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The Temple Veil as a Spatial Icon Revealing an Image-Paradigm of Medieval Iconography and Hierotopy

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The author argues that the imagery of the Sacred Veil separating the Holy from the Holy of Holies at the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was a very powerful spatial icon which considerably influenced art and culture of the Byzantine world and the Latin West. The paper deals with new approaches to the history of art, and the crisis in traditional methodology which does not work in some cases. First of all, it concerns the concept of hierotopy (the creation of sacred spaces), recently proposed by the author of this paper and elaborated in several publications by the international group of scholars (www.hierotopy.ru). These studies have revealed an important theoretical issue. In many cases the discussion of visual culture can not be reduced to a positivist description of artifacts, or to the analysis of theological notions. Some phenomena can be properly interpreted only on the level of "image-paradigms", which do not coincide with the illustrative pictures or ideological conceptions. This special notion seems a useful *instrumentum studiorum*, which helps to explain a layer of phenomena. That image-paradigm was not connected with the illustration of any specific text, though it was a part of a continuum of literary and symbolic meanings and associations. This type of imagery is quite distinct from what one could call an iconographic device. At the same time the image-paradigm belonged to visual culture, it was visible and recognizable, but it was not formalized in any fixed state, either in a form of the pictorial scheme or in a mental construction. In this respect the image-paradigm looks similar to the metaphor that loses its sense in re-telling, or in its de-construction into parts. It does not concern any mystic but a special type of consciousness, which determined several symbolic structures as well as numerous concrete pictorial motives; it challenges our fundamental methodological approach to the image as illustration and flat picture.

Keywords: hierotopy, Sacred Veil, Jerusalem, sacred space, image-paradigm, spatial icon

The present paper deals with hierotopy as a recently established new field of study.¹ Actually, there are three new notions - hierotopy, spatial icons and image-paradigms - which were proposed over the last ten years, since 2001, when I coined the term "hierotopy" and announced a program of studies in this direction. In the meantime several papers have been published, few international conferences organized, my monography and five collections of articles have been released.² The latest volume entitled *Hierotopy of Light and Fire in the Culture of the Byzantine World* has just been published.³ The three notions have been forming gradually. They are interrelated but different. The term "hierotopy" stands for the entire framework, intended to intellectually fix a special stratum of historical phenomena, which has eluded the attention of scholars due to the lack of a particular notion. The neologism "hierotopy" (or *ierotopia*) consists of two Greek roots: *hieros* (sacred) and *topos* (space), as well as many other words already established in our vocabulary over the last hundred years (the term "iconography" is one of them). The meaning of the notion might be formulated as the following: hierotopy is the creation of sacred spaces regarded as a special form of human creativity, and a field of historical research which reveals and analyses the particular examples of that creativity. The "spatial icons", meaning the iconic imagery presented in space, was conceived to describe the most important part of hierotopic phenomena, existing beyond flat pictures or any combination of objects of art. The "image-paradigm" is an *instrumentum studiorum* to analyze this specific category of images.

In order to make our discussion a bit more focused I will introduce the most powerful Byzantine example – a view of the so-called Great Church, the 6th-century cathedral of Saint Sophia in Constantinople (fig. 1). Even in a contemporary state of preservation where we are able to see only the material shell of the building, it is clear that we are dealing not just with a masterpiece of world architecture or a mystical place of divine presence, but also with a particular project of spatial imagery, which was created by concrete people in concrete historical circumstances. The project included immovable architectural forms and sacred images, as well as changing liturgical vessels and ritual gestures, a dramaturgy of lightings and various incenses, resounding words and recollections of miracle-stories - all woven together into one single whole. This creativity consisted in forming of spatial imagery has been called hierotopy.

