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Leo the Wise and the Miraculous Icons in Hagia Sophia

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Miracle-working icons could be regarded among the heroes of the Orthodox church. As we may learn from Byzantine miracle-stories, these icons were perceived as living beings, they could move, speak and even fight with pagans, unbelievers or sinners. The defence of the Orthodox faith was one of their major functions. It is hard to overestimate the meaning of miraculous images in Byzantine Empire. There are political, social, economical, psychological, liturgical, iconographical as well as purely artistic aspects of this general topic. We are just starting to study this phenomenon of great significance, which has been long neglected¹.

Among the most important issues is the role of miraculous images in sacred spaces of Byzantine churches. The written sources inform us that nearly every church had its own system of relics and miracle-working icons creating a kind of sacred network inside a particular church. Yet nothing survived in its original form. In some cases, however, we are able to reconstruct the concept of sacred space. In this paper I shall try to present such a reconstruction of a very important project realized by Leo

¹ A recent general discussion of the historical and cultural aspects of the topic, see: A. Lidov, *Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God, Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*. Ed. M. Vassilaki. Athens 2000, 47-57. The only book especially focused on the subject is a collection based on the materials of a symposium organized by the Centre for Eastern Christian Culture in Moscow 1994: A.Lidov, ed. *Chudotvornaya ikona v Vizantii i Drevnei Rusi (The Miracle-Working Icon in Byzantium and Old Rus')*. Moskva 1996. Among main publications examining the problematic of Byzantine miraculous icons, see: E.Kitzinger. *The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm*, *DOP*, 8 (1954), 83-150; R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold. Byzantine Society and its Icons*, London 1985; H. Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich 1990 (in English trans., *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, London-Chicago 1994); N. Patterson-Sevcenko, *Icons in the Liturgy*, *DOP* 45 (1991), 45-57; A.Weyl Carr. *Court Culture and Cult Icons in Middle Byzantine Constantinople*, in H.Maguire, ed. *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*. Washington 1997, 81-99. Analyzed in various aspects, the numerous testimonies to miraculous icons were reflected in the communications of the symposium, "Holy Image" held by the Dumbarton Oaks Center in 1990, and partly published in: *DOP* 45 (1991). The Early Medieval Roman miraculous icons are thoroughly studied in the fundamental monograph: G. Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani. Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter*, Weinheim 1990

VI the Wise (886-912) in the Great Church of Byzantine empire². I will argue that this project is of great significance not merely for the history of Byzantine iconography, but for a new research field just established – I mean Hierotopy, or studies in the making of sacred space³.

Main sources

The symbolic program of Leo the Wise has appeared at the Imperial Door of St. Sophia at Constantinople - central in the row of doors leading from the narthex to the nave of the church⁴ (figs. 1-2). One need not to say how important was the symbolic concept of this main entrance to the ‘Great Church’ of the Byzantine Empire. Nothing came down to our day of the original decor but the moulded brass frame of a doorway leading from the narthex to the nave, with a small relief portraying the *Hetoimasia* in the centre of the top plate (figs.2-4). Then, there is the renowned mosaic in the tympanum above the entrance, representing Christ enthroned, with Emperor Leo the Wise prostrate at His feet⁵ (figs.5-8). In the Byzantine time, however, there were two miracle-working icons to the sides of the Imperial Door – the icons of Christ and of the Virgin – we find repeated references to these in medieval descriptions of the Constantinopolitan shrines⁶.

There are several testimonies of the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. Invaluable information is found in a recently published text of the late eleventh century Latin description of Constantinopolitan shrines, known as the Anonymous Tarragonensis⁷. It informs us about an icon of the Virgin from Jerusalem which was displayed at the entrance to Hagia Sophia: “*In the same glorious basilica Sancta Sophia at the entrance doors, covered at the surface in gold and silver, there is another icon*

² This article is a considerably developed and modified version of the paper published in Russian some years ago: A. Lidov, Chudotvornye ikony v khramovoi dekoratsii. O simvolicheskoi programme imperatorskogo vkhoda Sophii Konstantinopolskoi, A.Lidov, ed. *Chudotvornaya ikona*, 44-75. I am very grateful to Robin Cormack, Slobodan Ćurčić, Judith Herrin, Nicoletta Isar, George Majeska and Cyril Mango for discussing with me various issues concerning this paper. Their suggestions helped me a lot to prepare a new English paper.

³ The concept of Hierotopy has been presented for the first time in my public lecture “The Byzantine Hierotopy. Miraculous Icons in Sacred Space” in the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome, January 2002.

⁴ The best visual documentation, see: C. Mango, A. Ertug, *Hagia Sophia. A Vision of Empire*, Istanbul 1997, 11, 15-19

⁵ We do not intend to discuss here which emperor is depicted. One may accept the opinion of the most scholars who agreed that this is Leo the Wise. It seems important that this identification is supported by some medieval testimonies that will be quoted later. On the identification, see: N. Oikonomides, Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia, *DOP* 30 (1976), 158-161

⁶ The basic historical testimony was presented in: G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Washington 1984, 206-209

⁷ The manuscript Tarragonensis 55 from the end of the 12th century in the Bibliotheca Publica de Tarragone: K. Ciggaar, Une Description de Constantinople dans le Tarragonensis 55, *REB* 53 (1995), pp.117-140

(ycona) of the blessed Virgin, that Mary the Egyptian has seen in the church of Jerusalem, when she could not enter in because of the sins she has committed. When, as we have written above, Maria the sinner has seen it and prayed at it, at that very moment she has received everything she has asked for. Finally, when the sinner stood in front of the same holy and venerable image of the Virgin to thank for the benefit she has obtained, and also to ask where she can find a place for repentance, dignified for her sins, the holy icon has thus responded: “If you cross the Jordan, you shall find there a fine place of repose”. That holy icon or image of the Virgin that has thus spoken to the wretched sinner, you can see at the entrance in Sancta Sophia. You can even see that sinner, represented by paints before the same image [of the Virgin]. It is such a pious matter to contemplate how the Virgin is carrying at her breast her noble Son and how the sinful woman, black as her sins, bends her knees and stretches out her trembling arms supplicating with tears the Virgin to be merciful to her. The work is worthy of admiration”⁸.

Another very important Latin testimony occurs in the so-called Mercati Anonymous - a free translation of a Greek description of the Constantinopolitan shrines made no later than the last quarter of the 11th century⁹. In his reference to St. Sophia, the Byzantine author lays special stress on the icon of the Virgin at the main entrance to the church: “In the right part of the church, behind the atrium, at the silver gates, there is an image of Mary on the wall, formerly preserved in Jerusalem; the one to which St. Mary of Egypt prayed in her time, when she heard a voice coming from the lips of the Holy Mother of God. **This holy image was brought to St. Sophia from the holy city by Emperor Leo**”¹⁰.

Next in time, come the accounts of Russian pilgrims from the end of the 14th century and beginning of the 15th. Says Ignatius of Smolensk (1389): “The next day we went to [the Church of] St. Sophia, that is [to say to the Church] of the Divine Wisdom. When we came to the great doors, we venerated the miraculous icon of the All-pure Mother of God from which the voice went out to [St.] Mary of Egypt forbidding her entrance into the Holy Church in Jerusalem. [And after she had comprehended her transgressions, she was greatly moved and made the All-pure Mother of God the guarantor of her [resolves]. As soon as she had spoken these words, she suddenly heard a voice from afar, saying: 'If you cross the Jordan you will find a propitious refuge.'] We also venerated the image of the Lord inside the holy church and the [other] venerable holy icons”¹¹.

And Alexander the Clerk (1394/95): “As you enter the great doors, on the right-hand side stands the icon of the holy Mother of God from which, in Jerusalem, a

⁸ Ibid., 125

⁹ K. Ciggaar, Une Description de Constantinople traduite par un pèlerin anglais, *REB* 34 (1976), 211-267.

¹⁰ Ibid., 249

¹¹ G. Majeska. Russian Travelers..., 92-93. In parenthesis is the text added in the Nikon Chronicle.

voice came forth to Mary of Egypt. The great doors [are made] from Noah's ark. On the left side the Savior is depicted in marble”¹².

Deacon Zosima (1419-1422): “First I venerated the holy Great Church of Sophia where the patriarch lives. I kissed the image of our Lord Jesus Christ before which people confess their sins when they cannot confess them before a father confessor because of shame; it is called the 'Confessor Saviour'. [I also kissed] the image of the All- pure [Mother of God], which spoke to Mary of Egypt in Jerusalem”¹³.

Apart from the Russian pilgrims', an account of great interest is extant in the text by Symeon of Thessalonica (a. 1400) which describes the solemn entrance of the patriarch to the church on Sundays and feasts: “The patriarch comes downstairs [from the south gallery. - A.L.] to enter the narthex. When he reaches the beautiful [imperial] doors, he venerates the holy image of the Mother of God here, near which is an icon of St. Mary. The saint is said to have taken her monastic vows before this very image of the Mother of God”¹⁴.

Regrettably, the historical testimony does not contain any precise information about the character and techniques of the images of Christ and of the Virgin left and right of the Imperial Door. Most probably, they were fairly large, and made on boards or special panels - as testified by traces of mounts found at a height of approximately two meters in the marble facing the east narthex wall to the sides of the Imperial Door¹⁵. This is the only material confirmation of the presence of two miraculous images, which the Russian pilgrims venerated by kissing before they entered the Great Church.

The Icon of the Saviour Confessor

Of the icon of Christ, we learn that it was known as the ‘Saviour Confessor’ (*Spas Ispovednik*), and heinous sinners ashamed to confess to their father confessor made penitence before it. Alexander the Clerk's words, “*preobrazilsja Spas na mramore (the Savior is depicted [better, is transfigured – A.L.] in marble)*”, no doubt, refer to an essential characteristic of the icon. We do not know to this day, however, whether this reference related to the artistic technique (stone relief, painting on

¹² Ibid., 160-161

¹³ Ibid., 182-183

¹⁴ J. Darrouzès, Sainte-Sophie de Thessalonique d'après un rituel, *REB* 34 (1976), 46-47. The entrance took place at the beginning of the vespers on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Immediately after venerating the icon of the Mother of God, the patriarch entered the church and, turning to the west wall, “*thrice venerated the holy image of the Savior above the beautiful gates*”. Symeon of Thessalonica refers to an image of St. Mary of Egypt near the icon of the Mother of God. The situation of this image is not quite clear with the narrow wall space between the main entrance and the right-hand door leaves no space for another icon. The ‘image of St. Mary’ might have been compositional part of the icon of the Virgin, as Anonymous Tarragonensis informs us, see notes 5-6

¹⁵ This observation belongs to Robert Van Nice. See: G. Majeska. *Russian Travelers ...*, 208

marble, or mosaic), a peculiar iconography or to a miracle story that has not come down to us.

