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HIERARCHIES OR DIRECT RELATION TO GOD:
A NEW INTERPRETATION

In this paper it will be questioned that the hierarchies play an important role in Byzantine church decoration. There are only a few examples which probably could be interpreted as depictions of hierarchies. But even they are far from certain. Depictions of hierarchies came up during the first centuries of the Post-Byzantine times and occured quite often from then on. It is proposed that these Post-Byzantine examples derive from Western models. In general it remains to clarify whether or not Byzantine theology is dominated by hierarchical theories. It contradicts the idea of theosis to which e.g. the Pantocrator probably fits better than anything else.

Keywords: hierarchy, pictorial programs, theosis, Western influence

Since the publication of Otto Demus¹ „Byzantine Mosaic Decoration“¹ (1948) it has been held true that Byzantine church architecture and the correlating iconographical programs from the late antique times onwards have been organized in a hierarchical manner.² This has nearly allways been confirmed with reference to Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagites who is famous for his elaboration of a Christian hierarchy in the times around AD 500. This hierarchy consists of a celestial and an ecclesiastical

¹ O. Demus, Byzantine Mosaic Decoration, London 1948, 15: „The Byzantine church is, first, an image of the Kosmos, symbolizing heaven, paradise (or the Holy Land) and the terrestrial world in an ordered hierarchy, descending from the sphere of the cupolas, which represent heaven, to the earthly zone of the lower parts.“ E. Giordani follows Demus and in her article „Das mittelbyzantinische Ausschmückungssystem als Ausdruck eines hieratischen Bildprogramms“ she speaks of „der kosmologisch-hierarchischen, topographisch-symbolischen und liturgischen Bedeutung des Kirchengebäudes“ (JÖBG 1 [1951] 124). Since then the idea of a hierarchical order has become a topos; see e.g. T. Velmans, Byzanz. Fresken und Mosaike, Zürich 1999, 97; B. Schellewald, Kuppelbilder, RbK V (1993) 590ff.: “Der Pantokrator beherrscht nicht nur die Kuppel, sondern das gesamte Gebäude. Die zentrale Idee des Allerhöchsten, dem sich jedes Glied der Kirche unterordnen muß, findet hierin ihren Ausdruck. Engelhierarchien, Propheten und Apostelgestalten, die als himmlische Trabanten die unmittelbare Umgebung des Pantokrators darstellen, symbolisieren in rangozüger Abstufung die Organisation der himmlischen Kirche.” (ibid., 591).

² As a theologumenon it is correct, but offers only one aspect of the Pseudo-Dionysian doctrine of hierarchy which was not decisive neither for dogmatic theology nor for art.
hierarchy which, in the first case, comprises in the first case nine, and, in the second case, six ranks. Their main raison d’être is to mediate the Divine Light from the invisible God down to the lowest rank. Thereby, God remains hidden and invisible.3

If this system were transferred to sacred architecture4, it would lead to two consequences:

First: God should not be depicted in anthropomorphic form.
Second: The depiction of hierarchies might be expected.

From this two problems arise:

First: It is true that the cross as a substitute of the image of God was depicted in cupolas and apses of Byzantine churches in late antique times and in rare cases also in medieval times. However, in the end they were replaced, mostly by images of the Pantocrator. Besides, the visualisation of Pantocrator contradicts the hidden God of the hierarchy.

Second: Only a few if any depictions of the hierarchy can be found in Byzantine art.

The purpose of this article is to re-evaluate this evidence and to discuss the importance of the Divine light which is distributed down the hierarchy. The ideas of Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagites will still play a very important role but, also, the aspect of the directly self-manifesting God. This God is the core of the so-called “theosis”, which has determined the Byzantine tradition from the Late-Antiquity onwards. In this context a special significance is assigned to the un-bosomed and always anew self-manifesting God, a God who is not so much the politically understood counterpart of the earthly emperor5 but offers much more an antithetical6 and deeply soteriological function.


6 H. Maguire, Art and Eloquence in Byzantium, Princeton 1981, 53ff., has already given some examples of antithetical elements in Byzantine pictorial programmes. Not only did he discuss such examples with a relationship concerning the content but also concerning the formal aspect. The author of this paper will address this aspect of an antithetical order in another article. An antithetical structure is not only valid for iconographical programmes but also for the Byzantine architecture. This antithetical structure is the
Therefore, in the first part, I will discuss the representation of God in the early pictorial programs of cupolas and churches.

In the second part, depictions of the hierarchy or of what could be considered as hierarchy will be presented.

In the end, I will concentrate on the Pantocrator to interpret his meaning from a theological point of view.

