

The Creator of Sacred Space as a Phenomenon of Byzantine Culture

The aim of this paper is to pose a question about a long neglected cultural phenomenon. I shall argue that in our discussion of Byzantine artists and donors one might find some room for a specific group of makers – the creators of sacred spaces who were responsible for an entire project of sacred space realised in a particular church, or some other environment. This figure should not be identified with the artisan making concrete art objects like walls and vaults, sculptural decorations and paintings, liturgical vessels and textiles. Nor can his role be limited to financial support of the project. It is noteworthy that this form of activity had a very powerful artistic aspect as well. In a sense, the creator of sacred space is the artist, whose role seems comparable with the contemporary activity of film directors leading the efforts of various 'artisans'. From this point of view, the creator of sacred space might be discussed in an art-historical context. At the same time, it seems important to emphasise that he belongs to a particular field of creativity, which has been recently named Hierotopy¹.

Allow me to recall some theoretical premises. They are rooted in recent studies of relics and miraculous icons². It has been understood that the most significant aspect of relics and miraculous icons was the role they played in the creation of particular sacred spaces. In many cases, relics and venerable icons were established as a core, a kind of

¹ A. LIDOV, *Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History*, in A. LIDOV (ed.), *Hierotopy. Studies in the Making of Sacred Spaces. Material from an International Symposium*, Moscow 2004, pp. 15-31.

² A. LIDOV (ed.), *Čudotvornaja ikona v Vizantii i Drevnei Rusi [The Miracle-Working Icon in Byzantium and Old Rus]*, Moscow 1996; A. LIDOV (ed.), *Christian Relics in the Moscow Kremlin*, Moscow 2000; A. LIDOV (ed.), *Eastern Christian Relics*, Moscow 2003.

pivot in the forming of a concrete spatial environment. This milieu included permanently visible architectural forms and various pictures as well as changing liturgical clothes and vessels, lighting effects and fragrance, ritual gestures and prayers, which every time created a unique spatial complex. Sometimes the environment would occur spontaneously, yet there are several examples relating to deliberate concepts and elaborated projects, which should be considered among the most important historical documents.

In my view, the very limited number of studies in this direction has been determined by the lack of an adequate notion covering this field of creativity. The widespread term 'sacred space' was inadequate because of its too general character, describing almost the entire realm of the religious. The proposed new term, 'hierotopy' (*ierotopia*), consists of two Greek roots: *hieros* (sacred) and *topos* (place, space, notion), as well as many other words already established in our vocabulary over the last hundred years (the term 'iconography' is one of them). The meaning of this notion might be formulated as follows: *Hierotopy is the creation of sacred spaces regarded as a special form of creativity, and a field of historical research which reveals and analyses particular examples of that creativity.* The aim is to understand the existence of a special and quite large phenomenon that requires establishing boundaries to the research field and elaborating specific methods³.

Probably, the most serious problem of hierotopy is the category of the sacred itself, which surmises the actual presence of God and cannot be separated from the miraculous, in other words, something not created by the human will. The 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

³ I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my deep and sincere thanks to colleagues and friends with whom I have discussed this idea from the very beginning. I mean, first of all, Gerhard Wolf, Nicoletta Isar, Slobodan Ćurčić, Peter Brown, Oleg Grabar, Herbert Kessler, Michele Bacci and Leonid Beljaev. Their suggestions and moral support were more than merely stimulating.

⁴ M. ELIADE, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, New York 1959, p. 26.

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 (Gn 28, 12-22). Using the same subject, let me try to separate 'hierophany' and 'hierotopy', by 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 had been his pillow, and set it up as a monument, and poured oil on it. Jacob also renamed the place and took special vows. So Jacob, and all his successors – the creators of churches and shrines –, made a particular spatial milieu. This differs from hierophany as a creation by human hands differs from God's will. Communion with the miraculous inspired the concept of a spatial image, but it itself remained beyond the realm of human creativity. This creativity, nevertheless, was intended to actualise the memory of a hierophany by all possible means, embodying an image of 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. One should note that Eliade's approach, analyzing the structure of the myth and its profound symbolism, has a basically different focus which, however, can be used in some hierotopical reconstructions.

Hierotopy as a type of creativity is deeply rooted in human nature. In the process of self-identification as a spiritual being, Man, first spontaneously and then deliberately, creates a concrete milieu of his connection with the transcendental world. The creation of sacred spaces can be compared with pictorial creativity, which also belongs to visual culture and appears spontaneously at the very early stage of the shaping of personality. However, in contrast with the creation of pictures, which have an entire infrastructure from first drawing lessons to academies, criticism and the art market, the creation of sacred spaces simply has not been included in the cultural context of modern European civilization.

The reason was that the positivist ideology of the nineteenth century, when most contemporary disciplines took shape, did not see in the ephemeral 'sacred space' an independent research subject. Most disciplines were bounded to concrete material objects, either pictures or architectural monuments, folk rituals or written texts. The

creation of sacred spaces did not receive its place in the established scheme of the humanities, whose structure was determined by the 'object-centred' model of the description of the universe. The subject was not formulated; as a logical consequence of this fact, a discipline did not occur, and a special terminology was not elaborated.

At the same time, it is not possible to say that the problematic of sacred space has not been touched in the humanities. Various aspects of this theme have been discussed by archaeologists, anthropologists, art historians and historians of religion. However, they, as a rule, have tried to solve the problems of their own disciplines, by emphasizing a particular aspect without 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 cannot be reduced either to the world of artistic images only, or to the combination of material objects, organising a sacred milieu, or to the rituals and social mechanisms that determine them. Ritual plays a great role in hierotopical projects but no less important seem 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 modernism⁵.

The hierotopic vision can be of practical use for many humanities. Characteristically, complete 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. At the same time, it is known for certain from written sources (i.e. Byzantine Monastic Typika) how detailed the practice of lighting was, dynamically changing during services according to a sophisticated scenario⁶. At

⁵ That approach was operating with various forms of arts and art-objects creating an artistic space as a final result of combination. At the matrix level it is quite contrary to hierotopic projects based on a particular image of sacred space which determines all external forms.

⁶ A characteristic example is the Typikon of the Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople: see E. CONGDON, *Imperial Commemoration and Ritual in the Typikon*

particular moments the light accentuated concrete images or holy objects, creating 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 is true of the realm of fragrance, which presents every time new combinations of incense, the smells of wax candles and aromatic oils in lamps. Christian culture inherited the great traditions of the Ancient East through the Roman imperial cult as well as through the sophisticated worship of the Old Testament Temple⁷. Jewish and Ancient Roman sources leave no doubts that individual dramaturgies of lighting and fragrance were practically always an integral part of a particular concept of sacred space⁸. The hierotopic approach allows the creation for such phenomena of an adequate research framework, where different cultural events and artifacts can 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 realise that practically all objects of religious art were originally conceived as elements of a hierotopic project and included in the 'network' of a concrete sacred space. However, with some exceptions, we do not 'question' our artistic monuments about this pivotal peculiarity, which was crucial for their external appearance. In order to solve this apparently simple problem, one should remove a fundamental stereotype of consciousness. The basis of the positivist universe is the object itself, around which the whole process of research is being constructed. However, it now becomes clearer and clearer that the centre of the universe in medieval religious minds was the immaterial and yet 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 anew.

Without denying any options of iconographic or stylistic approaches,

of the Monastery of Christ Pantokrator, in «Revue des études byzantines», LIV, 1996, pp. 169-175, 182-184.

⁷ B. CASEAU, *Euodia. The Use and Meaning of Fragrance in the Ancient World and their Christianization (100-900)*, Ann Arbor 1994.

⁸ P. HEGER, *The Development of Incense Cult in Israel*, Berlin-New York 1997.

hierotopy helps to reveal an unknown source of information existing in our art objects. If our efforts indeed lead to posing questions on the spatial aspect of a concrete monument and introduce one more dimension into traditional art historical discussion, the initial part of the project will be accomplished. Yet it should be repeated that Hierotopy does not coincide with traditional art history, though it might considerably renovate its methodology. Thinking further about the boundaries of the history of art, one may ask why the history of medieval art has been reduced to the making of objects and the role of artist limited to more or less high artistry.

As it seems, time came to extend the context by the introduction of the special figure of the creator of sacred space. Some projects of sacred space were of high artistic quality, though realised on a different level compared with the creation of art objects and architectural forms. Such figures are well known though their true role was hidden under the general name of donors or people giving commissions. Yet not all donors were creators of sacred space, though there are examples where their functions coincided. A representative figure in the West is the Abbot Suger, who in the 1140s created the concept of the first Gothic space in the cathedral of Saint-Denis⁹. His functions could not be reduced just to the setting up of the project, or to the casting of masters, or to the theological program, or to elaboration of new rituals, artistic modelling, iconographic or stylistic innovations. He was engaged in all these activities. The case of the Abbot Suger is well documented both by the archaeology of the site and by written sources.

He clearly revealed his intention in the famous treatise *De rebus in administratione sua gestis*: «Thus, when – out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God – the loveliness of the many-coloured gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner. I used to converse with travellers from

⁹ E. PANOFSKY, *Abbot Suger and Its Art Treasures on the Abbey Church of St-Denis*, Princeton 1979.

Jerusalem, and to my great delight, to learn from those to whom the treasures of Constantinople and the ornaments of Hagia Sophia had been accessible, whether the things here could claim some value in comparison with those there»¹⁰.

