

Fig. 1. Mosaic in the Rotunda of Hagios Georgios, Thessaloniki, 5th century.

HEAVENLY JERUSALEM:
THE BYZANTINE APPROACH

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The iconography of Heavenly Jerusalem is one of the most important subjects in the vast thematic range of medieval West European art. New studies appear frequently to prove by concrete examples that the symbolism of Heavenly Jerusalem determined many crucial cultural phenomena.¹ The Byzantine and the Eastern Christian iconography of Heavenly Jerusalem appears almost neglected against this background, largely due to the limitations of the traditional methodology and the absence of an adequate approach to the understanding of the Byzantine interpretation, which so spectacularly differed from the one accepted in the West. In this paper I shall attempt to elucidate and explain the specificities of the Byzantine approach, while pointing out the basic evolutionary stages of this theme in Eastern Christian art with the aid of a few representative examples.²

In this article we shall consider the “image” of Heavenly Jerusalem, which does not coincide with a concrete iconographic type based on a definite pictorial scheme. The “image” is understood as the combination of particular iconographic motifs which were used to accentuate the idea of Heavenly Jerusalem. This clarification is important, since in a broad sense all Christian art can be regarded as an image of Heavenly Jerusalem, for every church with all its decoration is a visual embodiment of the Heavenly Kingdom on Earth.

An original interpretation can be observed even in the very earliest Byzantine representations. The best-known image of Heavenly Jerusalem appears in the fifth-century mosaics of the rotunda of Hagios Georgios in Thessaloniki (Fig. 1). The dome of this late classical rotunda converted into a Christian church was decorated with a grandiose picture of the Second Coming. The three-tier composition depicted the appearance of the Heavenly Kingdom on Earth. The central medallion contained a full-length figure of Christ Triumphant carrying a golden cross. The second component, of which only a few fragments have survived around the medallion frame, probably featured angels or apocalyptic elders in white robes announcing the arrival of the Ruler of the World. Finally, the lowest and best preserved part of the mosaic decoration bore eight compositions, whose symbolic content has been associated from the first researchers onward with the theme of the New Jerusalem descending from Heaven.³

These scenes all display variations of a single compositional structure: figures of orants presented against the background of a grand and unusual edifice in the form of a central exedra flanked by two tower-like constructions. The architecture creates the image of a church sanctuary with an apsidal niche and an altar crowned by a ciborium with a different shape in each case. Gospels and crosses on the altars are supplemented by depictions of candles,

¹ Among the recent publications worthy of particular attention are the scholarly catalogue published by the Catholic University of Milan and Bianca Kühnel's fundamental monograph, both including detailed bibliographies: *La Gerusalemme celeste. Immagini della Gerusalemme celeste dal III al XIV secolo* (Milan, 1983); B. Kühnel, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem: Representations of the Holy City in Christian Art of the First Millennium* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1987). See also S. Kobelius, *Niebianska Jerozolima. Od sacrum miejsca do sacrum modelu* (Warsaw, 1989).

² The major ideas of this paper were presented for the first time at the conference “Jerusalem in Russian Culture,” organised by the Centre for Eastern Christian Culture (Moscow, 1991). See A.M. Lidov, “Obraz Nebesnogo Ierusalima v vostochnokhristianskoi

ikonografii,” *Ierusalim v russkoi kulture*, ed. A. Batalov and A. Lidov (Moscow, 1994), 15–33.

³ E. Weigand, “Der Kalenderfries von Hagios Georgios in Thessaloniki,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 39 (1939), 116–45; H. Torp, *Mosaikkene i St. Georg-Rotunden i Thessaloniki* (Oslo, 1963); A. Grabar, “À propos des mosaïques de la coupole de Saint Georges à Salonique,” *Cahiers Archéologiques* 17 (1967), 59–82; E. Kleinbauer, “The Iconography and the Date of the Mosaic of the Rotunda of Hagios Georgios, Thessaloniki,” *Viator* 3 (1972), 27–107; J.-M. Spieser, *Thessalonique et ses monuments du IV^e au VI^e siècle* (Paris, 1984), 125–64 (with an annotated bibliography, pp. 127–31).

lamps, curtains, chalices, and votive crowns. The details in the setting speak not merely of a church interior, but of a liturgy in which the orants are participating.⁴

It is interesting that the edifices depicted in the mosaics differ substantially from real-life church architecture. In their outward appearance the buildings are more reminiscent of imperial palaces and the late classical theatrical stage. The search for precise analogies led scholars to the façades of the late classical rock tombs in Petra (Jordan) which embodied the idea of the *sacrum palatium* – particularly grand, heavenly architecture, signifying the transition to another world.⁵ The combination in the rotunda mosaics of architectural elements drawn from church, palace, and theater stage accentuate the general idea of glorification and heavenly apotheosis, which is directly connected with the theme of the triumphal appearance of the Holy City.

Certain other features, to which considerably less attention has been paid in the scholarly literature, were also determined by the desire to create a visually precise and symbolically capacious image of Heavenly Jerusalem. One element that seems to be of prime significance is a certain “contamination” of the palace façade and the sanctuary interior. The architecture depicted in the mosaics exists outside the concept of “external” and “internal”; it is intended to create the image of a city-temple, a single sacred space within which the symbolic hierarchy of concrete spatial zones loses its meaning.⁶ It is noteworthy that this architecture is transparent; it is permeated by a glow emanating from the depths and is inseparable from the golden environment in which it exists. The absolute openness renders the building similar to grand propylaea, reminiscent of the entrance into the Kingdom of God and of the precious gates of Heavenly Jerusalem. The golden architecture – not created by human hands – against a sacral golden background, is clearly explained in

descriptions of the New Jerusalem as a city of pure gold which eclipses the grandeur of the palaces (Rev. 21:18–21).

