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ΑΠΕΙΚΟΝΙΣΕΙΣ ΑΓΙΩΝ ΣΤΙΣ ΤΟΙΧΟΓΡΑΦΙΕΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΣΟΦΙΑΣ ΣΤΟ ΚΙΕΒΟ

ΖΑΧΑΡΟΒΑ Αννα
Λέκτωρ – Τμήμα Ιστορίας και Θεωρίας της Τέχνης,
Σχολή Ιστορίας Lomonosov Moscow State University

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The paper presents some preliminary results of a research on the wall paintings of Saint Sophia in Kiev aiming to identify the images of the saints through the analysis of iconography and medieval graffiti. Numerous images of saints constitute a significant part of St. Sophia's iconographic program. Therefore, it is important to understand the principles for their choice and distribution. While some of these principles were in keeping with the current Byzantine tradition, others reflected ideas peculiar to the newly baptized Rus.

Keywords

Middle-Byzantine period; 11th century; wall paintings; Byzantine church decoration; iconography; images of saints; Kiev; Saint Sophia of Kiev.

The Church of St. Sophia in Kiev, together with a number of other 11th-century ensembles, marks an important point in the history of Byzantine art when the classical system of church decoration reached its maturity. St. Sophia also marks a key monument for Old Russian art, and its influence on its subsequent development was immense. It is therefore important to arrive at a better understanding of St. Sophia's iconographic program. Identification of the images of the saints is part of this process. This is the aim of a research project that we began a few years ago together with Nadezhda Gerasimenko and the late Vladimir Sarab'ianov. The results of this research have so far been published in Russian in a series of articles describing the images of saints identified in different parts of the Kiev cathedral.


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a general catalog presenting the results of our systematic analysis of all the surviving images and fragments, which are more than 800. Here we would like to share the preliminary results and the principles of our work.

St. Sophia has preserved the greater part of its mosaics and at least half of its wall paintings created in the 1030s-1040s (Fig. 1). Yet the attribution of the images of the saints is difficult due to the almost complete loss of accompanying inscriptions. These were washed off during the 17th- and 18th-century renovations and also during the first mid-19th-century restoration. Wherever fragments or traces of an accompanying inscription survive, they provide the most secure basis for the identification of the images. Unfortunately such cases are very few: St. Lauros, St. Timon, St. Papylas, St. Floros, St. Sabbatios, St. Dorotheos, St. Anthony, St. Ephraim, St. Eustathios, St. Tarachos, St. John the Theologian, St. Kerykos, St. Chariton (two images in different places), St. Philomen, St. Adrian (two images in different places), St. Aniketos, St. Romanos, St. Elpis, St. Philippos, St. Domnus, St. Ignatios the Godbearer, St. John the Merciful, St. Ermynkos, St. Sozon, St. Menas, St. Victor, St. Eudokia, St. Gerontios, St. Natalia, St. Theopistos, St. Agapios, St. Pankratios, St. Andronikos, St. John the Baptist, St. Theron and a few others (Fig. 2 nos 7, 8, 12, 14, 20, 24-26, 49, 55, 62, 72, 79, 80, 86, 90, 94, 99, 107, 111, 112, 120, 121, 123-126, 129, 136-138. Fig. 3 nos 141, 142, 149, 152, 160, 161).

Other indications are provided by medieval graffiti. This is the main tool for identifying the images of saints used by our Kievian colleagues, Nadezhda Nikitenko and Vyacheslav Kornienko. Although we do not agree with their general interpretation of St. Sophia’s iconographic program as aiming to glorify prince Vladimir and with the dating of the mosaics and frescoes to 1011-1018, as well as with several of their identifications of the images of saints, on many occasions we have benefited from


On the questions of dating see: A. Poppe, “The building of the

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their work on the corpus of medieval graffiti of the Kiev cathedral. We also found some graffiti ourselves. The most helpful are the pre-Mongol graffiti containing a short prayer to the saint represented on a fresco or just reproducing his or her name. In many cases the saint’s name is reproduced in its Greek form, sometimes even imitating the vertical layout of letters of the accompanying inscription, now lost.

