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COMMUNICATIVE ASPECTS OF SACRED SPACE. MESSAGES TO THE SAINT

THE SACRED SPACE IN CHRISTIANITY AS A COMMUNICATION MEDIUM

In our contribution we shall discuss the issue of ‘sacred space as a mediator between earthly and heavenly realms’ (A. Lidov)¹ and in particular the role of pilgrims as users and participants in the creation of sacred spaces. Pilgrimage in all its specific varieties is no doubt one of the most ancient ritual practices common to almost all cultures and faiths through the centuries that still profoundly influences millions of people today. Recently there is an increasing scientific interest in this religious practice still very much alive within the Christian tradition in particular. It is often regarded as specifically connected to the identity of a cultural or ethnic community.

Communication as theological concept

The phenomena are connected with the major theme of communication with God. “A core concept in Pseudo-Dionysius’s theology is *enosis*, or union with God, and it was expressed in key passages in terms of love, desire, deep yearning, and zeal by and for God in relation to his creatures”, — wrote G. Peers. And further: “...Images and signs represent for weak human comprehension the pure desire of God for unification with his creation. Such focus on yearning and desire was fundamental for Byzantine theology, society, and ethics”².

¹ Lidov A. Spatial Icons as a Performative Phenomenon // Spatial Icons. Textuality and Performativity. Proceedings of the International Symposium. Ed. by A. Lidov. M.: Indrik, 2009, p. 16. See also: Lidov A. Hierotopy. The creation of sacred space as a form of creativity and subject of cultural history // Hierotopy. The creation of sacred spaces in Byzantium and medieval Russia. Ed. by A. Lidov. M.: Indrik, 2006, p. 32–48; reprinted in: Лидов А. Иеротопия. Пространственные иконы и образы-парадигмы в византийской культуре. М., 2009, с. 11–37.

² Peers G. Icons’ spirited love // Religion and the Art 13, Brill 2009, p. 221–222, focusing on ‘De divinis nominibus’ 709B–713A, trans. found in *Pseudo-Dionysius. Complete Works*, Trans. Colm. Liubheid, New York: Paulist Press 1987, p. 81–83.

Because God is a Trinity, communication is an inherent necessity within the Godhead (Genesis 3:22). Because men are made in God's image, we likewise have the ability and desire to communicate. Men communicate with other men and before the fall, he would naturally commune with God (Genesis 2:15–16).

“The church is heaven on earth, where the God of heaven dwells and moves”³ according to the liturgical exegesis of St. Germanus I, Patriarch of Constantinople (c. 715–730). It is the space of the divine presence from the perspective of systematic theology. First there is the liturgy, every page of which expresses the imagery of the heavenly cult. The ritual was enclosed in an ambiance of iconographic programs explicitly designed to portray and heighten the vision of mystery. The surfaces of the church interior are so enveloped in this imagery that building and icon become one in evoking that vision of the Christian cosmos around which Byzantine liturgy revolved.

“An icon is not a speaking object and is not granted a human voice. Theologically a wall painting or a panel is not the equivalent of the holy person”. Nevertheless, as R. Nelson pointed out “This, however, is not to imply that icons do not communicate verbally with their beholders, and this is where inscriptions are important... What was evidently being proclaimed was a Biblical passage presumably inscribed on a scroll or codex that the holy person displayed”⁴. The Typikon of Cosmosotera monastery describes images of a holy person “as living beings that seem to speak graciously with their mouths to all who look on them”⁵.

The holy person is the agent of intercession. A similar communication link via images of saints and texts, written on their scrolls also occurs in the sacred space of the church interior, decorated with wall paintings. “By means of texts written on scrolls or books saints communicate with the faithful”⁶. By means of verbal prayers, oral or written on pieces of paper (or in a special book), the faithful communicate with the saint. Both are participating in the creation of the sacred space.

Present-day theories of communication

Let's try now to highlight the components of this specific communicative situation in Orthodox Christianity using some contemporary theories of communication. This is how it would appear in the model, developed by the

³ *St. Germanus of Constantinople on the Divine Liturgy*. The Greek text with translation, introduction and commentary by P. Meyendorff. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984, p. 56.

⁴ *Nelson R. Image and Inscription. Pleas for Salvation in Spaces of Devotion // Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*. Ed. By L. James. Cambridge, 2007, p. 108.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 116.

sociolinguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes in the context of his *Ethnography of Communication*⁷. Hymes developed a valuable model to assist the identification and labeling of components of linguistic interaction within a cultural context, but the categories are so productive and powerful in analysis that you can apply them to many different kinds of communicative situations. The model had sixteen components that can be applied to many sorts of discourse: message form; message content; setting; scene; speaker/sender/addressor; hearer/receiver/audience; addressee; purposes (goals and outcomes); key; channels; forms of speech; norms of interaction; norms of interpretation; and genres. To facilitate the application of his representation, Hymes constructed the acronym, S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G, under which he grouped the sixteen components within eight divisions.

Thus, the first element of a communicative situation in Hymes' model is formulated as '*Setting and Scene*' where *Setting* refers to the time and place of a speech act and, in general, to the physical circumstances. In our case the *Setting* could be any holy place — an open space or a building. Clearly, the temple is par excellence the place for communion with God; this is its main function. In brief we shall recall some factors and means for the building up and organization of the sacred space in the context of hierotopy: a hermit living in a cave and founder of a monastery; a reference to Jerusalem on earth and/or Heavenly Jerusalem; later miraculous relics of the Saint. i.e. in a temple there can be a sarcophagus with relics, a miraculous icon or a sculpture with the function of mediators, marking the specialized places for communion with God. The grave of the saint or the place where he was a hermit, which could be within the temple complex or outside it, have the same function.