1) The representation of God in the early pictorial programmes of cupolas and churches

The representation of God in late Antique and Byzantine pictorial programmes developed – with exceptions – from depicting a cross to the ascension of Christ and, from the 9th century onwards, to representing the Pantocrator in prominent places like cupolas and apses. Although many scientists of Art History are rightly suspicious of this development, it cannot be denied that, at least in the Late Antiquity, the cross was a neutral sign. It then changes its meaning in the Early Byzantine time and becomes a substitute for the figural depiction of God during Iconoclasm. Especially in the years after the iconoclastic controversy, the ascension is found first in the cupola and then, later on, in the vaulting of the bema exclusively. However, this seemingly straightforward development is betrayed by reality since, on the one hand, we find crosses in cupolas or Cappadocian vaultings whereas, on the other hand, the ascension in

second aspect of the Pseudo-Dionysian doctrine of hierarchy (see footnote 2) because the hierarchy is not decisive neither theologically nor art historically even though, in every parochial community, hierarchy is real. Instead, from a soteriological and from an art historical point of view the direct relationship to God is important from which the antithesis results. In some way the title of Woodfin's paper ("Celestial hierarchies and earthly hierarchies in the art of the Byzantine church", ed. P. Stephenson, The Byzantine World, New York – London 2010, 303–319) is misleading, since he does not deal with hierarchy in its proper sense.


For the three relevant monuments (Hg. Sophia in Constantinople, Hg. Sophia in Thessalonike, Kowmisis in Nikaia) see: L. Brubaker – J. Haldon, Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680–850): The Sources. An Annotated Survey, Cambridge 2001, 19ff. At the sparsely decorated Hg. Sophia in Constantinople there is a cross in the cupula which is mentioned by Paulos Silentiarios in the 6th century (O. Veh – W. Pülhorn, Prokop Bauten. Paulos Silentiarios Beschreibung der Hagia Sophia, Munich 1977, 330ff.). While the cross was a neutral substitute for God in earlier times it became the most important sign of the enemies of images during the iconoclastic controversy (see: J. F. Aldridge, The Cross and Its Cult in an Age of Iconoclasm, Ann Arbor 1996).

In general: H. Gutterlet, Die Himelfahrt Christi in der bildenden Kunst von den Anfängen bis ins hohe Mittelalter, 1934; with respect to the cupolas: N. Gkioles, Ο βυζαντινός τρούλλος και το εικονογραφικό του πρόγραμμα, Αθήνα 1990, 161ff.; compare especially the Hg. Sophia in Thessalonike (around 880) (N. Chatzidakis, Byzantine Mosaics, Athens 1994, fig.44).


See also the cross in the Eastern cupola of the Hg. Paraskeue in Geroskepos on Cyprus (before 843) (G. der Parthog, Byzantine and Medieval Cyprus, London 1994, 54). Another cross which can be compared to the one in San Apollinare in Classe (see footnote 7) can be encountered in the apses of the Gülü Dere in Cappadocia (chapel 5; beginning of 10th century) (M. Restle, Die byzantinische Wandmalerei in Kleinasiens, Recklinghausen 1967, Bd. III, 343).
central cupolas of the Byzantine period, too. Both types of crosses – the one of the early Christian period and the one of iconoclasm – refer to the hidden God. This fact is in perfect harmony with the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagites regarding the celestial hierarchy above which God sits enthroned in his unknowability.

With the take-over of the image of ascension, a meaningful change occurred. The connection between cupola and heaven continues to exist, but now God is shown as the Son in his anthropomorphic manifestation. Moreover, the implication of the hierarchy is missing. However, only with the appearance of the Pantocrator a change of paradigms has become apparent since he is neither the Son on his way to the heavenly Father nor the God hidden in heaven. On the contrary, he is the anthropomorphic representation of the self-manifesting God above the celestial hierarchy whose juvenile countenance refers to the Son although “Pantocrator” in the liturgical texts means the Father. This oscillating between the two natures of Christ and the two Trinitarian hypostases evokes thoughts of the Holy Spirit, too.

So far, we have seen that there is no stringent development from the cross to the ascension and, in the end, to the Pantocrator. However, one can observe a change from the cross which points at the hidden God to the Pantocrator who represents the visible and self-revealing God. This Pantocrator, in my opinion, should be seen in connection with the concept of theosis, i.e. the deification of the human being. In this paper, I will explain and support this hypothesis.

2) Presentation of depictions of the hierarchy

The second part deals with the questions where the hierarchy is to be seen and what influences the hierarchy had on the churches and their decorative programmes.

of the Hg. Basileios near Mustafapaşaköy in Göreme (C. Jolivet-Lévy, La Cappadoce médiévale – Images et spiritualité, 2001, fig. 8; the dating reaches from the 8th to the 10th century: idem, Les Églises Byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l’abside et de ses abords, 1991, 186).