Another important tool is iconographic analysis based on parallels in the art of the Middle Byzantine period. In some cases there are clear distinctive features or attributes that help to identify the saints. For example, in the south-western compartment on the ground floor an image of a female martyr was identified as St. Thecla thanks to a rare attribute – the Gospel book in her left hand (Fig. 2 no 60), and a saintly bishop was identified as St. John Chrysostom thanks to his characteristic appearance and a cross in his hand (Fig. 2 no 77). In another case, we could identify the elderly medical saint

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Fig. 1. Kiev, St. Sophia. View towards the Sanctuary.

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Cyrus wearing a monastic cloak and holding a little bottle in his hand, represented next to his younger companion who was identified as St. John (Fig. 2 nos 108, 109).

More often, however, it is the combination of the iconographic analysis with graffiti that bears fruit. Thus, many other images have been identified including St. Epiphanius, St. Paul the Confessor, St. Proclus of Constantinople, St. Martin, three images of St. Blasios, St. Leo, St. Meketios, St. Nikephoros, St. Anthimos of Nikomedia, two images of St. Andrew Stratelates, St. Jacob the Persian, St. Theodore Stoudites, St. Ananias, St. Anastasios the Persian, St. Constantine with St. George and Irene, St. Marina, St. Anastasia Pharmakolytria, St. Polychronia, St. Sabas, St. Sampson, St. Panteleimon, St. Hierotheos, St. Lazarus, St. Maria Magdalene, the prophet Sophonias, St. Stephen, St. Onuphrios, St. Gregory the Wonderworker, St. Kapiton, St. Phokas, Sts Cyprian and Justine, St. Theopiste, St. Artemios, St. Theodore Stratelates, St. Menas, St. Christine, King Hezekiah, St. Akepsimas and others (Fig. 2 nos 2-6, 15-19, 21, 22, 27, 35, 46, 58, 59, 61, 68, 69, 71, 74, 76, 78, 82, 98, 103, 110, 113, 114, 118, 119, 127, 128, 132, 134, 135, 139.

Fig. 2. Kiev, St. Sophia. Plan of the ground floor (reconstruction).
LEGEND FOR Fig. 2

Sanctuary
2. St. Epiphanios.
5. St. Martin of Rome.
7. St. Lauros.
8. St. Timon.
10. St. Andrew.
13. St. Lauros (?)
15. St. Lauros.
17. St. Meketios.

Central nave and cross arms
22. St. Jacob the Persian (?)
23. Sts Constantine and Helen.
27. St. Theodore the Stoudites.
28. St. Nicholas Stoudites (?)
29. St. Cosmas and Damian.
30. St. Demetrios.
31. St. Demetrios.
32. Prophet Elijah.
33. St. Theodore Stratelates (?)
34. St. Clement (?)
35. St. Ananias.
36. St. Azarias.
37. St. Misael.
38. Sts Sergius and Bacchus.
39. St. Mardarius (?)
40. St. Omphrios.
41. St. Anastasios the Persian.
42. Sts Agapitos and Theopistos.
43. St. Eustathios.
44. St. George (?)

South-West corner
45. St. Gurias (?)
46. St. Samonas (?)
47. St. Abibus (?)
48. St. Probus (?)
49. St. Tarachos.
50. St. Damian (?)
51. St. Cosmas (?)
52. St. Constantine with St. George and St. Eirene.
53. St. Andrew Stratelates.
54. St. Thekla.
55. St. Marina.
56. St. John the Theologian.
57. St. Mark.
59. St. Nina (?)
60. St. Helen.
61. St. Polychronia.
63. St. Sabas.
64. St. Sanctor.
66. St. Callistratios.
67. St. Sophia.
68. St. Ananias.
69. St. Azarias.
70. St. Misael.
71. St. Martina.
72. St. Thekla.
73. St. Eirene.
74. St. John the Baptist.
75. St. Myra.
76. St. Panteleimon.
77. St. Dorotheos.
78. St. Stephen.
79. St. Eusebius.
81. St. Elena.
82. St. Agapitos.
83. St. Probus.
84. St. Theodora.
85. St. Sophia.
86. St. Vitalis.
87. St. Ignatios.
88. St. Nicholas.
89. St. Basilios.
90. St. Irene.
91. St. Thekla.
92. St. Therapon.
93. St. Eirene.
94. St. Romanos.
95. St. Barabas.
96. St. Barbara.
97. St. Eirene (?)
98. St. Marie Magdalene.
100, 101. Sts Pistis and Agape.
102. St. Sophia.
103. Prophet Sophonias.
104-106. Sts Ananias, Azarias and Misael.