The main *Participants* in the examined communicative situation are God and the believer/believers. The roles which the model of Hymes offers are those of the *speaker* and *hearer*, or *sender* and *receiver* and so on. We could summarize them as *addressee* and *addresser*. A third part is given to the *audience*, which might be distinguished as addressees and *other hearers*, i.e. suited to chance witnesses to the communion with God. The specifics of the object require addition of a fourth role — that of a *mediator* — attributed to saints. Also we have to differentiate a fifth part — the *beneficient* — he to whom blessing or donation is addressed to. Often we pray to God not only for our own health and happiness, but also for that of our beloved ones, who are involved in this way in the interaction. In that sense when we pray for ourself the *addressee* and the *beneficient* coincide.

⁷ Hymes D. Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach. Philadelphia, 1974, p. 54–62.

The usual communicative '*Purpose*' of the believers is to get protection, healing, help and comfort in distress, for strength to overcome difficulties, and for success.

The '*Act Sequence*', which refers to the form and the order of the events, includes all ritual practices — collective or individual — and could vary from a holy place to a holy place, depending on the *settings*.

Prescriptions about the '*key*', the '*norms*' and the '*genre*' of the communicative event are to be found in the texts of the Bible, in the formulas of the donors' inscriptions or in different texts on wall paintings and icons.

MOVEMENT IN THE TEMPLE AND THE RECEPTION OF VISUAL AND TEXTUAL MESSAGES (GOD — SAINTS — BELIEVER)

Turning to the visual and textual messages to the believers, we take as our starting point the entrance of the temple. According to the symbolic meaning of this area, it stands for the border between two worlds. According to St. Maximus the Confessor, entry into the church stood for "the transition of believers from sin and lack of knowledge to virtue and knowledge... it shows us, believers, that we breach the Commandments of the Lord with our loose behavior and shameful life, it shows us to make amends through repentance"⁸. As St. Symeon of Thessalonica wrote: "Splendor of the temple signifies the beauty of paradise, therefore the Divine temple pictures paradise or better to say, presents the paradise heavenly gifts... In the beginning of prayers we stand outside the temple as if outside paradise of heaven itself. And when songs are finished and the gates open we enter the Divine temple like paradise or heaven. It means that heavenly dwellings are open to us and we got access to the Holy of Holies, we ascend to the light and approach the throne of the Lord..."⁹ Respectively the role of painted images around the entrance of the church is to lead the suggestion of certain ideas, principles, behavior, to prepare those entering for communication with the Lord. From interactional point of view these are means of metacommunication or communication about communication. In terms of Hymes' model they provide cues that establish the "*tone, manner, or spirit*" as well as the *norms* governing the event and the participants' actions and reaction. Thus we find images of archangels with enormous scrolls in their hands around the entrance, as is the case with the church of St. Peter and Paul at Turnovo from the end of the 15th century. The text of Isaiah (1:16–18) appears on the scroll of archangel Gabriel: "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove your bad doings

⁸ Творения преподобного Максима Исповедника. Книга I. Богословские и аскетические трактаты / Перевод, вступит. статья и коммент. А. И. Сидорова. Мартис, 1993.

⁹ *St. Symeon of Thessalonica. On the Holy Temple and its Consecration*, Ch. 108, 123 // J. P. Migne. *Patrologia Graeca*, V. 155, Paris, 1866.

from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason together” — says the Lord. Further the text on the scroll of St. John the Baptist runs as follows: “Repent, for the coming of the kingdom of the Lord is nigh”, and still further holy monks with similar texts like those of the saints from the same church containing direct addresses, and of course exhortations and admonishment to the believers to pray. As we see God’s discourse is above all instructive.

This didactic trend becomes stronger throughout the period of transition from the Middle Ages to modern times. In 18th and 19th c., visual didactic themes have been drawn on the exterior, in the open galleries of monastery churches for instance that of the Rila monastery, or in general in the western part of the church, around the entrance¹⁰. Here, besides the texts written on scrolls we find quite long texts inscribed in the scenes without any frame. Thus the illustration of the Parable of the Rich man and the poor Lazarus on the façade of the Rila monastery church incorporates the plea of the Rich man, addressed to Abraham: “Father Abraham, have mercy upon me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame” (Luke 16, 24).

‘*Ut pictura sermones*’ this is how Miroslav Timotijevic defines the interplay between rhetoric and wall painting and the part of the image in the communication system of Serbian Baroque¹¹. In fact, this link also existed in earlier phases of development of Orthodox culture in the Balkans. And as H. Maguire pointed out: “once the artifices of rhetoric had been translated into visual language, they could be understood by all, whatever their background or their level of education”¹².

We could find a prototype of addressing requests, for instance in the well known composition *Deesis* with the Holy Virgin *Paraklitissa* or *Mediatrice*, where the texts of the scrolls constitute a *sui generis* dialogue via prayers for intercession before Christ for the sins of mankind¹³. What is sometimes known as the *Royal Deesis*¹⁴ is found in Bulgaria in the church of St. George at Kremikovtzi, the church of Peter and Paul at Turnovo and the

¹⁰ Bakalova E. Didactic themes in church mural painting of the 19th century Bulgaria. *Western Influences?* // *Revue de l’Association internationale d’études du Sud-Est Européen* (Travaux du Colloque “L’Europe centrale et le Sud-Est européen aux XIXe–XXe siècles”, Cepelare 2008), № 35–39. 2005–2009, p. 383–401.