As the main goal of the project the Abbot Suger declares the creation of a spatial milieu – «*aliqua extranea orbis terrarum plaga*» in his specific terms. It was created by various sacred means including traditional artistic forms as well as particular presentations of relics, arrangements of candles and lamps, specific liturgical rites. Numerous religious poems, inscribed in the most significant parts of the church, served as a sort of commentary to his complex spatial concept. In these commentaries one can find a key to the symbolic meaning of a new dramaturgy of lighting, which determined the innovative architectural structure of the church and its principal visual effects¹¹. It is noteworthy that Suger made clear references to his models in Jerusalem and Constantinople, especially to Saint Sophia. He did not mean any special constructions or decorations, obviously quite different from Gothic buildings, but, most probably, this French abbot had in mind the concepts of spaces created by outstanding rulers. It seems that the Byzantine imperial paradigms were his permanent source of inspiration. Suger achieved his place in a sequence of great predecessors with whom he tried to be compared. Sometimes, these paradigms found visual expression in Romanesque iconography. For instance, a miniature of the twelfth-century *Chronicle of Saint Sophia* (Vat. lat. 4939) represents a huge figure of Duke Arechis II in the process of the creation of Saint Sophia in Benevento. In front of the ruler enthroned there is a small figure of a master builder on a ladder who is turning his head to the him and, as it seems, carefully following Arechis's instructions. The picture reveals a model relationship between 'creators' and 'masters' which actually existed in Suger's and other medieval minds".

Indeed, the example of Justinian as a holy 'concepteur' of the Great Church became for centuries a paradigm for Byzantine emperors who quite often played the role of creators of sacred spaces. The role of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-65.

¹¹ For a recent discussion of the Neoplatonist background of Suger's concept, see: L.M. HARRINGTON, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, New York 2004, pp. 158-164.

Justinian, who selected master builders and co-ordinated the efforts of thousands of artisans, has been convincingly demonstrated by his contemporary historian Procopius¹², and by the *Story of the Construction of Saint Sophia* (*Διήγησις περὶ τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας*), reflecting both historical facts and *mythologems* well known in the Byzantium of the ninth and tenth centuries¹³. It is not merely a rhetorical praising of the omnipotent ruler but an attempt to highlight a real function of the Emperor. Procopius especially emphasised Justinian's participation in the creation of the Great Church not by money only, but by his mind and other spiritual virtues (*De Aedificis*, 67). He was engaged in purely architectural matters, actively collaborating with the main architects Anthemios and Isidoros and giving them original advice (*De Aedificis*, 68-73).

The *Story of the Construction of Saint Sophia* has given us the semi-mythological imagery of a creator of a unique sacred space. The image of the Great Church was shown to the Emperor by the Angel of the Lord appearing in a dream vision (*Διήγησις*, 8)¹⁴. In another episode, the angel appeared as Justinian, dressed in royal garments and purple sandals, before a master builder, whom the emperor-angel instructed to make a triple window in the altar apse as an iconic image of the Holy Trinity (*Διήγησις*, 12). According to the *Story*, Justinian was responsible for all the decorations of the church as well as for the arrangement of the sanctuary space (*Διήγησις*, 16-17), the system of numerous doors, and the division of the naos into four sacred zones by the so-called 'rivers of Paradise' (*Διήγησις*, 26), traces of which are still visible on the floor¹⁵. Moreover, he ordered relics to be inserted in the dome and columns of Saint Sophia [fig. 64]. The emperor created some specific areas (sacred spaces) inside the church by the translation of famous relics. A characteristic example is provided by the Holy Well of the Samaritan Woman which was transferred from Samaria and installed in the South-East section of the building. All the activities of Justinian, from the very practical

¹² *De Aedificis*, in PROCOPII CAESARIENSIS *Opera Omnia*, Lipsiae 1962-1963.

¹³ *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum*, ed. Th. Preger, II, Leipzig 1907; G. DAGRON, *Constantinople imaginaire. Études sur le recueil des Patria*, Paris 1984.

¹⁴ DAGRON, *Constantinople imaginaire* cit., p. 200.

¹⁵ G. MAJESKA, *Notes on the Archeology of St Sophia at Constantinople: the Green Marble Bands on the Floor*, in «*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*», XXXII, 1978, pp. 299-308.

to highly artistic, might be perceived as a single whole, which proves to be quite systematic, though at first glance it looks like a strange combination of various things.

The same combination of activities can be found in the Bible, describing Solomon's construction of the Old Testament Temple¹⁶. Characteristically, Justinian had this image in mind, which served him as his most challenging model. A striking episode of *The Story of the Construction of Saint Sophia* concerns the appearance of Justinian in the cathedral on the day of consecration. He unexpectedly left the Patriarch, ran up to the ambon, and raising his arms declared: «Praise to God who made me worthy to accomplish such a matter. I have surpassed you, Solomon» (*Διήγησις*, 27)¹⁷.

The competition with King Solomon as the renowned creator of the most glorious Temple was an established paradigm for medieval rulers working on any great project¹⁸. According to Prudentius (ca. 400), «Wisdom builds a Temple by Solomon's hands [...]»¹⁹. At the same time Eusebius of Caesarea in his characterisation of Paulinus compared this early fourth-century Bishop of Tyre with Solomon, who appeared among other Old Testament 'architects': «Whether one should call thee a new Bezalel, the architect of a divine tabernacle, or Solomon, the king of a new and far goodlier Jerusalem, or even a new Zerubbabel, who bestowed upon the temple of God that glory which greatly exceeds the former?»²⁰. The pivotal claim of these and many other comparisons is based on the principal thesis that Solomon in his creation of the Temple space had been inspired by the Lord himself, who said to him according to the Bible: «Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my ordinances and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father». Solomon had just realised a divine project offered first to his father David.

¹⁶ G. SCHEJA, *Hagia Sophia und Templum Salomonis in Istanbul* Mitteilungen, XII, 1962, pp. 44-58.

¹⁷ J. KODER, *Justinians Sieg über Solomon in Thymiana*, Athens 1994, pp. 135-142.

¹⁸ J. GUTMANN (ed.), *The Temple of Solomon. Archeological Fact and Medieval Tradition in Christian, Islamic and Jewish Art*, Missouls 1976.

¹⁹ S. FERBER, *The Temple of Solomon in Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, in GUTMANN (ed.), *The Temple of Solomon* cit., p. 23.

²⁰ EUSEBIUS, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, X, iv, 3-4.

Byzantine emperors, wanting to be compared with Solomon and even to surpass him, always remembered that the crucial role in the construction of the Temple, or any other sacred space, belongs to the Lord himself. Indeed they always embodied a divine concept following the instructions of the omnipotent creator. Moreover, all creative rulers had in their minds the most powerful paradigm of the Book of Exodus (Ex 25-40), in which the Lord himself appeared as the creator of the sacred space of the Tabernacle. He 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 production, and the preparation of the holy oil. Characteristically, the complex structure was named in the original Hebrew by a significant term *tavnit* (image-model-project). God had chosen the master Bezalel for the practical realization of his plan, creating for centuries a model-relationship between creators of sacred space and creators of objects (Ex 35-36). The creation of sacred spaces by earthly rulers can be considered as iconic behavior in relation to the cosmocrator. That 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.

Leo the Wise as a creator of sacred space in Saint Sophia

One of these concepts I have recently attempted to reconstruct in a special article concerning Leo the Wise's project in Saint Sophia and his spatial program of the Imperial Door [figs. 65, 66, 68, 74]²¹. It allows me to present here just a summary of this work. I have argued that the Emperor Leo combined in one program venerable relics and miraculous icons, mosaic murals with verse inscriptions nearby, special rites and images of miracle-stories, which came to the minds of those in front of the concrete shrines. All together, they created a spatial milieu at the Main Entrance to the Great Church of the Empire. An invisible part of this milieu were repeating miracles, as numerous pilgrims inform us. To some extent, the boundaries of the milieu were mystically marked by the zone of specific miracles.

A phenomenon can be revealed from direct and indirect evidence,

²¹ A. LIDOV, *Leo the Wise and the Miraculous Icons in Hagia Sophia*, in E. KOUNTOURA-GALAKI (ed.), *The Heroes of the Orthodox Church. The New Saints, 8th to 16th Century*, Athens 2004, pp. 393-432.

coming mostly not from the reign of Leo the Wise (886-912). A clear testimony of the Emperor Leo's activity survived in twelfth-century verses – a passage from the *De metris Pindaricis* by Isaac Tzetzes († 1138) informing us about two inscriptions of Leo the Wise set up at the doors of Saint Sophia: «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»²². 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 the so-called Imperial Door from the narthex into the nave. It is not clear either which image of Christ is mentioned by Tzetzes. 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 Saint Sophia in conjunction with the important images there. The evidence confirms an active participation of Leo the Wise in the redecoration of Saint Sophia after Iconoclasm – a favourite project of the Macedonian dynasty.

Another important document is the famous mosaic in the tympanum over the Imperial Door – the central one in the row of doors leading from the narthex to the nave of Saint Sophia [fig. 71]²³. This renowned mosaic above the main entrance to the 'Great Church' of the Byzantine Empire represents Christ enthroned, with the Emperor Leo the Wise prostrate at His feet [figs. IX, 69]²⁴. The only surviving part of the

²² C. MANGO, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul*, Washington 1962, pp. 96-97.

²³ For the best visual documentation, see: C. MANGO, A. ERTUĞ, *Hagia Sophia. A Vision of Empire*, Istanbul 1997, pp. 11, 15-19.

²⁴ I do not intend to discuss here which emperor is depicted. One may accept the opinion of most scholars, who agree 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. OIKONOMIDIS, *Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XXX, 1976, pp. 158-161.

original decor of this Door – the moulded brass frame of the doorway with a small relief portraying the *Hetoimasia* in the centre of the top plate – most probably belongs to the same period [fig. 67]²⁵. With the project of Leo the Wise can be connected two miracle-working icons to the sides of the Imperial Door – the icons of Christ and of the Virgin²⁶. Now only traces of holes remaining in the marble revetment indicate the original location of the holy relics [fig. 68].

However, there are several testimonies from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. Invaluable information is found in the late eleventh century Latin pilgrim's description, known as the *Mercati Anonymus* – a free translation of a Greek description of the Constantinopolitan shrines²⁷. In his reference to Saint Sophia, the 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*»²⁸.