The image of the city is deliberately presented from a bird’s-eye view. The panoramic composition transforms the architectural setting from a background into the conceptual center of the depiction in relation to which even the figures of the orants seem secondary. A single architectural theme is given expression in eight variant views, clear evidence of a desire to create a special ideal image from a combination of churches, one that does not correspond to any particular single church. Coupled with this, in the interior of the rotunda, are the eight architectural compositions that form a closed circle. They constitute an entire frieze that can be interpreted as a kind of wall enclosing the interior space of the early Byzantine church which was comprehended as a visual embodiment of Heavenly Jerusalem. The real church merges with the depictions of churches into a single environment, the Holy City, which does not allow any formal division between the real space and the visual one. In the present context the quantity of the compositions is also significant: eight is a number symbolic of the Resurrection, a reminder of the time when Heavenly Jerusalem is to appear.

In an analysis of the original nature of the eastern Christian interpretation of Heavenly Jerusalem, which can already be observed in such an early work as the rotunda of Hagios Georgios, one can distinguish the following basic features:⁷ 1. Heavenly Jerusalem is treated as a metaphor, a symbolic image, and not as the illustration of a specific text; 2. Heavenly Jerusalem is conceived of as a church, which in turn is identified with a palace, a city, the gates of Heaven; 3. Together with this, Heavenly Jerusalem is a place of incessant worship, the eternal liturgy of the righteous; 4. Heavenly Jerusalem is not identified with any single place of

⁴ These figures were long thought to be martyr saints, but Kleinbauer has identified them as donors who ordered the decoration of the earthly church and earned the right to pray in the heavenly temple. See E. Kleinbauer, “The Orants in the Mosaic Decoration of the Rotunda at Thessaloniki: Martyr Saints or Donors?” *Cahiers Archéologiques* 30 (1982), 25–45. At present this is an open issue. There are many interpretations; according to one of them the strange combination of figures could be connected with the relics of the saints collected in the Rotunda. See Spieser, *Thessalonique*, 153–55.

⁵ H. Torp, “Quelques remarques sur les mosaïques de l’église de Saint Georges à Thessalonique,” *Pepragmena tou 9 Diethnous byzantinologikou Synedriou*, I (Athens, 1955), 489–98, pls. 164–69.

⁶ In this connection it is difficult to agree with the scholars who reject the Jerusalem symbolism of the mosaics on the grounds that here, in contrast to other early Christian representations, the city walls are not directly shown and the accent is placed on an act of worship in the church; see Kleinbauer, “The Iconography and Date,” 53, 54.

⁷ Its uniqueness can be clearly seen through a comparison with the contemporary Roman depictions of Heavenly Jerusalem, which present a fully concrete city, perceived as the illustration of a text (e.g., the mosaics in Santa Pudenziana, Santa Maria Maggiore and the Church of SS Cosmas and Damian). For a comprehensive catalogue of the Roman depictions, see *La Gerusalemme celeste*, 185–201.



Fig. 2. Miniature for Psalm 86. *Khloodov Psalter*, 9th century (Historical Museum, Moscow, gr. 129, fol. 86v).

worship. It is the concentration of churches, a sort of city made up of churches.

The conceptual aspects of the iconographic interpretation revealed in the mosaics of the Church of Hagios Georgios went on to be developed in Orthodox tradition. The representational structure of the mosaics has, however, no direct analogies. This unique creation of the intellectually refined and theatrically beautiful early Byzantine culture was too complex for subsequent repetition and did not lend itself to formalization. There was, though, a necessity to create firmly established iconographic formulas. The search

for such visual motifs was particularly intensive in the post-iconoclastic period. One finds a very interesting example in the miniatures contained in the ninth-century *Khloodov Psalter* (Moscow, State Historical Museum, gr. 129d).

The theme of Jerusalem occupies a significant place in the plan of this manuscript.⁸ It can be observed in ten of the miniatures. Among these the most remarkable is the illustration to Psalm 86 [87], fol. 86v (Fig. 2)

⁸ M.V. Shchepkina, *Miniatury Khloodovskoi Psaltyri* (Moscow, 1977), fols. 6r, 9r, 26v, 44r, 51r, 61r, 78v, 79r, 86v, 100v.

which is entirely devoted to the Holy City and begins with the words "His foundation is in the holy mountains." The miniature depicts a three-aisle basilica adjoined by a round, multi-tiered structure alongside the altar apse. The buildings are enclosed by a high wall which makes the depiction resemble a pillar or tower with a church on its top. There is an entrance in the wall with a flight of seven steps leading up to it. Above the city there is a Greek inscription, *ΑΓΙΑ ΣΙΩΝ* (Holy Zion). David is shown on a special elevation turned towards an image of the Virgin and Child on the city walls. Another Greek inscription precisely defines the meaning of the iconographic commentary: "David prophesies" – about the future sacred city, Heavenly Jerusalem, symbolically inseparable from Holy Zion. The integrity and polysemantic nature of this image is expressed in the words of Hebrews 12:22–23: "But you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn..."

In this miniature from the Khludov Psalter we again find the image of a church-city, but its architecture is already more concrete in character than in the mosaics of Hagios Georgios.⁹ The combination of a tiered tower and a basilica comprise a schematic depiction of the Holy Sepulchre complex in Jerusalem, the basic buildings of which were the Martyrium basilica and, adjoining it, the stepped rotunda of the Church of the Anastasis. This most holy Christian shrine, erected on the historical site of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, was already in early Byzantine times interpreted as

a visual image of Heavenly Jerusalem.¹⁰ The combination of a basilica and a stepped rotunda, presented in the form of a tiered tower, is known as a pictorial device from early Byzantine times onward (for example, the image of the Holy City on the eighth-century mosaic of the church of St. Stephan in *Kastron Mefaa*,¹¹ or on a bread stamp from the Cleveland Museum of Art¹²). In the post-iconoclastic period, however, it became an established formula in Byzantine iconography. It is of substantial importance that the depiction did not so much indicate a specific historical and geographical complex as conventionally signify the ideal temple-city.