¹¹ Timotijevic M. *Srpsko barokno slikarstvo*. Beograd, 1996, p. 164–181.

¹² Maguire H. *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*. Princeton, 1981, p. 111.

¹³ Nelson R. *Op.cit.*, p. 109–112.

¹⁴ On the so called “*Royal Deesis*” see Djordjevic I., Markovic M. On the Dialog Relationship between the Virgin and Christ in East Christian Art. *Apropos of the discovery of the figures of the Virgin Mediatrice and Christ in the naos of Lesnovo* // *Zograf*, 28, 2000–2001, p. 13–49.

church St. Demetrios at Boboshevo¹⁵, all dated from the 15th century. The following text appears on the scroll of the Holy Virgin: „Accept the prayer of your generous mother”, *Christ*: „What are you praying for, oh my mother of mine, for the salvation of sinners? You shall fill me with anger”. *Holy Virgin*: “Forgive me my son, may they receive salvation from you. Thank you, Word”.

Similar verbal prayers or messages to the saints, we find in donor’s inscriptions in wall paintings and icons, which contain direct pleas to the Holy Virgin or various saints — most often with requests for intercession of forgiveness of sins¹⁶. R. Nelson¹⁷ gives the following example from the church of Panagia Arakiotissa at Lagoudera on Cyprus (end of 12th c.) — donor’s dedicatory inscription inscribed next to the representation of the Virgin and child on the south wall: “All-pure Mother of God, he who has portrayed your immaculate image in perishable colors with great yearning and most ardent faith, Leon, your poor and worthless servant, called after his father Authentēs, together with his consort and fellow servant... request faithfully with countless tears to find a happy conclusion to the rest of their life together with their fellow slaves and children, your servants, and receive the death of the saved. For you alone, Virgin, are able to be glorified”¹⁸. According to R. Nelson “Employing the vocative, Leon addresses the Mother of God and requests her intercession for himself and his family. Although Leon had her image made, the inscription distinguishes icon and prototype. Leon directs his prayer not to the image but to the Virgin herself. The icon is a means to an end. The inscription declares Leon’s humility, a useful strategy if one wants to enter paradise. In accordance with that humility, the patron is represented by his name only. ...The inscription or rather its reading, makes the prayer on behalf of Leon”¹⁹.

“Inscriptions and icons join to create holy space”, as R. Nelson pointed out. “The words are animated and voiced by the readers. The images are seen and venerated by the viewers. Both are means of access to the holy, but

¹⁵ Staneva H., Rousseva R. The church of St. Demetrius in Boboshevo. Architecture, Wall Paintings, Conservation. Sofia, 2009, p. 94–98.

¹⁶ Papalexandrou A. Text in context: eloquent monuments and the Byzantine beholder // Word&Image. Vol. 17, N 3, July–September 2001, p. 259–283; Eadem. Echoes of Orality in the Monumental Inscriptions of Byzantium // Art and Text in Byzantine Culture. Ed. By L. James. Cambridge, 2007, p. 161–188.

¹⁷ Nelson R. Op. cit., p. 109–112.

¹⁸ On the original inscription in Greek see: David & June Windfield. The Church of the Panaghia tou Arakos at Lagoudhera, Cyprus: the paintings and their painterly significance // Dumbarton Oaks Studies 37, Dumbarton Oaks, 2003. Cf. Nikolaïdēs A. L’église de la Panaghia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre : Etude iconographique des fresques de 1192 // Dumbarton Oaks Papers, vol. 50 (1996), p. 105–109.

¹⁹ Nelson R. Op. cit., p. 110.

not the divine itself. By means of texts written on scrolls or books, saints communicate with the faithful. But it is the scroll or then book that speaks, when voiced by the reader, not the icon or the person portrayed. The result is the three-dimensional space of the icon that is formed by plane of the panel and the place from which it is seen and voiced"²⁰. Moreover the inscriptions in question provide the believers with models for communication with God in general and with language patterns of prayer in particular.

MODELS FOR COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

Prayer

The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus' teachings on prayer as part of the famous Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6 and again in Luke 11, Jesus provides what has come to be known as "The Lord's Prayer" or "The Disciple's Prayer". This model prayer sheds tremendous light on how Jesus prayed and how Jesus wanted his followers to pray. That is why on the wall in the ante chamber of the crypt beneath the Russian Church of St. Nicholas in Sofia for example, where pilgrims leave notes to the Saint Archbishop Seraphim, asking for wishes to be granted, we find a board with quotations from the evangelist Mathew which explains how to make one's prayer:

5. *And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward.*
6. *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your father who is in secret; and your father who sees in secret will reward you.*
7. *And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words.*
8. *Do not be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask him.*

John Climacus defines prayer as 'a dialogue and union with God' and as "reconciliation with God"²¹. John of Damascus's definition of prayer is "the elevation of the mind to God"²². An epigram about an image of St. Michael combines the Orthodox doctrine of prayer and holy image: "The mortal man who beholds the image directs his mind to higher contemplation. His veneration is no longer distracted: engraving within himself the archangel's traits, he trembles as if he were in latter's presence. The eyes encourage deep

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 116.

²¹ *John Climacus*. The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Paulist Press, 1982, p. 43.

