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*Hierotopy of the early «Basilica, 1935» from byzantine Kherson  
(Northern Pontic littoral of Crimea)*

Internal space of the Byzantine sacral monuments was the whole complex, including mosaics, murals, elements of sculpture and marble plastics, illumination. All these elements were logically united. The basilica itself might be perceived as a special embodiment of this rule: the whole space, embedded between the walls and lacking internal partition, and rhythmic colonnades, directing the way straight to the sanctuary. Each group of church service members had a precise place to embrace and thus all the zones were united. Altogether, this was forming the special atmosphere.

Modern researches in the field of Christian and Church archeology are using the wide variety of methods and approaches, based on the interdisciplinary connection of history, archeology, art history, theology and other related studies. This example is using the interpretation of the sacral space from the hierotopical point of view. This allows us to systemize the isolated features given about the «Basilica, 1935» from the byzantine Kherson. In the year 2001 A. M. Lydov suggested to use the term «hierotopy» (from Ancient Greek ἱερός – sacred and Ancient Greek τόπος – place, space) for the special field of historical and cultural research, revealing and analyzing the examples of sacral spaces which are seen as a special type of creative activity. Hierotopical approach is supposed to unite and complete the reconstruction of internal space, including not only tangible (material) elements. Illumination, singing, and visual elements are interworking to create the special atmosphere during the Church Service. This is the very atmosphere that was surrounding the legates of Vladimir the Great in the Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople (modern Istanbul).

Among the significant sites of Chersonesus (called Kherson in the byzantine period, modern Sevastopol, Crimea) the early complex “Basilica, 1935” is of a special interest. It was called this way by the year of discovery by G. D. Belov. Archeological excavation has discovered the pieces of its murals, a detail of mosaic floor, a part of “Good Shepherd” (“Dobriy Pastyr”) sculpture, all dated around IV – V century.

Having studied the murals fragments O. I. Dobrovsky has found the painting architectural elements: festoons of branches, painted with green and black color on the ivory background with yellowish fruits, grey and red ribbons, bird silhouettes, peacocks. The reconstruction completed by G. M. Manto and L. G. Kolesnikova suggested also geometrical ornamental motives.

The mosaic had hid four separate parts, joined together with the grapevine. Two of them contain compound geometrical motives: two with an image of kantharos and kylix and the other two with two growing grapevines with bunches.

The internal space possible reconstruction analysis allows one to refer to the poem by Efrem Sirin “About the Heaven”. Botanical elements are strongly associated with the Heaven itself. The symbolic image of birds embodies the Spirit or souls, the peacocks – the immortality, grapevine – Teachings of Jesus while images of kantharos and kylix are most probably symbolizing the Mystery of Eucharist.

Pretty large space of the Basilica allows us to assume the former existence of the second floor. The light could enter the building through the windows, illuminating the sculpture, the murals and the mosaic.

Christian cathedral can be seen as the reflection of the Heaven on Earth. Based on the assumption the symbolic images of “Basilica, 1935” are completely embracing this approach. The sacred space was perceived on three levels: the lower level – the believer saw the mosaic floor while entering the basilica, the middle level – walls with murals, the top level – free space between windows and sanctuary conch. These means managed to have created the sacral space. Using this architectural site as an example, we can go on and analyze other countless churches of the Byzantine Kherson. Hierotopy methods allow us to demonstrate the interconnection on all available elements.