of Great Palace had an even more important expression as the palace itself constituted a tridimensional background for the stage of the imperial *basileia*, which happened through the development of ceremonies. As it

appears from the *De Cerimoniis*, the spaces of the palace were the setting for strictly regulated rituals. The structure and style of the text gives evidence of the careful formulation of ceremonies, where attendants, dress and apparel, objects and movements had to follow times and modes of imperial protocol, the long tradition and symbolic meaning of which transformed these events in rites. From this source – a handbook of regulations – the spaces of the palaces may appear as the mere stage of the rituals, deprived of content. In reality, the function of each space added further significance to the ritual and its appearance worked together with the carefully orchestrated rites to show inherent meanings of the performative expression of the *basileia*. This is clear for instance in Corippus' poem celebrating the reception of Avar ambassadors at the court of Justin II (565-578). In the throne room furnished in the greatest pomp everything was carefully prepared and when Justin appeared before his audience, this happened as a heavenly epiphany, where everything from the location, position and apparel of the courtiers, to the opulent and stately room combined to create a lasting image of a heavenly appearance (*In laud*. III.151-270). The same impression is evidenced in the tenth-century accounts by Liutprand of Cremona, where the astonishment of the foreigner ambassador before the exoticism of eastern habits does not miss perceiving a certain heavenly character in the staging the *basileia*. However, it is perhaps an epigram of the Greek Anthology that, while describing the new decoration of the *Chrysotriklinos* by Michael III (842-867), succeeds in rendering the function of the staging of the *basileia* in the palace and, more importantly here, of the relationship between the iconic space of the palace and ritual. In the mosaic programme, the image of Christ was placed directly above the emperor's throne, the Virgin was depicted above the main door, Michael III was also portrayed along with Patriarch Photios, among apostles, martyrs, and saints (*Ant. Gr.* I.106). Here the location of the main Christian figures, Christ and the Virgin, above the throne and the door expressed the ideology of a divinely-protected *basileia*, as well as symbolized the benevolence of God to the Christian emperor through Christ and the heavenly court. Considering that the emperor would have appeared in the *Chrysotriklinos* on

his throne, underneath the image of Christ, then the real imperial ceremony took place amidst the imperial court and the heavenly court represented on the ceiling. At once, the *Chrysotriklinos* would have showed the Christian order of the empire, where the earthly court mirrored the heavenly kingdom. Here, the earthly *basileia* acted by will and under the protection of the heavenly one. Indeed, in the performativity of imperial ritual the palace was not only a background, but due to its decorations and apparatus, was conceived as the fundamental location of the expression of the *basileia*: it was part of a living icon. Without the space of the palace, the courtly ceremonies would have lost their meaning: in this resided the fundamental iconic character of the palace, a space of great pomp, a repository of treasures, which was conceived as an earthly expression of the heavenly kingdom and as such was meant to convey such an image.

Certainly, the Christian character of the earthly *basileia* was expressed in the palace also through the great number of churches, included within its great extension hosting relics and holy icons. Already in the fourth century, Constantine the Great worshipped God by praying in the sacred rooms of his palace (Eus. *LC* IX.11) alongside members of the imperial household (Eus. *VC* IV.17) or on his own within secret places within his royal palace chambers (Eus. *VC* IV.17). Thus, even the first nucleus of Great Palace, the *Daphné* of Constantine, included sufficient capacities – such as chapels and churches – to allow both the private Christian practice of the emperor and communal religious ceremonies attended by the members of the court. In later centuries, starting with the Theodosian dynasty, these places of worship greatly increased in number as a demonstration of the pious religiosity of each emperor, culminating with the construction of the church of the Virgin of the Pharos and the *Nea Ekklesia.* Although the rites performed before the icons and in the churches appear just as canonized ritual stops, obligations determined by the protocol in *De Cerimoniis*, this might be due to the strict structure of the text that, while formulating procedures and paths through the palace, was not meant to clarify their meaning. Private devotional practices of the

emperors are still recorded in later centuries and the *Nea Ekklesia*continued to mark the greatness of the imperial palace even in the fourteenth century, when the latter was in a state of unstoppable decay. All this attests to the iconic value of churches and Christian worship in the palace: the first were physical structures of great splendor conveying the religiosity of the emperors and destined to testify their great building activity, the latter was part of the celebration of Christian virtue of the holy imperial *basileia* that was enacted in the ceremonies performed there.

In conclusion, playing with the title of this session, the palace was an "icon of space" full of "icons in space": within its premises, materials and objects with high symbolic meaning cooperated with images of the emperors and of the heavenly court enacting the Christian character of the imperial *basileia*. While it was described in words and images by precious elements that became constant features of itself – expressions of its iconicity – inside its walls the stage of rituals created a "living icon" of the imperial court, which within the protocol of ceremonies had to be repeatedly staged, thereby activating the space of the palace. The Great Palace with its stratification of structures and memorials to past emperors was itself an icon of power, that of the sacred imperial *basileia*.

Fr. Maximos Constas

Rapture, Ecstasy and the Construction of Sacred Space: Hierotopy in the Life of Symeon the New Theologian

Overview

Architectural imagery, with all its attendant spatial properties and perspectives, so abounds in Byzantine religious literature that its scope and application are not easy to assess. In both the Old and New Testaments, the figure of the building is an important human symbol of achievement, whether it is the temple of Solomon, the visionary temple of Ezekiel, or the celestial Jerusalem. As sites of access to the deity, these symbolic structures were mapped onto the body of Christ, understood to be the par excellence temple of the divinity (cf. John 2:19). As the "corner-stone" of a "living spiritual edifice" (Mat 21:42; 1 Pet 2:5), in which "the fullness of the divinity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9), the mystical body of Christ was a structure extended to include the body of the mystic as the site and edifice of mystical encounter—a living, representational space paradoxically contained by the divinity and simultaneously containing it.