Inner and outer ambulatory
110. St. Stephan.
111. St. Philippos.
112. St. Domnos.
113. St. Onuphrios.
114. St. Gregory the Wonderworker.
117. St. Gregory the Theologian.
118. St. Capiton.
120. St. Ignatios the God bearer.
121. St. John the Merciful.
122. St. Stratonikos.
123. St. Ermylodos.
124. St. Sozon.
125. St. Menas.
126. St. Victor.
129. St. Eudokia.
130. St. Eustathios.
131, 132. Sts Agapios and Theopistos (?)
133. St. Eudokia.
134. St. Artemios.
136. St. Gerontios.
137. St. Natalia.
138. St. Adrian.
139. St. Menas.
140. St. Panteleimon.
In some other cases the graffiti are obscure or not well preserved, leaving the identification of the images in doubt.

It is important to try to understand the general principles that guided the painters of St. Sophia in the choice of individual saints. Distributing the images of saints according to their rank was already the common practice in Byzantine church decoration by the 11th century. Thus prophets or apostles were usually placed in the dome, saintly bishops in the sanctuary, martyrs in the naos, holy monks and holy women in the western part of the church. Very often the saints were further divided into smaller groups according to their profession or their...

LEGEND FOR Fig. 3

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commemoration day. The patron saints of the donors or some local saints were often given a prominent position.

As our research revealed, the painters of St. Sophia followed these general rules. Thus, the images of holy bishops, presbyters and deacons (more than 70) prevail in the eastern part, not only in the main apse, but also in the side chapels as well as in the prothesis and diakonikon on the walls and on the sides of an opening. In the western part of the cathedral there are about 60 images of holy women. Yet the majority of saints represented in St. Sophia are male martyrs. Very often they form smaller groups according to their occupation. Thus, many holy warriors are placed on the piers in the central zone and elsewhere. There are also groups of medical saints, presbyters, holy monks, stylites. The commissioners and painters obviously tried to make the hagiographical program diversified and representative of all types of holiness.

Another important principle was the placing together of the images of saints sharing the same vita and/or commemoration date. Such smaller groups of two, three, four or five saints were often painted next to each other on the wall, or opposite one another on the sides of an opening or in the soffit of an arch. The identification of a single image may often help to identify the whole group.

Thus, in the inner ambulatory, St. Stratonicos was identified as he is painted below the image of St. Ermolos, the latter with a surviving inscription (Fig. 2 nos 122, 123). The graffiti with names on the images of an elderly bishop and a female martyr painted on the sides of an opening helped us to identify them as Sts Cyprian and Justine, another graffiti with the name of Theopiste on the figure of a female martyr encouraged us to identify the neighboring images of a bearded martyr, a young boy and another damaged figure as her husband St. Eustathios and their children Agapios and Theopistos (Fig. 2 nos 127, 128, 130-133). In the upper gallery on the sides of a pier three images are painted next to each other: a holy bishop, a presbyter and a deacon. There is a graffito with the name Akepsimas on the painting of the holy bishop. Therefore we identified all three as the Persian martyrs bishop Akepsimas, presbyter Joseph and deacon Aeithalas, who were martyred on the same day (November 3) and were usually represented together (Fig. 3 nos 157-159, Figs 4, 5).