The motif of the gate is also present in the Khludov Psalter miniature, albeit in a far more prosaic form than in the Thessaloniki mosaics. The high flight of steps, a reminder of the city's unearthly nature, gives visual expression to Ezekiel's words about the seven steps leading to the gate of the heavenly temple (Ezek. 40:22). It is noteworthy that the iconographic formula used in the Khludov Psalter, showing the gate in a kind of tower crowned with a church, can be conceived as the symbolic prototype of the church over the gate which became a widespread feature in the architecture of the eastern Christian world. The church over the gate of a city or a monastery reminded the viewer of Heavenly Jerusalem, uniting in a single construction the symbolic motifs of the gate, church, and tower. Evidently, though, the key iconographic motif in the miniature is the image of the Virgin and Child which is not characteristic of western representations of Heavenly Jerusalem. In the Khludov Psalter the direct comparison of the Virgin and the Church-City occurs in

⁹ Some scholars have suggested that this miniature portrays the particular basilica of Mount Zion in Jerusalem. See A. Grabar, "Quelques notes sur les psautiers illustres byzantins du IX siècle," *Cahiers Archéologiques* 15 (1965), 64; later Grabar described the buildings, represented in the miniature, as the depiction of the Holy Sepulchre complex: A. Grabar, *L'icône-classe byzantine: Le dossier archéologique* (Paris, 1984), 288. See also T. Avner, "Jerusalem as an Early Iconographic Source of Inspiration in the Miniatures of the Marginal Psalters," *Jews, Samaritans, and Christians in Byzantine Eretz-Israel* (Jerusalem, 1988), 59–79 (in Hebrew). In my opinion the inscription "Holy Zion" is merely an indication of the general idea of the Holy City, as in Psalm 86 itself, rather than an attempt to identify the particular site in Jerusalem. Some miniatures in the Khludov Psalter present the same inscription (fols. 79, 100v), however, the architectural forms of the buildings are very different. In the miniature illustrating Psalm 86 of another ninth-century Psalter (Pantokrator 61, fol. 121) we can see the same combination of pictorial motifs, including the tower-rotunda and the basilica surrounded by the city wall, but the

new Greek inscription is added to accentuate the original meaning of the image – "The Holy City of God." For a new interpretation of this image in the context of the anti-Jewish polemic, see K. Corrigan, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 97–99, figs. 99, 100.

¹⁰ Even the first builder of the complex, Constantine the Great, held this belief. In the words of his biographer, Eusebius of Caesarea: "On the site of the delivering passion they will raise a new Jerusalem... perhaps that very temple which the prophet's word calls the new, young Jerusalem, and to the glory of which through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so much is said in the Scripture." (Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, ed. F.W. Winkelmann (Berlin, 1975), III, 25). See B. Kühnel, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem*, 81–89.

¹¹ M. Piccirillo, "Le chiese e mosaici di Umm er-Rasas – *Kastron Mefaa*," in M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici di Madaba* (Jerusalem, 1989), 269–308.

¹² G. Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison, 1970), 153–85.

several miniatures (fol. 79 illustrating Psalm 77:68–69, and fol. 100v illustrating Psalm 101:14). We find here the sources of one of the most important Byzantine iconographic themes – the identification of the Mother of God with the Church – which was given detailed and poetic interpretation in orthodox theology and hymnography. This theme took on special significance in the post-iconoclastic period when the image of the Virgin became established in the conch of the altar apse as an all-embracing symbol of the ideal Church. It is noteworthy that in the ninth-century miniature David seems to be celebrating a service in front of the icon of the Virgin, standing on a special dais like a priest in a church. The liturgical aspect is intensified by the depiction in the opposite margin (fol. 87) of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus carrying Christ's body into the cave sepulchre. The black cave entrance clearly echoes the black gate of the Church-City. In addition, Joseph and Nicodemus are dressed in white priestly sticharions with the characteristic bands running from the shoulders. In laying Christ's body in the tomb they can be identified with priests officiating at the Holy Sepulchre, interpreted by theologians as the first sanctuary. The juxtaposition of the two miniatures on one double page evokes thoughts of the never-ending liturgy in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

This accent, comprising the characteristic feature of the Byzantine interpretation of the subject, acquired special significance in the art of the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, the development of which was marked by an ever-greater concretization of the liturgical theme.¹³ It is noteworthy that we find iconographic motifs of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the scene of the Communion of the Apostles, the appearance of which in the altar apse determined the liturgical character of middle-Byzantine church decoration. A striking example of this can be found in the frescoes of the thirteenth-century church of the Holy Apostles in Peć, Serbia (Fig. 3).¹⁴ Behind the apostles receiving communion we see the characteristic combination of a basilica and a round, tiered tower with a dome crowned by a cross. The essential architectural features of the Holy Sepulchre complex – the Martyrium and the Rotunda of the Anastasis – are reproduced here. The iconographic motif is a reminder of the mystical link between the liturgy in the heavenly temple and the first