Two other Russian pilgrim accounts may also pertain to this icon. Before coming to the nave, Stephen of Novgorod (1349) noticed: “*A truly magnificent icon of the holy Savior stands there. It is called the 'Mount of Olives' because there is a similar one in Jerusalem*”¹⁶. Here, the pilgrim relates the icon to one of the sacred articles in the churches of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

Anthony of Novgorod, who visited the Great Church in 1200, speaks of a large mosaic image of Christ near the doors of St. Sophia, with one right-hand finger unpainted and encased in gilded silver. This finger occurs in a legend of the punishment of a presumptuous painter who aspired to depict the Lord exactly the way He looked in His earthly life: “*And, in his presumption, he made a large image of the Saviour in mosaic on the wall [var.: Also here at the doors he portrayed a great Saviour in mosaic on the wall]; a finger is missing on the right hand of the image, for, as he was finishing his labour, the artist said contemplating it: 'O Lord, I have portrayed You as You appeared when You lived on earth.' And a voice did come from the image: 'Have you ever seen me?' Then, the artist lost speech and died. The finger was never added to the image but forged out of silver and gilded*”¹⁷.

It is noteworthy, that Anthony's account of this mosaic icon is immediately followed by a mention of the portrayal of Emperor Leo the Wise on the monumental icon: “*To the sides of the doors [var.: To the sides of the gates of paradise, above] stands a great icon depicting Kyr Leo ho Sophos (Leo the Wise) with a gem in his brow, which sparkles as fire [as the moon] in the dark to spread its light all over St. Sophia [interpolated: We asked why he was painted here; why this honour was done him that befit a saint; to this the clergy told us that...] this king, Kyr Leo, took a scroll [in Babylon] in the tomb of holy prophet Daniel and copied it learnedly [interpolated: and kept it with him; many years after his death, some people brought it to Constantinople, where philosophers translated it into Greek; it enlisted the names of Greek kings] telling who would reign in Constantinople (Tsargrad) as long as it*

¹⁶ Ibid., 30-31, 209, 225. Stephen of Novgorod says that he walked “*between the walls, holding a candle*”, to approach the icon. In the actual architectural context of St. Sophia, this description corresponds the closest to the narthex. By “*circumventing the place*”, a pilgrim could emerge from the south aisle into the narthex to get back to the nave through the central doors.

¹⁷ See: Kniga Palomnik. Skazaniya mest svyatykh vo Tsaregrade Antonia archiepiskopa Novgorodskogo v 1200 godu. Ed. Chr.Loparev, *Pravoslavny Palestinsky Sbornik* 51 (1899), 7, 53. One redaction of the Pilgrim Book adds these words of Christ to the icon-painter: “*Though you may be boasting, it was not you who depicted me, but I wanted it this way. Likewise did King Abgar send an artist like you to paint me, but he could not have done so if I had not favoured to have my God-man image portrayed for believers in me to worship. Why are you vainly deluding your mind if you have never seen me? When I wanted my all-pure image preserved from oblivion by King Abgar, for the sake of his heartfelt faith, he had not seen me but believed. So you will not paint me from this day on*”

*stands*¹⁸. Most probably, Anthony of Novgorod refers to the mosaic icon above the entrance representing the emperor bowing to Christ enthroned. It is hard to expect that another portrayal of Leo the Wise was preserved for almost three centuries after his death at about the same place. So, according to the Anthony's account the mosaic icon of Christ with 'the silver finger' and the image of Leo the Wise were represented close to each other nearby an entrance into the church.

However, the accounts of the two Novgorodian pilgrims are not concrete enough in the localisation of the image of Christ, and bear no cross references to each other or any other information about the icon of the Saviour Confessor¹⁹.

The Icon of the Virgin who spoke to St. Mary of Egypt

We know much more about the icon of the Mother of God that spoke to St. Mary of Egypt. One of the most renowned relics of Christendom, its status was characteristically higher than that of the Saviour Confessor. According to Symeon of Thessalonica, it was this icon that the patriarch venerated at the start of festive liturgies²⁰.

The tradition of the icon goes back to a well-known episode in the Life of St. Mary of Egypt, ascribed to Sophronius of Jerusalem (+ 644)²¹. According to this

¹⁸ See: Kniga Palomnik..., 7-8, 53-54. Byzantine ideas of Leo the Wise as prophet are analyzed by Cyril Mango: C. Mango. The Legend of Leo the Wise, *ZRVI* 6 (1960), 59-93, esp.71-72

¹⁹ In George Majeska's opinion, the reference of Anthony of Novgorod to the icon of the Savior "with the finger" could have pertained to the mosaic icon of the Chalke Christ (full-length, with the Gospel) above the main entrance, but on the west wall inside the church - not in the narthex. Stephen of Novgorod mentions this icon - a copy of the renowned image of Chalke above the entrance to the imperial palace. See: G. Majeska, The Image of the Chalke Savior in Saint Sophia, *Bsl* 32 (1971), 284-295; G. Majeska. Russian Travelers..., 28-29, 209-212.

As I see it, however, another reference by Anthony of Novgorod could concern the Chalke image of Christ at St. Sophia: "At the side doors in the narthex, a great Christ is depicted on the wall in mosaic, standing. A priest lit a censer in his front [all days and nights long] and incensed before him. Once a voice came from the image to the priest: 'Is pola eti despota!' Three days later, this priest was appointed Patriarch" (Kniga Palomnik..., 54). The iconographic type of the standing Christ speaks in favor of its identification with the Chalke image. Then, there is a connection with the rite of the patriarchal entrance to the Great Church, when the patriarch turned for exceptional veneration of the icon of the Savior above the entrance (J. Darrouzès, *Op. cit.*, 46-47). Immediately after he entered the nave, the bishops on the patriarch's retinue chanted, 'Is pola eti despota!' - the word which the Christ of the mosaic icon addressed to the pious priest, prophesying his coming patriarchate. The rather obscure words "at the side doors to the narthex (*prtvor*)," however, make this assumption hypothetical.

²⁰ J. Darrouzès, *Op. cit.*, 46-47

²¹ *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (BHG, 1042). Ed. F. Halkin, t. II. Brussels, 1957, p. 80-82. The 7th century redaction of the Vita, published by J.-P. Migne: *Sophronii Hierosolymitani. Vita Mariae Aegyptiae*, in PG, t. 87, pars 3, col. 3697-3725, 3713). An English translation see: Life of St. Mary of Egypt (trans. by M.Kouli), in A.M. Talbot, ed. *The Holy Women of Byzantium. Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, Washington 1996, 65-94, esp.82-85. A study of this Vita, taken shape of the oral stories spread among the Palestinian monks of the 6th century: K. Kunze, *Die*

story, Mary, a courtesan of Alexandria, came to Jerusalem, and early in the morning of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross she decided to visit the Basilica of Constantine the Great (Martyrium) in the complex of the Holy Sepulchre. Yet the sinful woman was four times stopped at the entrance by a heavenly power lest she see the relic of the True Cross displayed in this day. Shedding tears of repentance, she appealed then to the image of the Mother of God above her in the porch for Her intercession before Christ, who “*incarnated to call sinners to repent*”²². Mary was forgiven and entered the church to see the precious relic. As she was leaving the church, she again called to the icon, imploring the Virgin “*to be her guide on the way of repentance and salvation*”²³. Then she heard a voice that sent her to hermitage in the wilderness of Jordan.

Tremendously popular throughout Christendom, this story graphically showed the power of heartfelt repentance, which turned a great sinner into a venerable saint. The icon of the Virgin was venerated as a great relic, which was mentioned, probably, for the first time by Piacenza Pilgrim in the 6th century (“*a portrait of Blessed Mary on raised place*”)²⁴. The polemics in the period of Iconoclasm made it one of the crucial arguments of icon-worshippers. St. John of Damascus cites the episode in all three of his Apologies²⁵. This part of the Life is amply quoted in the Acts of the Seventh Oecumenical Council (787). “*We saw this icon in the holy city of Christ our Lord, and often kissed it*”, said one of its participants²⁶. In the first half of the 9th century Epiphanius, a Byzantine pilgrim, informs us: “*On the left side of the Saint Constantine is the icon of the very holy Theotokos, who forbade Saint Mary to enter the church on the day of Exaltation. There also she made her promise*”²⁷. The place was razed to the ground in 1009 during the great destruction of the Holy Sepulchre complex by caliph Al-Hakim. In the early 12th century, Daniel the Abbot of Russia saw only the “*great doors*” of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, and noted the place where the venerated icon of the Mother of God had been: “*There is now a small church on the spot where a very large church used to be. There are great gates here, facing east. St. Mary of Egypt came to these doors, and was about to enter, and to kiss the shrine. But the power of the Holy Spirit barred her the way to the church. Then she prayed to the holy Mother of God, for there was Her icon standing in the porch*

Legenda der hl. Maria Aegyptica, Berlin 1978; *The Legend of Mary of Egypt in medieval insular hagiography*, Dublin 1996.

²² Sophronii Hierosolymitani. Vita Mariae Aegyptiae..., col. 3713, C11

²³ Ibid., col. 3713, D1-4

²⁴ J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, Warminster 1977, 83, 177

²⁵ Iohannis Damasceni. De sacris imaginibus, in *PG*, t. 44, 1, col. 1280 A1-4 ; II, col. 1313 B3 ; III, col. 1416 D1ss

²⁶ J. D. Mancini, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, Florentia 1759-1798 (reprint, Graz 1960), t. 13, cols. 89 A4-7

²⁷ Povest Epifaniya o Ierusalime i suschikh v nem mest pervoi poloviny IX veka, ed. V.G. Vasilevsky, *Pravoslavny Palestinsky Sbornik*, t. IV, 2, Book II, Saint-Petersburg 1886, 22; notes, pp. 73-76; J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims...*, p.117

(prytvor) near those doors, and felt she could now enter the church and kiss the Holy Cross. From these doors it was that she left for the wilderness of Jordan”²⁸.

The place, where the famous icon of the Virgin had been standing, was marked by a fresco replica of the miraculous image, as one may learn from the testimony of Saewulf, a Latin pilgrim who visited Jerusalem a few years before Daniel the Abbot: “In the west wall of the chapel of Saint Mary is to be seen, painted outside, the picture of the Mother of God. Mary the Egyptian was once repentant with all her heart, and praying for the help of the Mother of God, and was wonderfully consoled by the figure in the picture speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit, as may be read in her Life”²⁹.

According to the Mercati Anonymous, the miraculous icon was at St. Sophia of Constantinople as early as the 11th century, brought from Jerusalem by Emperor Leo³⁰. A simple deduction from the available data allows us to assume that the reference is to Leo VI the Wise (886-912).