²² *Martial Lekeux O. F. M.* The Art of Prayer, Imprimatur Catholicus 2008, p. 55.

thoughts and art is able by means of color to ferry over to its object the prayer of the mind". So prayer is an inner mental act which is more often accomplished orally. It is a "verbal expression addressed to God, paralleled by the non-verbal communication of bodily postures and gestures"²³.

Written communication: Abgar

But we have also precedents for written or epistolary communication with Christ or his 'intermediaries' in the Christian legends: for instance, the message which King Abgar who ruled Edessa at the beginning of our era wrote to Christ asking to be healed. The story of the exchange of letters between Christ and Abgar came down to us in the early developed version of the Ecclesiastic History of Eusebius (ca. 260–340) who claimed to use authentic documents in the archives of Edessa. According to the legend, on falling ill Abgar wrote to Christ and asked that he be healed. Abgar sent Ananias to carry the message to Christ and paint his portrait. By the 6th or 7th c. the story had changed so that instead to being painted, Christ pressed a hand towel, also called mandylion, over his face, leaving an imprint of his image. Hence the Mandylion was called *acheropoiotos* "not made by hands". Over the past ten years several interesting studies and exhibitions on this subject came out²⁴.

A. Cameron has examined the history of the text of Abgar and has come to the conclusion "that the motif of the picture entered the complex

²³ Smith M. with the collaboration of E. Bloch-Smith. The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus. Sheffield, 1997. Chapter 3.

²⁴ The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation / Ed. H. Kessler, G. Wolf. Bologna, 1998; Karaulashvili I. The Date of the Epistula Abgari // Apocrypha 13 (2002), p. 85–111; Eadem. Anchiskhati: Keramidioni Hierapolisidan tu Mandilioni Edesidan [The Anchiskhati (Icon of Ancha: Keramidion from Hierapolis or Mandylion from Edessa) // Mravaltavi (Annual of Tbilisi State K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts) 20 (2003), p. 170–178; Eadem. King Abgar of Edessa and the Concept of a Ruler Chosen by God // Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants / Ed. A. al-Azmeh and J. Bak. Budapest: CEU Studies in the Humanities & Archaeolingua, 2004, p. 173–190; Eadem. The Abgar Legend Illustrated: Interrelation of the Narrative Cycles and Iconography in the Byzantine, Georgian and Latin Traditions // Interactions: Artistic Interchange between the Eastern and Western Worlds in the Medieval Period. A Colloquium organized by the Index of Christian Art, April 8–9, 2004 / Ed. Colum Hourihane. Index of Christian Art. Princeton & Pennsylvania: Univ. Press, 2007, p. 245–260; Lidov A. The Miracle of Reproduction. The Mandylion and Keramion as a paradigm of sacred space // L'Immagine di Cristo dall' Acheropiita dalla mano d'artista / Ed. C. Frommel, G. Morello, G. Wolf. Città del Vaticano, Rome, 2005; Idem. Святой Мандилион. История реликвии (The Holy Mandylion. A History of the Relic) // Спас Нерукотворный в русской иконе (The Holy Face in Russian Icons). Moscow, 2005; Idem. Holy Face-Holy Script-Holy Gate: Revealing the Edessa Paradigm in Christian Imagery // Mandylion. Intorno al Sacro Volto / Ed. G. Wolf. Firenze, 2006.

of the Abgar legend only later, since Aetheria, who visited Edessa in about A.D. 380 saw no picture, but merely the letter of Jesus²⁵. In 944 Abgar's Mandyllion entered Constantinople in triumphal procession at the instigation of the emperor Romanos the I Lakapinos (920–944), Constantine the VII Porphyrogennetos wrote an encomium in honor of the first anniversary of the entrance²⁶. There are images in the illuminated manuscripts. The earliest surviving examples are studied by N. Ševčenko — one illustrating the text of the Narratio in the Metaphrastic Menologion in Alexandria (11th c.), Moscow State Historical Museum cod. 9 (1063), 4 scenes; in Paris. gr. 1528 Metaphrastic Menologion for 15th August 11th c. etc.²⁷ An important cycle occurs on the frame of the Volto Santo in Genoa²⁸.

But we would like to mention especially the miniatures in an amulet Roll, dated around 1374 now at Pierpont Morgan Library in New York (499)²⁹. The text is in Greek and includes scripture, apocrypha, and hagiographic poetry. The sacred texts and the accompanying images presented in roll format signal that this was a talismanic object designed to provide divine protection for its possessors³⁰.

On the Morgan fragment the texts include Psalms 91 and 35, the apocryphal history of the Letter of King Abgar and the Mandyllion and verses in praise of several saints. The most interesting images for us are: 1. Abgar

²⁵ Peregrinatio Aetheriae, 19 / Ed. H. Petré // Sources chrétiennes 21, 1948, p. 161–171; Cameron A. The History of the Image of Edessa: The Telling of a Story // Okeanos. Essays presented to Ihor Sevcenko. Harvard Ukrainian Studies VII, 1983, p. 80–94. A full treatment of the early texts will be found in E. Dobschuetz, Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende. Vol. I. Leipzig, 1899, 120ff.

²⁶ Peers G. Masks, Marriage and the Byzantine Mandyllion: Classical Inversions in the Tenth-Century *Narratio de translatione Constantinopolitum imaginis Edessenae* // Envisager. Ed. Johanne Villeneuve. Intermedialités: histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques. Vol. 8. Montréal, 2006, p. 13–30.