This paper applies a broad spatial perspective to Niketas Stethatos's *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* (scr. ca. 1055), attending to parallel passages in the writings of Symeon the New Theologian (ca. 949-1022). Such a perspective has the advantage of expanding reductively epistemological and/or narrowly linguistic conceptions of mysticism, permitting the incorporation of multiple levels of objects and discourse, including Symeon's physical and social environment, his individual mystical experiences, and their spatialized exterior representations. In exploring the juxtaposition of space and mysticism presented in the *Life*, this paper endeavors to reveal new insights into the understanding and production of sacred space. The mystical experiences described in the *Life* are always embodied experiences that unfold within a particular space or place, which is the multifaceted place where

mystical experience converges with its subsequent social, textual, iconographic, and architectural representations.

Space as Light

In the *Life's* complex hierotopy, the density of the mystic's body and its surrounding spatial structures are transformed through the medium of light, which renders them ambiguously fluid, and transposes them to a mode analogous to the spatial forms of an icon. While it is perhaps taken for granted that a "mysticism of light" was a characteristic feature of Byzantine spirituality, no writer before Symeon had emphasized the phenomenon of light to such a degree, nor with such emotional intensity. Dozens of his pages are devoted to his encounters with the divine light, many of which he construes in distinctively spatial terms, to which the *Life* remains faithful. The juxtaposition of space and light described in the *Life of St Symeon* will be framed within the larger context of Byzantine Neoplatonism, with particular emphasis on Proclus's doctrine of space as light, and related themes in Dionysios the Areopagite and Maximos the Confessor.

It is unlikely that Symeon was directly familiar with Neoplatonic metaphysics, and any philosophical elements in his writing are likely to have been mediated through the Platonizing Christian authors he is known to have read (e.g., Evagrios of Pontus, Gregory the Theologian, and, perhaps, Dionysios the Areopagite). On the other hand, Symeon's reformulation of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" (*ED* 1.12), with its distinctive juxtaposition of space and light, would appear to indicate familiarity with the Platonic corpus. The celebrated myth, however, had long been absorbed into Christian discourse, and we can safely assume that Symeon's thought was informed by the general Christian Neoplatonism of middle Byzantine Constantinople, which would soon experience a renaissance associated with Michael Psellos (d. ca. 1078) and John Italos (d. ca. 1082), along with the contemporary publication of the "Constantinopolitan edition" of the works of Maximos the Confessor. Symeon himself did not participate directly in the

Neoplatonic revival of the early Komnenian period, although his disciple and biographer, Niketas Stethatos, was exactly contemporary with it.

The Neoplatonic metaphysics of space as light provide a suggestive, if somewhat remote, philosophical framework for the spatial dynamics of the *Life of Symeon the New Theologian.* At the same time, it is clear that Symeon's self-understanding of his visionary experiences—which was shared by Stethatos—is deeply rooted in the tradition of Paul's rapture and ecstatic transport to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:1-4), a tradition supported by a millennium of patristic and early Byzantine exegesis of the *corpus Paulinum.*

Paul's Rapture.

The influence of Paul on Byzantine spirituality has not yet been fully appreciated, although the apostle has rightly been called the "model mystic for Symeon the New Theologian" (Golitzin 1995, 117). Symeon's visions are systematically modeled on the "rapture" (ἁρπαγή) of Paul (2Cor 12:1-4), an event that in the Byzantine tradition had long been identified with Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (Act 9:1-19; 22:6-11; 26:13-14). Two elements in this dramatic experience were at the fore of Byzantine spirituality: the perceptually overwhelming manifestation of divine light, and the ambiguous spatial location of the body, for at the time Paul confessed not knowing "whether he was in the body or out of the body" (2 Cor 12:3). In the *Life,* Symeon's mystical experiences are explicitly aligned with Paul's rapture, which is equated with the mystical experience of "ecstasy" (ἔκστασις)—a word that means "to stand or be outside of one's self or place"—so that Symeon's cell is flooded with light, which "flashes around him just as it once did with Paul," and "catches him up" (i.e., in rapture), alluding directly to Acts 26:13. Moreover, Symeon's mystical experiences both signal and require the displacement of the body, so that, like Paul, he enters an ambiguously liminal space, which is paradoxically both embodied and disembodied. The simultaneous embodiment and disembodiment of mystical

experience reflects philosophical conceptions of space in which the body is at once a spatialized receptacle and the negation of any bounded containing localized within definable space.

The Architecture of the Self

Throughout the *Life,* the cloistral space of the saint's cell is the basic structural unit that is both an extension of the saint's body and a microcosm of the physical world. As the body is enclosed within its cell, the body itself is a cell containing the soul, which in turn contains the uncontainable divinity. Correspondences between the monastic body and its cell were not new, and Symeon would have known of them from multiple sources, including John Klimakos's *Ladder of Divine Ascent* 27: "Strange as it may seem, the monk is a man who fights to keep his incorporeal self enclosed within the house of the body—the cell of a monk is the body that surrounds him, and within him is the dwelling place of knowledge." The cell/body analogy could, moreover, be extended to include the furnishings of the cell, which are themselves the spatialized forms of the cloistered body projected outward. The simple triad of floor, stool, and mat, for example, makes spatially and therefore steadily visible the collection of postures and positions the body moves in and out of. These furnishings objectify the locations of the body that most frequently hold the body's weight; they objectify the body's continual need to shift within itself the locus of its weight, as well as its need to become wholly forgetful of its weight, and to move weightlessly to a larger mindfulness.

Spaces and physical structures are thus endowed with spiritual meaning, and the spiritual structures or states of the soul are provided with cognate physical symbols. In this way, the mystic's body and its enclosing cell give spatialized, observable expression to his inward spiritual states. As the invisible empties itself into visibility, the spatial dynamics presented in the *Life* enable the translation of spiritual undertakings and achievements into tangible, hierotopic forms. And so closely does the *Life* identify Symeon's body with the space of his cell, that when

the latter is dismantled by Symeon's persecutors, Stethatos notes that the "inanimate cell underwent a punishment equal to that of its owner" (*Life* 98). Thirty years after the saint's death, an *epsilon*—the fifth letter of the Greek alphabet—mysteriously appeared on a piece of marble in the saint's cell, foretelling the translation of his bodily remains during the Fifth Indiction (*Life* 129). Similarly, Symeon's restoration of the monastic church of St. Mamas is described by Stethatos as an outward image of Symeon's efforts to reform and renew the inner lives of his monks, a spiritual project spatialized in the physical rebuilding of fallen and dilapidated monastic structures.