13 The type of Pantocrator which, of course, at that time had not yet been named as such already be encountered in developed form in an icon of the 6th century in the Katherine-Monastery on Sinai (K. Chr. Felmy, Das Buch der Christus-Ikonen, 2004, Abb.10). In the central cupola it probably first appears in the 9th century in the church of Pharos in Constantinople (see ekphrasis of Photos for this church (C. Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453, Toronto 1986, 185f.) as well as the description of the Nea written by Konstantinos VII. Porphyrogenetos (Vom Bauernhof auf den Kaiserthron. Leben des Kaisers Basileios I., des Begründers der Makedonischen Dynastie, beschrieben von seinem Enkel, dem Kaiser Konstantinos VII. Porphyrogenetos, ed. L. Breyer, Graz 1981, 130ff.); probably also for the Hg. Sophia (C. Mango, Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul, Washington 1962, 83ff.). The Pantocrator is named by inscription for the first time in the 12th century (Palermo, Capella Palatina (1143): E. Borsook, Messages in Mosaic. The Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily 1130–1187, Oxford 1990, fig. 25; Monreale (1166–89): ibid., fig. 62).

14 In this context it is important to take into account that the theological terminology by “Pantocrator” means the Father, not the Son; see: J. Pascher, Der Christus-Pantokrator in der Liturgie, Jahresbericht der Görrses-Gesellschaft 1939, Köln 1940, 50.

15 A reference to the Trinity is observed by C. P. Charalampidis, A propos de la signification trinitaire de la main gauche du Pantokrator, OCP 38 (1972) 260–265.
The natural place to expect the hierarchy would be the apse or the cupola, which according to sources and inscriptions is meant to be the heaven. As the cupola stands for the vertical orientated building, e.g. a church over a central plan, the apse is the most important place in longitudinal basilicas. Both architectural types were built during the whole period from late-antique to post-Byzantine times as pointed out in my habilitation thesis.

This fact suggests that the predominance of the church over a central plan with a cupola can be questioned. Liturgical commentaries which not only refer to centralised buildings but also to longitudinal ones confirm this idea. Furthermore, they ignore the cupola completely.

With this in mind, one might be less astonished to find the presumably first depiction of hierarchy in the bema of the Koimesis in Iznik-Nikaia. Only at second sight one might be surprised not to find an image of the hierarchy in the cupola since this building belongs to the early group of centralised plans.

The Koimesis was probably built in the 8th century and was demolished during the Turkish-Greek crisis in 1922. This church offered quite an early evidence which, unfortunately, is only documented by photos and descriptions and, therefore, cannot be verified anymore. The pictorial programme of the church belongs to two phases: the first is dated to the times of erection, the second to the 11th century. The earliest pictures show the angels on the vaulting of the bema and the cross in the apse.

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16 See e.g. Maximos Homolgetes, who in his Mystagogia from between 628 and 630 has written: "On the one hand it (i.e. the church) has the divine sanctuary (i.e. the bema) as heaven; on the other hand (as) earth it has the beauteousness of the naos." (PG 91,672A).
17 E.g. in the above mentioned ekphrasis written by Paulos Silentarios (see footnote 8) and by Photios (see footnote 13). For relating inscriptions see J. T. Matthews, The Pantocrator. Title and Image, New York 1976, 173ff.
19 The church over a central plan is still estimated to correspond at best to Byzantine theology in general and to Orthodox liturgy in particular; see e.g. K. Onasch, Einführung in die Konfessionskunde der orthodoxen Kirchen, Berlin 1962, 85.
21 One cameo in the collection of Dumbarton Oaks near Washington should also be mentioned; it probably dates from the 6th century and shows the hierarchical order of the Exousies (J. Spier, Late Antique and Early Christian Gems, Wiesbaden 2007, cat.no.778). Of course this is not a whole hierarchy but it is an otherwise seldom depicted order.
23 No images have survived there.
(mentioned above) which was later replaced by an image of Maria. The ascension in the cupola, however, is one of the images which remains hypothetic.

The angels deserve a closer examination. All in all, there are four two-winged angels dressed in the imperial loros which, comparable to the Western stola, is slung around their bodies. Each holds a so-called “labarum” which carries the inscription of the Sanctus. This Sanctus consisting of a triple “Holy”, points to the heavenly throne and the angelic powers flanking and adoring it. It also refers to the liturgical Sanctus which is connected with the deacons who stand around the altar like the seraphim around the throne. While the Eastern angel on the South wall can be identified as representing the Exousies, i.e. the Dominians, his neighbour belongs to the Kyriotetes, i.e. the Powers. Facing them, in the East there is the angel representing the Arches, i.e. the Principalities, and next to him the one representing the Dynamesis, the Authorities. From the peak of the apse the hand of God stretches out of a heavenly hemisphere from which three rays of the Trinitarian light emerge. Beneath, the outlines of a cross which originally has been depicted there could be seen until the demolition of the church. The angels represented there belong to the second sphere of the celestial hierarchy. Unfortunately the mosaics on the walls of the bema are not preserved but it can be assumed that here all other missing angelic ranks must have been depicted. There might have been an upper register with a seraph to the East and a cherub next to him and a lower register with an archangel and an angel next to him.