Probably, the most serious problem of hierotopy is a category of the sacred itself, which surmises the actual presence of God and cannot be separated from the miraculous, in other words, that not created by human will. An outstanding anthropologist Mircea Eliade, who dedicated several works to the phenomenon of the sacred, introduced a special notion of “hierophany”, making a clear statement: “Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different”⁴. As an example of hierophany Eliade provides the famous biblical story of Jacob’s dream about the ladder connecting the Earth and the Sky, the Lord speaking from the Sky and the construction of an altar at the holy spot (Genesis, 28:12-22). Using the same subject, let us try to separate “hierophany” and “hierotopy”, articulating the specificity of our approach. In the biblical story the description of the hierotopic project starts with the waking up of Jacob, who, inspired by his dream-vision, begins to make a sacred space, which would convert a particular place into “the house of God and the gate of Heaven”. He took the stone that was his pillow, and set it up as a monument, and poured oil on it. Jacob also renamed the place and took special vows. So, Jacob, and all his successors - the creators of churches and shrines - made a particular spatial milieu. That act differs from hierophany as a creation by human hands from God’s will. Communion with the miraculous inspired the concept of a spatial image, but itself remained beyond the realm of human creativity. This creativity, nevertheless, was intended to actualize the memory of a hierophany by all possible means, embodying an image of the divine revelation. As it seems, the permanent relation and intensive interaction between hierophany (the mystical) and hierotopy (actually made) determined the specificity of the creation of sacred spaces as a form of creativity.

It is not possible to say that the problematic of sacred space has not been touched upon in the humanities. Various aspects of the theme were discussed by archeologists, anthropologists, art historians and historians of religion. However, they, as a rule, tried to solve the problems of their own disciplines, emphasizing a particular aspect without the consideration of the whole. No doubt, hierotopical studies will use some traditional approaches of art history, anthropology and liturgics. At the same time one may claim that hierotopy does not coincide with any of them. Hierotopy can not be reduced solely to the world of artistic images, nor to the combination of material objects, organizing a sacred *milieu*, or to the rituals and social mechanisms determining them. Ritual plays a great role in hierotopical projects but no less important seem the purely artistic, theological and liturgical aspects usually neglected by anthropology. Furthermore, the hierotopical concept could not be interpreted in terms of the so-called *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the synthesis of arts, which acquired enormous significance in the age of modernism. The creation of a sacred space differs substantially from the manipulation with various artistic objects and effects, which reflects a model of another historical period, when the aesthetical values already became a substitute for the sacred ones.

The hierotopic vision can be useful practically for many humanities. Characteristically, the entire forms of creativity could not be properly discussed beyond the hierotopic framework, which is not connected with the positivist classification of objects. For instance, such an enormous phenomenon as the dramaturgy of lighting occurs beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines. As recent studies convincingly have demonstrated, that in the space of Justinian’s Hagia Sophia which originally had no figurative pictures, the image of God was created by the most sophisticated system of lightings, including the natural light of the sun and stars, reflected by golden

mosaics, marble decoration and silver furnishings and vessels, as well as fires of innumerable, sometimes moving, lamps, thousands of candles burning in the semi-transparent smoke of incense.⁵ In my view, the entire environment of Hagia Sophia was conceived by Justinian and his genius master builders as the most powerful spatial icon of the Lord made of light.

We also know from written sources, such as Byzantine monastic ceremonials, exactly how detailed the practice of lighting was, dynamically changing during the services according to a sophisticated scenario. In particular moments, the light accentuated concrete images or holy objects, organizing a perception of the entire space of the church as well as the logic of reading its most significant elements. Dramaturgy is an appropriate word in this context since the artistic and dramatic element in that field of creativity was no less important than the ritual and symbolic. The same concerns the realm of fragrance, which presents new combinations of incense, the smells of wax candles and aromatic oils in lamps every time.

The hierotopic approach enables us to create an adequate research framework for such phenomena, in which different cultural artifacts could be studied as interacting elements of a single project. Such a project was a matrix, or structural model, of a particular sacred space, subordinating all seeing, hearing and touching effects. It seems important to realize that practically all objects of religious art were originally conceived as elements of a hierotopic project and included in the "network" of a particular sacred space. However, with some exceptions, we do not "ask" our artistic monuments about this pivotal peculiarity, which was crucial for their external appearance.