It is noteworthy that this emperor was known for collecting famous relics from all over Christendom to gather them together in the Byzantine capital. Possibly, it was he who brought from Jerusalem the relics of the Passions, which were in the Holy Land as late as the 9th century. According to the Primary Chronicle for 911, the Russian ambassadors saw “the Passions of the Lord - the Crown of thorns, the Nails, the Chlamis of purple, and sacred relics, to preach their religion and show to them the true faith” – they were shown to them in the Imperial palace on Leo VI's order³¹. Leo VI also brought to Constantinople the relics of St. Lazarus from Cyprus, Saint Mary of Magdala from Ephesos and of St. Mary Cleophas and Saint Martha³². In the 11th century the Greek source of the Anonymous Mercati informed the pilgrims: “Indeed, the Emperor Leo brought the sainted Lazarus from Cyprus to the city of Constantinople, and he built the monastery of Saint Lazarus. The same emperor, moreover, brought in addition the body of the sainted Mary of Magdala from

²⁸ See: Zhitye i khozhdenye Danila, Russkiya zemli igumeni, 1106-1107 gg., ed. M.A. Venevitinov, *Pravoslavny Palestinsky Sbornik*, t. I, issue 3 (1883), 27; Zhitye i khozhdenye Danila, Russkiya zemli igumena, *Pamiatniki literaturny Drevnei Rusi, 12th century*, Moscow 1980, 40-41; Daniil Egumeno. Itinerario in Terra sancta, ed. M. Garzaniti, Roma 1991, 92. An English translation, see: *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099-1185*, Eds. J. Wilkinson and W.F.Ryan, London 1988, 131

²⁹ Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099-1185..., 103

³⁰ See note 3

³¹ See: *Pamiatniki Literaturny Drevnei Rusi, 11th-beginning of 12th century*, Moscow 1978, 52-53; J. Wortley, What the Men of Kiev saw at Tsaregrad in 911, *The Seventh Annual Byzantine Studies Conference. Abstracts of papers*, Boston 1981,16

³² *Patria Constantinopoleos*, IV, 33, *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum*, ed. Th. Preger. Bd. 2. Leipzig, 1907, S. 28; Chr. Walter, Lazarus a Bishop, *REB* 27(1969), 197-208, 200-201. A recent discussion of the St Lazarus' relics translation, see: B. Flusin, L'empereur et le Théologien. A propos du Retour des reliques de Gregoire de Nazianze, in I. Sevckenko and I.Hutter, eds., *AETOS. Studies in honour of Cyril Mango*, Stuttgart-Leipzig 1998, 151-153

Ephesus. And in that place therefore was buried Saint Mary, next to the Seven Sleepers (of Ephesus), and likewise the relics of Saints Martha and Mary”³³.

The Emperor Leo’s desire to have a famous icon of the Virgin from Jerusalem, one more relic of a renowned saint, seems a part of large scale and long term program. It is noteworthy that “The Icon Who Spoke to Saint Mary of Egypt” was brought and placed at the Hagia Sophia entrance, exactly where it had been at the basilica gates in Jerusalem, where it was also open for kissing. It means that the particular sacred space with all its historical and religious connotations had been transferred with the miraculous icon.

The fact allows us to assume that the miracle-working icon was to become one of the crucial elements in the symbolic program of the Royal Doors in St. Sophia at Constantinople. The only surviving part of this program that one may see now, is the Tympanum mosaic representing Leo the Wise bowing before Christ enthroned.

Probably, Leo VI, known for theological erudition, elaborated the whole iconographic program of the main entrance to St. Sophia. This program incorporated a specific system of sacred relics³⁴ linked by one symbolic concept. The icons of “The Mother of God Who Spoke to St. Mary of Egypt” and the “Confessor Saviour” were united by the idea of repentance and divine mercy, giving hope of salvation even to great sinners.

The Door of the wood of Noah’s ark

In this context it seems very significant that the two icons formed a kind of frame for another famous relic - the royal doors themselves made, as tradition had it, from the timber of Noah's ark covered by gilded silver plates. The earliest references to it are from the 10th century. The *Diegesis* on the construction of the Hagia Sophia included in the *Partia Constantinopoleos* informs us: “*In the second narthex the doors were made of ivory (three to the right, three to the left, and between them) three other doors: two of the middle size, and between them there was the very big one of gilded silver. All the doors were gilded. Inside these doors instead of normal wood there was the Wood of the Ark*”³⁵. It was one of the biggest relics of Byzantium, the door was of 7,6 m. height and 4 m. width³⁶. It was identified among the other doors as

³³ K. Ciggaar, *Une Description de Constantinople...*, 249. All these translations were events of great religious and political significance

³⁴ In the Byzantine world the miraculous icons containing the divine grace and healing power were considered in the category of sacred relics. A recent discussion of this issue, see: A. Lidov, *The Sacred Space of Relics*, in A. Lidov, ed., *Christian Relics in The Moscow Kremlin*, Moscow 2000, 14,16

³⁵ *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum...*, I, 97; G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire. Études sur le recueil des Patria*, Paris 1984, 205, 244-245

³⁶ On the system of the western doors to Hagia Sophia, see: C. Strube, *Die westliche Eingangsseite der Kirchen von Konstantinopel in justinianischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden 1973

basilikai, megalai or pulai tou kibotou³⁷. There is an early reference of the “*door of gilded silver*” in the Book of Ceremonies by Constantine Porphyrogenetos, the son of Leo the Wise³⁸. The Mercati Anonymous, paraphrased the 11th Byzantine original, mentions three doors made of the wood of Noah's ark, which performed miracles every day³⁹. A reference to the Door can be found in the twelfth-century Description of St. Sophia, which interpreted the three central doors as a symbolic image of the Holy Trinity⁴⁰. About 1200, according to the testimonies of Anthony of Novgorod and Robert de Clari, not merely the timber but some details of the Door's lock were venerated as miraculous objects. Both Russian and French visitors to Hagia Sophia noted the special healing power of the tubular lock hanging “*at the ring of the great monastery gates, made entirely of silver*”⁴¹. In the Paleologan period “*The great door of Noah's ark*” was worshipped by pilgrims and the entire congregation, who ascribed to them a healing power⁴². We do not know precisely when the relic appeared at St. Sophia. It could be a part of the Justinian's project. Yet we cannot rule out the possibility that it, too, came to the Great Church in the reign of Leo the Wise⁴³.

Of this ancient Door only the moulded brass frame of the Imperial Door is extant⁴⁴ (fig.3). An embossed relief above the head, in the centre of the top panel, makes the symbolic concept somewhat clearer. It represents a throne with a bird flying down on an open book – all inscribed in an arch resting on two pillars (fig.4). The book bears a Greek inscription, an adapted quotation from the Gospel according to John 10:7-9: “*So said the Lord: I am the door of the sheep. By me if any man enter, he shall go in and out, and find pasture*”. The relief is a graphic metaphor of the

³⁷ E. Antoniadhs, *Ekfrasis ths Agias Sofias*, I, Athens 1907, 174

³⁸ Constantinas Porphyrogenitus. *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. J. Reiske, Bonn ed., 192; A. Vogt, *Le Livre des Ceremonies*, Paris, 1935-1939, II, 2.

³⁹ See: K. Ciggaar, *Une Description de Constantinople...*, 249

⁴⁰ “*There being symbolically, a triple entry yawning out of the middle of the protemenisma (for the holy places are accessible to those who have been taught that there is one God in the Trinity) towards him who passes the great quantity of silver which at once meets him near the doors*” (C. Mango, J. Parker, *A Twelfth-Century Description of St. Sophia*, *DOP* 14 (1960), 237, 243

⁴¹ *Kniga Palomnik...*, 8, 54, 74; Robert de Clari, *La conquete de Constantinople*, ed. P.Lauer, Paris 1956

⁴² G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers...*, 207. The Russian Anonymus of the 14th century records: “*Christians worship at these doors for healing comes from them*” (*Ibid.*, 130-131, 182-183)

⁴³ The Door of the wood of Noah's ark is gone, and its fate is unknown. The present-day doors were probably made during the Fossati restoration in 1847-49 (see: T. Lacchia, *I Fossati architetti del Sultano di Turchia*, Roma 1943, 94). There is an Italian drawing (Cod. Barb. Lat. 4426, fol.46r) presumably copied from the original by Ciriaco of Ancona that might give an impression of how the Imperial Door looked.

⁴⁴ The bronze frame is traditionally dated to the 6th century, though a later date cannot be ruled out. See: R.S. Nelson, *The Discourse of Icons. Then and Now*, *Art History* 12/2 (1989), 140-150. Mango recently suggested the same date as the Tympanum mosaic: C. Mango, A. Ertug, *Hagia Sophia. A Vision of Empire*, 14

Church as the abode of salvation. The throne is an image of the Throne of the Second Coming (the *Hetoimasia*). The grace of the Holy Spirit is embodied in the dove coming down to the Gospel open and sounding, the Door of Noah's ark and every one who enters the church. The arch is a traditional emblem of the Church and, no less important, an iconic allusion to Noah's ark, seen as one of the essential prototypes of the Temple. In fact, Byzantine theology and hymnography referred to Christ as a New Noah. In his sixth sermon "On Lazarus", John Chrysostom thus interprets the story of Noah's deliverance: "Yet there were mysteries in the event related; the past prototyped the future; to be more precise: the ark was the Church; Noah - Christ; the dove - the Holy Ghost, and the olive branch - God's mercy"⁴⁵. The Door of Noah's ark symbolically represented Christ in His church, at the same time promising salvation and mercy of the Lord to the righteous (Gen. 7:1)⁴⁶.

Thus, there were three miraculous relics included in the symbolic program of the Imperial Door: the Door of Noah's ark proper and the two icons, of Christ and of the Mother of God. They were united in the theme of repentance, divine mercy and salvation found by entering church.

The Tympanum Mosaic

The revealed symbolic context allows us to take a new look at the Tympanum mosaic above the entrance - one of the best-known and most enigmatic compositions in Byzantine iconography (figs.5-8). More than fifteen works specially dedicated to it have been published since its restoration in 1932⁴⁷. Its content and symbolic concept,

⁴⁵ Joannis Chrysostomi, In Lazarum VI, *PG*, 48, 1037, lin.45-48

⁴⁶ On this symbolism, see: H. Hohl, Arche Noe, *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, I, 178-179

⁴⁷ A series of works emerged in the 1930s under direct impact of T. Whittemore's publication: T. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of St. Sophia in Istanbul. Preliminary Report on the First Years Work. 1931-1932. The Mosaics of the Narthex*, Oxford 1933; C. Osieczkowska, La mosaïque de la Porte Royale à Sainte-Sophie de Constantinople et la litanie de tous les saints, *Byz* 9 (1934), 41-83; J.D. Stefanescu, Sur la mosaïque de la Porte Imperiale à Sainte-Sophie de Constantinople, *Byz* 9 (1934), 517-523; A.M. Schneider, Der Kaiser des Mosaikbildes über dem Haupteingang der Sophienkirche zu Konstantinopel, *Orientalia Christiana* 32 (1935), 75-79; F. Dolger, JUSTINIANS ENGEL an der Kaisertur der H. Sophia, *Byz* 10 (1935), 1-4; A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Strasbourg 1936, 100-106; H.E. Del Medico, Les mosaïques du Narthex de Sainte-Sophie. Contribution à l'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine, *Revue Archéologique* 12 (1938), 49-66.