Ecstasy and Displacement

Mystical experience does not simply generate the emplacement of the body, but brings about its transcendence, the ecstatic displacement of the mystic into a realm outside the limits of the body's proper spatial location. In the *Life,* this transcendence is typically expressed through the attenuation and even disappearance of the physical space of the cell. As Symeon's cell is "flooded with light from above," the physical space of his cell is "dissolved" (ἀφανισθέντα), while the saint is "caught up into the air" and "completely forgets his body." Afterwards, in reverse order, the saint is "contracted back into himself" (συσταλέντος πρὸς ἑαυτό), back into his body, and back into the space of his cell (*Life* 5). This is a formula that Stethatos repeats throughout the *Life,* so that later, while Symeon is praying in his cell, the "roof of the house is lifted away" (τῆς στέγης ἀρθείσης τοῦ οἴκου), as a "cloud of light" descends from heaven and settles above his head. During another visionary moment, while the saint is standing at prayer inside (ἔνδον) his cell, he "seemed to be outside in the open air" (αἴθριος ἔξω), and "the building and everything else disappeared, and he seemed no longer to be inside" (ἡ οἰκία καὶ πάντα παρήρχοντο καὶ ἐν οἴκῳ οὐδόλως ἐνόμιζεν) (*Life* 69). These experiences are corroborated by Symeon's own writings, which are described in the same language and using the same images. Two examples will suffice: "I was not aware I was within the house; it seemed I was sitting in the dark

open air, and I was utterly oblivious even of my own body" (οἰκίας ἡμνημόνησα ὅτι ἐντὸς ὑπάρχω, ἐν τῷ δοκεῖν ἀέρι δὲ τοῦ σκότους ἐκαθήμην, πλὴν καὶ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ λήθην ἔσχον εἰς ἅπαν) (*Hymn* 25); and: "Light appeared to me, and the walls of my cell immediately vanished, and the world disappeared, and I remained alone in the presence of the Alone. And I do not know if this my body was there, too; I do not know if I was outside of it" (ὡράθη μοι ἐκεῖνο τὸ φῶς, ἤρθη ὁ οἶκος τῆς κέλλης εὐθὺς καὶ παρῆλθεν ὁ κόσμος, ἔμεινα δὲ μόνος ἐγὼ μόνῳ συνὼν τῷ φωτί, οὐκ οἶδα δὲ εἰ ἦν καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦτο τηνικαῦτα ἐκεῖ, εἰ γὰρ ἔξω τούτου γέγονα ἀγνοῶ) (*ED* 5).

The Saint as Icon and Iconic Space.

These literary descriptions of a sainted figure standing in a ground of light devoid of architectural framing are analogous to the artistic forms and compositional features of Byzantine icons. In this way, the saint or mystic is an icon, a model or image of sanctity for others, becoming a sacred site for the faithful and a visible example of liminality, existing visibly within the world but nonetheless representing something beyond it. It is worth noting that Symeon himself was directly involved in the design and production of icons, particularly of his spiritual father, Symeon the Elder. The icon proved to be popular, and local religious leaders requested copies of it. It also proved to be controversial, and when the cult of Symeon the Elder came under attack, resulting in the theft of the icon and the slandering of the saint, Stethatos deemed the affair a "new Iconoclasm" and its proponents were naturally compared to Iconoclasts (*Life* 92-93). During his lifetime, Symeon the New Theologian, while in his cell, was observed to be suspended six feet in the air, rising to the "same level as a large icon of the Deesis" hanging close to the ceiling. A bright and radiant light emanated from Symeon's body, and his hands were raised in prayer, like a figure in an icon (*Life* 117; cf. 126). After his death, Symeon himself was depicted in an icon, the face of which was seen to glow a "fiery burning red" (*Life* 143). These passages suggest that the form of space envisioned in the *Life,* the "place" of the sainted body, is a fully

iconic space, at once a *hierotopy* and a *heterotopia*, virtualizing the inherent liminality of the icon.

The *Life of St Symeon the New Theologian* is a rich, and in many ways unique, source for the understanding and production of sacred space in the middle Byzantine period. While the *Life*has been studied from various perspectives, its sophisticated juxtaposition of space and mystical experience remains largely unexplored. In studying the spatial dynamics put forward by the *Life,* especially the abolition of spatial perspective in the ecstatic vision of the divine light, this paper will argue that accounts of such visionary experiences influenced, or at the very least encouraged, the depiction of space and spatial perspective in Byzantine iconography.

Andreas Rhoby

Speaking Icons: The Mediation of Inscriptions in Byzantine Sacred Space

The omnipresence of inscriptions in Byzantium has long been underestimated. There is, of course, a decline in the production of stone inscriptions after the sixth century; it has, however, been overlooked that after Late Antiquity inscriptions were less frequently displayed in public spaces, but rather in enclosed areas. Churches and monasteries are the kinds of places in which the epigraphic habit found its new domain. The walls of churches were equipped with painted inscriptions serving as captions and labels; this is attested very early: the frescoes of the Santa Maria Antiqua church at the Forum Romanum at Rome testifies to this practice. In addition, from the seventh century onwards, and especially after Iconoclasm, inscriptions were applied to various objects, primarily in the ecclesiastic and monastic milieu: painted inscriptions on portable icons, engraved or incised inscriptions on metalwork, ivory, glass, wood etc.

Byzantine inscriptions fulfill several tasks, but the main purpose is to convey a "message". This message can be manifold: the content can refer to a person who is "responsible" for the inscription, e.g. a patron in the case of a donor inscription. On the other hand, inscriptions can also convey a spiritual content, e.g. a text on the scroll of a saint depicted in a church. Either way, inscriptions interact with their beholders, regardless of whether a literate, semiliterate or illiterate audience is looking at them (James 2007; Rhoby 2012; Eastmond 2015). As can still be seen today, inscriptions in churches, both painted on the walls or preserved on icons and liturgical objects, are embedded in the (sacred) space of their surroundings.