The example which was functioning in the same space of Hagia Sophia is the 10th-century Constantinopolitan stone chalice from the Treasury of San Marco in Venice (so-called "Chalice of Patriarchs") - a gold medallion with an enamel Pantocrator, which appears at the bottom of the semi-transparent bowl made of sardonyx (fig. 2).⁶ At the moment of communion the image had to appear in the fluctuating liquid as a visible testimony of the Eucharistic miracle of the transubstantiation of wine into the blood of Christ. However, one might find a more striking indication to the spatial context of the image in the eloquent juxtaposition of the liturgical chalice and the cupola of the Byzantine church, that also bore the Pantocrator image (fig. 3). In that domed space the communion of the faithful usually happened. So, in the space of a particular church these two images of the Pantocrator had to be perceived as interrelated parts of one and the same hierotopic concept creating the spatial image of the Eucharistic miracle.

Thinking more about the hierotopic background of objects of religious art, we should recognize that this apparently simple problem requires the removal of the fundamental stereotype of the consciousness. The basis of the positivist universe is the object itself, around which the whole process of research is being constructed. However, it becomes more and more clear now that the center of the universe in medieval religious minds was immaterial and yet a real space around which the world of objects, sounds, smells, lights and other effects appeared. The hierotopic approach allows us to see artistic objects in the context of another model of the universe and to read them again.

Without denying any options of traditional approaches, hierotopy helps to reveal an unknown source of information and might considerably renovate the methodology of art history. Thinking further about the boundaries of our discipline, one may ask why the history of medieval art has been reduced to the making of objects and the role of artist was limited by more or less high artisanship. Perhaps time came to extend the context with the introduction of a special figure of the creator of sacred space.⁷ Some projects of sacred space were of high artistic character although realized on a different level in comparison with the creation of art objects and architectural form. Such figures are well known although their true role was hidden under the general name of donors or commissioners. Yet not all donors were creators of sacred space although there are examples when their functions coincided. A representative figure in the West is the Abbot Suger, who created the concept of the first Gothic space in Saint Denis.⁸ His functions could not be reduced solely to the investment in the project, or to the casting of masters, or to the theological program, nor to the elaboration of new rituals, the artistic modeling or iconographic and stylistic innovations. He was engaged in all these activities. His role could be compared to the role of film-directors, which we, a long time ago, agreed to regard in the art-historical context.

In the Byzantine tradition the emperors quite often played the role of the creators of sacred space, following the example of Justinian as a holy constructor of the Great Church. Justinian himself was in competition with King Solomon - a renowned builder of the Old Testament Temple. Solomon in his creation of the Temple space was inspired by the Lord himself, who instructed Moses on Mount Horeb about the entire project of the Tabernacle from the general structure of the space to details of the sacred vestment's production (Exodus, 25-40). God has chosen the master Bezalel for the practical realization of his plan, creating for centuries a model-relationship between the creators of sacred spaces and creators of objects (Exodus, 35-36). The creation of sacred spaces by earthly rulers can be considered as the iconic behavior in relation to the cosmocrator. This activity far beyond the ordinary commission should become a subject of intensive research, based on a sequence of historical reconstructions of particular projects of sacred space. One very interesting element of these projects is the translation of sacred space, which consists of the main direction of medieval hierotopy. A complex problem of the definition of the "holy place" as distinct from the "sacred space" occurs in this context. The translation of a spatial image did not mean the disappearance of the locus, moreover, topographical material concreteness stimulated the power and miraculous efficacious of a spatial image. The hierotopic creativity established a sophisticated system of interaction between the static place-matrix and the flying space, which at any moment can be materialized in new place. In this context a set of projects on the recreation of the Holy Land in various countries of the East and the West come to mind. In the West the most striking example is the famous Campo Santo in Pisa, for which in the 13th century the crusaders brought the real "Holy Land" by ships from Jerusalem and covered a large field, later surrounded by the gallery-cemetery. It was an iconic image and material relic at the same time, revealing the idea of the New Jerusalem and the coming of the Last Judgment.