²⁷ Ševčenko N. Illustrated Manuscripts of the Metaphrastian Menologion. Chicago, London, 1990, p. 48, 70, 142, 237.

²⁸ Intorno al Sacro Volto: Genova, Bisanzio e il Mediterraneo (XI–XIV secolo) / Ed. Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti, Colette Dufour Bozzo and Gerhard Wolf. Venice, 2007, p. 163–174; Peers G. Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium. University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2004.

²⁹ Der Nersessian S. La légende d'Abgar d'après un rouleau illustré de la bibliothèque Pierpont Morgan à New York // Известия на българския Археологически Институт, 10, 1936, с. 98–106; Peers G. Magic, the Mandyllion and the Letter of Abgar. On a Greco-arabic Amulet Roll in Chicago and New York // Intorno al Sacro Volto: Genova, Bisanzio e il Mediterraneo (XI–XIV secolo) / Ed. Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti, Colette Dufour Bozzo and Gerhard Wolf. Venice, 2007, p. 163–174.

³⁰ Попконстантинов К. Писмото на цар Авгар до Исус Христос във византийско-славянския свят — според паметници от Филипи, Генуа и България // Civitas Divinopolitana: В чест на професор Георги Бакалов. Тангра ТанНакРа, Център за Изследвания на българите, 2004, с. 405–416.

gives his letter to Christ to a messenger; 2. Christ receiving message; 3, 4. Christ's Reply and Seal; 5. King Abgar sending out Ananias; 6. Ananias receiving the Mandyllion from Christ; 7. Mandyllion revealed; 8. A paralytic cured by the Edessa image; 9. The messenger with the Edessa image before Abgar. The 21 images are both iconic and narrative; those accompanying the Letter of Abgar and Mandyllion legends constitute the *longest extant narrative cycle in Byzantine art*. The Letter to Abgar was the only text written by Christ himself as a kind of divine autograph³¹. Christ writing to Abgar is also represented on the miniature from the Georgian manuscript Alaverdi Tetraevangelion, Tbilisi, Institute of manuscripts, Ms. A-484³².

MESSAGES TO THE SAINT
(SENDER: BELIEVER / PILGRIM → RECEIVER: GOD)

The narrative about King Abgar is probably not familiar to many today, yet the belief in the performative force, in the magic power of the written word is great and is behind a comparatively wide spread practice of pilgrimage, which has not been examined in depth: namely the practice to leave written requests to saints in churches or other 'holy places'. Piotr Kowalski³³ and Natalia Gancarz³⁴, who have studied the practice of recording requests to the Virgin in especially designed for this purpose books in Poland, use the term 'recorded votive offerings', 'voting entries' or 'votive texts'. At this stage of the study, proceeding from the Bulgarian linguistic material, we prefer the working definition 'written requests-wishes', and distinguish them from the *votive gifts*, which usually appear in the form of objects and have a different communicative purpose, namely expressing gratitude, symbolizing the essence of thanksgiving.

³¹ For the Amulet Roll see: *Peers G. Masks, Marriage and the Byzantine Mandyllion: Classical Inversions in the Tenth-Century Narratio de translatione Constantinopolitum imaginis Edessenae* // *Envisager* / Ed. Johanne Villeneuve, Intermedialités: histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et Des techniques. Vol. 8, Montréal, 2006, p. 13–30; Idem. Magic, the Mandyllion and the Letter of Abgar: A Fourteenth-Century Amulet Roll in Chicago and New York // *In Intorno al Sacro Volto: Genova, Bisanzio e il Mediterraneo (XI–XIV secolo)* / Ed. Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti, Colette Dufour Bozzo and Gerhard Wolf. Venice, 2007, p. 163–174; Idem. Art and Identity in an Amulet Roll from the fourteenth-century Trebizond // *Church History and Religious Culture*. Vol. 89 / Ed. Bas ter Haar Romeny and Mat Immerzeel. Leiden, 2009, p. 153–178.

³² We are expressing our gratitude to I. Karaulashvili who had the courtesy to send us this image.

³³ *Kowalski P. Wpisy intencyjne do ksiąg kościelnych* // *Folklor — sacrum — religia* (Seria Wydawnicza Lubelskiego Konwersatorium "Pogranicze". T. 2). Lublin, 1995, p. 260–281.

³⁴ *Gancarz N. Przyczynek do badań nad prośbami do matki boskiej* // *Literatura Ludowa*, 3, 2007, p. 3–16.

The *setting* in this case is the core of the sacred space: the tomb of the saint, the shrine where his relics have been placed, his miraculous icons or his hermitage. One of the saints — *mediators* or *intercessors* in Bulgaria, to whom written prayers are addressed, is St. John of Rila, the first Bulgarian hermit saint. He is among the local ascetics in the Balkans whose feats, relics and miracles have drawn pilgrims from the 10th century to the present day. Originally the saint lived in a cave in the rock, which still stands and is a place of veneration. Under this rock in the forest today is the saint's grave. Next to the saint's hermitage there is curative spring where pilgrims write and leave their written requests among the rocks. Here the metacommunication is performed once again through a quotation (Mathew 7:7) written on the rock face: "Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you" and through the moral guidelines and spiritual support that St. John of Rila's Testament, displayed nearby, provides to the believers.