We have some other important sources: a large text from the 11th century *Anonymus Tarragonensis*²⁹, important liturgical evidence of

²⁵ For all details see: P.A. UNDERWOOD, *Notes on the Work of the Byzantine Institute in Istanbul: 1957-1959*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XIV, 1960, pp. 210-213, fig. 13. This brass frame is traditionally dated to the 6th century, though a later date seems more probable. The Justinianic date has been questioned on epigraphical grounds. Some letters of the inscription point out the 10th century as the most probable date (cf. *ibid.*, p. 212). C. Mango recently suggested the same date as the Tympanum mosaic (MANGO, ERTUĞ, *Hagia Sophia* cit., p. 14). See also: R.S. NELSON, *The Discourse of Icons. Then and Now*, in «Art History», XII, 2, 1989, pp. 140-150.

²⁶ The basic historical testimony has been presented in: G. MAJESKA, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Washington D.C. 1984, pp. 206-209.

²⁷ K. CIGGAAR, *Une Description de Constantinople traduite par un pèlerin anglais*, in «Revue des études Byzantines», XXXIV, 1976, pp. 211-267.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²⁹ K. CIGGAAR, *Une Description de Constantinople dans le Tarragonensis* 55, in «Revue des études byzantines», LIII, 1995, pp. 117-140: «In the same glorious basilica of Saint Sophia at the entrance doors, covered in gold and silver, there is another icon (*ycona*) of the blessed Virgin, that Mary the Egyptian has seen in

Symeon of Thessaloniki³⁰, and a set of Russian pilgrims' accounts from the 14th to the 15th century³¹. Of the icon of Christ, we learn that it was known as the 'Saviour Confessor' (*Spas Ispovednik*), and great sinners ashamed to confess to their father confessor made penitence before it. A Russian pilgrim's remark of this icon («the Saviour is transfigured in marble»), no doubt refers to an essential characteristic of the icon³². We do not know to this day, however, whether this reference is related to the artistic technique (stone relief, painting on marble, or mosaic), a peculiar iconography or to a miracle story that has not come down to us³³.

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 Thessaloniki, it was this icon that the patriarch venerated at the start of festive liturgies³⁴.

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 saw it and prayed at it, at that very moment she received everything she has asked for. Finally, when the sinner stood in front of the same holy and venerable image of the Virgin to give thanks for the benefit she has obtained, and also to ask where she could find a place for repentance, dignified for her sins, the holy icon 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 thus spoke to the wretched sinner, you can see at the entrance in Sancta Sophia. You can even see that sinner, represented in paint 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».

³⁰ J. DARROUZÈS, *Sainte-Sophie de Thessalonique d'après un rituel*, in «Revue des études byzantines», XXXIV, 1976, pp. 46-47.

³¹ MAJESKA, *Russian Travelers* cit., pp. 92-93, 160-161, 182-183.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

³³ For a detailed discussion of all possible evidence which might pertain to that icon, including strange testimonies of Anthony of Novgorod (1200) and Stephan of Novgorod (1349), see: LIDOV, *Leo the Wise and the Miraculous Icons in Hagia Sophia* cit., pp. 397-398.

³⁴ DARROUZÈS, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47. The entrance took place at the beginning of the vespers on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Immediately after venerating the icon

The tradition of the icon goes back to a well-known episode in the seventh-century *Life of St Mary of Egypt*³⁵. According to this story, Mary, a courtesan from 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. But the sinful woman was stopped at the entrance by a heavenly power lest she saw the relic of the True Cross displayed on that 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 Christ³⁶. 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 Virgin³⁷. Then she heard a voice that sent her to a hermitage in the wilderness of Jordan.

Tremendously popular throughout Christendom, this story graphically showed the power of heartfelt repentance, which could turn a great sinner into a venerable saint. The icon of the Virgin was venerated as a most important relic. The polemics in the period of Iconoclasm made it one of the crucial arguments of icon-worshippers.

According to the *Mercati Anonymus*, the miraculous icon was at

of the Mother of God, the patriarch entered the church and, turning to the west wall, «thrice venerated the holy image of the Saviour 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 since 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 a compositional part of the icon of the Virgin, as Anonymous Tarragonensis informs us.

³⁵ *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (BHG, 1042), ed. F. Halkin, II, Brussels 1957, pp. 80-82. For the 7th century redaction of the *Vita*, published by J.-P. Migne: SOPHRONII HIEROSOLYMITANI *Vita Mariae Aegyptiae*, in PG LXXXVII, 3, coll. 3697-3725: 3713). For 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, pp. 65-94, esp. pp. 82-85. For a study of this *Vita*, taken from of the oral stories spread among the Palestinian monks of the 6th century: K. KUNZE, *Die Legenda der hl. Maria Aegyptiaca*, Berlin 1978.

³⁶ SOPHRONII HIEROSOLYMITANI *Vita Mariae Aegyptiae* cit., col. 3713, C11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 3713, D1-4.

Saint Sophia of Constantinople as early as the 11th century, brought from Jerusalem by the Emperor Leo³⁸. 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. The Emperor Leo's desire to have a famous icon of the Virgin from Jerusalem, one more relic of a renowned saint, seems part of a 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 Saint Sophia entrance, exactly where it had been at the Basilica gates in Jerusalem, where it was also open to be kissed³⁹. This means that the particular sacred space with all its historical and religious connotations had been transferred with the miraculous icon. And through this transfer the entire space of the Great Church of Constantinople was not merely linked but partly identified with the most sacred shrine in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem relic, with its literary associations, became part of another spatial image. In one sense, the display of this icon-relic emphasised an iconic concept of Saint Sophia as the New Jerusalem.

The translation of the relic allows us to assume that the Jerusalem icon was to become one of the crucial elements in the symbolic program of the Imperial Door in Saint Sophia at Constantinople. Probably, Leo VI, known for his theological erudition, elaborated the whole symbolic program of the sacred space at the main entrance to Saint Sophia. This program incorporated a specific system of venerated relics⁴⁰ linked by one symbolic concept.

Characteristically, the icons of 'The Mother of God Who Spoke to St Mary of Egypt' and the 'Confessor Saviour', united by the idea of repentance and divine mercy, formed a kind of frame for another

³⁸ See note 3.

³⁹ This detail concerning both icons was mentioned in the Acts of the Seventh Oecumenical Council of 787 (J.D. MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, Florentiae 1759-1798, facsimile repr. Graz 1960, XIII, p. 89A) and by Deacon Zosima in 1419-1422 (MAJESKA, *Russian Travelers* cit., pp. 182-183).

⁴⁰ In the Byzantine world the miraculous icons containing divine grace and healing power were considered in the category of sacred relics. For a recent discussion of this issue, see: A. LIDOV, *The Sacred Space of Relics*, in LIDOV (ed.), *Christian Relics in The Moscow Kremlin* cit., pp. 14, 16.

famous relic – the Imperial Door itself made, as tradition had it, from the timber of Noah's ark covered with gilded silver plates. The earliest references to it are from the 10th century⁴¹. It was one of the biggest relics of Byzantium, the door was of 7.6 m. high and 4 m. wide⁴². The *Mercati Anonymous*, paraphrasing the 11th Byzantine original, mentions three doors made from the wood of Noah's ark, which performed miracles every day⁴³. A reference to the Door can be found in the twelfth-century *Description of Saint Sophia*, which interpreted the three central doors as a symbolic image of the Holy Trinity⁴⁴. Around 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 objects⁴⁵. We do not know precisely when the relic appeared at Saint Sophia. Yet it seems possible that it, too, came to the Great Church in the reign of Leo the Wise⁴⁶.

Of this ancient Door only the moulded brass frame of the Imperial Door is extant [fig. 67]. An embossed relief above the head, in the

⁴¹ *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* cit., I, 97; DAGRON, *Constantinople imaginaire* cit., pp. 205, 244-245.

⁴² 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.

⁴³ See: CIGGAAR, *Une Description de Constantinople traduite par un pèlerin anglais* cit., p. 249.

⁴⁴ «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*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XIV, 1960, pp. 237, 243.

⁴⁵ C. LOPAREV (ed.), *Kniga Palomnik. Skazanie mest svjatyx vo Caregrade Antonja arxiepiskopa Novgorodskogo v 1200 godu*, in «Pravoslavnij Palestinskij Sbornik», LI, 1899, pp. 8, 54, 74; ROBERT DE CLARI, *La conquête de Constantinople*, éd. par P. Lauer, Paris 1956.

⁴⁶ The Door of the wood of Noah's ark is gone, and its fate unknown. The present-day doors were probably made during the Fossati restoration in 1847-1849 (see: T. LACCHIA, *I Fossati architetti del Sultano di Turchia*, Roma 1943, p. 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.

centre of the top panel, makes the symbolic concept somewhat clearer. It represents a throne with a bird flying down onto an open book – all inscribed in an arch resting on two pillars. The book bears a Greek inscription, a quotation adapted from the Gospel according to St 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 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 everyone 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. The Door of Noah's ark symbolically represented Christ in His church, at the same time promising salvation and the mercy of the Lord to the righteous (Gn 7, 1)⁴⁷. It is noteworthy that some letters of the inscription point to the 10th century as the most probable date, which allows this brass frame to be considered as a part of Leo the Wise's project⁴⁸. The iconography of the brass frame could be a part of the project of this emperor, symbolically connecting the actual relics at the Door with the sacred space of the main entrance into the Great Church.

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 the church. The protagonist of this spatial dramaturgy was the Jerusalem icon of the Virgin who spoke to St Mary of Egypt and gave her salvation after her deep penitence in front of the icon.

The symbolic context revealed 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. More than fifteen works specially dedicated to it have been published since its restoration in 1932⁴⁹. Its content and symbolic concept, however,

⁴⁷ On this symbolism, see: H. HOHL, *Arche Noe*, in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1968-1976, I, pp. 178-179.

⁴⁸ See note 25 above.