Late in the 15th century the Franciscans initiated the construction of architectural landscapes called the New Jerusalem in San Vivaldo near Florence and Varallo not far from Milan.⁹ In the 17th century the innovative hierotopic concept came to Russia and inspired the glorious project of the New Jerusalem complex near Moscow, which was the largest project of the recreation of the Holy Land in world history (fig. 4). Creators of this enormous sacred space of 50 square kilometers revealed in their project an iconic image and a precise replica at the same time, combining Byzantine and Western hierotopical traditions.¹⁰

The significant phenomenon of spatial icons could be discussed in this context. This phenomenon stands for iconic (that is mediative) images not depicted figuratively but presented spatially, as a kind of vision that extends beyond the realm of flat pictures and their ideology, still dominant in our minds and preventing us from establishing an adequate perception of hierotopical projects. It is crucial to recognize and acknowledge the intrinsic spatial nature of iconic imagery as a whole: in Byzantine minds, the icon was not merely an object or a flat picture on a panel or wall, but also a spatial vision emanating from the picture and existing between the image and its beholder. This basic perception defined the iconic character of space in which various media were interacting.

It is noteworthy that Byzantine "spatial icons", most unusual in a modern European context, have a typological parallel in the contemporary art of performances and multimedia installations, which have nothing to do with the Byzantine tradition historically or symbolically. What they do share in common is the basic principle of the absence of a single source of image, the imagery being created in space by numerous dynamically changing forms. In this situation, the role of the beholder acquires major significance, as he actively participates in the recreation of the spatial imagery. All the differences of the contents, technologies and aesthetics notwithstanding, allow us to speak about one and the same type of perception of images.

Recent studies of spatial icons and of hierotopy in general have required serious reconsideration of existing methodology and elaboration on the newly introduced notions, one of which I am going to discuss in this paper. I will argue that in many cases the discussion of visual culture cannot be reduced to a positivist description of artifacts or to the analysis of theological notions. Some phenomena can be properly interpreted only at the level of image-ideas - I prefer to term them "image-paradigms" - which do not coincide with the illustrative pictures or ideological conceptions and, it seems, may become a special notion and a useful *instrumentum studiorum* that helps

to adopt spatial imagery into the realm of our mostly positivist discourse. The image-paradigm is not connected with an illustration to any specific text, although it does belong to a continuum of literary and symbolic meanings and associations. This type of imagery is quite distinct from what we may call an iconographic device. At the same time, the image-paradigm belongs to visual culture - it is visible and recognizable - but it is not formalized in any fixed state, either in a form of the pictorial scheme or in a mental construction. In this respect the image-paradigm resembles the metaphor that loses its sense in retelling or in its deconstruction into parts. For the Mediterranean world, such an irrational and simultaneously visual perception of the phenomena could be the most adequate evidence of their divine essence. It does not require any mystic perception but rather a special type of consciousness, in which our distinct categories of artistic, ritual, visual and spatial are woven into the inseparable whole. This form of vision determines a range of symbolic structures as well as numerous specific pictorial motifs; in addition, it challenges our fundamental methodological approach to the image as illustration and flat picture.

In previous years I have tried to present some reconstructions of particular image-paradigms that existed in the Byzantine world.¹¹ Among them the image-paradigm of the Heavenly Jerusalem was the most perceptible, existing practically in every church where the Heavenly City, was not formally depicted but appeared as a kind of vision, created by various media which included not only the architecture and iconography, but also particular rites, liturgical prayers, the dramaturgy of lighting, and the organization of incense and fragrance. It is clear, that the level of sophistication and aesthetic quality of the project was quite different in the Byzantine capital from that of a remote village, but the principle of the image-paradigm, remained crucial in the concept of a sacred space. The Heavenly Jerusalem was, probably, the most powerful image-paradigm but, certainly, not an isolated one. We may speak about the entire category of neglected images.