Of special importance among later publications are: L. Mirković, Das Mosaik der Kaisertur im Narthex der Kirche der Hl. Sophia in Konstantinopel, *Atti dell' VIII Congresso di studi bizantini* (1951), II, Roma 1953, 206-217; L. Mirković, O ikonografiji mozaika iznad carskih vrata u narteksu Sv. Sofije u Carigradu, *Starinar*, 9-10 (1958-1959), 89-96; J. Scharf, Der Kaiser in Proskynes. Bemerkungen zur Deutung des Kaisermosaiks in Narthex der Hagia Sophia von Konstantinopel, *Festschrift P.E. Schramm*, Wiesbaden 1965, 27-35; E.J.W. Hawkins, Further Observations on the Narthex Mosaic in St. Sophia at Istanbul, *DOP* 22 (1968), 153-166, pl. 1-12 (observation results from the new mosaic restoration); N. Oikonomides, Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia, *DOP* 30 (1976), 151-172 (with an historiographic review of the basic concepts); Z. Gavrilović, The Humiliation of Leo VI the Wise. The Mosaic of the Narthex at Saint Sophia, Istanbul, *Cah. Arch.* 28

however, remain an open question to this day⁴⁸. Scholarly interpretations group round two basic ideas. According to one of them, the mosaic symbolically represents the divine investiture of the earthly king, who obtains his power from Christ the Wisdom. This idea, which belongs to Andrei Grabar⁴⁹, later found support from Zaga Gavrilović⁵⁰, who also regards the concept in the context of Leo the Wise's Annunciation sermon, and accordingly dates the mosaic to the end of the 9th century, when this text was written. This interpretation has been recently supported by Robin Cormack⁵¹.

The other interpretation, proposed in its time by Lazar Mirković⁵², and developed in detail by Nicholas Oikonomides⁵³, puts the idea of repentance into the foreground as the semantic focus of the composition. Historically the appearance of the Tympanum mosaic was conditioned by events round Leo the Wise's fourth marriage and clash with Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos.

The symbolism of the relics of the royal entrance analysed above – reminiscences of repentance and salvation – speaks for this latter interpretation which is, however, open to major clarifications, for which we ought to regard the basic iconographic features of the scene.

Christ, represented enthroned in the centre, holds in His hand an open Gospel with the inscription: EIRHNH UMIN. EGW EIMI TO FWS TOU KOSMOU (*Peace be unto you. I am the light of the world*) - a combination of two addresses by Christ in the Gospel according to St. John (20:19, 26; 8:12). The words, “*Peace be unto you*” were addressed to the Disciples as Christ twice appeared unto them after Resurrection, “*when the doors were shut*”. The Byzantine iconography of this gospel text represents Christ against the background of gates symbolizing the entrance to the Heavenly Kingdom. The other quotation, “*I am the light of the world: he that*

(1979), 87-94; A. Schmink, Rota tu volubilis: Kaisermacht und Patriarchenmacht in Mosaiken, . L.Burgman, M.-T. Fögen, A. Schmink, eds.*Cupido legum*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, 211-234

⁴⁸ R. Cormack. Interpreting the Mosaics of S. Sophia at Istanbul, *Art History* 4/ 2 (1981), 141; idem, Patronage and New Programs of Byzantine Iconography, *The 17th International Byzantine Congress. Major Papers, Washington 1986, New York 1986*, 620-623. Among recent new interpretations, see: H. Franses, *Symbols, meaning, belief: donor portraits in Byzantine art*, (Ph. D. dissertation, London University 1992), 30 –60; Ch. Barber, From Transformation to Desire: Art and Worship after Byzantine Iconoclasm, *Art Bulletin* 1993, no1, 11-15

⁴⁹ A. Grabar developed on, and supplemented his concept, which first appeared in his book ‘The Emperor’, for several decades: A. Grabar, *L'empereur...*, 100-106; *La peinture Byzantine*, Geneve 1953, 91-92, 96-97; *L'iconoclasme byzantin. Le dossier archéologique*, Paris 1957 (new edition, Paris 1984, 250-252).

⁵⁰ Z. Gavrilović, op. cit., 87-94

⁵¹ R. Cormack, The Mother of God in the Mosaics of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, in M. Vassilaki, ed., *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*. Athens 2000, 114, 116. Cormack is coming back to Grabar’s interpretation connecting the iconography with a sermon of Leo the Wise on the feast of Annunciation

⁵² L. Mirković, O ikonografiji..., 89-96

⁵³ N. Oikonomides, Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic..., 151-172

followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”, is also semantically connected with the theme of entrance and the way to salvation. Of much significance was the appearance of this inscription on the symbolic threshold marking the transition from the twilight narthex, the place of catechumens, excommunicates and penitents, to the floodlit nave.

This combination of the two verses from the St. John’s Gospel is extremely rare. Mirković found an explanation to it in Leo the Wise’s penitent poem (wdarion katanuktikon) written, most probably, because of his uncanonical fourth marriage⁵⁴. The emperor appeals to Christ and the interceding Virgin, imploring for forgiveness on Doomsday. The words in the mosaic inscription “*Peace be unto you. I am the light of the world*” written on the opened Gospel, could be interpreted in this context as a direct reply of Christ to the penitent emperor in front of the Throne of the High Judge⁵⁵.

Another crucial characteristic of the Tympanum mosaic is the posture of the prostrate emperor clinging to Christ’s feet - non-typical of emperors’ portraiture⁵⁶. The closest iconographic analogy is offered by the scene of ‘The Penitence of David’, in particular, a miniature in the Paris manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, 879-883 (Bibl. Nat., gr. 510, fol. 143 v)⁵⁷. Of great expressive power are semantic parallels between the stories of David and Leo the Wise. David repents his ignominious marriage with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, whom he had put in a dangerous position to be killed (2 Sam 11-12). God accepts his penitence, but David pays with the death of his firstborn by Bathsheba. Likewise, Leo sought to expiate in prayer the sin of a fourth marriage, expressly banned by all ecclesiastical laws and viewed as adultery. The Emperor insisted on church recognition of his marriage - all the more essential after the birth of his ‘firstborn’ son and heir, the future Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos. It was not just a personal but a state and political matter, an ultimate condition to save the dynasty. Engaged in political games, the Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos categorically refused to recognise the marriage. Creating a religious and political scandal he twice ordered the Emperor out of festive liturgies, at Christmas and Epiphany 906/907, stopping him at the doors of St. Sophia⁵⁸. Yet a

⁵⁴ PG, 107, col. 309-314; L. Mirković, O ikonografiji..., 92

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The symbolism and iconography of the attitude are analyzed in detail in: A. Cutler, *Transfigurations. Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography*, Pennsylvania State University 1975, 53-110 (“Proskynesis and Anastasis”).

⁵⁷ N. Oikonomides, Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic..., 157-158. Most probably this imperial manuscript itself was known to Leo the Wise, a pupil of patriarch Photios, who was the probable ideator of the manuscript iconography: L. Brubaker. *Politics, Patronage, and Art in the Ninth Century Byzantium. The Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus in Paris* (B.N.GR. 510), *DOP* 39 (1985), 1-13

⁵⁸ For the historical context of, and basic literature on the tetragamy controversy, see: N. Oikonomides, Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic..., 161-176. The most detailed account of the developments is to be found in the 10th century *Life of Euthymius*. See: *Vita Euthymii, patriarchae*

church council convened for this purpose in 907 accepted the Emperor's repentance - which historical records describe as deep and sincere - and resolved to admit him to church after he did penitence.

Oikonomides did not think that the Emperor could have voluntarily ordered himself to be depicted in humiliation over the main entrance to the Great Church, and so supposed a later date of 920 when after the death of Leo VI a church council had approved the position of Nicholas Mystikos in the tetragamy contradiction⁵⁹. In Oikonomides opinion, the mosaic was intended to graphically remind the viewer of the Patriarch's final victory over the crowned sinner.

We can hardly agree with this interpretation as the developments of 907 brought triumph to Leo the Wise as ruler and Christian, for the Eastern Church tradition viewed repentance as a feat of piety, and a gift of divine wisdom as the only way to salvation⁶⁰. Forgiveness given to Mary of Egypt, a great sinner, after the intercession of the icon of the Mother of God, was a kind of guarantee for the penitent Emperor in his meditations on Doomsday and the destiny of his son and heir. It is indicative in this respect that, according to the 10th century Typikon of the Great Church, the Psalm 50 (51) of penitence, where David asks God to cleanse him from the sin of his lawless marriage, was sung at matins immediately after the entrance into the church from the narthex⁶¹, through the Imperial Door under the Tympanum mosaic⁶². It was a manifestation of penitence and triumph at the same time.

One may find the same logic of criticism in the recent book "Empereur et pretre" by Gilbert Dagron, who dedicated several pages revealing the ideological

(Vie d'Euthyme le Patriarche, 12), ed. P. Karlin-Hayter, Brussels 1970, 245-250 (bibliography on tetragamy). The Life contains an expressive description of the emperor's behaviour after the patriarch stopped him in the main gateway of St. Sophia: "*The emperor wept and, flooding the holy floor with his tears, went back without a word, and entered the mytatorium through the right gates. Then he summoned several metropolitans and learned from them everything they had done and signed. He replied to them with a moan from his despondent heart: 'I count on Christ Son of God, Who descended from heaven to save us miserable sinners. May He have mercy on me the greatest sinner of all, and embrace me as the prodigal son, and adopt me again in His catholic apostolic Church through the prayers of our father the Patriarch and your entire Holy Synod!' The reading of the Holy Gospel began at that very instance, and the groans of the emperor as he shed torrential tears made all who heard weep and lament with him - not only the congregation but even the metropolitans*" (Ibid., 74-79). A recent discussion of the tetragamy topic see: S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886-912). Politics and People*, Leiden-New York-Köln 1997, 133ff.

⁵⁹ N. Oikonomides, *Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic...*, 170-172

⁶⁰ These ideas found reflection in numerous patristic texts on the topic of repentance. See: M. Arranz, *Les prières pénitentielles de la tradition byzantine*, *OCP* 57 (1991), 87-143, 309-329; 58 (1992), 23-82

⁶¹ J. Mateos, *Typicon de la Grand Eglise* (OCA, 165), Roma 1962, I, XXIII-XXIV.

⁶² It is noteworthy that in the Byzantine illuminated psalters the psalm 50 has been illustrated by the miniature "The Penitence of David" (e.g., Parisinus gr.139, fol.136v, second half of the 10th century).

context of the Tympanum mosaic⁶³. Dagron has convincingly demonstrated that the public repentance was a traditional, in some sense canonical, form of the Byzantine imperial self-representation from Constantine the Great onwards. The penitence of king David has been established as a powerful model and symbolic prototype. From this point of view Leo the Wise on the Tympanum mosaic was “the image of all Davidic emperors”. According to Dagron, « *Le repentir de Léon VI fut assurément sincère mais théâtral, et la pénitence tourna à l'apothéose* »⁶⁴.

In this historical and symbolical context one may suggest that the two different interpretations of the Tympanum mosaic are not contradictory. The initial idea of penitence did not exclude the fundamental concept of Holy Wisdom and imperial investiture. These two messages could co-exist in the same image simultaneously revealing its special power in particular liturgical moments. In the specific spatial context of the ritual entrances to St. Sophia the messages were addressed to an emperor who, according to the ceremonial, prayed and bowed three times before the Imperial Door, holding a lit candle⁶⁵. During this rite of the earthly ruler, penitence and divine blessing were equally present. The iconic image of the Tympanum mosaic was temporarily unified with the ‘living icon’ of imperial ritual beneath and in this dynamic sacred environment two symbolic concepts of the mosaic became really inseparable.