⁴⁹ A series of works emerged in the 1930s as a direct result of T. Whittemore's

remain an open question to this day⁵⁰. Scholarly interpretations group round two basic ideas. According to one of them, the mosaic symbolically represents the divine investiture of an earthly ruler, who obtains his power from Christ the Wisdom. The other interpretation 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 surrounding 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

publication: T. WHITTEMORE, *The Mosaics of St. Sophia in Istanbul. Preliminary Report on the First Year's 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*, in «Byzantion», IX, 1934, pp. 41-83; J.D. STEFANESCU, *Sur la mosaïque de la Porte Imperiale à Sainte-Sophie de Constantinople*, in «Byzantion», IX, 1934, pp. 517-523; A.M. SCHNEIDER, *Der Kaiser des Mosaikbildes über dem Haupteingang der Sophienkirche zu Konstantinopel*, in «Orientalia Christiana», XXXII, 1935, pp. 75-79; F. DOLGER, *Justinians Engel an der Kaisertur der H. Sophia*, in «Byzantion», X, 1935, pp. 1-4; A. GRABAR, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Strasbourg 1936, pp. 100-106; H.E. DEL MEDICO, *Les mosaïques du Narthex de Sainte-Sophie. Contribution à l'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine*, in «Revue Archéologique», XII, 1938, pp. 49-66. Of special importance among later publications are: L. MIRKOVIĆ, *Das Mosaik der Kaisertur im Narthex der Kirche der Hl. Sophia, in Konstantinopel*, in *Atti dell'VIII Congresso di studi bizantini* (Palermo, 3-10 aprile 1951), 2 vols., Roma 1953, II, pp. 206-217; L. MIRKOVIĆ, *O ikonografiji mozaika iznad carskih vrata u narteksu Sv. Sofije u Carigradu*, in «Starinar», IX-X, 1958-1959, pp. 89-96; J. SCHARF, *Der Kaiser in Proskynesis. Bemerkungen zur Deutung des Kaisermosaiks in Narthex der Hagia Sophia von Konstantinopel*, in *Festschrift P.E. Schramm*, Wiesbaden 1965, pp. 27-35; E.J.W. HAWKINS, *Further Observations on the Narthex Mosaic in St Sophia at Istanbul*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XXII, 1968, pp. 153-166, pls. 1-12 (observation results from the new mosaic restoration); OIKONOMIDIS, *Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic* cit., pp. 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*, in «Cahiers Archéologiques», XXVIII, 1979, pp. 87-94; A. SCHMINK, «*Rota tu volubilis*»: *Kaisermacht und Patriarchenmacht in Mosaiken*, in L. BURGMAN, M.-T. FÖGEN, A. SCHMINK (eds.), *Cupido legum*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, pp. 211-234.

⁵⁰ R. CORMACK, *Interpreting the Mosaics of S. Sophia at Istanbul*, in «Art History», IV, 2, 1981, p. 141; ID., *Patronage and New Programs of Byzantine Iconography*, in *The*

interpretation which is, however, open to major clarifications, for which we ought to look at the basic iconographic features of the scene.

Christ, represented enthroned in the centre, holds in His hand an open Gospel with the inscription: «ΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΥΜΙΝ. ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ ΤΟ ΦΩΣ ΤΟΥ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ» («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 the Resurrection, «when the doors were shut». The Byzantine iconography of this gospel text represents Christ against the background of gates symbolising the entrance to the Heavenly Kingdom. The other quotation, «I am the light of the world: he that 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, excommunicants and penitents, to the floodlit nave. The inscription emphasised the spatial connotations of the Tympanum mosaic and its symbolic context, including an evangelic space of Christ's meeting with the disciples after the Resurrection.

Another crucial characteristic of the Tympanum mosaic is the posture of the prostrate emperor clinging to Christ's feet – atypical of imperial portraiture⁵¹. 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. 143v)⁵². Of great expressive power are

17th International Byzantine Congress. *Major Papers* (Washington, 3-8 August 1986), New York 1986, pp. 620-623. Among recent new interpretations, see: H. FRANCES, *Symbols, Meaning, Belief: Donor Portraits in Byzantine Art*, Ph.D. Dissertation, London University 1992, pp. 30-60; CH. BARBER, *From Transformation to Desire: Art and Worship after Byzantine Iconoclasm*, in «Art Bulletin», LXXV, 1, 1993, pp. 11-15.

⁵¹ The symbolism and iconography of the attitude are analysed in detail in: A. CUTLER, *Transfigurations. Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography*, University Park 1975, pp. 53-110 (*Proskynesis and Anastasis*).

⁵² OIKONOMIDIS, *Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic* cit., pp. 157-158. Most probably this imperial manuscript itself was known to Leo the Wise, a pupil of the Patriarch

semantic parallels between the stories of David and Leo the Wise. David repents of his ignominious marriage with Bathsheba (2 Sm 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. 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 Saint Sophia⁵³. Yet a church council convened for this purpose in 907 accepted the Emperor’s repentance – which historical records

Photios, who was the probable ideator of manuscript iconography: L. BRUBAKER, *Politics, Patronage, and Art in the Ninth Century Byzantium. The Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus in Paris (B.N.G.R. 510)*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XXXIX, 1985, pp. 1-13.

⁵³ For the historical context of, and basic literature on, the tetragamy controversy, see: OIKONOMIDES, *Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic* cit., pp. 161-176. The most detailed account of the developments is to be found in the 10th century *Life of Euthymius*. See: *Vita Euthymii, patriarchae*, ed. by P. Karlin-Hayter, Brussels 1970, pp. 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.*, pp. 74-79). For 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, pp. 133ff.

describe as deep and sincere – and resolved to admit him to church after he had done penitence.

Oikonomidis 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 contradiction⁵⁴. In Oikonomidis' 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 salvation⁵⁵. 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 narthex⁵⁶, through the Imperial Door under the Tympanum mosaic⁵⁷. 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 prêtre* by Gilbert Dagron⁵⁸, who has convincingly demonstrated that public repentance was a traditional, in some sense canonical, form of Byzantine imperial self-representation from Constantine the Great onwards. The penitence of King David has been established

⁵⁴ OIKONOMIDIS, *Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic* cit., pp. 170-172.

⁵⁵ These ideas are reflected in numerous patristic texts on the topic of repentance. See: M. ARRANZ, *Les prières pénitentielles de la tradition byzantine*, in «Orientalia Christiana Periodica», LVII, 1991, pp. 87-143, 309-329; LVIII, 1992, pp. 23-82.

⁵⁶ J. MATEOS, *Typicon de la Grand Eglise*, Roma 1962 (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 165), I, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

⁵⁷ It is noteworthy that in Byzantine illuminated psalters 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).

⁵⁸ G. DAGRON, *Empereur et prêtre. Études sur le 'cesaropapisme' byzantin*, Paris 1996, pp. 129-138.

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» and his penitence could be perceived as a Christian apotheosis⁵⁹.

In this historical and symbolic 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 at particular liturgical moments.

The specific spatial context is of great significance again. At the ritual entrances to Saint Sophia, messages were addressed to an emperor who, according to the ceremonial, prayed and bowed three times before the Imperial Door, holding a lit candle⁶⁰. 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 the two symbolic concepts of the mosaic became really inseparable. It seems very probable that this 'performative' aspect was an original part of the entire project of the sacred space initiated by Leo the Wise in particular historical circumstances.

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 explanation⁶¹. The iconography seems

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁰ GRABAR, *L'empereur* cit., p. 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 D.C. 1997, p. 5. The emperor attended the liturgy with the ceremonial entrance through the Royal doors, normally closed, only a few times a year: at Easter, Pentecost, Transfiguration, Christmas and Epiphany, and occasionally at some other feasts.

even more unusual in the 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.

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 a reminder of real objects rather than merely depictions. It is noteworthy that none of the images in the Tympanum mosaic had any accompanying inscriptions originally. This detail embarrassed even the Byzantines who some centuries later added the letters IC XC beside the head of Christ enthroned⁶². All these details suggest special prototypes of 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 contemporaries. This may explain a certain amount of artificiality and the unique character of the composition. The actual 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.

Let me begin with the image of Christ enthroned. James Breckenridge has already suggested the connection of this image with a highly venerated prototype⁶³ – 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 Palace⁶⁴. Emperors always prayed to this icon as they started out for Saint Sophia and came back to the palace⁶⁵. They lay prostrate before the icon in the

⁶¹ For a recent discussion, see: FRANCES, *Symbols* cit., p. 62; BARBER, *From Transformation to Desire* cit., pp. 11-15.

⁶² HAWKINS, *Further Observations* cit., pp. 156-158.

⁶³ J.D. BRECKENRIDGE, *Christ on the Lire-backed Throne*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XXXIV-XXXV, 1980-1981, pp. 247-260.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁶⁵ See: D.F. BELYAEV, *Byzantina. Ežhednevnye i voskresnye priemy vizantijskix carej i prazdničnye vyxody ix v xram Sv. Sofii v IX-X vekax*, Saint-Petersburg 1893, II, pp. 16, 35, 47, 229, 244.

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' victory⁶⁶. 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 Porphyrogennetos⁶⁷ and, as scholars argue, had particular significance for the Macedonian house⁶⁸. It seems very probable that the 'ideator' of the Tympanum iconography intended not merely to represent Christ as the heavenly ruler but to recall the major icon of the Empire and the role of the Macedonian dynasty in the restoration of icon-worship. The image of Christ enthroned, replicated at the threshold of Saint 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 a 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»⁶⁹. 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

⁶⁶ *Anthologia graeca*, I, 106: C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453. Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs 1972, p. 184. The decoration described in the epigram, most probably, has been executed between 856 and 866.

⁶⁷ On the iconography of coins, see also: P. GRIERSON, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, III, *Leo III to Nicephorus III, 717-1081*, Washington 1973, pp. 154-158.