The customary *Act Sequence* is as follows. At first pilgrims passed through the monastery, may attend a service, bow before the relics of the saint, kept in the main church and orally or in their thought turn their prayers to the saint. After that they follow the pathway to the cave with a narrow passage through it coming out on higher ground. Most of the pilgrims attempt 'to squeeze through it' because whoever squeezes through it without difficulty is considered righteous, if anyone 'gets stuck' he or she are said to be sinners, yet, if they succeed in passing, they would be forgiven. And in the end they write their requests and place them among the stones³⁵. A similar sequence, only limited to the interior of the church we find in the sacred sphere of the sanctuary in Tuchow (Poland): first one prays orally, but in silence, in the main altar, and seals it by walking on the knees around the altar with the painting of the Heavenly Mother, famous for its grace. Then, in the side altar one confirms one's prayer by recording it and in a way, 'signing an agreement' with the Mediator³⁶. In cognitive terms this idea of making a deal is a perfect illustration of Michael Reddy's metalinguistic metaphor of verbal communication. As specified by the so-called 'conduit metaphor', speakers communicate by physically transferring word-objects to their addressees. So the elements of a prototypical scenario of giving and taking correspond closely with those involved in a typical speech-act scenario. The principal participants are there: the

³⁵ On details on the pilgrims' practices and the holy places around the monastery see: Bakalova E. and Lazarova A. A Locus Sanctus in Bulgaria: the Monastery of St. John of Rila and its Sacred Topography // Routes of faith in the Medieval Mediterranean. History, monuments, people, pilgrimage prospects. Thessaloniki, 2008, p. 302–319.

³⁶ See Gancarz N. Op. cit.

speaker/donor, the hearer/recipient, and the idea/object³⁷. Moreover this specific communicative scenario often includes the presentation of votive gifts together with the written prayers and wishes. Kowalski goes even further claiming that “non-material votive offerings in the form of a written document as a substitute for material objects formed a trend which transformed the tradition”³⁸.

The discourse analysis of some of the written requests illustrates how this pilgrimage practice is understood as making an order. The use of the imperative of the verb ‘give’ is rather frequent, for example, ‘give us health and happiness to all our relatives’, without any form of address, as well as of the verb ‘want’, for instance ‘I want a baby’ and the more polite form ‘I would like to have...’ We come across requests with a telegraphic structure like ‘Much love’ or ‘Health, Diana. Assen’, where only the ‘purchase’ and the beneficiaries are marked. In others notes the requests are even numbered as in contract or bill.

“God, may these wishes come true, they are most important for me:

- 1) to win Vlado
- 2) to pass exams after the 7th grade and be accepted wherever I want to
- 3) all of us to be healthy and fine

I am grateful in advance and one more, that is a bit childish:

- 4) to have a boy-friend.

_____ ” (name and surname)

The analysis of the forms and style, which Hymes called *Instrumentalities*, shows a diversion from the genre of prayer or request. Beside ‘orders’ and ‘telegrams’, we find interesting headings of the type “Magda’s wish”, “It is my wish to...” etc. Some of the notes keep to the standard epistolary style with address ‘Dear Ivan Rilski’, a signature, a post scriptum and sometimes even markers for sender and receiver ‘For God from Dari’.

Still a large part of the studied texts keep to a certain degree to the norms and rules governing the event and participant’s action and reaction, with the formulae characteristic for the prayer genre: “Saint Ivan Rilski, I pray to you from all my heart, give me health, happiness and calm... Listen to my prayer. I bow before your will. Amen.”. Others address both to the saint-intercessor and the ultimate addressee God: “Saint Ivan Rilski, and you Oh God, forgive my sins...” Sometimes the link between addresser and addressee is defined as emotional and asymmetric: ‘I love you and I bow before your kindness and your strength’.

³⁷ Reddy M. J. The Conduit Metaphor: A Case of Frame Conflict in our Language about Language // *Metaphor and Thought* / Ed. Andrew Ortony. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

³⁸ See Kowalski P. Op. cit.

Similar practices are to be seen at the grave of Archbishop Seraphim Sobolev in the Russian Church in Sofia; at the miraculous icon of St. Menas, (which ‘specializes’ in finding lost objects) at the Monastery of the Holy Martyr Menas, near Sofia, at Obradovsti, and elsewhere. The case with the relics of one of the most venerated saints in present day Romania — Saint John the New in the main town of Moldavia, Suceava is similar. Belief in the miraculous force of the relics of this saint gathers a great number of pilgrims in the church of St. George, at Suceava. Written requests and prayers for support are left near the coffin of the saint³⁹.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenon could be observed in a wider cultural and linguistic context through the comparison of the respective pilgrimage practices not only of other Christian peoples, but in other religions. In Coptic monasteries in Egypt pilgrims from various parts of the world leave their written requests in the shrines with relics of saints. In Turkey the House of Virgin Mary on Bülbül Dagi near Ephesus is believed to have healing properties and is visited by the Moslems as well as the Christians who leave there together written requests and votive offerings to the Mother of God. In Jerusalem notes with requests or prayers are placed in the cracks of the Western Wall and here there is a belief that their content reaches the Judean God directly. There is even an internet site “Send a note to the Kotel”, maintained by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation to whom you can send your request in case you cannot go on a pilgrimage. They assure you they will do it instead of you: „Write your letter here. We’ll print it and place the note between the stones of the Wall”. As far as we know there is a similar practice in Buddhist temples in India, too. At this stage our conclusions can be only tentative at best, but we believe that these cross-cultural or ‘cross-religious’ regularities give ground to determine this practice based on the performative force of the written word a good candidate for at least near-universal pattern of communication with a deity.