The miraculous prototypes

The revealed sacred space had one more aspect, which could be named the miraculous one. As we remember, the Tympanum mosaic was represented above three miraculous relics, which, possibly, formed a part of the original concept. It presumably meant that the Byzantine emperor was praying and bowing in front of the relic and icons and beneath the mosaic image in a potentially miracle-working realm. In this ‘miraculous’ context one may re-examine the strange iconography of the Tympanum mosaic. Some scholars have already noticed the unique character of its composition, but it still remains without an appropriate explanation⁶⁶. The iconography seems even more unusual in a case of the iconic image above the main entrance to the Great Church of the Empire, which is presumably intended to serve as a model for other churches. The iconography of the Tympanum mosaic, however, has never been repeated.

⁶³ G. Dagron, *Empereur et pretre. Etudes sur le ‘cesaropapisme’ byzantin*, Paris 1996, 129-138

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 137

⁶⁵ A. Grabar, *L'empereur...*, 101; G. Majeska, *The Emperor in His Church: Imperial Ritual in the Church of St. Sophia*, in H. Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, Washington 1997, 5. The emperor attended the liturgy with the ceremonial entrance through the Royal doors, normally closed, only few times a year: on Easter, Pentecost, Transfiguration, Christmas and Epiphany, and occasionally on some other feasts.

⁶⁶ A recent discussion, see: H. Franses, *Symbols...*, 62; Ch. Barber, *From Transformation to Desire...*, 11-15

The unknown image-maker used an archetype of the *Trimorphon* (the central image between two in medallions) that has determined the pictorial structure of the Byzantine *Deesis*, with its dominant idea of supplication. The left medallion of the mosaic, flanking the image of Christ enthroned, reinforces this parallelism. The Mother of God, significantly portrayed in a three-quarter turn above the emperor imploring for salvation, stretches out the hands to Her Son, addressing Him in intercession (an image destined to become traditional in *Deesis* compositions as they had taken shape in Byzantine monumental art by the 11th century).

The right-hand medallion, however, represents not John the Baptist but a frontal image of an archangel with a sceptre, token of authority, in his hand. With brows raised in wrath, he gazes aside from Christ - perhaps, at the person who enters the church from the south narthex doors. Most probably, this is Archangel Michael, the heavenly guard personifying divine power and protecting the church gates from sinners⁶⁷. Byzantine illustrations to the Life of St. Mary of Egypt depict him barring entrance to the sinful woman⁶⁸. The image of an archangel, embodiment of God's will, is present even in the earliest iconographic redactions of "The Penitence of David". As the Mother of God personifies intercession, so does Michael the inevitable Judgment. It is not by chance that both become prominent in Leo the Wise's poem of repentance, whose probable influence on the Tympanum mosaic has been pointed out above in conjunction with the inscription on the Gospel in Christ's hands⁶⁹. The power of the Archangel image is stressed by the empty space beneath. The image-maker deliberately avoids the expected symmetry of the composition, possibly, leaving the visual space for a real person entering the church who could be an invisible counterpart to the image of a prostrate emperor.

The Mother of God and the Archangel are represented not full-length but in medallions. This fact appears to be of great significance. The use of *imagines clipeatae*, memorial portraits, reveal memory about real objects than merely depictions. It is noteworthy that all the images in the Tympanum mosaic did not have any accompanying inscriptions originally. This detail embarrassed even the Byzantines who some centuries later added the letters IC XC beside the head of Christ enthroned⁷⁰. All these details suggest special prototypes of the mosaic images. Our knowledge of the entire symbolic program of the Imperial Door allows us to suppose that the author of the iconographic concept could have portrayed objects of worship – famous miraculous icons of Christ, the Mother of God and the Archangel, which could be easily recognisable by the contemporaries. This may explain a certain amount of artificiality and the unique character of the composition. The actual

⁶⁷ Cf. L. Mirković, O ikonografiji..., 89-95; N. Oikonomides, Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic..., 158

⁶⁸ S. Radojčić, Una poenitentium. Marija Egipatska u srpskoj umetnosti XIV veka, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja*, kn.4, Belgrade 1964, 255-264, 258

⁶⁹ L. Mirković. O ikonografiji..., 92

⁷⁰ E.J.W.Hawkins, Further Observations..., 156-158.

miraculous objects at the Imperial Door might be supplemented by ‘virtual’ images in the Tympanum mosaic above. Like the actual emperor at the ritual entrance, the emperor in the mosaic could be represented in the space of miraculous icons.

This statement is difficult to prove because, with very few exceptions, we have no idea what the main Byzantine miracle-working icons looked like. Furthermore, as far as we may learn from later practice, to the Byzantine mind the idea of miraculous object was not strictly connected with a specific pictorial scheme. It was not the scheme, but the miracles performed by icons that seem to define them. Their identification was rather a matter of spiritual encounter experienced by people and reported in texts or oral tradition. However, one may provide indirect evidence to support the ‘miraculous’ origins of the mosaic icons in the Tympanum.

Christ enthroned. Let us begin with the image of Christ enthroned. James Breckenridge has already suggested the connection of this image with a highly venerated prototype⁷¹. Analysing the iconography on Byzantine coins he came to a conclusion that the image of Christ on the lyre-backed throne, which appeared on the ninth and tenth century Byzantine coins as well as in the Tympanum mosaic, reproduced the same most famous icon. This concerns the mosaic image of Christ enthroned above the imperial throne in the east apse of the Chrysotriklinos, the principal throne room of the imperial Sacred Palace⁷². Emperors always prayed to this icon as they started out for St. Sophia and came back to the palace in an expression of “*servants' submission and adoration of the King of Kings*”⁷³. They lay prostrate before the icon in the attitude of Leo the Wise in the mosaic. The image re-appeared in the new decoration of Chrysotriklinos in the reign of Michael III (856-866), soon after the Iconophiles' victory, as we learn from a Byzantine epigram, glorifying the image of Christ that “*shines above the imperial throne and confounds the murky heresies*”⁷⁴. In the reign of Basil I (867-886), father of Leo the Wise, the image of Christ enthroned was established on coins, thus becoming the principal state symbol which retained this role under Leo the Wise, Alexander and Constantine Porphyrogennetos⁷⁵ and, as scholars argue, had particular significance for the Macedonian house⁷⁶. It seems very probable that the maker of the Tympanum iconography intended not merely to represent Christ as the heavenly ruler but to recall the major icon of the Empire and

⁷¹ J.D. Breckenridge Christ on the Lyre-backed Throne, *DOP* 34-35 (1980-1981), 247-260.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 257

⁷³ See: D.F. Belyaev, *Byzantina. Ezhednevnye i voskresnye priemy vizantiiskikh tsarei i prazdnichnye vykhody ikh v khram Sv. Sofii v IX-X vekakh*, Saint-Petersburg 1893, II, 16,35, 47, 229, 244.

⁷⁴ *Anthologia graeca*, I. 106: C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453. Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs 1972, 184. The decoration described in the epigram, most probably, has been executed between 856 and 866.

⁷⁵ On the iconography of coins, see also: P.Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. III: Leo III to Nicephorus III, 717-1081, Washington 1973, pp. 154-158.

⁷⁶ J.D. Breckenridge, Christ on the Lyre-backed Throne..., 248

the role of the Macedonian dynasty in the restoration of icon-worship. The image of Christ enthroned, replicated at the threshold of Hagia Sophia could have mystically connected two most important imperial sacred spaces in the Great Palace and in the Great Church. The same repentant attitude of the *proskynesis*, performed by the emperors before two icons of Christ, revealed this connection in more profound and symbolic way.

It is significant that the entire Tympanum mosaic could have been perceived as a miracle-working image of Christ. The 14th century Russian Anonymous Description of Constantinople, based on a Greek original, says after the mention of the Door of Noah's ark, "*There is a miraculous icon of the Savior high above the doors; this Savior heals many sick*"⁷⁷. The Legend connects a miracle and a relic with this image: "*A candelabrum with an iron chain hung before this Savior; attached to the chain was a little glass with oil. Beneath the little glass stands a stone pedestal with a cup and wood from Noah's ark bound with iron from the ark on the pedestal. Oil dripped into this cup from the candelabrum; the little glass with the oil came loose and [fell], breaking the cup in two and splitting the stone pedestal. The little glass did not break, however, and the oil did not spill. This pedestal is bound with iron bands, with the cup attached to it so that Christians may see it and the sick be cured*"⁷⁸. So, the actual miraculous icons of the Saviour Confessor and the Virgin from Jerusalem, as well as the mosaic images above co-existed in the sacred environment of a 'historical' miracle, made present by a special reliquary. All together, they created a multi-layered sacred space, which included the visual imagery of the Tympanum mosaic, the real icon-objects beside the Door of Noah's ark, and the environment created by the reliquary in front of them. The reliquary with the wood from Noah's ark was connected with the main relic of the Imperial Door. At the same time, the cup containing the holy oil from the glass lamp before the "*miraculous icon of Saviour high above the door*" associated the reliquary with the Tympanum mosaic. Thus, the reliquary became a cornerstone of this sophisticated spatial program, in which all the sacred layers were merging in a single whole. We do not know when precisely, before the mid-14th century, this program had taken shape. Yet it indirectly confirms the original miraculous status of the mosaic image of Christ enthroned.

The Virgin in supplication. For the image of the Mother of God in the Tympanum mosaic, there are a number of possible prototypes. According to the iconographic type the image could be connected with the Agiosoritissa icon in the

⁷⁷ G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers...*, 130-131

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 130-131. George Majeska relates this tradition to the Chalke image of Christ on the west wall of the St. Sophia nave (G. Majeska, *The Image of the Chalke Savior...*, 284-295). We cannot conclude from the text, however, to which of the two images of Christ above the entrance the tradition refers. Visual observations of the floor of St. Sophia did not allow us to find the spot where the stone reliquary pillar had been.

Chalkoprateia church in Constantinople⁷⁹ as it appeared on Byzantine seals and on the early 12th century Sinai icon with the inscribed representations of the chief miraculous icons⁸⁰. Yet this iconographic type of the Virgin was quite widespread and there is no specific reference to the Chalkoprateia shrine. Another possibility is the Virgin image from the mosaic program of the Chrysotriklinos. Apart from this image of Christ enthroned, the epigram of the *Anthologia graeca* (I. 106) also refers to the image of the Mother of God above the entrance to Chrysotriklinos, described as “*the divine gates and guardian*”⁸¹. Yet we know nothing about this image, except this characteristic, and its presence in the Chrysotriklinos space could not be considered as a crucial argument for the identification.

In my opinion, however, the representation of a venerated icon in the Tympanum mosaic might have been symbolically connected with the miraculous image of the Virgin known to have spoken to Mary of Egypt, and brought by Leo the Wise to St. Sophia for a special purpose. From the Anonymous Tarragonensis we have learnt that the Virgin was represented with the Child, and St Mary of Egypt has been depicted, possibly on the same panel beneath the image of the Virgin⁸². Thus, the pictorial schemes of the images were certainly different. However, from the later tradition of the miraculous icon worship we know that the same miraculous prototype could be represented in different iconographic types, sometimes with the same inscription. A precisely dated complex of 1192 survives in the Panagia Arakiotissa in Lagoudera on Cyprus. There are a fresco-icon of the standing Virgin with the Child in her arms on the south wall before the sanctuary barrier (inscribed ‘Arakiotissa’), an image of the Virgin Paraclesis with hands stretching in prayer on the east wall to the north of the barrier (inscribed ‘Eleousa’) and an actual icon of the half-length Hodegetria, probably, originally situated to the left of the gates of the sanctuary barrier (inscribed ‘Arakiotissa’ too)⁸³. All three images together were made by the same painter and displayed very close to each other as an inseparable iconographic program in the sacred space framing the doors to the sanctuary. They created a kind of complex of the Virgin Arakiotissa miraculously appearing in three symbolically connected but visually different images, which could be venerated both together and separately.