⁶⁸ BRECKENRIDGE, *Christ on the Lire-backed Throne* cit., p. 248.

⁶⁹ MAJESKA, *Russian Travelers* cit., pp. 130-131.

pedestal is bound with iron bands, with the cup attached to it so that Christians may see it and the sick be cured»⁷⁰.

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 an '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 the 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 into a single whole.

As I have argued elsewhere, the images in the medallions of the Tympanum mosaic – the Virgin in supplication and the Archangel – had particular miraculous prototypes as well⁷¹. The representation of a venerated icon of the Virgin in the Tympanum mosaic might have been symbolically connected with the miraculous image 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 possibly depicted, on the same panel beneath the image of the Virgin⁷². Thus, the pictorial schemes of the images were certainly different. However, from the later tradition of 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

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 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 in Saint Sophia*, in «Byzantinoslavica», XXXII, 1971, pp. 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 me to find the spot where the stone reliquary pillar had been.

⁷¹ LIDOV, *Leo the Wise and the Miraculous Icons in Hagia Sophia* cit., pp. 413-420.

⁷² CIGGAAR, *Une Description de Constantinople dans le Tarragonensis* 55 cit., p. 125 (as note 6).

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 originally situated, probably, to the left of the gates of the sanctuary barrier (inscribed 'Arakiotissa' too)⁷³. 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 entrance 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 present in the symbolic program of the Imperial Door at Saint Sophia. The 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 probable 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 an 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 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 text⁷⁴. It was the icon the

⁷³ For the fresco-icons, see: A. NICOLAIDIS, *L'église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudera, Chypre: étude iconographiques des fresques de 1192*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», L, 1996, pp. 107-109, 110-111, figs. 3-5, pp. 77-78. For the Hodegetria icon: A. PAPAGEORGIOU, *Icon of the Virgin Arakiotissa*, in M. VASSILAKI (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, exhib. cat. (Athens, Benaki Museum, 20 October 2000-20 January 2001), Athens-Milan 2000, n. 62, pp. 406-407.

⁷⁴ See: A. GRABAR, *Un rouleau liturgique constantinopolitain et ses peintures*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», VIII 1954, fig. 2, pp. 172-173; P. VOKOTPOULOS,

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 Saint 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 scroll⁷⁵. 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 Noah's ark and the miraculous icons of Christ and the Virgin⁷⁶. It is noteworthy that the motif of forgiveness appears in the Trisagion prayer, whose initial words are framed by the images of Christ and the Mother of God: «Give wisdom and reason to the supplicant, 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, inv. 1898 a-b)⁷⁷. Inside a

Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Athens-Jerusalem 2002, n. 19, pp. 96-123. For a liturgical study of the Jerusalem scroll, see: A. JACOB, *Histoire du formulaire grec de la liturgie de Saint Jean Chrysostome (Dissertation)*, Louvain 1968, pp. 257-263.

⁷⁵ On the tradition of the Little Entrance in Hagia Sophia, see: BELYAEV, *Byzantina* cit., II, p. 153; T.F. MATHEWS, *The Early Churches of Constantinople. Architecture and Liturgy*, University Park-London 1971, pp. 138-147; R. TAFT, *The Great Entrance. A History of the Transfer of Gifts and other Pre-anaphoral Rites*, Roma 1978, pp. 30, 192. In contemporary liturgical practice, the priest kisses the icons of Christ and the Mother of God to the sides of the Royal Door of the iconostasis during the Little Entrance.

⁷⁶ MAJESKA, *The Emperor* cit., p. 5.

⁷⁷ F.E. HYSLOP, *A Byzantine Reliquary of the True Cross from the Sancta Sanctorum*, in «Art Bulletin», XVI, 1934, pp. 333-340, figs. 1-3; A. FROLOW, *La relique de la Vraie Croix. Recherches sur la développement d'une cult*, Paris 1961, n. 667, p. 487; A. WEYL CARR, *Staurotheke*, in H.C. EVANS, W.D. WIXOM (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, exhib. cat., New York 1997, n. 35, pp. 76-77.

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 the frontal standing figure of St John Chrysostom on the internal surface. The holy bishop of Constantinople holds in both 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”» (*Io* 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 have been 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 condemned⁷⁸. To 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 who 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 Saint 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 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

⁷⁸ R. CORMACK, *Painting after Iconoclasm*, in A. BRYER, J. HERRIN (eds.), *Iconoclasm*, Papers given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies (Birmingham, March 1975), Birmingham 1977, pp. 151, 153.

as an iconic space in 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 church iconography.

It seems that the unique Imperial Door 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 nave, and from the nave to the altar. Such paired iconic images were regularly met with in Byzantine churches from the 10th century onwards⁷⁹. 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 Saint Sophia at Constantinople, and to either side of the gates, icons of Christ and the Mother of God – often miracle-working images,

⁷⁹ The main early examples were collected recently by Engelina Smirnova: *Izobraženja na zapadnyx granjax predaltarnyx stolbov v vizantijskix xramax X-XI vv.*, in A. LIDOV (ed.), *Iconostasis. Origins-Evolution-Symbolism*, Moscow 2000, pp. 293-296. One of the first examples is provided by Kiliçlar (Qelegjar) kilisesi, Goreme N 29, 10th century (C. JOLIVET-LÉVY, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords*, Paris 1991, p. 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, figs. XXV-XXVII, pp. 44-47). The type formed 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*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XIV, 1960, pp. 71-86; G. BABIĆ, *O živopisanom ukrasu oltarskih pregrada*, in «Zbornik za likovne umetnosti», XI, 1975, pp. 3-49; M. BUTYRSKIJ, *Bogomater' Paraklesis u altarnoj pregrady: proisxoždenie i liturgičeskoe sodержанoe obraza*, in LIDOV (ed.), *Iconostasis. Origins-Evolution-Symbolism* cit., pp. 207-222, 725 (an English résumé). On the possible connection of this program with the mosaic above the entrance to St Sophia at Constantinople, see: MIRKOVIĆ, *O ikonografiji* cit., pp. 91-92.

or their copies. In Orthodox ceremonials from Byzantine times up to the present, the priest, «deeply moved and full of repentance», prays at 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 Great Penitence created by a wise Byzantine emperor for St Sophia at Constantinople⁸⁰.

As for the archangel medallion in the Tympanum mosaic, the image could have been a reminder of the mosaic icon of the Archangel Michael situated in St Michael's chapel close to the entrance into the narthex at the south-west vestibule⁸¹. This image was related to the miracle that happened during Justinian's construction of Saint Sophia at Constantinople as recorded in the 10th century *Deegetis* on the construction of Saint Sophia⁸². According to tradition, well known in the reign of Leo the Wise, the Archangel Michael appeared to a certain youth while the church was being built to give it its name and promise that he would guard it till the youth came back with tidings from the emperor. The latter, however, sent the youth to Rome as soon as he heard his story in order to leave the archangel as guardian of the church and the city till the Second Coming⁸³.

⁸⁰ For early evidence of the kissing of the icons nearby the 'holy doors' in the 12th ceremonial of the Great Church, see: R. TAFT, *The Pontifical Liturgy of the Great Church according to a Twelfth-Century Diataxis in Codex British Museum Add. 34060*, in «Orientalia Christiana Periodica». XLV, 1979, pp. 284-285. Another testimony in the 13th century Euchologion (Patmos 719); see: A.A. DMITRIEVSKIJ, *Opisanie liturgičeskix rukopisej*, Kiev 1901, II, p. 170. On contemporary practice: I. DMITREVSJ, *Istoričeskoe, dogmatičeskoe i tajstvennoe izjasnenie Božestvennoj liturgii*, Moskva 1993, pp. 153-154.

⁸¹ On this icon, see: MAJESKA, *Russian Travelers* cit., pp. 202-206, 94-95, 128-129, 130-131. According to George Majeska, the icon could have been on the east wall of the south-west vestibule (*pronaos*) adjoining the narthex. Most probably, it was in the central part of the wall near the doors to the patriarchal chambers in the south galleries. Possibly, there was also the altar of the chapel (*pridel*) of St Michael.

⁸² See: *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* cit., II, pp. 84-88; S.G. VILINSKIJ, *Vizantijsko-slavjanskije skazanija o sozdanii xrama Sv. Sofii caregradskoj*, Odessa 1900, pp. 84-85, 100-101; DAGRON, *Constantinople imaginaire* cit., pp. 201-203, 229-233.

⁸³ The Russian Anonymous (14th century) contains an abbreviated version of the tradition, most probably going back to a Byzantine original: ARCHIMANDRITE

The image of the 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 mosaic portrayed «the first and the greatest» of archangels with an unsheathed sword, and that this very archangel was appointed guardian of the church⁸⁴. In his time Franz Dölger had already pointed out a possible connection between the Archangel of the Tympanum mosaic and the tradition of the miraculous appearance⁸⁵. This seems to me quite probable, despite the obvious difference between the pictorial schemes of the 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 later miraculous shrines.

Important, though indirect, evidence may be found in the liturgical setting of St Sophia at Thessaloniki, which follows the traditions of the Great Church. Possibly, the «holy icon of archangel» displayed to the right of the entrance in the narthex of St Sophia at Thessaloniki was a kind of substitution of two archangel-guardians near the two main entrances in Constantinople. Solemn liturgies started with incense burning before this icon. Symeon of Thessaloniki described the matins entrance ritual from the ancient ceremonial of the Great Church, which was preserved in the liturgy of St Sophia at Thessaloniki, at the turn of 15th century⁸⁶. 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

LEONID, *Skazanie o Sv. Sofii caregradskoj*, in «Pamjatniki drevnei pimennosti i iskusstva», LXXVIII, Saint-Petersburg 1889, pp. 1-13; MAJESKA, *Russian Travelers* cit., pp. 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 Salos relates his vision (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 130-131, 204).

⁸⁴ NIKETAS CHONIATIS, *Historia*, ed. J.L. van Dieten, Berlin 1975 (Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae 11), pp. 238, 79-81.