The Iconic Veil

I would like to deal with another characteristic example of the image-paradigms that played a great role in the Jewish, Christian (Byzantine, Latin, Coptic) and Islamic cultures: the paradigm of the iconic veil. I would like to demonstrate that the curtain was a powerful vehicle in the visual culture, definitive of the iconic imagery from the very beginning. It goes back to the prototype of the Temple veil and to the Jewish and Christian tradition of its theological interpretation (fig. 5).

The first mention of the veil (*paroket*) of the Tabernacle's separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies and screening the Ark and the seat of God indicates that it was a kind of image, "the skilled work", woven from blue, purple, crimson and linen and embroidered with cherubim. The Jewish tradition perceived the veil as a symbolic representation of the cosmos and eternity.¹² In the 1st century Josephus stated that the veil, which had been embroidered with flowers and patterns "in Babylonian work", depicted a panorama of the heavens. He explained that the colors woven together had symbolic meaning: the scarlet signified fire; the linen, earth; the blue, air; and the purple, sea. The veil thus represented the matter, the substance, of the visible creation and the universe. Later Jewish mystic theology suggested that the veil was also an image of the sacred time simultaneously representing the past, the present and the future. The *Third Book of Enoch* describes how Ishmael, the high priest, was taken up into heaven and shown all the history of the world on the reverse side of the veil, as on a great screen.

Philo gave the same explanation of the colors of the veil as symbolizing the four elements of the world. A crucial point of his interpretation is that the veil was the boundary between the visible and the invisible creation. The world beyond the veil was unchanging and without a temporal sequence of events, but the visible world outside the veil was a place of change. This statement seems to me of great significance for the tradition of icon worship and deserves more careful analysis. Philo not only introduced an opposition between the earthly and the heavenly worlds, but also defined a concept of interaction between these two sacred realms, the holy and the holiest, which belong to different ontological models. The holiest realm, placed beyond the veil and existing outside time and matter, creates the eternal pattern for the changing sacred environment in front of the veil. Some traces of Philo's



1. Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, general view of the interior



2. The enamel with Christ the Pantocrator at the bottom, the so-called "Chalice of Patriarchs", late 10th-early 11th c., Treasury of San Marco, Venice



3. The Pantocrator in the dome of Saint Sophia in Kiev, mosaic, mid 11th c.



4. The New Jerusalem near Moscow, general view of the complex



6. *The Second Parousia*, tabernacle presented as an image universe, miniature from the *Christian Topography*, 9th c., The Vatican Library



7. Christ as the Temple Veil, detail of fig. 6



5. *The Temple Veil* in the mosaic of the Synagogue in Beit Shean, 6th century, The Museum of Israel, Jerusalem



8. The Tabernacle, miniature of the *Ashburnham Pentateuch*, 7th c.



9. The curtains in the lower register of murals, 8th c., Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome

vision can be found in the Byzantine theology of icons. The holy image, following the veil paradigm, is not just “the door to Heavens” (this traditional interpretation seems too simplified), but also the living spatial and transparent boundary connecting two heterogeneous sacred realms. It provides an explanation of the special concept of time and space that we may discover while contemplating icons. From this point of view, every icon could be interpreted as a curtain signifying the boundary between the dynamic space of prayer and the unchangeable space of divine presence, at the same time dividing and unifying the beholder and the divine realm through the holy image.