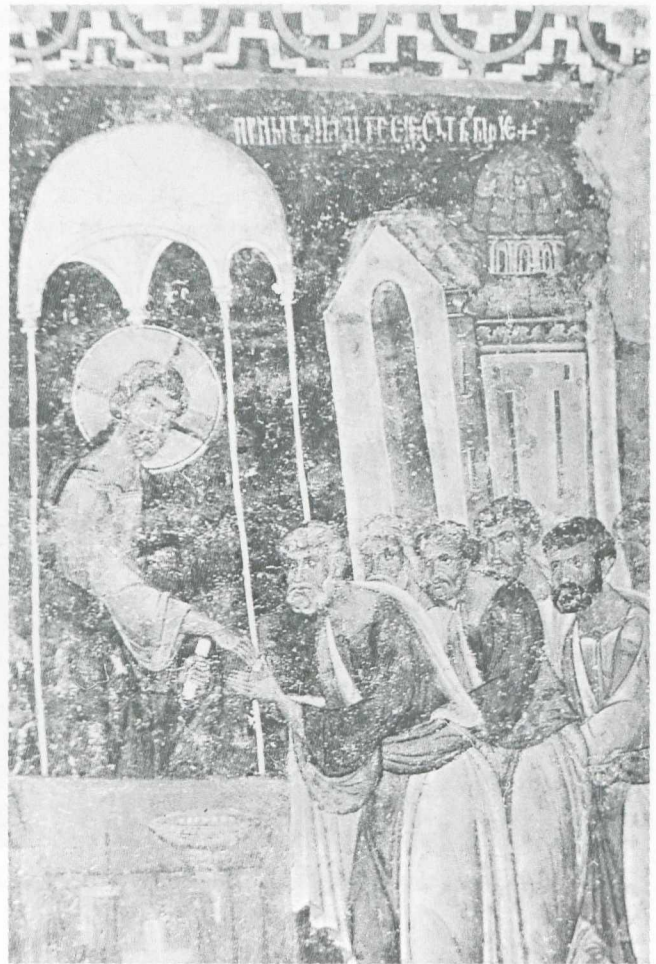


Fig. 3. *The Communion of the Apostles. Fresco in the Church of the Holy Apostles, Peć (Serbia), 13th century.*

altar set up on the site of Christ's burial and Resurrection. An expressive detail is the unproportionately high entrance into the basilica, which in the context evokes memories of the image of the heavenly gate. The author of the image does not strive after archaeological precision, but after a symbolic embodiment of the idea of the holy city.

From the late thirteenth century a depiction of the city wall became common in scenes of the Communion of the Apostles (an early example is in the Peribleptos church at Ohrid, Macedonia), recalling that the Heavenly Jerusalem is the place where Christ and the apostles celebrate the liturgy. The motif of the gate is nearly

¹³ C. Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church* (London, 1982), 164–249.

¹⁴ V. Djurić, S. Cirković, V. Korać, *Pechka Patriarshia* (Belgrade, 1990), 42, fig. 15.

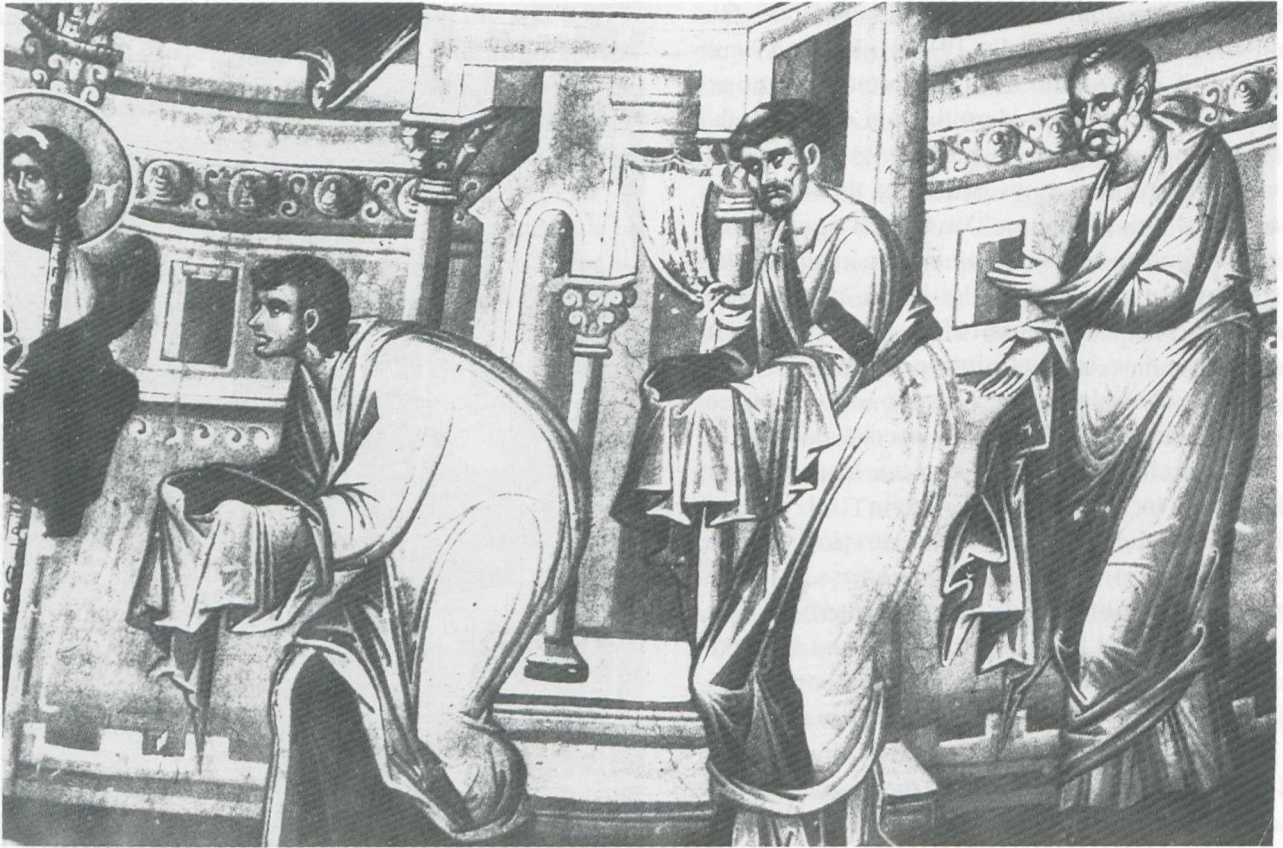


Fig. 4. *The Communion of the Apostles. Fresco in the St. George Church, Staro Nagorichano (Macedonia), 14th century.*