The same approach deeply rooted in the Orthodox tradition might have been presented in the symbolic program of the Imperial Door at Hagia Sophia. The

⁷⁹ R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire byzantine*. P.I. T.III, Paris 1969, 246-251. Chr. Baltoyani, *The Mother of God in the Portable Icons*, *Mother of God*, 147-148

⁸⁰ G. et M. Sotiriou, *Les icônes du Mont Sinai*, Athens 1956-1958, I-II, 125, 146-147

⁸¹ C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453. Sources and Documents*, 184

⁸² K. Ciggaar, *Une Description de Constantinople dans le Tarragonensis* 55, 125 (as note 6)

⁸³ For the fresco-icons, see: A. Nicolaidis, *L’église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudera, Chypre: Études iconographiques des fresques de 1192*, *DOP* 50 (1996), 107-109, 110-111, fig.3,-5, 77-78 . For the Hodegetria icon: A. Papageorgiou, *Icon of the Virgin Arakiotissa*, *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*. Ed. M. Vassilaki, Athens 2000, no 62, 406-407

Jerusalem icon beneath and the mosaic depiction in the medallion of the Tympanum were interwoven in the concept of the miraculous protection of the Mother of God. The idea of supplication embodied in the image of St Mary of Egypt on the Jerusalem icon (through the gesture of hands raised in prayer?) may have received new life and force in two icons of the Virgin, and may have been addressed to two miraculous images of Christ – Christ enthroned in the Tympanum mosaic and unknown image of Christ Confessor to the left of the Imperial Door.

One may find a possible reflection of this powerful program in the iconography of the 11th century Constantinopolitan liturgical scroll (Jerusalem, Stavrou 109). Two marginal miniatures represent a kind of the Deesis composition with an icon of the Mother of God with the gesture of supplication, to the right, and Christ, represented enthroned in a circle, to the left of the text⁸⁴. It was the icon the miniature painter sought to show, as the waist-length image of the praying Mother of God is the only framed marginal illumination of the scroll. Both miniatures frame the prayer of the Little Entrance. It is apt to recall here that the Little Entrance was performed in St. Sophia in the narthex through the Imperial Door, flanked by the icons of Christ and the Mother of God, who spoke to Mary of Egypt, which has been also represented to the right of the entrance, as in the scroll⁸⁵. When the emperor prayed and bowed three times before the Imperial Door, the patriarch read the prayer of the Little entrance while looking perhaps at the relics of the Noah's ark and the miraculous icons of Christ and the Virgin⁸⁶. It is noteworthy that the motif of forgiveness appears in the Trisagion prayer, whose initial words are framed the images of Christ and the Mother of God: "*Give wisdom and reason to the suppliant, and scorn not the sinner but accept his repentance for salvation*". So it seems probable that the iconography of the Constantinopolitan scroll could be an indirect reflection of the Hagia Sophia entrance program with all its liturgical connotations.

In this context another unique Constantinopolitan program might be re-considered. I mean, the reliquary from Sancta Sanctorum – a Byzantine gift of the tenth century (now in the Museo Sacro della Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican City,

⁸⁴ See: A. Grabar, Un rouleau liturgique constantinopolitain et ses peintures, *DOP* 8(1954), fig. 2, 172-173; P. Vokotopoulos, *Mikrografies ton Byzantinon ceirografon tou Patriarceion Ierosolimon*, Athenai-Ierousalima, 2002, no 19, 96–123. A liturgical study of the Jerusalem scroll, see: A. Jacob, *Histoire du formulaire grec de la liturgie de Saint Jean Chrysostome (Dissertation)*, Louvain 1968, 257-263.

⁸⁵ On the tradition of the Little Entrance in Hagia Sophia, see: D.F. Belyaev. *Byzantina*. II, 153; T.F. Mathews. *The Early Churches of Constantinople. Architecture and Liturgy*, University Park and London 1971, 138-147; R. Taft, *The Great Entrance. A History of the Transfer of Gifts and other Pre-anaphoral Rites*, Rome 1978, 30, 192. In contemporary liturgical practice, the priest kisses the icons of Christ and the Mother of God to the sides of the Royal Gates of the iconostasis during the Little Entrance.

⁸⁶ G. Majeska, *The Emperor*, 5

inv.1898 a,b)⁸⁷. Inside a wooden case, on either side of the relics of the True Cross, three pairs of images are represented. In the upper zone there are half-length figures of Christ blessing and holding the Book and of the Virgin stretching her arms in prayer to the right of Christ. In the middle register the frontal busts of the archangels in imperial vestments are depicted, and below two full-length images of Peter and Paul the Apostles are portrayed. The iconographic program of the Vatican reliquary is completed by the depictions on the lid: an image of the Crucifixion, with some very rare details, on the external side and a frontal standing figure of St John Chrysostom on the internal surface. The holy bishop of Constantinople holds in two hands an open Gospel, inscribed in Greek: “The Lord said to his disciples: ‘ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another’” (John 15:17), which could be perceived as a clear message to the Latins.

Scholars agree that the reliquary was sent as a special gift from Constantinople to the Roman pope in the tenth century. Robin Cormack suggested that this object could be offered by Nicholas Mystikos in conjunction with the successful synod of 920, when in the presence of papal legates the tetragamy of Leo the Wise was finally condemned⁸⁸. In our mind, however, an equally convincing hypothesis would be, that the precious reliquary of the Holy Cross was presented by Leo the Wise himself to the legates of the Roman pope supported the emperor in his controversy with the patriarch at the Constantinopolitan synod of 907. The iconography of the reliquary could be connected with the most important program of the Imperial Door of Hagia Sophia, and appeared possibly, in conjunction with the same church synod of 907. It is noteworthy that in later church iconography all three pairs of images on the reliquary (Christ and the Virgin in supplication, the archangels, Sts Peter and Paul) were clearly associated with the theme of the entrance into the church. In some instances they were represented all together in the door’s area. The symbolism of the Entrance forms one of the most significant messages of the Sancta Sanctorum reliquary. In the special iconographic context of the flanking images the cross-shaped cavity for the precious relics of the Redemptive Sacrifice could be perceived as an iconic space of the passageway – the Gates of Salvation, a traditional metaphor of Christian theology. So, the maker of the Sancta Sanctorum reliquary intended to present an image of sacred space reflecting the church iconography.

It seems that the unique Imperial Door’s program of Leo the Wise, though never repeated directly, created a kind of archetype to be reproduced in later iconography. Here, perhaps, the tradition began of placing particular images of Christ and the Mother of God to the sides of the doors leading both from the narthex to the

⁸⁷ F.E. Hyslop, A Byzantine Reliquary of the True Cross from the Sancta Sanctorum, *Art Bulletin* XVI (1934), 333-340, fig. 1-3; A. Frolov, *La relique de la Vraie Croix. Recherches sur la développement d’une cult*, Paris 1961, no 667, 487 ; A. Weyl Carr, *Staurotheke, The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era. 843-1261*, New York 1997, no 35, 76-77

⁸⁸ R. Cormack, *Painting after Iconoclasm*, in A.Brayer and J.Herrin, eds., *Iconoclasm*, Birmingham 1975, 151, 153

nave, and from the nave to the altar. Such paired iconic images were regularly met in Byzantine churches from the 10th century onwards⁸⁹. This concerns a sublime tradition graphically embodied in the symbolic structure of the Russian iconostasis, where we see the Saviour enthroned above the royal gates, as above the entrance to St. Sophia at Constantinople, and to either side of the gates, icons of Christ and the Mother of God – often miracle-working images, or their copies. In the Orthodox ceremonials from Byzantine time up to our days, the priest, “*deeply moved and full of repentance*”, prays in the very beginning of the liturgy before the royal gates of the iconostasis, and kisses in veneration the icons of the Saviour and the Mother of God – naturally, forgetful of the unique program of the Great Penitence, created by a wise Byzantine emperor for St. Sophia at Constantinople.⁹⁰

The Archangel as guardian. As for the archangel medallion in the Tympanum mosaic, the image could have been a reminiscence of the mosaic icon of Archangel Michael situated in St. Michael's chapel close to the entrance into the narthex at the southwest vestibule⁹¹. This image was related to the miracle, which happened during

⁸⁹ The main early examples were collected recently by Engelina Smirnova: *Izobrazhenia na zapadnykh graniakh predaltarnykh stolpov v vizantiiskikh khramakh X-XI vekov*, in A. Lidov, ed., *Iconostasis. Origins-Evolution-Symbolism*, Moscow 2000, 293-296. One of the first examples is provided by Kiliçlar (Qeleglar) kilisesi, Goreme N 29, 10th century (C. Jolivet-Levy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Les programme iconographique de l'apside et de ses abords*, Paris 1991, 139, pl. 88 fig. 2), another early example in the 11th century mosaics of the Church of Dormition in Nicaea (Th. Schmit, *Die Koimesis - kirche von Nikaia. Das Bauwerk und die Mosaiken*, Berlin und Leipzig 1927, Taf. XXV-XXVII, 44-47). The formed type is represented in the Lagudera murals of 1192 in Cyprus, with Christ frontal, full-length, right of the altar entrance; and the Mother of God left, in a three-quarter turn to the icon of Christ, the open scroll in Her hands representing Her dialogue with Christ, as She prays Him for the salvation of sinners. The murals of the Decani Monastery (Serbia, 14th century) include an analogous composition framing the entrance from the narthex into the church. See: S. Der Nersessian, *Two images of the Virgin in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, *DOP* 14 (1960), 71-86; G. Babić, *O zivopisanom ukrasu oltarskih pregrada*, *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti* 11 (1975), 3-49; M. Boutyrsky, *The Virgin Paraclesis before the sanctuary barrier: origins and liturgical context of the image*, in A. Lidov, ed., *Iconostasis. Origins-Evolution-Symbolism*, Moscow 2000, 207-222, 725 (an English resume). On the possible connection of this program with the mosaic above the entrance to St. Sophia at Constantinople, see: L. Mirković. *O ikonografiji...*, 91-92.