Sometimes this principle of grouping helps to attribute even the worst preserved images. Thus, in another place on the upper gallery, we have identified the Holy Five Martyrs of Sebastos commemorated on December 13 (Fig. 3 nos 144-148). In this case we could discern the rare attribute of St. Mardarius, who always wears a red cap. The second clue was provided by the number of surfaces available in this compartment where four arches rest on four piers at the sides and a single column in the center which is inconvenient for painting due to its rounded shape. Four busts of saints including St. Mardarius were placed in the soffit of one of these arches and the fifth surface was provided by the side of the only adjoining pier. Therefore this was a perfect location for the popular group of the Holy Five, whose image appears frequently in Byzantine art.

References:


14 Ibid., 51-53, figs 28-31.

15 Gerasimenko – Zakharova – Sarab’ianov, “Novye atributsii" op.cit. (n. 3), 229, fig. 7.

16 Ibid., 225-226, fig. 7.

17 On their iconography see: K. Weitzmann, “Illustrations to the
Yet in another similar case we encountered difficulties. A bearded martyr wearing a cap is also represented on the ground floor in the northern arm of the cross (Fig. 2 no 44). However, we could not identify him with the same certainty as St. Mardarius, since other martyrs next to him differ in their appearance from the usual iconography of his companions and two have torques (μανιάκια) on their necks characteristic of Sts Sergius and Bacchus (Fig. 2 nos 38-43).  

Some images in St. Sophia definitely have a patronal character. The most conspicuous case is the painting of St. Constantine with two small-scale figures of St. George and St. Eirene identified long ago (Fig. 2 no 58). Fig. 6). The latter two are the patron saints of the great prince Yaroslav and his wife Ingigerd, the donors of Saint Sophia.

On the next pier there are some other images that may relate to Yaroslav’s family. The frescoes in the lower zone of the pier facing the central nave mainly represent holy warriors and martyrs. In the north-eastern corner, however, there is a single image of a prophet, who can be identified as Elijah based on his characteristic appearance and clothes, the melote (Fig. 2 no 32). Elijah was the...
name of the oldest son of Yaroslav who died young, long before the construction of St. Sophia. The second son and heir of Yaroslav was Izyaslav baptized as Demetrios. The image of St. Demetrios is placed next to that of Elijah on the eastern side of the pier facing the altar (Fig. 2 no 31). The accompanying inscription does not survive, but the appearance and the military attire of the saint makes this identification more than plausible.

It is also possible that another image of the holy warrior and great martyr George, the patron saint of Yaroslav himself, was painted opposite St. Demetrios, on the western side of the corresponding altar pier. In 1893 the iconostasis was removed for renovation, and an image of a martyr was discovered there, but he was not identified at that time (Fig. 2 no 50).

Another image connected with the great prince was painted in the upper gallery, directly above the images of saints Constantine, George and Eirene. This is a rare image of the Old Testament king Hezekiah, who is identified by the iconography, two graffiti and the Greek inscription on his roll (Fig. 3 no 150). The southern part of the gallery was the usual place for the prince and his family to attend the liturgy. Therefore this image of king Hezekiah may be interpreted as Yaroslav’s private model of the pious ruler.

Images of locally venerated saints are also present in St. Sophia. Although at the time of its construction and decoration the first Russian saints had not yet been canonized, there were already some saints who were particularly venerated. After embracing Christianity, prince Vladimir brought the relics of St. Clement of Rome from Cherson and he left them in his church of the Tithes in Kiev. The church was consecrated in 996 on May 12, which is the day of commemoration of St. Epiphanios of Cyprus. Therefore the cult of these two saints became widespread in Rus, and their images are often found in monumental painting. The mosaic images of both of them hold places of honor in the row of saintly bishops in St. Sophia’s main apse. Another fresco image with similar iconographic traits has been tentatively identified as St. Clement in the south-western corner of the central nave (Fig. 2 no 34).