In this programme only the angel of the Thrones is missing but, probably, the throne of the Hetoimasia alludes to him. This throne, which refers to the one of the Last Judgement, is associated with the heavenly throne and therefore has a double meaning. In this context the interpretation of the bema by patriarch Germanos (born

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24 Schmit (see footnote 22) 21ff. and Taf.XIII u. XIV. P. Underwood, The evidence of restoration in the sanctuary of the Church of the Dormition at Nicæa, DOP 13 (1959) 235ff., supposes that the angels were removed during the iconoclastic controversy and placed there again after that struggle. As far as I can see, so far the angels have not been understood as part of the whole celestial hierarchy. This point will be discussed later in this paper.


26 See Jes 6,3: „And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."


28 See e.g. Germanos in his Historia ekklesiastike: “(...) the deacons are in the likeness of the six-winged Seraphim and the many-eyed Cherubim.” (St. Germanus of Constantinople. On the Divine Liturgy, the greek text with transl., ed. by P. Meyendorff, 1984, 94).

29 It should be stressed that the relating angels are placed opposite each other so that a sequence is established from the Dominions to the Principalities or Rulers. This scheme is a further hint at the anti-thetical order of Byzantine pictorial programmes (see footnote 6.) which will be discussed later.

30 Schmit (see footnote 22) 21ff. u. Taf. XII u. XX.

31 This would correspond to the principle that places higher and nearer to the apse were more estimated than others.

32 A connection between the heavenly throne (i.e. the altar) and the nine steps leading to the Bema signifying the nine hierarchies is also established by the Syrian Soughita. Interestingly enough: although this was a centrally arranged building with cupola the hierarchies were not connected with the cupula itself. See A. Palmer (with L. Rodley), The Inauguration Anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: A New Edition And Translation With Historical and Architectural Notes and a Comparison with a Contemporary Constantinopolitan Kontakion, BMGS 12 (1988) 164. This symbolic tradition lasted obviously at least
ca. 655) is of importance: “The bema is a concave place, a throne on which Christ, the king of all, presides with His apostles, as He says to them ‘You shall sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ (Mt 19:28).”

This reconstruction – if correct – in the best possible way corresponds to the Dionysian doctrine of the celestial hierarchy. One might objection that the cross was preceded by an image of Maria. However, in this case the angelic orders were without function and it might be difficult to explain their appearance.

The second building following the Koimesis and probably built around 1050 was the Nea Mone on the island of Chios. It belongs to the group of the octagon-dominated churches whose thrust of the cupola rests on eight pillars. This octagon should have been topped by an eight-sided tambour. However, instead, the original tambour has nine sides which nine radiating fields in the cupola correspond to. For their decoration nine angels might have been depicted. In the medallion, there might have been a cross.

This evidence suggests that the angels now missing might have belonged to the concept of the celestial hierarchy even if correlating inscriptions had been omitted. This departure from the normal octagonal scheme which had obviously been intended confirms the hypothesis concerning the hierarchy. In addition, it should be mentioned that this building is – as the name suggests – a catholicon, a monastic church.

33 St. Germanus of Constantinople (see footnote 28) 60.
34 This is, as far as I can see, communis opinio; deviating from this opinion: F. de Maffei, The Second Nicene Council. The Seventh Ecumenical Council and the Mosaics in the Bema of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Nicaea, edd. A. Akbaygil – H. Inalcik – O. Aslanapa, Iznik throughout history, 2003, 109ff., who dates the building to the 6th century and assumes the image of Christ enthroned as predecessor of the cross. However, this reconstruction would result in two heavenly thrones which seems rather unlikely. A solid proof for the Mary being represented in the first phase does not exist. Therefore, the assumption of a cross seems justified especially as it conforms with the overall context. The inscription at the front of the apse only which follows the concave heavenly segment could be related to Mary: ἘΓΓΑΚΡΙΤΡΟΠΡΟΕΩΦΟΡΟΓΕΝΗΚΑΣΕ – “from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth” (Ps 110 [109] 3). This could probably be used to suggest another reconstruction (Schmit [see footnote 22] 33 and 42). Ch. Barber, Theotokos and Logos (see footnote 22) interprets it as Mariological programme.
35 The inscription which is inserted under the angels on both the North and the South walls hints at the hierarchical function: ΚΑΙΠΡΟΚΡΟΥΧΗΝΗΣΑΝΑΥΤΩΟΝΤΕΚΑΝΕΑΟΙΘ (Schmit [see footnote 22] 23): “And let all the angels of God worship him!” (see Hebr 1,6 [according to 5 Mose 32, 43]).
36 See Ch. Bouras, Nea Moni on Chios. History and Architecture, Athens 1982; for the ground plan: ibd., fig. 25; for the interior view: ibd., fig. 57; for the tambour: ibd., fig. 89f.
37 A detail which can be found at other churches of Chios, too (e.g. Panagia Krena and in Pyrgos the Church of the Apostles) since these churches are more or less copies of the Nea Mone. Common to all of them is also the cupola over the Western narthex; but this cupola cannot explain the nine-sided central tambour of the Nea Mone because, due to its lower position, the Western cupola does not disturb the influx of light (see P. Spagnesi, Chiese bizantine di Chios. Quaderni dell’Istituto di Storia dell’Architettura n.s.33, 1999 (2001) 3–20; Bouras, Nea Moni [see footnote 36] 106 and 150). In other cases e.g. Hg. Lazaros in Larnaka (Ch. G. Chatzakoglou, Church of Saint Lazarus in Larnaka: History, Architecture and Art of the Church of Saint Lazarus in Larnaka, Lefkosia 2004) or Hg. Barnabas and Hilarion in Peristerona (A. – J. Stylianou, Peristerona [Morphou], Κυπριακά Σπουδαί 27 (1963) 243–247) (both on Cyprus), where three cupolas are aligned on an West-East axis, the relating windows are open to all cardinal points.
A further example of the depiction of the celestial hierarchy accompanies the second homily on Easter written by Gregorios of Nazianzus on folio 9v of codex 339 dating from around 1000. Here Christ as the Angel of the Great Counsel is surrounded by the celestial hierarchy. The picture is related to the vision of Habakkuk which Gregorios mentions in his text saying that Christ “is surrounded by an angelic crowd”. The famous Parisinus graecus 510, offered to emperor Basileios I. by patriarch Photios sometime between 879 and 882, confirms this evidence.