³⁹ *Бакалова Е.* Цамблаковото “Мъчение на св. Йоан Нови Сучавски” в румънската монументална живопис от XV–XVII век // *Paleobulgarica/Старобългаристика* XV (1991), 4, p. 56–77; *Sinegalia T.* Medieval relics in the perspective of 21st century // *Routes of faith in the Medieval Mediterranean. History, monuments, people, pilgrimage prospects.* Thessaloniki, 2008, p. 88–104; *Bakalova E., Lazarova A.* La tradition du pèlerinage: sources médiévales et pratiques contemporaines // *Cultures populaires et terrains balkaniques. Mélanges offerts à Jean Cuisenier à l’occasion de son quatre-vingtième anniversaire*, Sofia 2009, p. 104–108, fig. 7–10.

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КОММУНИКАТИВНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ
САКРАЛЬНОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА.
ПОСЛАНИЯ К СВЯТОМУ

В данной работе речь идет о проблеме «сакрального пространства как посредника между земным и небесным царствами» (А. М. Лидов) и, в частности, о роли, которую играли паломники как пользователи и участники процесса построения сакрального пространства. В своих специфических разновидностях паломничество, без сомнения, является древнейшей ритуальной практикой, известной практически всем культурам и верованиям на протяжении столетий, и оно продолжает охватывать миллионы людей в наши дни. В последнее время обозначился возрастающий научный интерес к этой религиозной практике. Она рассматривается как своеобразная часть культурной или этнической идентичности определенного сообщества. Предметом нашего исследования является сравнительно широко распространенная, но еще недостаточно глубоко изученная практика современного паломничества, а именно: практика оставления письменных просьб к святым в церквях или других «святых местах». В данном случае ядро сакрального пространства — это гробница святого, святилище, в котором хранятся его мощи, или чудотворная икона. Подобный коммуникативный сценарий зачастую включает преподнесение votivных даров вместе с письменными молитвами и пожеланиями.

В христианских легендах содержится описание прецедентов письменного общения с Христом или его «представителями»: например, послание, в котором царь Авгарь (правитель Эдессы в 4 г. до н. э. — 13–50 гг. н. э.) просил Христа об исцелении. Аналогичная практика известна и в других религиях.

Феномен связан с основной темой общения с Богом, возникающей в целом ряде текстов, написанных на стенах церковных строений или на иконах. Святой выступает как посредник в таком общении. Сходная коммуникация через образы святых и тексты, написанные на их свитках, является составной частью церковного интерьера, настенной декорации храмов. Посредством текста, написанного на свитках или книгах в руках святых, осуществляется общение с верующими (Р. Нельсон). Посредством вербальных молитв, записанных на листах бумаги (или в специальной книге), верующие вступают в общение со святыми. И то и другое является частью процесса построения сакрального пространства.

Прототип отправки письменной просьбы можно найти, например, в хорошо известной композиции Деисус с Богородицею Параклисис, в которой тексты на свитках составляют, по сути дела, диалог молящихся о заступничестве перед Христом за грехи человечества. Сходные вербальные молитвы или послания святым можно найти в донаторских надписях в настенных росписях и на иконах; в них содержатся прямые обращения к Богородице и разным святым, по большей части — с просьбами о заступничестве и прощении грехов.

В данной работе анализируются элементы конкретных коммуникативных ситуаций и ключевые характеристики письменного запроса, обращенного к святому, в основном на материале Болгарии. Св. Иоанн Рильский, первый болгарский святой отшельник, входит в число местных балканских аскетов, чьи деяния, реликвии и чудеса привлекают паломников с X в. по наши дни. Изначально святой жил в пещере в горах. Это место сохранилось и стало объектом поклонения. Могила святого находится под скалой. Сегодня она отмечена культовым строением, которое иногда называют Старым Эрмитажем; так нередко отмечают место жизни святого отшельника, а иногда возводят церковь над его могилой. Отсюда тропа ведет в лес, на гору, где, согласно Житию, св. Иоанн Рильский подвергся искушению дьявола. У подножия горы бьет целебный источник. Этот путь проходят паломники. Среди них существует обычай оставлять между камнями короткие записки с просьбами и желаниями. Аналогичная практика наблюдается у могилы св. Серафима (Соболева) в русской церкви св. Николая Чудотворца в Софии; перед чудотворной иконой св. Мины (он «специализируется» в отыскании потерянных вещей) в монастыре Св. Мученика Мины недалеко от Софии, в Обрадовци; а также в других местах. Феномен исследуется в более широком культурном контексте путем сравнения подобных паломнических практик у других христианских народов (в Румынии — перед реликварием с мощами св. Иоанна Нового в Сучеве, в Польше и др.).



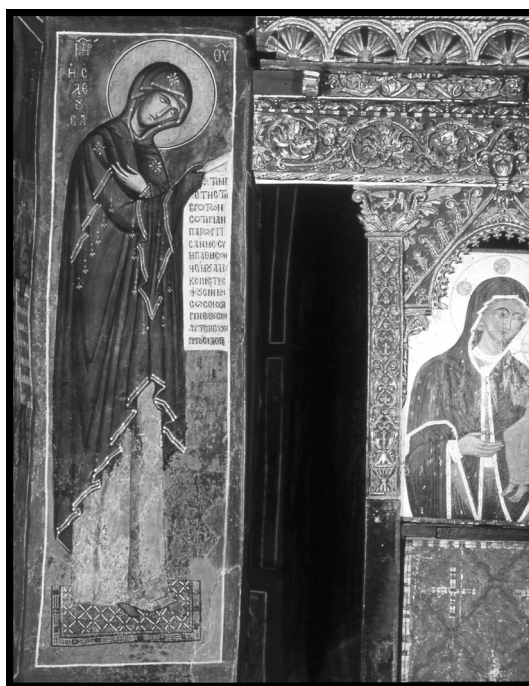
1. Archangel with scroll at the entrance: “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean”.
Isaiah (1:16–18). The church of Peter and Paul at Turnovo, 15th c.