In the Christian tradition, the tearing of the temple veil at the moment of Christ’s death becomes a new source of interpretation (Matthew, 27:51; Mark, 15:38; Luke, 23:45). According to Saint Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews, the veil is designated as the flesh of the Lord: “The new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh” (Hebrews, 10:19-20). There are some important aspects derived from the Christian vision of the veil, called *katapetasma* in the original Greek. The eternity of Christ, who passed beyond the veil and thus beyond time, has been confirmed. Through the veil torn in two he opened the Holy of Holies and a way to salvation to the faithful. The Temple Veil as the flesh of Christ became an image of his redemptive sacrifice and one of the most influential and widespread symbols in Christian culture. A theological interpretation of the apocryphal story of the Virgin weaving the Temple veil became a popular theme of early Byzantine hymnography and homiletics, in which the weaving came to be compared with the incarnation of the Logos.¹³

From early Christian times onwards, the veil was perceived as a powerful iconic image having various connotations, ranging from the idea of the incarnation to that of the Eucharistic sacrifice. In contrast to the Jewish tradition, a *topos* of the open curtain was highly emphasized. It seems quite natural, then, that in the period of iconoclasm, the Temple veil became one of the arguments of the icon worshippers presented at the Second Council of Nicaea: “Thus, this Christ, while visible to men by means of the curtain, that is his flesh, made the divine nature - even though this remained concealed - manifest through signs. Therefore, it is in this form, seen by men, that the holy Church of God depicts Christ”.¹⁴ This vision was incorporated into contemporary iconography.

The *Parousia miniature* from the 9th-century Vatican manuscript of Christian topography provides the most characteristic example (fig. 6), and has been recently discussed by Herbert Kessler.¹⁵ The composition of the Second Coming is actually structured by the Tabernacle, following a two-part scheme used for the Ark of the Covenant in the Jewish tradition and later in Byzantine iconography. The arched upper part represents the Holy of Holies; the rectangular lower part, the holy place, which is interpreted as a tripartite hierarchy of the heavenly, earthly and underground beings. Christ is represented in the Holy of Holies in the background of a magnificent gold cloth decorated with a trellis pattern filled with fleurs-de-lis (fig. 7). The ornamentation was probably inspired by Josephus’s description of the Temple veil embroidered with flowers and patterns. The curtain is at the same time the background and a major iconic representation, symbolically inseparable from the image of Christ, because, in Pauline and patristic interpretation, it is the flesh of Christ. Through Christ and the Temple veil, the viewer may gain access to heaven, represented by the blue background. This is a visual embodiment of the New Testament’s words about “the new and living way” that Christ opened for us the Holy of Holies when the veil was torn in two at the moment of the redemptive sacrifice. The idea of the entrance to heaven is emphasized by the Greek inscription above the *Vatican Parousia*: “Come, enter and possess the kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made”. The creator of the miniature suggests the fundamental idea of all icons perceived as mediating realms. In this respect, the image of the “Christ as Veil” operates as an ideal icon. It is noteworthy that the curtain is closed and open at the same time. The idea of boundary seems crucial, but the possibility of crossing this threshold is no less significant. Open, the curtain is a sign of passage and transfiguration, in which the idea of *theosis*, or deification, is realized as a dynamic process, a dialectic interaction of the holy and the holiest realms with the active participation of the beholder. We may assume that the curtain as a potentially transparent sacred screen can be regarded as a basic principle of iconicity.

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

The image-paradigm of the iconic curtain has been revealed through real curtains and veils hanging in actual Christian churches. In Syrian sources from the 4th century onwards, there are several testimonies to the use of altar curtains, which were conceived as an interactive system of veils concealing, respectively, the door of the sanctuary barrier, the ciborium and the holy gifts on the altar table. Theologians identified these curtains with the Temple veils - the symbolism is reflected not merely in commentaries but even in the terminology of the church spaces divided by curtains.¹⁶ The evidence of written sources is confirmed by archaeological data indicating traces of hangings in the early Syrian sanctuaries.