Unfortunately, most of the Byzantine icons and objects are no longer displayed within their original context—the environment of St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai might serve as a rare exception—, which makes it rather difficult to reconstruct their primary impact within the church or monastery space. However,

some detailed analysis of the inscriptions preserved on these objects may help to gain a better understanding of the original setting.

A possible case is the famous Bulgarian icon of the Theotokos Eleusa with its bronze and silver cover, which also includes enamel plates. While the original icon is lost, the cover dates to the fourteenth century (a. 1341/42), namely to the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander (Beševliev 1964, no. 160; Grabar 1975, 26–28; Čimbuleva – Gjuzelev 2003, 28–29; Vanev 2013, 35–36). For a long time it was attached to the iconostasis of St Stephen's (new Metropolis) church in Nesebăr (Byzantine Mesembria) (Vanev 2013, 35). Although this church dates back to the middle Byzantine period, the icon's original site was the katholikon of the Theotokos Eleusa monastery, which is no longer preserved. However, remains of this complex, the so-called *Bazilikatanamorskij abrjag* in the north-eastern part of the city, have been found in the course of excavations since the early twentieth century (Soustal 1991, 358). The history of the Theotokos Eleusa monastery is mainly told by the inscriptions preserved on the icon cover. Today the icon is kept in the National Institute of Archaeology (and in its museum respectively) in Sofia (inv. no. 125).

Before commenting on the original impact of the icon's inscriptions in the sacred space of the church, their position on the icon and their content must be described. Two inscriptions, written in large and easily decipherable letters, are placed very prominently on both sides of the Theotokos' nimbus and next to and above Christ's nimbus respectively. The inscription to the right of the Theotokos (and to the left from the perspective of the beholder) refers to the donation of the icon cover during the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander (his son Michael Asanes is also mentioned), whereas the inscription to the left of the Theotokos (and to the right from the perspective of the beholder) states that the church of the Theotokos Eleusa was renewed under the uncle of the aforementioned Tsar. Both inscriptions are composed in the first person, the latter one from the perspective of the uncle,

the other perhaps from the artist responsible for the icon cover or from the uncle as well. The inscription written in tiny letters displayed in the right-hand corner of the icon cover is of very curious content: it is a detailed inventory list of the items belonging to the church ranging from decorated books to church clothes and liturgical objects. At the end—in a manner very similar to tomb inscriptions—those who might assault the church's property are cursed. This inscription, too, is composed in the first person, and the agent is most likely the uncle of the Tsar mentioned above. A fourth inscription is hardly legible, and one has to know that it is there in order to see and decipher it: it is preserved on no fewer than 17 tiny enamel plates which form the bottom end of the Theotokos' veil. Written in the third person, it states that the uncle of the Tsar commissioned the "hanging crown" (αωρητςστφανος) of the Theotokos. The inscription is not fully preserved but there is some evidence that the uncle's name is Samoel.

Further inscriptions on the icon cover are the labels of the Mother of God Eleusa, of Christ and of the two archangels Michael and Gabriel. In addition, inscriptions are also to be found on the small plates showing scenes from Mary's life on the right-hand border of the icon (Grabar 1975, 28). There is good reason to believe that originally both the right and the left border of the icon were fully covered with these small plates depicting scenes from the Mother of God's life. This practice is well attested elsewhere, such as on the fourteenth-century cover of an icon kept in the Batopaidi monastery of Mt Athos (Tsigaridas – Loberdou-Tsigarida 2006: 306–319).

Since the cover and its inscriptions are directly connected to the renovation of the church under the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander, who was a generous patron and sponsor (e.g. of the richly illustrated Bulgarian version of the verse chronicle of Constantine Manasses [cf. Boeck 2015]), it is safe to assume that the icon also formed the new "center" of worship in the church. As was the case in St Stephen's church, where it was later displayed, the icon certainly had a similar prominent

place either on the iconostasis or another central place in the church's sacred space. The icon and its cover must even have acted as a symbol of the new church as a whole: all important information regarding the church's state is given in the inscriptions on the icon cover. Attaching the inventory list to the icon is a further means of ensuring that the state of the church is preserved: it is reminiscent of the similar practice of painted inventory lists and charters on church walls likewise attested in fourteenth century churches in the Byzantine and Slavonic world.

How were the visitors, beholders and the Theotokos Eleusa's worshippers involved in the presence of the icon, which formed both the material and the spiritual center of the church? Some of the inscriptions on the cover are—as mentioned—easily decipherable: however, what was much more important than reading was being aware that the inscriptions were there. There is evidence that dedicatory inscriptions, tomb inscriptions and perhaps even inscriptions on the scrolls of saints were read aloud on certain occasions (e.g. on the commemoration day of the church's inauguration): this might also have been the case for the inscriptions on the Theotokos Eleusa's icon cover.

In addition, research has proven that Byzantine works of art, especially icons, attract different senses (Pentcheva 2010). Such an important icon as that of the Theotokos Eleusa most certainly had the capability to perform in various ways (Pentcheva 2006): one gazed at it, one read its inscriptions, one listened to the text of the inscription when they were read out aloud, and one could see the light coming from outside and being reflected on the silver-bronze cover.

In the case of the Theotokos Eleusa church—and this might be true for other churches as well—the sacred space focused on the icon. However, it also consisted of the various objects mentioned in the inventory list attached to the icon. The removal of the icon and the church objects would have destroyed this sacred space—the curse at the end of the list has to be understood in this sense as well.

When the icon—supposedly after the destruction of the Theotokos Eleusa monastery—was moved to a new church, the aforementioned St Stephen's church, it again certainly formed a place of worship, simply due to the fact that the icon was (and still is) an important piece of art for the tradition of Mesembria/Nesebăr. However, it definitely could not take full effect as it did in its original setting.