2. The Parable of the Rich man and the poor Lazarus on the façade of the Rila monastery. Detail: “Father Abraham, have mercy upon me...” (Luke 16:24)



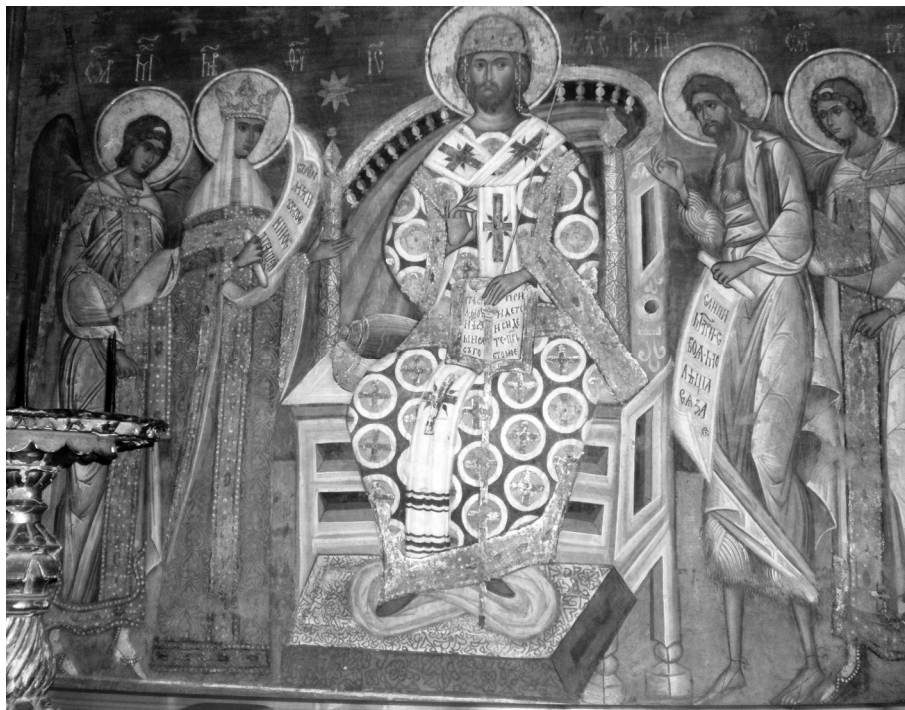
3. The Royal Deesis with the Virgin Mediatrix. The Church St. George at Kremikovtsi monastery, 1493 (Bulgaria)



4. The Virgin Mediatrix with scroll "Accept the prayer of your generous mother..". The church of Panagia Arakiotissa at Lagoudera on Cyprus (1192)



5. The church of Panagia Arakiotissa at Lagoudera on Cyprus (1192).
Donor's inscription



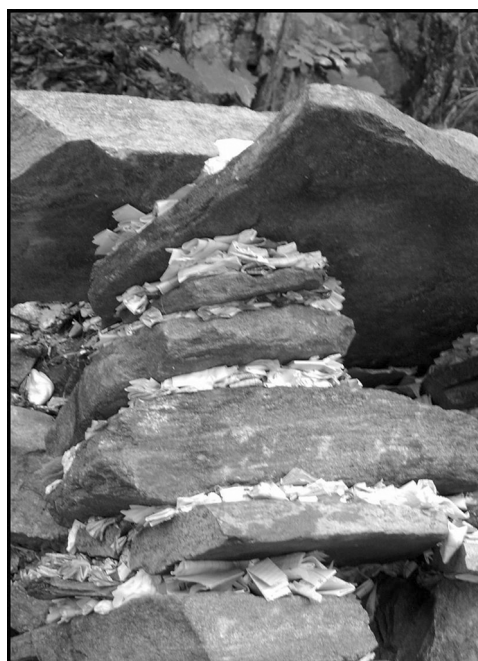
6. The Royal Deesis with the Virgin Mediatrix.
The Church St. George at the monastery of Voronetz 1488–1496 (Romania)



7, 8. The legend of Abgar, Amulet Roll, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library
(Ms. m. 499), 1374



9. The legend of Abgar. Alaverdi tetraevangelion, Tbilissi Institute of manuscripts, Ms. A-484. 12th c.



10. Messages to Saint John of Rila among rocks to his Hermitage.

to have baby, love and happiness
with Kris

СМЕТКА				
№				
№	Вид на стока	бр.	Един. цена	Стойност
	ЗЛАТО, БРАТНЕ, КОСМЕ			

11, 12. Message to Saint John of Rila



13. The Russian Church of St. Nicholas in Sofia and the grave of Archbishop Seraphim. The “mail-box” of Archbishop Seraphim



14. The Russian Church of St. Nicholas in Sofia and the grave of Archbishop Seraphim. Writing down wishes and prayers



15. Relics of Saint John the New in the church of St. George at Suceava. Pilgrims writing requests and prayers for support are left near the coffin of the saint



16. The Wailing Wall. Jerusalem