always distinguished in the depiction of the wall; in some versions it is shown in the form of a grand portal with porticoes and arcades (Fig. 4).¹⁵ The source of such treatments lies in the biblical texts of visions describing the richly decorated gate with porches in the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem. The origins of the symbolism can be found in the same prophecies: "thou shalt call thy walls Salvation and thy gates Praise" (Isa. 60:18). Addressing the participant in the liturgy, the altar composition declared the Eucharist as an indispensable condition for salvation and admission into the life of the Heavenly Jerusalem. The Holy City is particularly mentioned in the liturgical canticle about communion: "Shine, Shine, O New Jerusalem! for the

glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." The iconographic motif was not an invention of the Palaeologan period. It represented a reinterpretation of a pictorial feature known from early Christian sarcophagi, for example the late-fourth-century sarcophagus in San Ambrogio in Milan on which Christ was depicted with apostles against the background of the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem pierced by gates.¹⁶

The new interpretation of an ancient theme is also present in the rare depictions of ciboria which are reminiscent of the aediculum or the canopy over the Holy Sepulchre. The depiction of a ciborium in the scene of the Communion of the Apostles among the early-thirteenth-century mural paintings of the Akhtala mon-

¹⁵ A remarkable example of this widespread motif can be found in the fourteenth-century wall paintings at Staro Nagorichano: B. Todić, *Staro Nagorichano* (Belgrade, 1994), pl. 94.

¹⁶ R. Sansoni, *I sarcofagi paleocristiani a porta du città* (Bologna,

1969), 3–12; *La Gerusalemme celeste*, no. 95, p. 202; M.-L. Thérél, *Les symboles de l'Ecclesia dans la création iconographique de l'art chrétien du IIIe au VIe siècle* (Rome, 1973), 109–15.

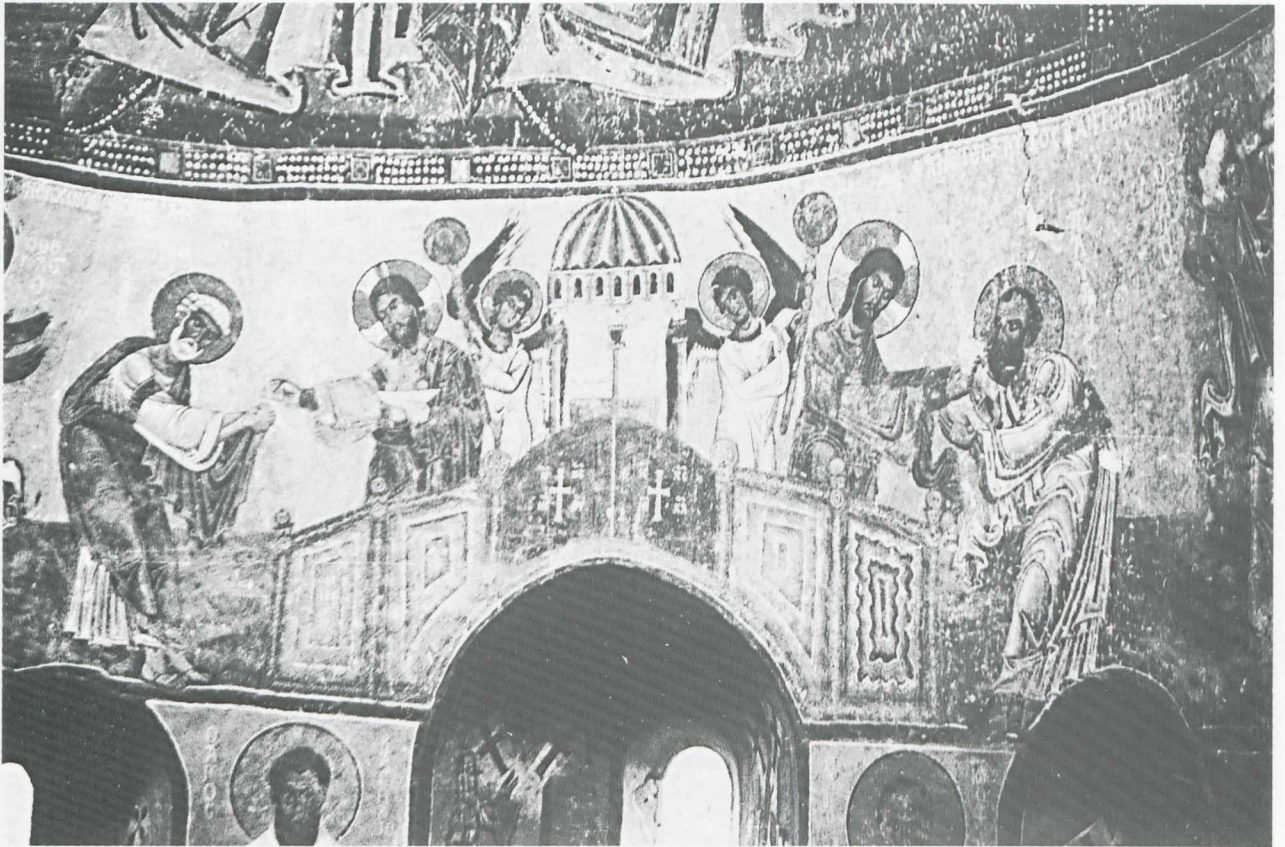


Fig. 5. *The Communion of the Apostles. Fresco in the Akhtala monastery, North Armenia, 1205–1216.*

astery in Armenia provides one of the early examples (Fig. 5).¹⁷ The upper part of the ciborium reproduces the unusual dome of the canopy; its umbrella-like shape, relief segments, and the plaques of the metal cover are conveyed with all the precision that Byzantine iconography could afford. The Jerusalem aediculum was interpreted as the proto-ciborium placed above the first altar of the Holy Sepulchre. Real architectural details are used to stress the prototypical significance of the altar in the scene of the Communion of the Apostles and they remind the viewer of the temple of Heavenly Jerusalem in which the Eucharist depicted does indeed take place.