⁸⁵ DÖLGER, *Justinians Engel* cit., pp. 1-4.

⁸⁶ PG CLV, coll. 553, 641; DARROUZÈS, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61, 64.

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 goes to the altar and takes the cross, preserved behind the altar-table, and places it on the right side (in the narthex) near the great doors, where it stands till the psalm reading is over. Then three candles are lit on the cross, and the ceremonial entrance with this cross takes place. If this rite reproduced a tradition of the Great Church, it means that in Saint 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 an angelic power and later admitted to see the Holy Cross?

It appears that the Archangel icon in the tympanum of Saint Sophia was doubtless also a guardian of the church, like many images of archangels flanking the doors which became a common theme of the Byzantine church iconography in the Comnenian and, especially, in the Palaiologan periods⁸⁷. The well-established topos occurred in Byzantine epigrams of the same era, directly connected, as Hoerandner has convincingly shown, with contemporary pictorial practice⁸⁸. For this tradition as well as for the entrance images of Christ and the Virgin, the Imperial Door program of Saint 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 reminders of the crucial miraculous images, which played the role of sacred landmarks on the emperor's way from palace to church. As we know, in Byzantine church iconography replicas sometimes acquired an independent

⁸⁷ M. TATIĆ-DJURIĆ, *Archanges gardiens de porte à Decani*, in *Dečani i vizantijska umetnost' seredinom XIV veka*, Beograd 1989, pp. 359-366.

⁸⁸ W. HOERANDNER, *Nugae Epigrammaticae*, in *ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝ. Studies in honour of Robert Browning*, Venezia 1996, pp. 109-111. The author provides several examples from the written sources and Byzantine and Post-Byzantine iconography starting with the Tympanum mosaic.

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 the miraculous icons of the Christ Confessor and of the Mother of God who spoke to St Mary of Egypt. As in the composition of the relics, 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 unexpected support in the logic of the general symbolic structure of the Imperial Door program, combining holy objects and images, actually inseparable in this project of a sacred environment.

The Tympanum composition could be interpreted as a select group of miraculous images – a visual parallel to the collections of written testimonies on miracle-working icons in the main treatises of icon worshippers, including the *Apologies* of St John of Damascus, The Acts of the Second Nicaean 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 the particular efficaciousness 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 the special veneration of the emperor⁸⁹. Evidence suggests that Leo the Wise could order to be represented on the Tympanum mosaic in the sacred space of miraculous icons, making his prayer most efficacious. The major function of these images was to remind one of some most important sacred spaces, which merged into the single imagery of the main entrance into the Great Church.

Additional arguments for our interpretation are provided by other miraculous images in Saint Sophia, formally not included 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 Saint

⁸⁹ PSEUDO-KODINOS, *Traité des offices*, éd. par J. Verpeaux, Paris 1966, pp. 227-231.

Sophia, just above the Imperial Doors on the level of the Tympanum mosaic. It was a replica of the Chalki Christ – a famous miraculous icon above the Brazen gates (Chalki) of the imperial Great Palace⁹⁰. According to tradition, the destruction of the Chalki icon marked the beginning of Iconoclasm⁹¹. The icon was restored by the Empress Irina during the respite of Iconoclasm but was later subverted again by Leo V, and eventually, soon after 843, was restored by the hands of the icon-painter St Lazarus on the orders of the Empress Theodora⁹². Most probably, it was a mosaic image of a full-length Christ, blessing and holding the Gospel book in his left hand⁹³.

Like the Chalki icon of the Great Palace, its mosaic replica on the west wall of Saint Sophia did not survive. It has been replaced by a green marble plate, surrounded by a few other panels made in the *opus sectile* technique [fig. 73]. Among them, the most interesting is the panel depicting the triumphal precious cross in the ciborium, which was initially situated right above the icon of Christ⁹⁴. Like the icon plate, this panel was especially inserted into an older marble incrustation of the west wall. It could be a part of the concept reflecting the Chalki setting of the Great Palace, where, according to the Patriarch Methodius' epigram (847), the cross was represented close to the icon of Christ⁹⁵.

The presence of the Chalki miraculous icon in Saint Sophia is recorded by the Russian pilgrim Stephan of Novgorod in 1349. He

⁹⁰ MAJESKA, *The Image of the Chalke Savior* cit., pp. 284-295; ID., *Russian Travelers* cit., pp. 209-212.

⁹¹ 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. AUZÉPY, *La destruction de Christ de la Chalce par Leon III*, in «Byzantion», LX, 1990, pp. 445-492.

⁹² For a comprehensive analysis of sources, see: C. MANGO, *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, Copenhagen 1959, pp. 108-148.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-142. On the iconographic peculiarities, see: A. FROLOW, *Le Christ de la Chalce*, in «Byzantion», XXXIII, 1963, pp. 107-120.

⁹⁴ Majeska emphasised the imperial connotations of this decorative composition situated on the wall between the imperial doors and imperial gynaeceum on the west gallery: MAJESKA, *The Image of the Chalke Savior* cit., pp. 290-292, pls. I-II.

⁹⁵ MANGO, *The Brazen House* cit., pp. 126-128.

clearly associated this icon with the image in Chalki 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 Saviour 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, hoping 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»⁹⁶. The mention of the golden crown of the icon is significant. This particular detail is a characteristic of the venerated icon and Stephan of Novgorod may have taken it from the actual appearance of the Chalki Christ in Saint Sophia.

It is important to observe the connection between the image of the Chalki Christ and the symbolic program of the Imperial Door analysed above. The mosaic images with Christ enthroned and the Chalki 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-sided icon. It is noteworthy that the well-informed Orthodox pilgrim Stephan of Novgorod does not make any difference between the 'copy' in Saint Sophia and the famous icon of Christ in Chalki itself, which was highly venerated in the same century⁹⁷. We can assume that they were perceived as one image in two representations.

It is noteworthy that both images of Christ at the Imperial Door not merely reproduced venerable miracle-working icons connected with the most important prototypes in the Great Palace – the Chrysotriklinos and the Chalki –, but they revealed in the Great Church major sacred spaces of Byzantium associated with the imperial triumphal procession. With replicas of two miraculous icons of Christ, the spatial imagery of the Great Church became inseparable from the Great Palace. And that single sacred environment obtained its most sublime meaning during the solemn services the Emperor took part in.

In this context, our knowledge about the role played by miraculous icons in the patriarchal service in Saint Sophia gains new significance.

⁹⁶ MAJESKA, *Russian Travelers* cit., pp. 28-29.

⁹⁷ The Russian Anonymous 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.*, pp. 136-137).

According to the description of Symeon of Thessaloniki, 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 Chalki Christ), saying «We bend before your over-pure image»⁹⁸. 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 on the Imperial Door and the mosaic images above them, and even more important, the dramaturgy of sacred spaces associated with them.

The exact date of the Saint Sophia replica of the Chalki 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 restoration project of iconic representations in the space of Saint Sophia undertaken by the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty in the 9th and 10th centuries. The close symbolic connection of the Chalki Christ with the Imperial Door program of Leo the Wise makes the order from this emperor a probable hypothesis.

It is noteworthy that the tradition of the Chalki icon had powerful imperial connotations. The oldest and most famous legend concerning the Chalki image, first given in the *Chronicle* of Theophanes, reports that this image spoke to the Emperor Maurice (582-602) in a dream⁹⁹. The Chalki 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?». Maurice's penitence is also connected with another story, which tells about the forgiveness of another sinful emperor – the iconoclast Theophilus – after the supplication of his wife Theodora, again in front of the Chalki image¹⁰⁰. In her vision Theodora had

⁹⁸ DARROUZÈS, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-49.

⁹⁹ MANGO, *The Brazen House* *cit.*, pp. 109-112.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

received a response from 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»¹⁰¹. This miracle-story of the Empress' vision was sometimes read in Byzantine churches on the Sunday of Orthodoxy¹⁰², connecting the restoration of icon-worship with the main themes of repentance and forgiveness. One should notice that such a symbolic context of the Chalki Christ correlates it to the Imperial Door program of Leo the Wise, combining imperial and penitential aspects. A further 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)¹⁰³. 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' associations¹⁰⁴.

The connection between the symbolic meanings of the Tympanum mosaic and the Chalki 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 conch¹⁰⁵ was copied

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁰² For instance, in the 11th century Evergetis Synaxarion: DMITRIEVSKII, *Opisanie cit.*, I, p. 521.

¹⁰³ I am grateful to Nicoletta Isar who brought my attention to this 'sound' aspect of Leo the Wise's project.

¹⁰⁴ 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 motif revealing the royal background of the donors. See some examples: LIDOV, *Leo the Wise and the Miraculous Icons in Hagia Sophia cit.*, p. 425.

¹⁰⁵ C. MANGO, E.J.W. HAWKINS, *The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XIX, 1965, pp. 113-148; R.M. SAILOR, *Tradition and Innovation: A Reconsideration of the Hagia Sophia Apsidal Icon*, M.A. Thesis, University of Oregon 1994. The 14th century tradition confirms that the conch mosaic was perceived as a miraculous image of the Virgin.

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 [figs. 66, 70, 72]. 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, the nave and 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 remnants of the entire sacred space of Saint 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 big role¹⁰⁶. Sometimes they gave the most important key for understanding a particular program. Only a few of them are known from epigrams. Furthermore, it makes its crucial role very probable in the creation of the miraculous framework of the Great Church, not merely as wall decoration, but a sophisticated structure of miraculous icons and relics interacting with various rituals in the actual sacred space. In this context one should remember once more the verses of Leo the Wise written around images of Christ beside the main doors to Saint Sophia that I have discussed above¹⁰⁷.