⁹⁰ An early evidence of the kissing of the icons nearby the ‘holy doors’, see in the 12th ceremonial of the Great Church: R. Taft, *The Pontifical Liturgy of the Great Church according to a Twelfth-Century Diataxis in Codex British Museum Add. 34060*, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 45 (1979), 284-285. Another testimony in the 13th century Euchologion (Patmos 719). See: A.A. Dmitrievskii, *Opisanie liturgicheskikh rukopisei*, II, Kiev 1901, 170. On the contemporary practice: I. Dmitrevsky, *Istoricheskoe, dogmaticheskoe i tainstvennoe izyasnenie Bozhestvennoi liturgii*, Moscow 1993, 153-154

⁹¹ On this icon, see: G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers...*, 202-206, 94-95, 128-129, 130-131. According to George Majeska, the icon could have been on the east wall of the southwest vestibule (*pronaos*) adjoining the narthex. Most probably, it was in the central part of the wall near the doors

the Justinian's construction of St. Sophia at Constantinople as recorded in the 10th century *Deegetis* on the construction of Hagia Sophia⁹². According to the tradition, well known in the reign of Leo the Wise, the Archangel Michael appeared to a certain youth in the church being built to give it its name and promise that he would guard it till the youth came back with tidings from the emperor. This, however, sent the youth to Rome as soon as he heard his story to leave the archangel as guardian of the church and the city till the Second Coming. The Russian Anonymous (14th century) contains an abbreviated version of the tradition, most probably going back to a Byzantine original: "*When you have reached St. Sophia you enter the narthex by the south doors. There is an oratory there, a church of St. Michael, as you enter the narthex. It was in this oratory that St. Michael appeared to a youth who was watchman over the work. St. Michael spoke thus to the youth: 'Where are the master builders of this church, and what is the church's name?' The youth responded, 'The master builders have gone to the imperial palace to dine, and the church has no name.' St. Michel then said to the youth, 'Go tell the master builders that they should complete this church quickly in honor of St. Sophia.' The youth said to the saint, 'My lord, the sight of you is awesome; the brightness of your robe blinds me. What is your name, my lord?' The saint said, 'My name is Michael.' The youth then said to the saint, 'Lord Michael, I cannot leave here until my masters come, lest I ruin their work.' Then Michael said to the youth, 'What is your name?' And the youth told the saint, 'My name is Michael.' St. Michael then said to the youth, 'Michael, go to the emperor and let him order the master builders to complete this church in honor of St. Sophia quickly, and I will be watchman over St. Sophia and the work in your place, and the power of Christ the Lord God is in me, I will not leave here until you return.' The saint dispatched the youth, and he went and told the emperor of the apparition of St. Michael. The emperor meditated in his heart and sent the youth to Rome so that he should not return back [to St. Sophia], and St. Michael would be the guardian of the Temple of St. Sophia and of Constantinople until the second coming*"⁹³.

The image of Archangel Michael was the first to face those who entered the church on weekday services, when the atrium way was closed. One of the early references to the icon, from 1182, belongs to Niketas Choniates, who says that the

to the patriarchal chambers in the south galleries. Possibly, there was also the altar of the chapel (*pridel*) of St. Michael

⁹² See: *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum...*, 84-88; S.G. Vilinsky, *Vizantiiko-slavyanskije skazaniya o sozdaanii khrama Sv. Sofii tsaregradskoi*, Odessa 1900, 84-85, 100-101; G.Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire...*, 201-203, 229-233

⁹³ Archimandrite Leonid, *Skazanie o Sv. Sofii tsaregradskoi*, *Pamyatniki drevnei pimennosti i iskusstva*, 78. Saint-Petersburg 1889, 0-13; G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers...*, 128-129, 130-131. There were major differences between the versions of the legend about Archangel Michael's apparition. Thus, one of them dates the event not to Justinian's reign but to the church repairs in the reign of Romanos III (1028-1034). A monk from the Monastery of St. Andrew Salus relates his vision. (*Ibid.*, 130-131, 204).

mosaic portrayed “*the first and the greatest*” of archangels with a bared sword, and that this very archangel was appointed guardian of the church⁹⁴. In his time Franz Dolger has already pointed out a possible connection between the Archangel of the Tympanum mosaic and the tradition of the miraculous appearance⁹⁵. It seems to us quite probable, despite the obvious difference between the pictorial schemes of two images in the Tympanum and in the southwest vestibule. The iconographic difference might have been determined by the same approach that we have already interpreted in the case of the images of the Virgin in the same miraculous framework. This practice has a lot of analogies in the later miraculous shrines.

An important, though indirect, evidence may be found in the liturgical setting of St. Sophia at Thessalonica following the traditions of the Great Church. Possibly, the “*holy icon of an archangel*”, displayed to the right of the entrance in the narthex of the Thessalonica Sophia was a kind of substitution of two archangel-guardians nearby two main entrances in Constantinople. Solemn liturgies, described by Symeon of Thessalonica, started with incense burning before this icon. Symeon of Thessalonica described the matins entrance ritual from the ancient ceremonial of the Great Church, which was preserved in the liturgy of St. Sophia at Thessalonica at the turn of 15th century. Before the reading of Psalm 50, of penitence, the priest “*starts to wave the censer from the right side of the narthex, where there is a holy icon of an archangel on the wall, and burns incense all round the narthex, waving the censer at the pillars and walls. <...> As he comes back to his point of departure, he makes the sign of the cross with the censer, saying: 'Forgive us, o Wisdom.' Then he takes from the altar the cross, preserved behind it, and places it on the right side near the great doors, where it stands till the psalm reading is over. Then three candles are lit in the altar, and the doors come ajar, and the ceremonial entrance takes place*”⁹⁶. If the rite reproduced a tradition of the Great Church, it means that in St. Sophia at Constantinople the altar cross was also placed in the narthex near the icon of the Mother of God, which had spoken to St. Mary of Egypt and under the Archangel image in the Tympanum mosaic. If so, could this unique ritual be a part of the symbolic program of Leo the Wise, and was it meant to recall the Vita episode in which the repentant Mary was stopped by the angelic power and later admitted to see the Holy Cross?

It appears that the Archangel icon in the tympanum of Hagia Sophia was doubtless also a guardian of the church, as many images of the archangels flanking the doors which became a common theme of the Byzantine church iconography in the

⁹⁴ Nicetas Choniates. *Historia*, ed. J.L. van Dieten (Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae, Bd. 11). Berlin 1975, 238, 79-81

⁹⁵ F. Dolger, *JUSTINIANS ENGEL*, 1-4.

⁹⁶ See: J. Darrouzes, *Op. cit.*, 60-61, 64. See also: E. Goloubinsky, *Istoria russkoi tserkvi*, I/2, Moscow 1904, 490

Komnenan and, especially, in the Palaiologan periods⁹⁷. The well established topos occurred in Byzantine epigrams of the same era, directly connected, as Hoerandner has convincingly shown, with contemporary pictorial practice⁹⁸. For this tradition as well as for the entrance images of Christ and the Virgin, the Imperial Door's program of Hagia Sophia could have been an important source of inspiration.

Most probably, the mosaic images of Christ, the Mother of God and the Archangel in the Tympanum were not precise copies and thus could hardly be used for the iconographic reconstruction of particular icons. As we see it, however, they were meant as reminiscences of the crucial miraculous images, which played a role of sacred landmarks on the emperor's way from palace to church. As we know, in Byzantine church iconography the replicas sometimes acquired an independent meaning and miraculous power. So, if our assumptions are correct, the mosaic portrays Leo the Wise as penitent, and at the same time worshipping three miraculous icons related to the theme of church entrance. In this context, each representation accentuated its own aspect of one symbolic image, which embodied the pivotal idea of repentance as the way to salvation. As we have seen above, the same concept is at the basis of the composition of three relics under the Tympanum – the Door of Noah's Ark and miraculous icons of the Christ Confessor and of the Mother of God who spoke to St Mary of Egypt. As in the relics composition, in the Tympanum mosaic the major icon of the 'Chrysotriklinos Christ' is supplemented by two icons in medallions. An idea of their miraculous origins receives an unexpected support in the logic of the general symbolic structure the Imperial Door' program, combining holy objects and images, actually inseparable in this project of sacred environment.

The Tympanum composition could be interpreted as a selected group of the miraculous images – a visual parallel to the collections of written testimonies on miracle-working icons in the main treatises of icon worshipers, including the Apologies of St. John of Damascus, The Acts of the Second Niceae Council, or The Letter of Three Oriental Patriarchs. It might have been an additional reference to the great role played by the Macedonian dynasty in the restoration of icon-worship. Moreover, all these texts embodied an idea of particular efficiency of the prayer addressed to miraculous images. In this context, one may recall the Byzantine practice of bringing various miraculous icons in the Easter period to the royal palace for a special veneration of the emperor⁹⁹. The evidence suggests that Leo the Wise could order to represent himself on the Tympanum mosaic in the sacred space of miraculous icons making his prayer most efficacious.

⁹⁷ M. Tatić-Djurić, Archanges gardiens de porte à Decani, *Dechani i vizantijska umetnost' seređinom XIV veka*, Beograd 1989, 359-366

⁹⁸ W. Hoerandner, *Nugae Epigrammaticae*, FILELLHN. *Studies in honour of Robert Browning*, Venice 1996, 109-111. The author provides several examples from the written sources and Byzantine and Post-Byzantine iconography starting with the Tympanum mosaic

⁹⁹ Pseudo-Kodinos, *Traite des offices*, ed. J. Verpeaux, Paris 1966, 227-231.

The Chalke Christ on the west wall. Additional arguments for our interpretation are provided by other miraculous images in Hagia Sophia, not included formally in the narthex program. Among them of primary importance is the image of Christ, which was represented on the west wall in the naos of Hagia Sophia, just above the Imperial Doors on the level of the Tympanum mosaic. It was a replica of the Chalke Christ – a famous miraculous icon above the Brazen gates (Chalke) of the imperial Great Palace¹⁰⁰. According to the tradition, the destruction of the Chalke icon set the beginning of Iconoclasm¹⁰¹. The icon was restored by the Empress Irina during the intermission of Iconoclasm but was later subverted again by Leo V, and eventually, soon after 843, it was restored by hands of the saint icon-painter Lazarus at the order of the Empress Theodora¹⁰². Most probably it was a mosaic image of full-length Christ, blessing and holding the Gospel book in his left hand¹⁰³.

Like the Chalke icon of the Great Palace, its mosaic replica on the west wall of Hagia Sophia did not survive. It was replaced by a green marble plate, surrounded by a few other panels made in the *opus sectile* technique. Among them the most interesting is the panel depicting the triumphal precious cross in ciborium, which was initially situated right above the icon of Christ¹⁰⁴. As the icon plate, this panel was especially inserted in older marble incrustation of the west wall. It could be a part of the concept reflecting the Chalke setting of the Great Palace, where, according to Patriarch Methodius epigram (847), the cross was represented nearby the icon of Christ¹⁰⁵.

The presence of the Chalke miraculous icon in Hagia Sophia is recorded by the Russian pilgrim Stephan of Novgorod in 1349. He clearly associated this icon with the image in Chalke and the legend of the beginning of Iconoclasm: “*Going a little farther, and turning toward the west, you will see an icon of the holy Savior standing high up over the doors there. The story of this icon is recounted in the books which we can not quote, but, [briefly], a pagan iconoclast put up a ladder, hopping to rip the golden crown of [the icon]. St. Theodosia overturned the ladder and killed the pagan, and the saint was killed there with a goat horn*”¹⁰⁶. The mention of the golden crown of the icon is significant. This particular detail is a characteristic of the venerated icon

¹⁰⁰ G. Majeska, *The Image of the Chalke Savior*, 284-295; Idem. *Russian Travelers*, 209-212

¹⁰¹ There is a recent reconsideration of this tradition arguing that the image destruction never took place in the historical reality of the 8th century: M.-F. Auzepy, *La destruction de Christ de la Chalce par Leon III*, *Byz 60* (1990), 445-492.