The role of Cherson as the baptismal font of Rus was probably one of the reasons why some other saints of

the Pontic area were also depicted in Saint Sophia. In the inner gallery there is a curious depiction of St. Kapi-
ton of Cherson and St. Phokas of Sinope, the latter hold-
ing an oar in his hand (Fig. 2 nos 118, 119)26. However,
this geographical principle of grouping the images of
saints remains rare in St. Sophia.

One more factor that played an important role in the
choice of individual saints was the presence of their rel-
ics in the church. The placing of the saints’ relics into the
foundations and walls of a church under construction
was an ancient practice. Among other medieval sources,
this is attested in the Paterikon of the Kiev monastery
of the Caves. This tells that relics of different martyrs
were laid under the walk of the cathedral of the Dormi-
tion and that the images of these saints were painted
upon the walls27. It is highly probable that the same
practice was used in building and decorating the Kiev
metropolis half a century earlier. In St. Sophia there are
many crosses painted next to the images of saints (Fig.
7), possibly indicating the places where pieces of relics
had been put28.

On another side of the pier with the images of St.
Demetrios and the prophet Elijah there is an image of St.
Nicholas facing westwards (Fig. 2 no 75). Opposite this
is St. Panteleimon (Fig. 2 no 76). Both were identified
long ago thanks to their characteristic appearance and
graffiti. St. Nicholas is considered the patron saint of
Yaroslav’s third son Svyatoslav. As for St. Panteleimon,
it is known for sure that his relics were present in St.
Sophia. During the excavations of 1940 an 11th-century
silver reliquary with this saint’s name was found there29.

So far we have discussed some of the main principles in
the choice and grouping of the images of saints, prin-
ciples which were general in 11th-century Byzantine art.
However, there are also some particularities specific to
St. Sophia.

One conspicuous trait of St. Sophia is that this is a

26 Logvin, Sofìia Kievskaia, op.cit. (n. 2), pls. 211, 212. Vys-
otskii, Srednevekovye nadpisi Sofii Kievskoj, op.cit. (n. 23), 34.
Gerasimenko – Zakharova – Sarab’ianov “Vnutrennie galerei”,
op.cit. (n. 3), 43-44, figs 13, 15, 16. V. D. Sarab’ianov, “Izobrazheniya
dvuh Pontijskih svjatitelej v rospisjah Sofii Kievskoj” (Images
of Two Pontic Saints in the Wall Paintings of St. Sophia of Kiev),
Ocherki po istorii christianskogo Hersonesu (Essays on the History
of Christian Chersonesus), vol. I, Saint-Petersburg 2009, 109-
117. T. Starodubcev, “Holy gardener and holy bishop: the images
27 L. A. Ofshevskaia – S. N. Travinikov (eds), Drevnerusskie pa-
teriiki. Kiev-Pecherskij Paterik, Volokolamskij Paterik (Old Rus-
sian Paterica. The Paterikon of the Kiev Cave Monastery. The
Paterikon of Volokolamsk), Moscow 1999, 12-14, 115-116. The
Paterikon of the Kievan Caves Monastery (transl. M. Heppel), Cam-
op.cit. (n. 3), 27-29. V. D. Sarab’ianov, “Relikvii i obrazy svjatych
v sakrafnom prostranstve Sofii Kievskoj” (Relics and Images of
Saints in the Sacred Space of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev), Spatial
icons. Performativity in Byzantium and Medieval Russia (in Rus-
29 Sarab’ianov, “Patronafnye izobrazheniya Yaroslava Mudrogo”,
op.cit. (n. 3), 242.
very large and complex building. The other particularity is ideological. Being the first cathedral of the newly baptized Rus, St. Sophia emphasizes the importance of the Church and its apostolic mission. These two particularities also affected the choice and grouping of the images of saints.