A fourth example can be seen in the post-Byzantine Episkope in Paliachora on the island of Aigina dated by an inscription to the year 1610. Apart from the cupola, all frescoes have survived. In the vaulting of the sanctuarium, Christ enthroned is depicted with the symbols of Ezekiel’s vision encircled by ten round-arched fields. Two of these bear a triad with seraphim and cherubim; seven fields include a triad of angels each whereas the tenth field shows two wheels interlaced with one another burning like fire – the so-called “trochoi” mentioned by Ezekiel. All in all we have the nine representatives of the celestial hierarchy before us here; two of them – the seraphim and cherubim – have an iconographical tradition; not so the other ranks. As in Iznik, they were depicted as anthropomorphic figures without differentiation. The burning wheels – those trochoi – from Ezekiel 1,15ff. originally belong to the Christ enthroned.

There is an identical scheme in the vault above the narthex in the Koimesis of Ligourio (Peloponnese) dated to the year 1701. Suggested by the location in the village, this building probably used to function as a parochial church as still does today. In contrast to Paliachora the trochoi in Ligourio are more distant to the Christ enthroned which was probably caused either by negligence or ignorance.

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38 G. Galavaris, The Illustrations of the Liturgical Homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus, 1969, 255ff. and fig. 379. The folio shows the front page to the second homily “On Easter” by Gregorios. In the top register, the vision of Habakkuk is depicted, and at the bottom left, a miniature includes the Angel of the Great Counsel (Jes 5, 9). Two remarks should be added here: 1) The number of angels surrounding Christ is not always nine but varies between eight or ten. However, only here Christ appears as angel (of the Great Counsel) so the emphasis on the heavenly powers seems to be intended. This could explain the number of nine angels which correspond to the number of ranks of the celestial hierarchy. 2) The vision of Habakkuk (Hab 2, 1f.) does not refer to Christ as an angel or to hierarchy.

39 PG 36,624A: καὶ κύκλῳ αὐτοῦ ὡς πλῆςθος οὐρανίου στρατιᾶς.

40 The number of nine angels occurs again with the depiction of the vision of Habakkuk on folio 285r where Christ is painted as Angel of the Great Counsel (L. Brubaker, Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium. Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, 1999, 284ff. and fig. 29). Brubaker does not go into details concerning this point. See also idem, Miniatures and Liturgy: Evidence from the Ninth-Century Codex Paris. Gr. 510, Byzantion 66 (1996) 9–34; idem, Vision and Meaning, fig. 29.

41 Both manuscripts are counted as one here.


43 The image of Christ enthroned contradicts the motive of the Pantocrator and may be seen as Western influence here.

44 See Hes. 1, 4ff.

45 See Hes. 1, 15ff.

46 See e.g. the Northern apse of the Tokali Kilise dating from between 910 and 920 (C. Jolivet-Lévy, Les Églises Byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l’abside et de ses abords, 1991, Pl. 65). Such fiery wheels are described in the Manuel from Athos (Malerhandbuch vom Berge Athos vom Mönch Dionysios, ed. by Slavischen Institut München, München 1983, 45) as “throne”. However in the Episkope, one angelic triad is named as “thrones” so that the wheels must be identified as “trochoi”.