Annemarie Weyl Carr

Reference, Presence, Place: Seeing Toponymic Icons Hierotopically

A Paper in Memory of Gordana Babić

This paper responds to the years-long sustenance that Alexei Lidov's idea of hierotopy has given me, not so much in the phenomenology of ritual or display, but in keen attention to those occasions when I can encounter an object *in its own place*, in a sense *topically*, as it settles into a matrix of attention within its own setting. This paper is also offered as a tribute to Dr. Gordana Babić, whose work and memorably lively presence have been a steady source of ideas and insights for me over many decades. In recent years, I have returned again and again to her articles on the subject of toponyms in icons, following her determination to push beyond mere nomenclature to see how the very use of place names altered the icons' modes and degrees of signification. Few situations allow one to watch toponyms emerge and function, but a moment *in situ* this summer seemed to focus the question that her articles had asked: "what does a toponym *do* to an icon?"

The site in question was the village of Pyrgos on the far northwestern coast of Cyprus. I was there on a Kykkotissa pilgrimage, because the site is permeated with the legend of the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God at the monastery of Kykkos, high in the mountains behind Pyrgos. It is in the tranquil bay here that the imperial ship bearing the Kykkotissa from Constantinople is supposed to have arrived; the trees bent in veneration as the icon passed on its way to the monastery, and even the sea creatures followed it until Kykkos' saintly abbot, Isaias, told them to stop, for seashells still on the slopes today show how fragile they were on dry land. The frescoes in the village church acknowledge its embeddedness in Kykkos' legend, with depictions of the imperial ship's arrival, and the procession from it bearing both the icon and the monastery's chrysobull. I had reached the church just as the Sunday liturgy was ending, and watched the congregation gather with one accord to venerate the icon. Their veneration was sincere and moving. The

icon comes from a fierce little pilgrimage church nearby, known as the Galaktiste, where milk offerings to the Mother of God were thrown on the walls; it was discovered there embedded in an outer wall, restored at Kykkos, and then placed in its own throne in the village church, where it is known as the Galaktiste. It is a heart-meltingly beautiful icon, of the 14th century, and has the type of the icon of Kykkos. The Kykkotissa assumes visibility as a major icon in the 14th century; this is among the very early iterations of its type on Cyprus.

Notable to me here was the independence of the icon from the identity of the Kykkotissa despite both its identical type and Pyrgos' deep immersion in the Kykkotissa's legend. For far too long, I had believed that there was a degree of finality in the emergence of a toponym—that it established ownership of a type—and in lockstep with art historical habit, I had called all the examples of the Kykkotissa's type by its name. In fact, I was well aware that number of the big, early icons of the Kykkotissa's type had gone on to develop names and even cults of their own. They were not Kykkotissas: they had identities of their own. The Galaktiste was a visible example. The degree to which it had enjoyed special veneration already at the Galaktiste Church is not clear; it does not have a biography. But its identity is compelling. A comparable example is the Panagia Theoskepaste, in Kalopanagiotis. Among the largest of the 14th-century icons of the Kykkotissa's type, and often closely aligned stylistically with the Galaktiste, the Theoskepaste resided until 2004 in a tiny shrine, probably of the 18th century, fully hidden by a huge live oak tree a kilometer above the monastery of St. John Lampadistes. The shrine's site is densely woven into local legends, but the icon itself does not figure in them, and its earlier history is unknown. But its name is a very powerful one in Kalopanagiotis, invoked with deep reverence.   The Salamiotissa, in turn, now the title palladium of a new convent, was a long-venerated miracle-worker in the village of Salamiou according to ethnographers of the early 20th century. When these icons assumed their names is unknown. On the other hand, the very largest of the early icons of this type, a bilateral icon with the

Deposition on its reverse, had unquestionably assumed its own identity by the 16th-century, since a 16th-century repainting of its obverse includes the name Athanasiotissa.

All of these icons are or were on poles, and in fact fully half of the 17 pre-Ottoman instances of the Kykkotissa's type in Cyprus were on poles, thus designed to take a place in the life of the church and community which they served. This is plain in this l6th-century icon bearing the name, Kardiovastousa, of its church in the village of Kaminaria, and others of the panels, too, must in time have born the name of their place. Thus these icons—for all our propensity to call them Kykkotissa—were never designed to be Kykkotissas, but rather to work like the Kykkotissa: that is, to be prominent icons. While they do, for this purpose, adopt the image of a miracle-worker—and so are in this sense icons of a great icon—what a great icon is, is a great image. The icons that adopt the image don't invoke a concrete bond to the physical model; they adopt a great image, and that image settles into and gives energy to the material and place that it occupies. The fact that their model has a toponym does not disturb this process: the replicas don't take on its identity; they draw upon its image to lend particular power their own panels and their own places, as avenues to the Mother of God. A benign amnesia settles over the image's past as it assumes its new life, helping to explain why it has been so hard to trace favored image types back in time. Reference is not part of the replicas' brief; performance is.

Acquisition of a name, then, would seem to have little impact on the ensuing life of an image. If the name does not assert ownership of the image, however, it presumably must indicate ownership of the particular panel or place where the image has proved potent. It belongs to the panel. What, then, is one to make of the placement of the name on another panel? Is this, as Gordana Babić suggests, offering the image of a man-made thing for veneration? In fact, the replication of toponyms on panels is fairly rare. The toponyms have been most extensively

studied not on painted panels, but on small objects, especially seals and coins. The names must assume magic powers of association in these cases, linking the seal or its owner to a holy site, but they do not accompany images offered for veneration. The earliest instances of panels with toponyms that I know of offer contrasting ways of understanding the response. On the one hand, the exceptional and abraded condition of the Hodegetria—among all the named images on the famous Five-Virgins panel at Sinai—suggests that where the original panel was well-known, its named replica functioned not as a reference, across space to another place, but as a performance, making the original present in this place. The Hodegetria is the toponym most frequently found on panels by far; it is by far the panel most frequently represented in icons as an icon-of-an-icon for veneration; and the instance cited by Nicolas Oikonomides in the Peloponnesos of an icon named Hodegetria that was transmitted in a will as a source of income, suggests that the toponymic did make the replica a site at least of anticipated special powers. The toponymic in these cases seems to have functioned to manipulate sacred space, making the image identified as being in one place present in another.