¹⁰² A comprehensive analysis of sources, see: C. Mango, *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, Copenhagen 1959, 108-148

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 135-142. On the iconographic peculiarities, see: A. Frolov, *Le Christ de la Chalce*, *Byz 33* (1963), 107-120

¹⁰⁴ Majeska emphasized the imperial connotations of this decorative composition situated on the wall between the imperial doors and imperial gynaecium on the west gallery: G. Majeska, *The Image of the Chalke Savior...*, 290-292, pl.I-II

¹⁰⁵ C. Mango, *The Brazen House...*, 126-128

¹⁰⁶ G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers...*, 28-29

and Stephan of Novgorod may have taken it from the actual appearance of the Chalke Christ in Hagia Sophia.

It is important to observe the connection between the image of the Chalke Christ and the symbolic program of the Imperial Door analysed above. The mosaic images with Christ enthroned and the Chalke Christ were situated approximately at the same level above the Imperial Door, but on two different sides of the west wall in the narthex and in the nave. Together they could be perceived as a kind of monumental double-side icon. Both icons had the most important prototypes in the Great Palace – the Chrysotriklinos and the Chalke – and at the same time both were venerated as miracle-working icons. It is noteworthy that the well-informed Orthodox pilgrim Stephan of Novgorod does not make any difference between the ‘copy’ in Hagia Sophia and the famous icon of Christ in Chalke itself, which was highly venerated in the same century¹⁰⁷. We can assume that they were perceived as one image in two representations. The miraculous icons united two significant spaces of the Great Palace and of the Great Church into a single sacred environment which obtained its most sublime meaning during the solemn services in which the Emperor took part.

In this context our knowledge about the role played by the miraculous icons in the patriarchal service in Hagia Sophia gains new significance. According to the description of Symeon of Thessalonica, at the beginning of the evening services on Saturday, Sunday and the main feasts, the Patriarch stopped in the narthex before the Imperial Door and venerated the icon of the Virgin that spoke to Mary of Egypt. Then on entering the church he turned to the west wall and bent thrice to “*the holy image of the Saviour above the beautiful doors*” (the Chalke Christ), saying “*We bent before your over-pure image*”¹⁰⁸. Characteristically, the relic-icon brought from Jerusalem and the monumental mosaic replica appear as equal miraculous images of the Saviour and the Mother of God situated at the entrance. From the liturgical point of view they form the inseparable parts of a single sacred unity where the material relic freely flows into depiction and the latter is filled with the energy of the miracle-working object. This helps us to understand the principle of interrelation between the relic-icons of the Imperial Door and the mosaic images above them.

The exact date of the Hagia Sophia replica of the Chalke Saviour is unknown, but the significance of its location allows us to assume that the image above the entrance on the west wall appeared as part of a large project of restoration of iconic representations in the space of Hagia Sophia undertaken by the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty in the 9th and 10th centuries. The close symbolic connection of

¹⁰⁷ The Russian Anonimous testified: “*All of Constantinople, including the Franks and everyone from Galata, comes to this Savior [icon] on [its] holiday, for on this holy Savior holiday forgiveness comes to the infirm*” (Ibid., 136-137)

¹⁰⁸ J. Darrouzès, op.cit., 46-49.

the Chalke Christ with the Imperial Door's program of Leo the Wise makes the order of this emperor a probable hypothesis.

It is noteworthy that the tradition of the Chalke icon had powerful imperial connotations. The oldest and most famous legend concerning the Chalke image, first given in the Chronicle of Theophanes, reports that this image spoke to the Emperor Maurice (582-602) in a dream¹⁰⁹. The Chalke Christ as the High Judge said to the sinful emperor: "*Where dost thou wish me to give thee thy due, here or in the world to come?*" The penitence of Maurice is also connected with another story tells about forgiveness of another sinful emperor – the iconoclast Theophilos – after the supplication of his wife Theodora, again in front of the Chalke image¹¹⁰. In her vision Theodora had received a response of Christ: "*O woman, great is thy faith. Know therefore, that because of the tears and thy faith, and also the prayers and imploration of priests, I forgive thy husband Theophilos*"¹¹¹. This miracle-story of the Empress' vision was sometimes read in Byzantine churches on the Sunday of Orthodoxy¹¹², connecting the restoration of icon-worship with the main themes of repentance and forgiveness. One may notice that such a symbolic context of the Chalke Christ correlates it to the Imperial Door's program of Leo the Wise, combining the imperial and penitential aspects. One more similarity could be found in the topos of images miraculously responding to sinners (the icons of Christ Confessor and of the Virgin who spoke to St. Mary of Egypt)¹¹³. They have created a kind of sounding environment at the sacred entrance, recalling the living interaction between miraculous images and believers in this mystical space, enriched by a number of imperial 'historical' associations.

It does not seem strange in this context that in the later church iconography of memorial portraits the evocation of the Chalke Christ became an established motive revealing the royal background of the donators. In the narthex fresco of the Boiana church near Sofia, Bulgaria (1259), the Bulgarian king Constantine Assen Tich and his wife Irina are represented before the image of Christ 'Chalketis' to the right of the main entrance into the naos of the church¹¹⁴. A more profound conceptual analogy to the Imperial Door's program of Hagia Sophia may be found in the famous 14th century Deesis mosaic at the inner narthex of the Kahriye Çamii in Istanbul, again to the right of the main entrance¹¹⁵. The full-length images of Christ, inscribed 'O XALKITIS', and the Virgin in supplication are accompanied by the portraits of Isaac

¹⁰⁹ C. Mango, *Brazen House...*, 109-112

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 131-132

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 132

¹¹² For instance, in the 11th century Evergetis Synaxarion: A.A. Dmitrievskii, *Opisanie...*, I, 521

¹¹³ I am grateful to Nicoletta Izar who paid my attention to this 'sound' aspect of the Leo the Wise project

¹¹⁴ N. Mavrodinov, *Boianskata tsrkva*, Sofia 1972, 33,39-44, fig. 6, 11, 12, 22

¹¹⁵ P. Underwood, *The Deesis Mosaic in the Kahrie Cami at Istanbul*, *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of A.M.Friend*, Princeton 1955, 254-260.

Kommenos and the nun Melania venerating the image of Christ Chalketis. This donors' scene represented together two members of the royal family, who lived in the 12th and 14th centuries respectively¹¹⁶. Without going deep into the complex historical concept, we may just note that the composition intended to present the veneration of an 'imperial' miraculous image as the most reliable way to salvation. In this iconography we come across the type of Byzantine religious consciousness that seems to justify the proposed interpretation of the Imperial Door's program in Hagia Sophia, which could be a source of inspiration for the Kahriye Çamii mosaic.

The miraculous framework in Hagia Sophia. The connection between the symbolical meanings of the Tympanum mosaic and the Chalke Christ suggests that the whole program of the Imperial Door was not something isolated and self-contained in Hagia Sophia. Apparently, it was a part of an even more complex system of images and relics, which created a kind of 'miraculous network' in the sacred space of the Great Church. Another possible part of this structure could be the image of the enthroned Virgin with the Child in the altar apse, well visible from the open Imperial Door. This worshipped icon of the Virgin in the altar conch¹¹⁷ was copied in the mosaic composition above the south narthex entrance, with the images of the Emperors Constantine and Justinian presenting the City of Constantinople and the Great Church to the image of the Virgin. This principle of symbolic repetitions was a basic one, and acquired special significance in churches with marble-inlaid walls decorated by separate iconic images. But it does not seem accidental that during the liturgical procession from the south-west vestibule to the sanctuary the Tympanum mosaic stood between two images of the enthroned Virgin. An additional element, which connected these three images, was the curtains hanging in front of the doors to the narthex, to the nave and to the sanctuary. The hooks for these curtains, belonging to the original frames, are still visible above the Imperial Door as well as above the south-west entrance.

One should remember that these three famous mosaics present only remnant of the entire sacred space of Hagia Sophia, which was filled by numerous unknown icons and relics functioning in the shared context. We have to remember that a lot of inscriptions near these shrines played a great role¹¹⁸. Sometimes they gave the most important key for the understanding a particular program. Only a few of them are known from epigrams. Fortunately, there is an extremely interesting witness to two

¹¹⁶ N. Teteriatnikov, The Place of the Nun Melania (The Lady of the Mongols) in the Deesis Program of the Inner Narthex of Chora, Constantinople, *CahArch*, 43 (1995), 163-180, 168-170

¹¹⁷ C. Mango, E.J.W. Hawkins, The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul, *DOP* 19 (1965), 113-148; R. M. Sailor, *Tradition and Innovation: A Reconsideration of the Hagia Sophia Apsidal Icon*, 1994 (M.A. Thesis, University of Oregon). The 14th century tradition confirms that the conch mosaic was perceived as a miraculous image of the Virgin

¹¹⁸ S. Mercati, Sulle iscrizioni di Santa Sofia, *Bessarione*, 26 (1923), 204-206; Idem., *Collectanea Byzantina*, II, Bari 1970, 276-280

inscriptions of Leo the Wise set up at the doors of Hagia Sophia¹¹⁹. It is a passage from the *De metris Pindaricis* by Isaac Tzetzes (d.1138): “*Thou hast verses such as these in the great and famous – the very great, I say, and splendid church of the Wisdom of God, written by the Emperor Leo the Wise, beautifully covered over the Holy Door. Thou hast also those that are composed round the Saviour, piously written by him in the Beautiful Gate*”¹²⁰.

The text is unclear. Nothing is said about the contents of the verse inscriptions of Leo the Wise. One of them has been covered above the ‘Holy Doors’, possibly the gates of the sanctuary barrier. Another inscription surrounded an image of Christ at or in the ‘Beautiful Doors’. According to flexible Byzantine terminology, it could have been the doors of the exonarthex or so called Imperial Door from the narthex into the nave. Which image of Christ is mentioned by Tzetzes? The Tympanum mosaic has no room for the inscription but it could have been situated nearby. There is a possibility that the image was represented on the silver revetment of the Door of Noah’s Ark. It may concern also the miraculous icon of Christ Confessor to the left of the central doors, or another unknown image in the exonarthex. Despite all this uncertainty, the message of Tzetzes’ verses is of great significance. It presents as fact Leo the Wise’s creation of the symbolic programs of the main doors in Hagia Sophia in conjunction with the important images there.

The evidence confirms an active participation of Leo the Wise in the redecoration of Hagia Sophia after Iconoclasm – a favourite project of the Macedonian dynasty. Furthermore, it makes very probable his crucial role in the creation of the miraculous framework of the Great Church, not merely wall decoration, but a sophisticated structure of miraculous icons and relics interacting with various rituals in the actual sacred space. We have tried to reconstruct this spatial phenomenon, using all the available testimonies, direct and indirect, about Leo the Wise and the miraculous icons in Hagia Sophia. It is a challenging subject requiring new methodological approaches and the collaborative efforts of many scholars. Ultimately, we may build up a new field of research revealing a historical source of exceptional importance.

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¹¹⁹ C. Mango, *Materials for the study of the mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul*, Washington 1962, 96-97

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 97