47 My Observation. The church is dated by an inscription above the Southern entrance.
The close relationship between both post-Byzantine programmes fosters the assumption that they were more common than all other depictions of the hierarchy mentioned above.48

To sum up the images of the celestial hierarchy obviously belong to two different traditions: on the one hand, there are monuments as those in Iznik, Chios and the manuscripts with possible connection to the capital and dating from the early and middle Byzantine periods; on the other hand, there are those two post-Byzantine churches in Greece. Furthermore, a common location within the church building cannot be identified.

3) The Pantocrator interpreted from a theological point of view

In this third chapter I will deal with the following questions: How can the appearance of the celestial hierarchy in iconography and its transitory nature be explained? And why was it superseded by the Pantocrator despite the fact that both – hierarchy and Pantocrator – are determined by the pseudo-Dionysian doctrine?

The starting point is a contradiction in this doctrine. According to Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagites, the Divine light disseminates from God enthroned above the celestial hierarchy either through each hierarchical rank or by passing these ranks and coming directly down to the lowest orders of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.49 Examples of this direct deification, according to Pseudo-Dionysios, are baptism,50 the eucharist51 and the proclamation of God’s Word.52

This contradiction between the indirect and direct mediation of deification has already been pointed out by Wiebke-Marie Stock in an unusually blunt way:53 “Diese Bewegung durchkreuzt den hierarchischen Aufbau des Kosmos, indem sie vom höchsten Gipfel dieses Kosmos – Gott – zum Menschen eine Brücke schlägt und eine Vereinigung schafft, anstatt eine stufenweise Vermittlung abwärts zu favorisieren.”

The aim of both mediations is the deification, the so-called ‘theosis’, of the human-being by God.

But how corresponds the art-historical evidence to this theological evidence?

The reconstruction of the pictorial programme in Iznik seems to be an exact realization of the Dionysian doctrine of the celestial hierarchy.54 There, the cross from which light emanates illustrates the presence of God.55 The representation of the

48 See e.g. in the central cupola of the Hg. Theodoroi in Kampos (also on the Peloponnese) which belongs to the post-Byzantine period, too. My Observation.
49 Stock (see footnote 3) 226; see also: D. Staniloae, Orthodoxe Dogmatik, Köln 1985, 401: „Auch unter diesem Gesichtspunkt bedeutet die Hierarchie nicht ein Dazwischentreten der oberen Scharen zwischen Gott und die Tieferstehenden.“
50 Stock (see footnote 3) 47.
51 Stock (see footnote 3) 170 and 221.
52 Stock (see footnote 3) 223f.
53 Stock (see footnote 3) 226.
54 Unless Mariy is assumed to be original in the apse.
55 The three rays of light emerging from God’s hand rather point to the involvement of the Trinity than to the light of the theosis. One has to think of the last one as to be uniform (for the meaning of light see: Stock [see footnote 3] 182f.). The bright shining chain hanging down from heaven to earth, „an der man immer weiter hochgreifen kann, als ziehe man sie herunter, wobei man sich in Wahrheit selbst
throne adds an eschatological dimension and relates to the divine sitting above the hierarchy.\textsuperscript{56}

The two manuscripts with the homilies of Gregorios show another solution. According to the hypothesis formulated in this paper, a simultaneous representation of the hierarchy and Christ contradicts Pseudo-Dionysios. Therefore, the artists of these codices painted Christ as the Angel of Great Counsel. To them, the depiction of the nine hierarchical orders seems to have been of importance despite the fact that this is not required by the related sermon on Easter. This sermon only mentions the angelic crowd surrounding God. Christ as Angel of Great Counsel blends in well with the angelic crowd. However, this formal assimilation of Christ with the angels contradicts the hypothesis that Christ as one of the divine hypostases of the hidden God must not be depicted as part of the hierarchy.

In this context, one might assume that the medaillon in the cupola of the Nea Mone on Chios must have depicted a cross amidst the hierarchy since an Angel of the Great Counsel is not attested elsewhere.

All these monuments mentioned developed in the sphere of Constantinople and therefore may be regarded as part of a group.

In temporal and topographical contrast with this group stand the two post-Byzantine churches in Greece. They differ from the first group by including Christ in the representation of the hierarchy, which obviously, is not in harmony with Pseudo-Dionysios’ doctrine. The only possible explanation points to the longstanding direct and indirect Western influence on Greece which also affected other iconographical themes, e.g. the image of the Holy Trinity.\textsuperscript{57}

How can the temporal difference between both groups be explained? It is quite possible – in some cases well-known – that the monuments of the earlier group – namely Iznik, Chios and the manuscripts – were sponsored by persons belonging to a hierarchical shaped monastic and imperial milieu. The later group in Greece, on the other hand, might have been influenced by the Western reception of Dionysios. There, in the Western iconography, are several examples for the connection of the hierarchy