The symbolic motif first noted in the Akhtala murals appears with new force in the scene of the Communion of the Apostles among the fourteenth-century

mural paintings in the Church of the Virgin in Peć (Fig. 6).¹⁸ In the center of the composition a church is shown between two altar-tables without ciboria, the combination of forms creating a generalized depiction of the Holy Sepulchre complex. A six-winged seraph placed in front of the church evokes a clear association with the theme of the gates of Paradise guarded by angels, reminding us that the scene of the Communion of the Apostles does not merely depict a place of worship, but creates an image of Heavenly Jerusalem. The sources of the iconographic motif can be noted in early Byzantine representations of the Holy Sepulchre.¹⁹ In Palaeologan art, however, it is given a purely liturgical interpretation.

The numerous Jerusalem motifs, which became common in the Christological and Mariological cycles

¹⁷ A.M. Lidov, *The Mural Paintings of Akhtala* (Moscow, 1991), 34–36; idem, “Les motifs liturgiques dans le programme iconographique d’Axtala,” *Zograf* 20 (1989), 36 ff.

¹⁸ A. Stojaković, “Pokusaj određivanja realnih vrednosti jednog

slikanog arhitektonskog tipa,” *Zbornik Arhitektonskog fakulteta*, VI (Belgrade, 1960–61), 3–12.

¹⁹ K.J. Conant, “The Original Buildings at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem,” *Speculum* 21 (1966), 1, pl. XVI.



Fig. 6. *The Communion of the Apostles. Fresco in the Church of the Virgin, Peć (Serbia), 14th century.*

of the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries should also be considered in the liturgical context. A striking image of Heavenly Jerusalem was created in scenes of the Annunciation. The Incarnation was interpreted as the beginning of the path to salvation and the appearance of a new “spiritual temple” in the person of the Virgin. In the Annunciation in the mural paintings at Kurbino-vo, Macedonia (1191)²⁰ the throne of the Virgin resembles an altar, behind which rises a fabulous city that looks like a temple.²¹ In the architectural composition there is a depiction of an enclosed garden placed above the Virgin’s shoulder. Within the garden among the trees there is a vessel whose shape is characteristic of eucharistic chalices. The symbolic image of Heavenly Jerusalem suggests the unbroken connection of sublime notions: the Virgin, the altar, the temple, the holy

city, and, finally, the garden of Paradise. In iconographic variants of the theme more specific motifs of Heavenly Jerusalem also appear, such as, for example, the river of life in a twelfth-century icon from the Sinai Monastery (Ezek. 47:1–12; Rev. 22:1–2) (Fig. 7). From the twelfth century the depiction of the gates of Heaven behind the throne of the Virgin became an established iconographic motif, and the entire scene frequently unfolded against the background of a city wall. The metaphors for the Virgin in Byzantine hymnography – “Gate of the Word,” “Indestructible Wall,” “Spiritual Temple,” “Life-giving Source,” “Wise Paradise” – were translated into the language of Byzantine iconography and perceived as conceptual facets of the single symbolic image of Heavenly Jerusalem.

Architectural motifs that accentuated the idea of

²⁰ L. Hadermann-Misquich, *Kurbino-vo: Les fresques de Saint Georges et la peinture byzantine du XIIe siècle* (Brussels, 1975), 96–103.

²¹ Some iconographic variants feature the architectural motifs of the Holy Sepulchre (basilica and rotunda).



Fig. 7. *The Annunciation. Icon from the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, late 12th century.*

Heavenly Jerusalem gradually became more and more numerous in art between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, reflecting the general logic of an artistic development directed towards a strengthening of the illustrative-narrative principle. These motifs appear especially frequently in scenes of The Adoration of the Magi, The Raising of Lazarus, The Last Supper, The Doubting of Thomas, and The Dormition. The image of the heavenly temple is introduced into traditional

compositions as a sort of commentary that deepens and fills out the basic symbolic content of the scene and, at the same time, acts as a reminder that what is depicted is not simply a specific historical New Testament event, but an episode of a timeless liturgical celebration with Christ officiating as the priest.

Probably the most interesting iconographic interpretations of the Heavenly Jerusalem theme are provided by the frontispiece miniatures in manuscripts of



Fig. 8. Frontispiece miniature in the *Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos*, 12th century (Vatican, gr. 1162, fol. 2v).

the middle-Byzantine period. Characteristic examples are the well-known miniatures depicting the Ascension in the Church from the Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos (Vatican gr. 1162, fol. 2v and Paris gr. 1208, fol. 3v), dating from the second quarter of the twelfth century (Fig. 8). Scholarly opinion holds that what is depicted here is the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.²² However, it is possible to provide arguments that this miniature does not reproduce a particular church but presents an image of Heavenly Jerusalem.

The five-domed structure of the church depicted differs substantially from the composition of the Church of the Holy Apostles where the domes were located above the arms of the cross and not over the corner bays. Besides this, the treatment and juxtaposition of the architectural forms and the different coloring of the drums suggest that the author of the depictions did not have a particular church in mind but a combination of several church buildings placed alongside one another, each with its own dome. This concentration of churches was evidently intended to create the image of a church-city. The three arches in the lower part of this composition are treated as a solemn portal, and the whole image in the first miniature of the manuscript might easily be interpreted as a sort of gate giving access to the sacral space of the book. At the same time, the upper part of the arcade, which cuts strangely across the architecture of the churches, creates the image of a city wall encrusted with precious stones in precise accordance with the vision of John the Divine (Rev. 21:18–20).