In one of the oldest Byzantine liturgical commentaries, ascribed to Sophronius of Jerusalem, it is said that the *kosmites* (architrave of the sanctuary barrier) is a symbolic image of the *katapetasma* (Temple veil). Multiple sources mention curtains in different contexts, such as imperial ceremonies or miraculous events in Constantinople. The Byzantine accounts fit well with the contemporary evidence from the *Liber Pontificalis* about the numerous iconic curtains presented by Roman popes to the main basilicas of their city.¹⁷ The most characteristic example is Paschal I (817–824) adorning Santa Maria Maggiore in 822–824.¹⁸ He presented to this church several dozen textiles belonging to various types of decorations (among others “the clothes of Byzantine purple”); most were for the altar area of the basilica. There were at least three different sets of iconic curtains decorating the spaces between the columns in the sanctuary barriers. A year later, Pope Paschal added an extra set of iconic curtains representing another cycle: Christ’s Passion and Resurrection.

Another group of curtains displayed on that basilica’s great beam was connected with the sanctuary barrier’s decoration. The most significant among them was “a great veil of interwoven gold, with 7 gold-studded panels and a fringe of Byzantine purple”. According to Krautheimer, this large veil with seven images displayed beneath the triumphal arch was for the wider central opening of the sanctuary barrier; thus, it had to serve as an actual replica of the Temple veil over the sanctuary door.¹⁹ This great curtain hung in juxtaposition to another placed at the entrance to Santa Maria Maggiore, “a great Alexandrian curtain, embellished and adorned with various representations”. The two veils engaged in a visual and symbolic dialogue with a third, situated on the same horizontal axis, probably, behind the throne in the opening of the central arcade. It is noteworthy that in many cases the *Liber Pontificalis* indicates the manner of making the curtains, emphasizing that they were manufactured from four different materials “of fourfold-weave”. The symbolism of this technology seems quite clear: it connects Roman textiles with the Temple veil that was made of blue, purple, crimson and linen.

I have mentioned just a few examples of the elaborate system of curtains creating a multi-layered structure of sacred screens, dynamic, changing and interacting. We can imagine that Santa Maria Maggiore, as well as other Roman churches, looked much more like a cloth tabernacle than a stone church. A good impression of this imagery can be found in the 7th-century miniature of the *Ashburnham Pentateuch*, representing the Old Testament Tabernacle as a Christian church with the eight different types of curtains arranged as a system of sacred screens (fig. 8).²⁰ The evidence of the *Liber Pontificalis* allows us to see in this iconographic pattern a reflection of contemporary church interiors, embodying the most powerful image-paradigm, which for centuries played such a great role in Mediterranean visual culture, extending beyond the fluid borders of the West and East. It was not an illustration of a particular theological notion, although it had several symbolic meanings deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and its Christian interpretation, revealing in every church the imagery of the Tabernacle.

The all-embracing symbolism of the iconic veil can be found in almost all church decoration, presented on different levels, from a concrete pictorial motif to a general structure. In this connection we should examine the well-known iconographic theme of curtains in the lower register of church walls. Curtains appeared in early Byzantine art (in the murals of the Bawit monasteries and of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome), and they became an established device in the middle Byzantine period (fig. 9). Scholars have suggested different interpretations of this motif. In my view, however, its connection with the Temple veil symbolism seems the most probable.

Some new arguments can be provided. The representations of curtains were accumulated in the sanctuary area, while in the naos, plates imitating marble were depicted. The good example is the screen in the 12th-century ossuary church in Bachkovo where a striking combination of curtains and fresco icons is represented (fig. 10).



10. The curtains in the sanctuary of the ossuary church of the Petritsion monastery (Bachkovo), Bulgaria, 12th c.



11. The Inscription "Curtain called the veil" in the lower register of murals, the upper church of Boiana monastery near Sofia, Bulgaria, 13th c.



12. The sixth-century mosaic vaults recalling the ornamental veils, Hagia Sophia of Constantinople

On the curtains, represented in the sanctuaries of some 12th-century Russian churches, we find a pattern in the form of menorah - a candlestick with seven branches, an iconography pointing to the Tabernacle and the Temple service. However, the most striking example is in the decoration of the mid-thirteenth-century upper church of the Boyana monastery near Sofia, Bulgaria. An original inscription that has survived on the curtains in the lower register of the northern wall clearly identifies the meaning of the image (fig. 11): "*kourtina rekoma zavesa*" (*kourtina*, called the veil).