\textsuperscript{56} The depiction of the Trinity enthroned is not canonical but included in the manuscript of Kokkinobaphos (Vat. gr. 1162, fol. 113v). There the Trinity sends Gabriel down to Mary to announce the forthcoming birth. See: I. Hutter – P. Canart, Das Marienhomiliar des Mönchs Jakobus von Kokkinobaphos. Codex Vaticanus graecus 1162, Stuttgart 1991 (Unfortunately, this book was inaccessible to me).

with Christ\textsuperscript{58} as can be seen in Ligourio and on Aigina. The best example is found in the Abtskapelle of the Stiftskirche in Bad Hersfeld, Germany.\textsuperscript{59}

However, in the end, the social and theological conditions for a full acceptance of the Dionysian celestial hierarchy were missing, which had indeed been much more absorbed in the west since the 9th century.\textsuperscript{60}

The fact that the Dionysian celestial hierarchy did not dominated the Byzantine way of thinking\textsuperscript{61} leads to the question where the Dionysian idea of deification found its equivalent expression in the art.

Both Dionysian concepts share the deifying function, i.e. theosis, and therefore need a relation to God. If this relation is thought in a direct mediated manner then the image sought-after must be one of the self-manifesting God in a celestial context. This can only be the Pantocrator who has adorned either apses or, since the 9th century, the cupola of Byzantine churches.

In this context, two observations are probably of importance.

The first concerns the two exapteryga in the Eastern pendentives of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul which remain of an ensemble of four. These were interpreted by

\textsuperscript{58} E.g. the mosaic in the cupola of the baptistery in Florence whose dating ranges from the time after 1225 to around 1300 (M. Boskovits, The Mosaics of the Baptistery of Florence, Florence 2007, fig. 17–25; and: M.V. Schwarz, Die Mosaiken des Baptistariums in Florenz, Vienna 1997, Abb. 60) and in San Marco in Venice (E. Vio [ed.], San Marco. Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur, Munich 2001, 246f. and fig. on page 247).


\textsuperscript{60} In 827 Byzantine envoys delivered some manuscripts with texts from Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagites to Louis the Pious. They were the basis for Latin translations commissioned by the abbot of Saint-Denis near Paris, Hilduin, probably with the help of some Greeks (see W. Berschin, Griechisch-lateinisches Mittelalter. Von Hieronymus zu Nikolaus von Kues, 1980, 144). Shortly afterwards, Johannes Scotus Eriugena also translated Dionysian texts into Latin (ibidem 145f.). The Byzantines, however, had reservations about Neoplatonism whose most important representative Dionysios was, but felt nonetheless free to draw on this source. The same was true with respect to Dionysios who was only rehabilitated by Maximos Homologetes. See: W. Völker, Der Einfluss des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita auf Maximus Confessor, Studien zum Neuen Testament und zur Patristik. E. Klostermann zum 90. Geburtstag dargebracht, 1961, 331–350; T. Bojadiev – G. Kapriev – A. Speer (eds.), Die Dionysisus-Rezeption im Mittelalter. Intern. Colloquium in Sofia vom 8. bis 11. April 1999, 2000.

\textsuperscript{61} Here, let me emphasise that the interpretations of depictions of the celestial hierarchy in Byzantine art I have dealt with so far may not be generalizable. Even though the arguments are well founded they may still leave room for speculation. However, this does not affect my most important point but rather confirms it. If further studies lead to the conviction that one of the monuments discussed did not depict the Pseudo-Dionysian celestial hierarchy, my hypothesis would be supported: that hierarchy as theological concept was not that important in Byzantium and played no role at all in Byzantine art. One point in favour of this hypothesis is the fact that no work about hierarchy was written after Pseudo-Dionysios except by Niketas Stethatos (ca. 1005 – ca. 1090). He, however, was less interested in Dionysian aspects but more in the assimilation of the heavenly to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. For this reason, he organized the ecclesiastical hierarchy into nine ranks, too. See: Nicétas Stéthatos, Opuscules et lettres, ed. J. Darras, Paris 1961, 326f.; with regard to the reception of Pseudo-Dionysian ideas in Byzantium see: B. R. Suchla, Das „Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum“ im Byzantinischen Reich des sechsten bis neunten Jahrhunderts, edd. A. Speer – Ph. Steinkrüger, Knotenpunkt Byzanz. Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen. 2012, 35–46.
Schneider\textsuperscript{62} as to be those four-winged angels described by Ezekiel 1,1ff. in his vision of the enthroned God. According to Schneider, the Pantokrator which has occurred in Byzantine cupolas since the 9\textsuperscript{th} or at least the 10\textsuperscript{th} century is the centre of this vision. These angels, called by Ezekiel “cherubim”, have no standard appearance in earlier times; they are normally equipped with four wings but could also be depicted as exapteryga as is the case in the Hagia Sophia. Furthermore, they are characterised by four figures: a human-one, that of a lion, of a bull and of an eagle. These figures are also the personifications of the Evangelists so that their accompanying the Pantocrator probably relates as well to the vision above mentioned. This Pantocrator as a visionary picture corresponds perfectly to the idea of the theosis.