A different pattern of response appears in the Hagiosoritissa icon at Makhairas monastery on Cyprus itself. It must belong to much the same date as the Sinai panel of the Five Virgins, and was labeled with one of the toponyms that appeared also on the Sinai panel. This icon, too, reveals in its altered condition that it assumed exceptional potency, but its alteration is of a different kind: it shed its original toponym, and assumed a new place name, the name of Makhairas itself. Apparently, the panel had assumed heightened energy in this place, becoming the name icon of Makhairas. This suggests that when an icon begins to make its own miracles, it doesn't do so under the name of another place, manipulating space by making somewhere else present; it assumes as its own the name of the place where it is.

We don't know when the Kykkotissa acquired its name. Neither the *Chronicle* of Leontios Makhairas from the 1430s nor the core of its *Diegesis,* supposedly

dictated before 1422, uses the name, and one has to wait till after the Ottoman conquest to encounter it in a text.   Of its 17 surviving pre-Ottoman replicas, however, four do carry the label, *E Kykkiotissa.*   As Babić had said of toponyms, the examples are all within the region of Kykkos' authority, where the name was meaningful. Three of the four named examples were produced in the years around 1500, and a good half-century or so after the first extensive cluster of replicas attributable to the middle of the 14th century, and in this sense seem to reflect a "second phase" of replication, after the icon's cult had settled into tradition, or perhaps in response to a new wave of miraculous events.   These are less slavish in their repetition of the image—the Pedoulas icon allows the red and gold veil to become blue; the fresco at Letymbou shows the Kykkotissa as a standing figure, accompanied by two full-length female saints; and the Moutoullas icon elides a number of details.   This looseness suggests an easier familiarity with the type.

The fourth example is more problematic.   You see it here before and after restoration.   Its iconography, pastiglia patterns, and even Morellian details of the figures are those of a mid-14th-century panel of the Kykkotissa's type.   Its style, however, even after recent radical restoration, remains at odds with this date, making its attribution difficult.   I think it is significantly earlier than the other three labeled icons, though, and so is very probably the first known instance of the name. Thus it does stand out among them.   It is, moreover, the only one of the four for which we have any sense of a biography.   It was first brought to light in 1992 by Sophocles Sophocleous, who managed to get it removed—reluctantly, given its reputation for special sacredness—from metal and fabric covers that had hidden it in the iconostasis of its church.   The icon at Kykkos is a hidden icon, and the occlusion of this icon could imply an effort to make its place into a Kykkos.   But occlusion is not unique to the Kykkotissa on Cyprus, and if anything, the situation suggests the opposite.   At the end of the Frankish period, the icon was clearly a Kykkotissa.   When it re-emerged in the 1990s, it brought with it a reputation of special sacredness, but also a different identity: it is the Panagiatou Kivotos, the

Panagia of the Ark. As its own powers matured, it assumed its own name. As with the icon of Makhairas, the name of the old miracle-worker was displaced when it assumed its own power. They suggest that one really doesn't ask one icon to do the miracles of another; they do their own.

But if one doesn't ask one icon does not do another's miracles, then what to the icons with another's toponym do? That they are tools in the manipulation of institutional power is true, but not sufficient: rather few of the many icons labeled Hodegetria can be declarations of the hegemony of the Hodegon, or in any specific way a declaration of allegiance to Constantinople. By the same token, few are known as miracle-workers in their own right, though many—like the one cited by Oikonomides—were expected to be effective intercessors. I don't know of instances of their performing miracles of the Hodegetria, nor do I know of instances in which toponymic icons literally are set into contexts that repeat the features of their home place. Instead, a degree of reference, of pointing across distance, remains. Rather than collapsing space, making one place another, they must have made a relay. Like an icon-within-an-icon, the toponymic icon invites veneration of its subject through the referenced icon. Such "veneration through" is layered, in that it affirms the process of veneration through an image as well as performing it. In the painted icons-in-an-icon, one venerates Mary through her painted icon; in the toponymic icons, one venerates Mary through her miracles performed at the named site. It is not so much that a man-made object is offered for veneration, as that a relay is acknowledged.   I have in the past spoken of named icons as self-referential, in that they announced their identities, as if self-aware.   A similar self-awareness characterizes their veneration, in that the worshipper affirms the process of veneration through an icon, and in doing so, makes an affirmation of his or her faith.

In the Ottoman period, Kykkos would build a veritable empire on the basis of its miracle-working icon, harnessing for this purpose the faith that through the icons

of its icon the devotee could gain access to the miracles of Mary herself in the icon at Kykkos. Affirmation of faith both in icons and through icons was woven into the texts that supported this effort. Ephraim the Athenian proclaimed in his publication of the Kykkotissa's story that the veneration of icons was a worthy act, affirming our faith and leading to miracles. Serapheim of Pissidia, in reissuing of the story, was even more direct: venerating icons affirms miracles, and so is the very basis of our faith. The carefully tailored circuit from faith through icons to miracles, and from the miracles back through the icons to faith, was an Ottoman one shaped to the needs of the era. Yet the very earliest narration of the story had already emphasized the importance of icons as an affirmation of Orthodox faith:

> You see, my brothers, how through images and the senses and vision everything happens for our salvation? In order that we would not be orphaned when they had left us and gone to Heaven, the Virgin and the apostles…made available the holy icons to us pious ones for the joy of our souls…so we could see the great and innumerable miracles and good works of the holy icons and be confirmed each day in the Orthodox faith.

And a version of the relay, through her icons to Mary, must also have been present already in the slowly broadening use of toponymic panels.