Let me sum up some previous discussion. Using all the available testimonies, direct and indirect, we have tried to reconstruct the spatial environment and new 'miraculous imagery' created by Leo the Wise in Saint Sophia. It seems clear that the Emperor Leo was not just a donor providing money for a renovation of the Great Church. He was not an architect or an artist-artisan making sculptural decoration or painting murals. What he actually did was the detailed

¹⁰⁶ S. MERCATI, *Sulle iscrizioni di Santa Sofia*, in «Bessarione. Rivista di studi orientali», XXVI, 1923, pp. 204-206; *Id.*, *Collectanea Byzantina*, II, Bari 1970, pp. 276-280.

¹⁰⁷ See note 22: C. MANGO, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul* cit., pp. 96-97.

elaboration of a concept of a particular sacred space, a kind of 'spatial icon', which included, beyond material images and venerated holy objects, various rituals, and chanting, lighting, censoring effects. An integral part of this project was the invisible presence of literary associations connected with numerous miracle-stories, which existed in the minds of the Byzantine beholders coming to the Great Church and looking at the venerated images and relics.

Taking into consideration all these data, it seems natural to pose a question about a cultural figure – one may call him the creator of sacred space or the master of hierotopy –, a phenomenon long hidden under the layers of various activities belonging to different people in different historical circumstances. No doubt that spontaneous aspect in the creation of any particular sacred space played a considerable role. Every special phenomenon should be perceived as a result of the creative efforts of several masters. I did not want to fall back into the rut of an old-fashioned art-historical deification of the individual maestro: Solomon; Justinian; Suger of St-Denis¹⁰⁸. The creation of an environment conducive to the eruption of the sacred (Eliade's hierophany) is always complex, and not merely reducible to the genius of a single patron. But at the same time we might want to consider a 'concepteur', a particular creator of a sacred space, whose role could be initiative, basic and multifunctional. Like future film directors, he was responsible not merely for the general spatial imagery but for complex links of various arts subordinated in a single spatial whole. Without revealing this figure, or better to say, if we do not keep in mind a possibility of this cultural function, we shall not be able to properly understand several quite significant phenomena of medieval culture.

In the present paper I have tried to argue that we should reveal a form of sophisticated creativity, with all its literary, theological, liturgical and purely artistic aspects. From this point of view the creators of sacred space should be considered among Byzantine artists and be included as a special phenomenon in the history of Byzantine art and culture. Not every donor nor every emperor was a creator of sacred space (for instance, it is not true for Basil I, Leo the Wise's father, who ordered a lot of new buildings and decorations).

¹⁰⁸ I highly appreciate some stimulating criticism by Dr Gervase Rosser and Prof. Ćurčić on this point.

At the same time, the creation of a sacred space was an integral part of Byzantine imperial behaviour. As has been noticed before, Leo the Wise followed the model of Justinian, which he could learn about in numerous artefacts, sacred spaces and legends of the Great Church. The Emperor Leo inserted his project of sacred space into the framework made by Justinian some centuries before. Leo's spatial projects were later transformed by other emperors, or masters of hierotopy, developing his original concepts without, or with, a direct reminder of the wise emperor. Some models of spatial imagery, as happened in iconography, became established and fashionable paradigms.

Addendum: *The evidence of Byzantine Typika*. A reflection of this phenomenon can be found in some Middle Byzantine typika, the concrete authors of which clearly demonstrated the multifunctional role of the creators of particular sacred spaces. The *Typikon* of the Kosmosoteira monastery in Pherrai, written by Isaak Komnenos after 1152, provides one of the most striking examples¹⁰⁹. The text suggests the model behaviour of the Sebastokrator Isaak as a Byzantine ruler and giver of commissions, who followed the paradigms of his royal ancestors. He was in charge of the location and arrangement of his tomb in the monastery, which he transferred from the original site in the Constantinopolitan Chora monastery to the specially constructed church-mausoleum in Pherrai (probably, the tomb was situated in the specially enclosed north part of the narthex). All details of the spatial environment were carefully fixed, including the display of marble plates, a cast bronze railing, an icon stand with the portraits of the donor's parents and a likeness of himself¹¹⁰. The lid of the coffin after the actual death of the donor had to be adorned

¹⁰⁹ The Greek text was published: L. PETIT, *Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosotira près d'Aenos*, in «Izvestija russkogo archeologičeskogo Instituta v Konstantinopole», XIII, 1908, pp. 17-75. For an English translation see: *Typikon of the Sebastokrator Isaak Komnenos for the Monastery of the the Mother of God Kosmosoteira near Bera*, trans. by N. Sevcenko, in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, II, Washington 2000, pp. 782-858.

¹¹⁰ For all important details of the tomb's arrangement discussed: N. ŠEVČENKO, *The Tomb of Isaak Komnenos at Pherrai*, in «Greek Orthodox Theological Review», XXIX, 2, 1984, pp. 135-139.

with his personal precious 'enkolpion' (a pendant reliquary) with the image of the Theotokos.

Sevastokrator paid great attention to two venerable icons of Christ and the Mother of God richly decorated with gold and silver, both affixed to one end of the tomb. In the Typikon, he gave orders for special and changing lightings of these icons, which had to emphasise the meaning of miraculous images at particular services¹¹¹. Isaak established special rituals in front of the icons: after vespers the monks recited the *Trisagion* and forty times *Kyrie Eleisons*. Beyond several rites, chanting and reciting of special prayers intended to this particular space, Isaak made regulations for instrumental sounds produced by bells and *simantra* (wooden beams) creating every time an unusual symbolic context as well as a specific perception of the sacred space¹¹². Moreover, nearly all elements of Isaak's project for his tomb space and his foundation monastery had to be presented in a dynamic state. They changed during the day and the year, acquiring more powerful meanings at particular liturgical moments, very often according to the scenario elaborated by the creator of the sacred space. It is noteworthy that Isaak perceived the miraculous icons as living beings who, according to the text of the Typikon, might participate in the mystical spatial performance which was permanently happening around his tomb.

¹¹¹ PETIT, *op. cit.*, p. 9; *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents cit.*, II, p. 802: «At any rate, I wish that by both of these icons there be lit as well the triple lamps of silver, those which I hung up nicely before them. Moreover, let all the little candles be lit, along with these, as many as the bronze *lamna* is able to hold, the one extending above and across the entrance doors to the sanctuary. Furthermore, [one should light] every lamp suspended from the beams of the church, and from the objects designed to support the holders for the candles – I mean inside the narthex. This is the way I wish the splendid illumination to be arranged on the feasts of the Mother of God, who has given me hopes for intercession and for my salvation».

¹¹² «So on all the rest of the days of the year that are not feast days, let the small semantron be sounded first, to call together the monks for the hymnodies, then the large wooden one. On Sundays and on all the feast days enumerated, particularly [on the day of] the holy Dormition of the Mother of God, I wish, as was said, for the two large bells hanging quite high up in the tower to be rung loudly, as long as necessary – these being the very bells that I had hung up in fervent faith and in my reverence toward the Mother of God» (*Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents cit.*, II, p. 802).

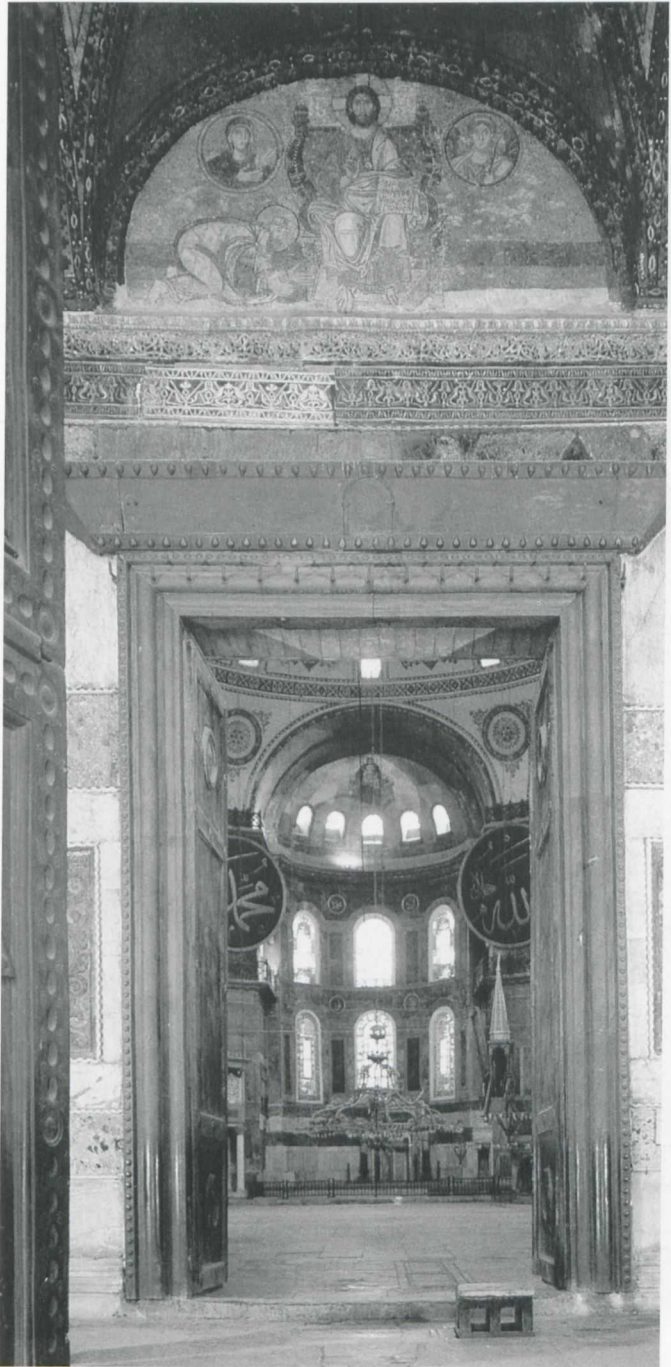
Certainly, I have not been able to mention all the details concerning Isaak Komnenos's scenario of the sacred space of his mausoleum in Pherrai. It deserves very detailed study but it is not the aim of the present paper. For me it has been much more important to point out the number of documents which might confirm my hypothesis of the creator of sacred space as a special cultural figure. Byzantine Typika and other sources, re-read anew, will provide an important well-documented proof that the Byzantines not only knew and practiced in this field but, most probably, had special training in the making of sacred space going back to the great paradigms of the Old Testament.