Some of the architectural elements depicted in the miniature are linked to the conception of the Old Testament temple. A special study of the motif of columns bound in knots convincingly demonstrated that to the Byzantine mind these evoked the unusual columns which flanked the entrance to the Temple of Solomon.²³ The description of the temple in Ezekiel's vision helps to explain the depiction of grilled windows (Ezek. 40:16). The idea of the unity of the Old Testa-

ment temple and Heavenly Jerusalem, substantiated in the epistles of the apostles, is also affirmed in the frontispiece miniature of the Homilies by the depictions of prophets to the sides of the Ascension scene in the central arch. In the present context the Ascension can be understood as a symbol of the unity of the Church on Earth and in Heaven: from Heaven, Christ blesses the apostles who have taken up his mission on Earth. It is no coincidence that the Descent of the Holy Spirit appears above the Ascension as a reminder of the beginning of the apostolic mission and of the moment when the earthly church received the consecration. The figure of the Virgin personifying the Church is in the center of the Ascension scene; she lifts up her hands to Christ, as if praying for the salvation of mankind. The theme of the Virgin as the Church, which is the central one in James of Kokkinobaphos's collection of homilies,²⁴ is considerably enriched in the manuscript's frontispiece miniature through the iconographic motif of the church-city that creates a symbolic image of Heavenly Jerusalem.

The correctness of the proposed interpretation is confirmed by the frontispiece miniature of the Homilies of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (1136–55) from the collection of the Sinai monastery (Fig. 9).²⁵ Here the idea of the church-city as the place where the holy text was created is expressed with graphic vividness. Seven pillar-like domed churches evoke thoughts of "Wisdom hath builded her house" and "hewn out her seven pillars" (Prov. 9:1). The central church is reminiscent of a stepped rotunda and, alongside it, one can see a basilica. In the lower part of the city there are gardens and springs that are evocative of Paradise. The upper part of the composition contains an image of the Virgin, the first inhabitant of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the embodiment of the idea of the Church. And, finally, the picture is crowned by a great many flowering crosses, perceived as the most general sign of the Heavenly Jerusalem.²⁶

A similarly typological approach is found in the headpiece miniatures of two liturgical scrolls in the col-

²² A. Heisenberg, *Grabkirche und Apostelkirche*, II (Leipzig, 1910), 200; R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (Harmondsworth, 1965), 175, 339, 355; idem, "A Note on Justinian's Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople," in his *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York, London, 1969), 197–203, 198–99.

²³ I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, "The Byzantine Knotted Column," *Byzantine Studies in Honor of Milton V. Anastos* (Malibu, 1985), 95–103.

²⁴ C. Stornajolo, *Miniature delle Omilie di Giacomo monaco* (Cod. Vat. gr.

1162) e del *Evangelario greco Urbinate* (Rome, 1910).

²⁵ K. Weitzmann, G. Galavaris, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Illuminated Greek Manuscripts*, vol. I: *From the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, 1990), 141, 151, fig. 472.

²⁶ G. Jaszai, "Jerusalem, himmlisches," *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* 6 (1970), 399. The enduring repeated motif of a flowering cross on the domes of churches is also present in the frontispiece miniature of the Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos.



Fig. 9. *St. Gregory of Nazianzus. Frontispiece miniature in the Homilies of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, 12th century (Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, gr. 339, fol. 4v).*

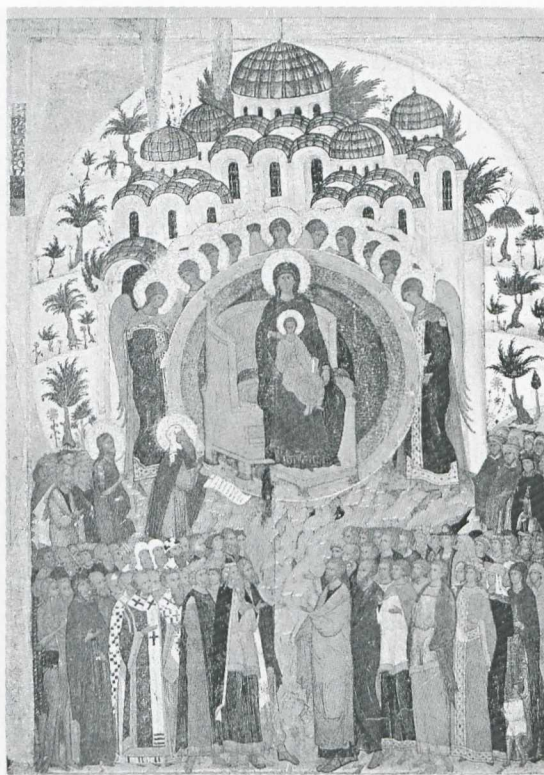


Fig. 10. *In Thee Rejoiceth. Russian icon, early 16th century (The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow).*

lections of the National Library in Athens (no. 2759) and the Monastery of John the Divine on Patmos (no. I, 707).²⁷ In these miniatures the liturgical scenes that depict the holy bishops officiating at the altar take place in the special architectural setting of the church-city. They include the already familiar iconographic motifs of the three-arched entrance, knotted columns, and richly decorated walls behind which rise the pillar-like bases of five domes crowned with flowering crosses. The miniatures in the liturgical scrolls emphasize the tower-like architectural construction, again convincingly explained in the context of the symbolism of Jerusalem. One can see the same combination of pictorial motifs, including the image of the Virgin in the upper part of the composition. There is an intention to present the iconographic model of an ideal church as the embodiment of the Heavenly Jerusalem idea.