Maria Lidova

The Adoration of the Magi: from Iconic Space to Icon in Space

It has often been postulated by scholars that the central Byzantine Marian iconography, representing the Virgin seated on the throne with Child Christ on her lap flanked by attendants, derives from the visual rendering of her figure in the compositions of the Adoration of the Magi. The principal consideration in favor of this hypothesis is usually connected to the question of iconographic similarity between the seated pose of Mary and Jesus and the general solemnity of their figures – very much in line with imperial imagery and representations of ceremonial receptions. However, purely iconographic investigations have not been able to fully substantiate this idea or demonstrate the gradual evolution of this visual formula. Moreover, no convincing attempt has been made to explain the transition of the Mary with Child image from its original appearance in narrative compositions to its later place as the primary iconic image of Christian worship. As will be demonstrated in this paper, the only way to solve this problem is to apply the method of hierotopy, which privileges the spatial dimensions of Byzantine art production and its attempt to transmit the power of the divine over apparent schematic similarities.

The Adoration of the Magi is among the most popular themes in Early Christian art. It was reproduced in almost all media with a great number of late antique artworks serving as examples. The surviving material indicates that the arrival of the Eastern wise men and their encounter with the newborn King was represented more often than the Nativity feast with which it was usually associated. The only canonical Gospel that mentions the event is that of Matthew (Mt. 2: 1-14). Hence, it is not surprising that from the start visual renderings of the Adoration relied heavily on the Apocrypha for further details on the context of the incarnation, such as the cave space, the active participation of the angels, the presence of midwives and so forth.

When a late antique viewer looked at a composition of the Adoration, his memory would evoke the story narrated by the sacred texts, while his internal gaze would be directed to Palestine and to Bethlehem as the site of these events. The church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was one of the earliest foundations in the Holy Land, second in importance only to the church of the Anastasis. The Nativity basilica was closely associated with the Virgin's role in salvation, and became a model for subsequent ecclesiastical buildings. Built in the fourth century on the initiative of either Constantine or his mother Helen, the church was situated right above the cave believed to be the location of the Nativity. The actual natural site was transformed into a specific Christian shrine on two levels with the man-made structures built on top of the sacred space thought to have been sanctified by God's incarnation. Interestingly, the Apocrypha, in particular the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of Christ, when narrating the events in Bethlehem, already compared the cave of the Nativity to the temple: "Then came shepherds; and when they had lighted a fire, and were rejoicing greatly, there appeared to them the hosts of heaven praising and celebrating God Most High. And while the shepherds were doing the same, the cave was at that time made like a temple of the upper world, since both heavenly and earthly voices glorified and magnified God on account of the birth of the Lord Christ". For a new religion in search of an identity and objects of devotion, the claiming of sites such as the Nativity cave was of crucial importance. As with other early sites of pilgrimage, the sacred space of the cave enclosed within the church became the focus of veneration, inviting travelers from abroad to reconnect to the sacred events through the physical experience of a mystery made accessible and contextualized by the church's architectural frame.

The Letter of the Three Patriarchs (9th c.) mentions the existence of a mosaic image set at the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem: "Moreover, Helen of blessed memory, the Godly-minded empress in the process of discovering the life-giving Cross, embellished and decorated with sacred icons the holy and revered places, among which was the holy and famous Bethlehem. There she built a very great

church in honour of the Mother of God and on the outer wall on the west side she depicted an artistic mosaics the holy birth of Christ, the Mother of God holding the life-bringing infant at her breast and the adoration of the gift-bearing Magi" (Munitiz et al. 1997, p. 42) The passage is followed by the famous remark that during the conquest (612-629) the Persians did not destroy the church since they recognized in the magi the representation of their countrymen.

Various hypotheses have been made as to the dating and location of the mosaic, as well as to the validity of the source and its relevance for the discussion of early material. The creation of images on façades was not unusual in the Early Byzantine period and evidence survives for similar practices in Rome, Poreč and others cities. Neither the phenomenology of external visual introductions to the sacred spaces of given churches, nor the question of the religious use of the façade compositions have yet received proper scholarly attention. We can assume, nevertheless, that a similar image on the entrance wall of the church would have had a strong effect on viewers, and in the case of a Bethlehem basilica, on many pilgrims.

Over time the images decorating the Bethlehem church, either on the west wall or in the apse, could have easily become associated with the site itself. If that is the case, then the sacred space enclosed within the building would have found expression in an artistic image with rather different dimensionality, capable of suggesting on the outside the sacred content hidden inside the church's walls. This quintessential visual formula, as mentioned in the Letter of the Patriarchs, could show the Nativity, the Virgin and Child and the Adoration, and could have become a sort of embodiment of the site built to commemorate these events in historical and liturgical terms. In this manner, the 'body' of a concrete space could be assimilated with the more abstract 'body' of God given lasting corporeality in an image. Unlike the building, however, this visual expression of the site was portable, and could be taken to distant locations as a memento of the believer's

long journey and successful pilgrimage, as well as a reminder of the spiritual prototype.

Russian art historian Dmitry Ainalov was the first to suggest a link between the representation on the Adoration on the Monza ampulla and the late antique murals that once decorated the Bethlehem basilica. The container for sacred liquid represents Mary seated frontally on a throne together with Christ child, on one side adored by three shepherds and on the other by the Magi. Two archangels appeared behind the back of the throne and there is a large star above Mary's head. According to Ainalov's interpretations, the composition in the Bethlehem became known through pilgrims' tokens and small-scale images that travelled all over the Christian world. Due to the lack of other sources and any material evidence, Ainalov's suggestion has remained only an attractive hypothesis. In spite of this, the impact and overall significance of the artistic legacy of the Holy Land and its sites on subsequent artistic tradition should not be omitted from research solely on the grounds that little, if anything, has survived. Recent studies demonstrate the crucial role that Jerusalem and the Holy Land played in the formation of the earliest cult practices in the capital cities of the Eastern and Western parts of the Empire. In these studies, the legendary and historical allusions made to the earliest icons and relics brought to Constantinople from Palestine finally receive further substantiation and are taken as reflections of the real transmission of patterns, liturgies, feasts and artworks, and thus no longer as mere mythical references intended to grant authority to the mentioned artifacts.