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

The imageries discussed in this paper leads to an important methodological statement: some important phenomena of visual culture cannot be described in traditional terms of art history. They challenge our fundamental methodological approach to the image as illustration and flat picture, being quite distinct from what we may call iconography. The artists, operating with various media including standard depictions, could create in the minds of their experienced beholders the most powerful of images, which were visible and recognizable in any particular space, yet not figuratively represented as pictorial schemes. These images revealed specific messages, being charged with profound symbolic meanings and various associations. At the same time, they existed beyond the illustrations of theological statements or ordinary narratives. So, this is a special kind of imagery, which requires, in my view, a new notion of image-paradigms. The introduction of this notion into contemporary art history, and humanities in general, will allow us to acknowledge a number of phenomena, not only Byzantine, "medieval" or "Mediterranean", which define several symbolic structures as well as numerous pictorial motifs.

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- 1 This article is based on my paper delivered at the conference *Iconology at the Crossroads* in Rijeka, May 24-25, 2013.
 - 2 A. M. LIDOV, *Ierotopiia. Prostranstvennye ikony i obrazy-paradigmy v vizantiiskoi kul'ture* (Hierotopy. Spatial icons and image-paradigms in Byzantine culture), Moscow, 2009; *Hierotopy. The Creation of sacred spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, A. M. LIDOV (ed.), Moscow, 2006; *Hierotopy. Comparative studies of sacred spaces*, A. M. LIDOV (ed.), Moscow, 2009; *New Jerusalem. Hierotopy and iconography of sacred spaces*, A. M. LIDOV (ed.), Moscow, 2009; *Spatial icons. Performativity in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, A. M. LIDOV (ed.), Moscow, 2011. All the books are available online at www.hierotopy.ru.
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**Zastor Hrama kao prostorna ikona
Otkrivanje slike - paradigma srednjovjekovne ikonografije i hijerotopije**

U ovome se radu raspravlja o tome kako je prikaz Presvetog Zastora koji razdvaja Svetište od Svetišta nad svetištima u židovskome Hramu u Jeruzalemu bio najmoćnija prostorna ikona, koja je znatno utjecala na umjetnost i kulturu bizantskoga prostora, ali i latinskoga Zapada. U članku se preispituju novi pristupi povijesti umjetnosti i kriza tradicionalne metodologije, koja u pojedinim slučajevima ne daje željene rezultate. To se ponajprije odnosi na koncept hijerotopije (stvaranje svetog prostora), pojma koji je recentno uveo u raspravu autor ovoga članka i koji je međunarodna skupina znanstvenika elaborirala u nekoliko publikacija (www.hierotopy.ru). Te su studije ukazale na postojanje značajnog teorijskog problema. U mnogim se slučajevima rasprave o vizualnoj kulturi ne mogu svesti na pozitivističke opise djela ili na analizu teoloških pojmova. Neki se fenomeni mogu pravilno tumačiti samo na razini "slikovnih paradigmi", što se ne podudara s ilustrativnim slikama ili ideološkim koncepcijama. Ova se posebna ideja čini korisnim *instrumentum studiorum*, koji pomaže objasniti slojeve fenomena. Iako "slikovna paradigma" nije povezana s ilustracijom određenoga teksta, dio je kontinuiteta literarnih i simboličkih značenja i asocijacija. Ova je vrsta prikaza različita od onoga što se može nazvati ikonografskim modelom. "Slikovna paradigma" pripada vizualnoj kulturi, ona je vidljiva i prepoznatljiva, ali nije formalizirana u nekom fiksnom obliku, niti kao slikovna shema niti kao misaona konstrukcija. U tom smislu nalikuje metafori koja gubi svoj smisao u prepričavanju ili u dekonstrukciji.

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