The frontispiece miniatures from the Comnenian period show the main direction of Byzantine iconographers' attempts to create a more stable and recognizable

image of Heavenly Jerusalem. For all the similarity of pictorial approaches, however, in the Byzantine period this image never became an iconographic type, a scheme to be repeated. It seems that giving an image or an all-embracing symbol a definite form was alien to Byzantine spirituality, which presupposed meditative contemplation of celestial phenomena according to which real visual detail was not an entity with value in itself or an element of a narrative, but a sort of reference point for a gradual immersion in the sphere of the irrational. In our opinion it is precisely on this level that the substantial difference between the Byzantine treatment of the theme of Heavenly Jerusalem and western European depictions can be understood. Having consciously rejected the illustrative principle, eastern Christian iconographers strove to create a poetic symbol-metaphor in which the motifs of the city, temple, tower, heavenly gates, garden of Paradise, and the Virgin would blend into an indivisible whole. In this way the combination of motifs and the very method of depiction could easily change, depending on the context, while retaining the unique nature of the whole.

In post-Byzantine times, however, this approach to

²⁷ *L'Art Byzantin – Art Européen* (Athens, 1964), cat. nos. 358–59, pp. 339–40.

the representation of the Holy City assumed new features. The narrative-illustrative tendencies which had accumulated over the course of several centuries disrupted from within the traditional understanding of the sacred image, which then became typologically closer to the value system of the Latin world. It seems that in this period one could speak of the appearance of the Heavenly Jerusalem in Orthodox culture as an iconographic type that presupposed the reproduction of a single pictorial structure. This type acquired its definitive form in Russian art at the end of the fifteenth century, becoming widely known under the name "In Thee Rejoiceth" (*O Tebe raduyetsia*) which to the present day is considered only among the hymnographic subjects (Fig. 10).²⁸ The content of the iconographic theme is, however, of greater significance than simply an illustration of the hymn written by St. John of Damascus. Even the canticle, which was included in the liturgy of St. Basil the Great, features the image of Heavenly Jerusalem in such metaphors of the Virgin as the Assembly of the Angels, the Consecrated Temple, the Spiritual Paradise, the Altar and the Heavens.

In a visual representation of the hymn the idea of Heavenly Jerusalem is expressed even more distinctly: it is composed of the characteristic Byzantine motifs but has acquired the structure and completeness of a separate iconographic type. It is sufficient to draw attention to the image of the temple-city presented as a concentration of churches, to the steep hill on which the holy city is located, to the garden of Paradise in the white circle, to the righteous divided according to rank and seeming to participate in the liturgy, who bring to mind the description of Heavenly Jerusalem in the Life of St. Basil the New.²⁹ In some icons of the "In Thee Rejoiceth" type there is a depiction of the city wall which leaves no doubt as to the direction of the iconographic conception.³⁰ Two images of the Virgin and of

Heavenly Jerusalem approach each other for a long time within the Byzantine tradition finally to blend here into one iconographic theme. It is most probable that the Jerusalem symbolism predetermined the exceptional popularity and wide distribution of "In Thee Rejoiceth" icons in comparison with other hymnographic images in the art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Note that this took place in a period when the theme of Jerusalem also acquired a new relevance in many other spheres of Russian culture as a consequence of the political-religious concept of Moscow as the second Jerusalem,³¹ which emphasized the exclusive status of the Russian orthodox state. The most famous embodiment of this concept is the St. Basil Cathedral on Red Square, constructed in the mid-sixteenth century as the visible symbol of the Heavenly Jerusalem.³²

That, however, is the subject for special research that exceeds the scope of this work, the aim of which has been to present major characteristics of the Byzantine approach to the iconography of Heavenly Jerusalem. To summarize the pivotal idea of this paper, in Byzantine art Heavenly Jerusalem was never portrayed as an illustration of any particular text, but as a changing image based on established pictorial motifs, each with a circle of literary associations of its own. The archetypal symbolic structure of this image was constant and recognizable, though the outer forms were always presented in new combinations. The traditional method of direct juxtaposition of the verbal text and the illustrating image, thoroughly elaborated in Western medieval art history, was not suitable to reveal this aspect of Byzantine iconography, which, as we see it, gives us an opportunity to understand some essential principles of the Eastern Christian artistic consciousness, so distinct from the Latin one.

²⁸ E. Georgievskij-Druzinin, "Les fresques du monastère du Thera-pon. Étude de deux thèmes iconographiques," *L'art byzantine chez les slaves* 2/1 (Paris, 1932), 122–28; E.V. Duvakina, "Problemy ikonografii O tebe raduyetsia v svyazi s rospis'iu sobora Ferapontova monastyrja," *Ferapontovskii sbornik*, I (Moscow, 1985), 175–87; A. Dumitrescu, "L'illustration de l'hymne En toi se rejoit en Russie et son rayonnement dans les Balkans," *Cahiers Balkaniques* 11 (1990), 91–119.

²⁹ S. Vilinsky, *Zhitie sv. Vasilija Novogo v russkoj literature*, I (Odessa, 1913), 50. Indicatively, at the liturgical moment before the communion, when the hymn "In Thee Rejoiceth" is chanted by the faithful, in the sanctuary a priest reads the intercession prayers for all the saints according to their ranks, for salvation of the living and the dead. No doubt the creators of the iconographic

type had in mind these liturgical connotations directly connected with the ideas of the Last Judgment and the Heavenly Kingdom.

³⁰ Duvakina, "Problemy," 196. For an understanding of the sources of this iconographic theme within Palaeologan art, see A. Cutler, "The Virgin on the Walls," in idem, *Transfigurations: Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography* (London, 1975), 111–41.

³¹ Some new aspects of this topic were presented in the collection of articles *Ierusalim v russkoj kulture*, ed. A. Batalov and A. Lidov (Moscow, 1994).

³² A.L. Batalov and T.H. Viatchanina, "Ob ideinom znachenii ierusalimskogo obraztsa v russkoj arkhitektury XVI–XVII vv.," *Arkhitekturnoe nasledstvo* 36 (1988), 29–36.