The second observation is about a certain detail of the Pantocrator which can be observed in several places, e.g. the Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople. Theodoros Mesarites\textsuperscript{63} (around 1200) and also Tursun Beg\textsuperscript{64} 250 years later report that the Pantokrator looks neither to the left nor to the right but always in the direction of the beholder. Another important aspect is the light. Both places – cupola and apse – are the most important ones for the incoming light of the sun which was related to the light of the theosis.\textsuperscript{65} So the look of the Pantocrator in combination with the rays of the sun-light offers a congenial expression of the Dionysian ideas of the always anew self-manifesting and deifying God.

In this context, the inscription accompanying the Pantocrator in the cupola of the Karanlık Kilise in Cappadocia\textsuperscript{66} is revealing: “God was looking down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there were any who had wisdom, searching after God.” (Psalm 52,2)

The last chapter has sought to demonstrate that there have been two versions of the image of the celestial hierarchy in Byzantine art, one originating in the East and the other one influenced by the West, the one belonging to the middle-Byzantine and the other to the post-Byzantine period. Moreover, it has been pointed out that the Eastern version probably derived from the monastic-imperial milieu of Constantinople. This version illustrates the hierarchical structure of the heavenly and earthly orders and implicates the hidden God. For parochial everyday life, however, this sort of God was not acceptable. For personal realisation and assurance of salvation, an always anew self-manifesting God was needed and found its expression in the Pantokrator. This second concept, also by Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagites but independent of any hierarchy, needs no specific type of church. For this reason, it is applicable to both the cross-in-square church and the basilica.


\textsuperscript{63} A. Heisenberg, Die Apostelkirche in Konstantinopel, Leipzig 1908, 28–31. See e.g. the Pantocrator in Kiev (between 1037 and 1046) (I. Fantinovna Tockaja, Mosaiki ta freski Kiivskoi, 1980, fig. 2 and 18); for the earliest example see the encaustic-icon in the Katherine-Monastery on the Sinai from the 6\textsuperscript{th} century (Felmy [see footnote 13] Abb.10).

\textsuperscript{64} See A.M. Schneider (see footnote 62) 347.

\textsuperscript{65} See footnote 55.

\textsuperscript{66} M. Restle, Die byzantinische Wandmalerei in Kleinasien, vol. II, 220.
In conclusion, the preceding reflections offer some new insight into the Byzantine architecture and pictorial programmes.

This, on the one hand, applies to the image of the Pantocrator which occupies a distinguished and unique place in the iconographical programme. Hereby, the Pantocrator is neither the imperial counterdraft to the autocrator in Constantinople nor the one enthroned above all hierarchical spheres. On the contrary, the Pantocrator presents the un-bosomed and always anew self-manifesting God to whom every believer can turn in prayer, be in direct relationship and experience direct and unmediated deification.

Secondly, the investigation has pointed out that the iconographical programmes of Byzantine churches do not conform to the Pseudo-Dionysian doctrine of the celestial hierarchy but follow the logic of the veneration of the depicted persons and themes: holy persons are in the lowest register, above are the images of Christ followed by the heavenly sphere in the vaulting.

Thirdly, it has been suggested that, if the hierarchy as a constitutive idea is omitted, the cross-in-square church is no conditio sine qua non any longer. Instead, as can be observed in the history of Byzantine architecture, this type of church building can be replaced by the basilica without any concessions on theology and cult.

Therefore, the second version of the Dionysian doctrine which manifests the direct relation to and experience of God in parochial liturgical life is the founding basis of the Byzantine church, and not so much the first version which is also Dionysian but rather belongs to the monastic sphere.

All in all, it is not a question of a hierarchical but of an antithetical order. It is about the direct relation between God, un-bosomed and always anew self-manifesting, and the believer, who seeks and is open to the deifying God.

Thus, the evidence of Byzantine architecture and iconography is in harmony with the theological and liturgical development in Byzantium. Moreover, it shows that the Byzantines were much more flexible than usually thought.

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ХИЈЕРАРХИЈЕ ИЛИ НЕПОСРЕДНА ВЕЗА С БОГОМ: НОВА ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЈА

У овом раду ће се довести у питање то да су хијерархије играле важну улогу у византијској црквеној декорацији. Постоји само неколико примера који вероватно могу да буду објашњени као представе хијерархија. Међутим, чак и то је далеко од извесног. Представе хијерархија појављују се током првих векова поствизантијске ере и срећу се често од тада, па сматрамо да ти примери проистичу из западних модела. Уопштено, преостаје да се разјасни да ли је теорија о хијерахији доминирала византијском теологијом или не. Она противуречи идеји теосиса, у који се нпр. Пантократор вероватно уклапа боље него било шта друго.