Since they were originally celebrated on the same day, the Adoration and the Nativity regularly appear together in art, but the Adoration often acquires a somewhat more privileged position. Exemplary in this respect are two ivories from the British collections, bearing almost identical iconographies. One of them is kept in the collection of the British Museum (inv. 1904,0702.1) and represents an image consisting of two registers. In the upper part the Virgin is portrayed seated

frontally on the throne holding Christ Child on her knees. At the sides of the throne four figures are shown standing symmetrically: the three Magi and an angel holding a cross on a long staff. The solemnity of the scene is underlined by the architectural frame composed of an arch, forming a sort of ciborium, and two spiral columns on top of which two crosses were originally carved. The lower zone of the plaque is occupied by a narrative composition of the Nativity rendered on a much smaller scale, depicting, on the left, Mary, at rest after the birth on a large and irregularly shaped mattress; on the right, baby Jesus in a masonry crib, in front of which the figure of the midwife Salome is seen prostrating her withered hand.

The ivory from Rylands library in Manchester (inv. 6), which once formed the central piece of a five-part ivory Gospel cover, reproduces the general scheme of the British Museum plaque almost identically. The differences in style, original function and carving techniques, however, indicate that the contexts and locations of production of these two ivories were not the same. Noteworthy is the position of Mary's arms on both ivories. They are oriented downwards and create a mandorla-shaped space around Christ. This feature differentiates the ivory images from the iconography customary in Early Byzantine art, where Mary is usually portrayed with her hands positioned differently, with one arm bent so that her hand can rest on Christ's shoulder. There is a series of early representations of Mary in which the symmetrical, embracing gesture of her arms is reproduced, with the Panagia Kanakaria apse mosaic providing important evidence for monumental decorations (6th c.). Whether or not this specific rendering derives from a particular prototype and whether this prototype should be identified with the image that once decorated the Bethlehem church are topics for future investigation.

The scene of the Adoration dominates the composition of the ivories and refers to the historical event itself. The setting and general rendering of the scene, however, indicate that beyond its narrative function, the Adoration scene in this case was designed to inspire devout contemplation in the Christian viewer. The ivories do

not only represent the image of the Christian deity in the form of Mary with Child seated on the throne – the iconography that would be so central to the Byzantine artistic tradition – but also record the transformation of the narrative scene into a cult image.

The various steps in the passage from narrative compositions to iconic representations, and consequently to the principle image of the Byzantine church that crowns the altar space inside the apse, can be detected in a number of Early Byzantine artworks. One of them is an eighth century decoration of Deir el-Surian monastery in Egypt, in which a side apse represents the Adoration scene. The decoration illustrates how similar narrative compositions could be adapted to the semi-spherical shape of the conch. This mural is distinguished by the placement of the Mother and Child in the very center, where Mary is depicted flanked by two groups of attending worshippers, the Magi on the left and shepherds on the right. The position of her arms is the same as on the two ivories discussed above, confirming once again that this element should be taken as an indicator of a particular type of representation. This iconography follows almost precisely the image on the Palestinian ampulla from Monza. As with the British Museum ivory, here the narrative component is secondary to the visual impact of the representation, since the viewer is led to focus on the figure of the Virgin, and is even able to make eye contact with the frontal gaze of Mary.

Another example is the famous golden encolpion from the Dumbarton Oaks collection, its circular surface divided in two parts. In the lower zone, the elements of the Nativity scene with a seated Joseph and Jesus in cradle merge almost seamlessly with the Adoration composition. Several figures shown within this narrative direct their gazes and gestures upwards. Although the attention of these figures is justified contextually by the presence of a star in the sky or image of Christ above, the direction of their gazes also creates an impression that they point to an emphatic representation on the top with the Virgin Mary and Christ seated on

the throne and turned frontally toward the viewers, flanked by archangels. Through the sequence of these moments in the story of Incarnation, the subject becomes a more comprehensive image of eternal power and glory, with the illustrations of the Gospel story dedicated to a single event evolving into an icon that could be worshipped in the hands of object's owner. The token's key image would in turn make its way to the central position of the apse of the great majority of Byzantine churches, where the viewer could become, in a manner of speaking, one the Magi coming to worship God and bearing gifts of devotion.

This association between the members of the Christian church and the Magi was often implied in the writings of early church fathers. In fact, the Adoration scene apparently functioned in Early Christian art as a vehicle for transmitting the idea of appropriate worship, propagating in visual terms reverential conduct before the image of God and his Mother. The latter aspect is closely related to the importance and profound religious significance of gift giving, which still forms a significant part of Christian life in a church, in which gifts take the form of candles lit before the images of saints, and votives, both considered small but meaningful offerings. The most vivid attestation to the fact that this parallelism was intentional in the Early Byzantine period is found on the ornament of Theodora's dress in the mosaics of San Vitale in Ravenna. The emperor and empress are portrayed facing each other across the space of the sanctuary holding gifts in their hands, in the hope of worshiping the Lord in imitation of the three Magi whose silhouettes are visible on the lower edge of Theodora's cloak.

The appearance of these references within the space of the sanctuary is also not occasional. Beginning with the interpretations of John Chrysostom, the altar space of Christian churches was regularly compared to the cave of the Nativity and more direct references to Bethlehem were drawn in connection with the sanctuary and the Eucharist. This tradition continued in later centuries and received its richest formulation in the writing of the Patriarch Germanos (715-730): "the church is an

earthly heaven in which the super-celestial God dwells and walks about. It represents the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ…The apse corresponds to the cave in Bethlehem where Christ was born, as well as the cave in which he was buried...” These liturgical interpretations of the space indicate that such associations became common understanding within the complex sacred topography of Christian shrines. The mystical experience of the altar space as a cave of the Nativity with its concrete prototype physically present in the Holy Land created the necessary premises for the placement of the image of the Mary and Christ inside the conch. Via this visual connector, which attracted the attention of all the worshippers, the reality of iconic space was made present in real time for the congregation and vice versa, the visual icon became the quintessence of an absolute model of a sacred space, revealing the true nature of the Byzantine image making.