ALEXEJ LIDOV

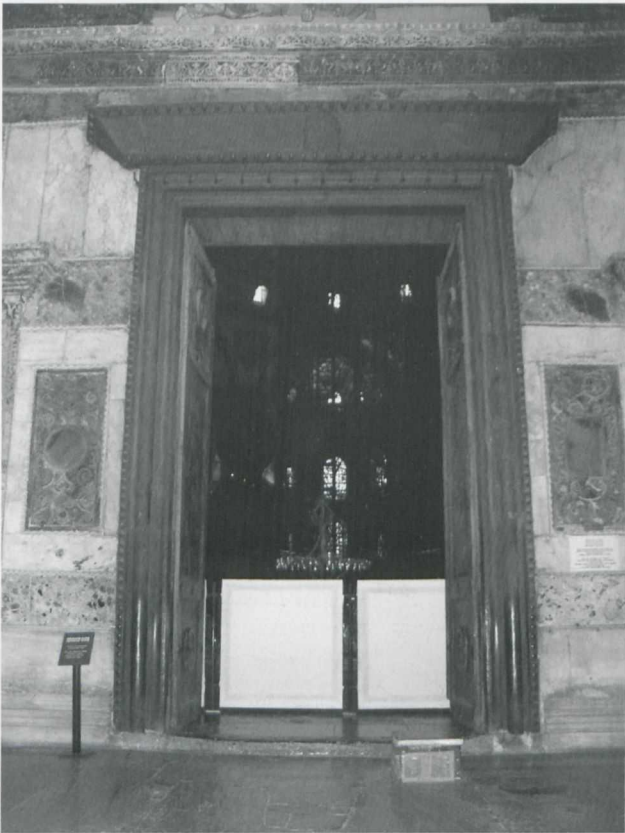
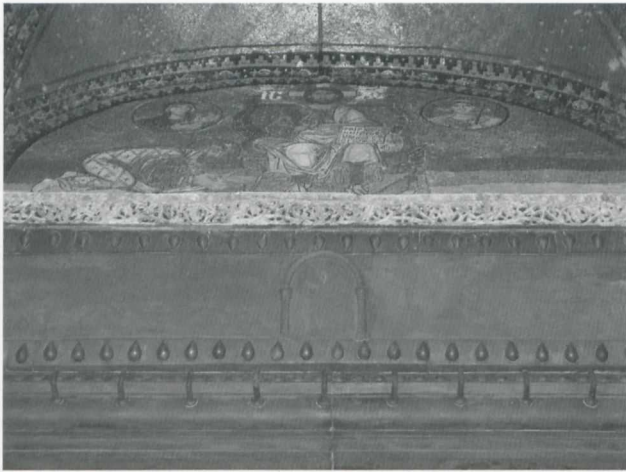


64. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. View of the pillar of St. Gregory the Wondermaker in the North Aisle

65. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. The Imperial Door, view from the exonarthex.

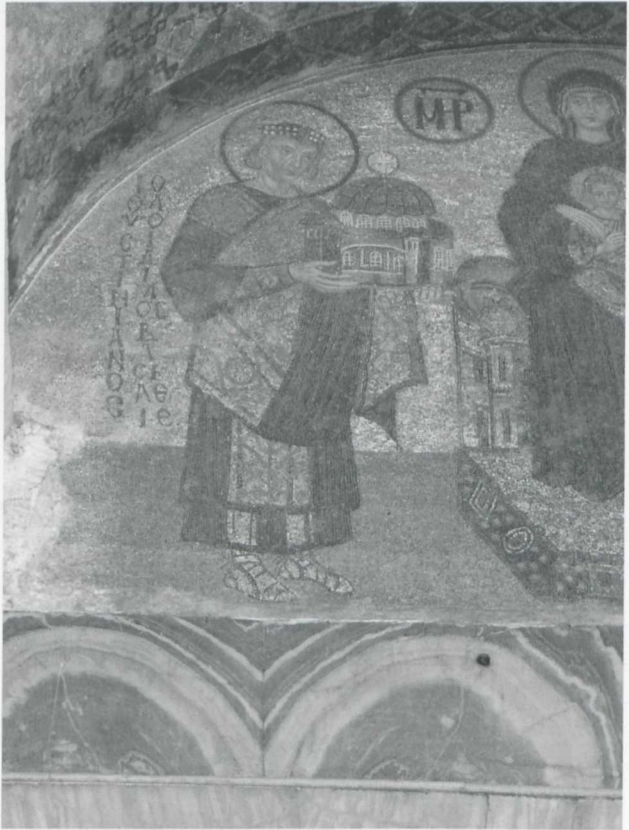
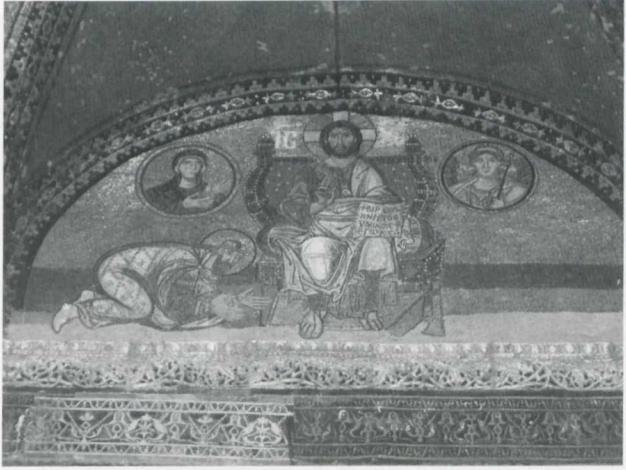


66. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. The Imperial Door.



67. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. *The Hetoimasia*, 10th c., detail of the brass mould of the imperial door.

68. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. The Imperial Door and the original locations of the wonder-making icons of Christ and the Virgin Mary.



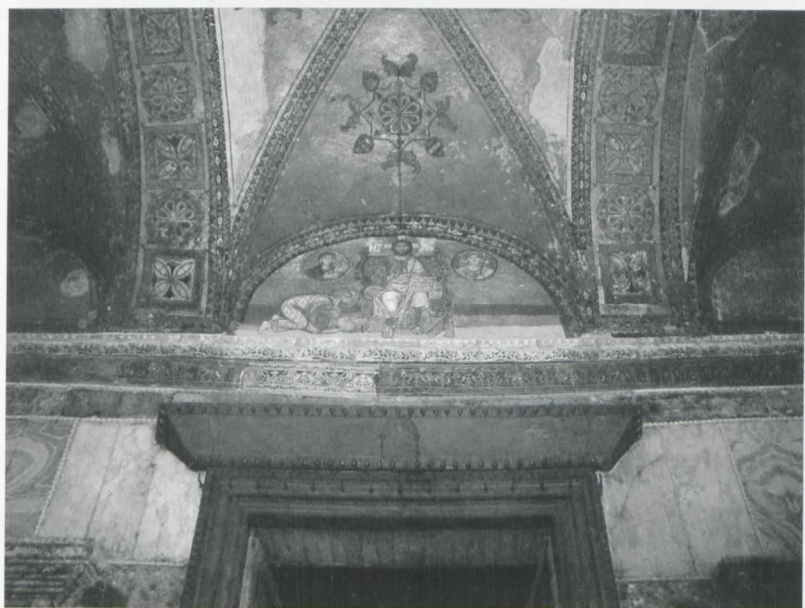
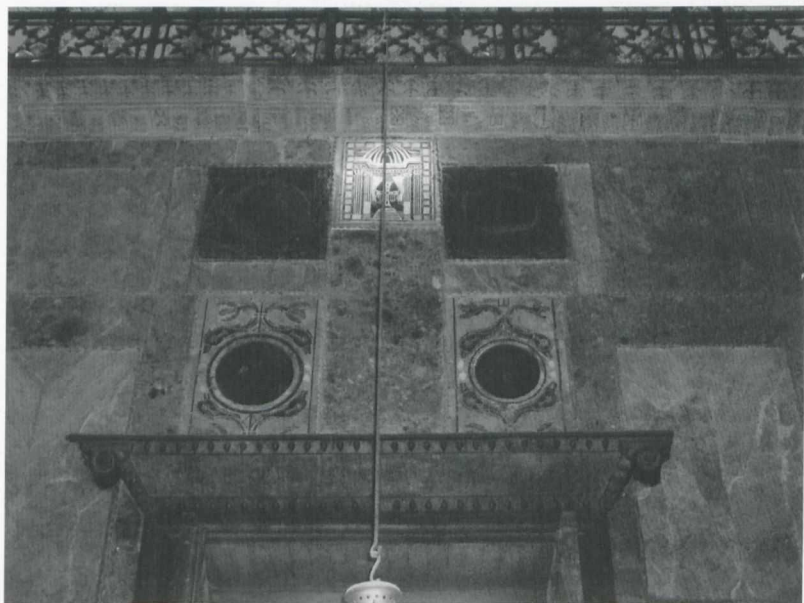
69. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. Emperor Leo the Wise clinging in proskynesis to Christ's feet, mosaic early 10th c., detail of the Imperial Door.

70. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. mosaic in the lunette of the southwest vestibule, detail of Justinian offering the model of Saint Sophia.



71. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. view of the endonarthex.

72. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. Southwest vestibule, entrance to the endonarthex.



73. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. West wall of the naos. Marble plate (marking the ancient location of the Chalkitis icon), surrounded by *opus sectile* panels.

74. Istanbul, Saint Sophia. Endonarthek. View of the upper part of the Imperial Door.