The structure of the building is very complicated (Figs 2, 3). There are numerous cross-shaped piers providing narrow vertical surfaces unsuitable for painting any subject other than individual figures in several registers. The central five-nave core is enveloped by an inner and outer ambulatory and spacious galleries in the upper storey. The painters had to fill all these numerous compartments. These were probably perceived as separate spaces, as images of some saints and groups of saints are repeated several times in different parts of the cathedral. Thus, there are at least two different images of St. Nicholas (Fig. 2 nos 75, 116), St. Panteleimon (Fig. 2 nos 76, 140), St. Menas (Fig. 2 nos 125, 139), St. Andrew Stratelates (Fig. 2 nos 21, 59), prophet Elijah (Fig. 2 nos 32, 92), Sts Sergius and Bacchus (Fig. 2 nos 38, 39, Fig. 3, nos 154, 155), Sts Adrian and Natalia (Fig. 2 nos 86, 87, 137, 138), Sts Cosmas and Damian (Fig. 2 nos 29, 30, 56, 57, probably representing two different pairs of homonymous saints), etc.

The inner and outer ambulatory on the ground floor were initially open. Most probably they did not function as proper liturgical spaces, but were used for litanies. This could also account for some peculiarities in their decoration. Thus in the western corners of the inner ambulatory there are two groups of images that clearly have some special meaning. In the north-western compartment there are nine images of holy warriors, mostly represented in military attire (Fig. 2 nos 134, 135, 139 and others not identified). In the south-western compartment of the inner ambulatory there are numerous images of holy bishops (Fig. 2 nos 114-121 and others not identified). Among them, St. Nicholas was singled out: there are traces of some decoration now lost which had been set around his head (Fig. 2 no 116)30.

Another interesting combination of images of saints is found in the north-west corner of the naos.32 This compartment stands in the same line as the prothesis which also functioned as a chapel dedicated to the apostles Peter and Paul. In the prothesis, next to the cycles of Sts Peter and Paul, there are numerous single images of other apostles, including those from the Seventy Apostles. The north-western compartment of the naos continues the theme of the apostolic mission of the Church. It opens

again with the images of St. Peter and Paul facing each other (Fig. 2 nos 84, 85. Figs 7, 8). Other images painted in this compartment include figures representing the Old Testament servants of God: prophets and high priests. Based on the iconography, we identified the images of Aaron, Moses, Elijah and Elisha (Fig. 2 nos 81, 88, 92, 93).

Next to them, there are a number of holy bishops representing the New Testament church. Yet the choice of individual saints is specific. We identified one of them as Lazarus, who was resurrected by Jesus and later became the bishop of Cyprus (Fig. 2 no 82). His traits are very peculiar: he has short grey hair, but no beard, his cheeks are hollow, his eyes are wide open. His appearance really conveys the horrifying experience of returning to life from death. Outside Cyprus, images of St. Lazarus as bishop are not encountered very often. Yet there are some examples in pre-Mongol Russian wall paintings, the image in St. Sophia being probably the model for the other ones as they all share the same iconography. Next to the image of St. Lazarus there is a large cross that could mark the presence of his relics in this place.

Two more saintly bishops are painted on two other piers of this compartment, both having the same unusual appearance: short grey hair and no beard. Based on this rare iconography, we hypothesize that these may be St. Germanos and St. Ignatios, patriarchs of Constantinople known for their struggle against iconoclasm (Fig. 2 nos 83, 89). They were eunuchs and therefore had no beard. As their canonization was a relatively recent event at the time of St. Sophia’s decoration, they may have been depicted here as heroes of the contemporary Church. The images of these saints are among the first mosaics of St. Sophia of Constantinople created following the victory over iconoclasm and, their iconography persists in later tradition, although they were not frequently depicted.

The meaning of the combination of saints in this compartment may then be interpreted as an exaltation of the salvific mission of the Church. Starting with the ministry of prophets and high-priests, when the Law was given to Moses and the Divine grace passed from the prophet Elijah to the prophet Elisha, the Lord then gives His new Law to the Apostles and lays the foundations of the New Testament Church. The same ministry and grace is taken over by the leaders of the Church, starting from the times of Jesus and up until the present day.

It is not always possible to understand and interpret the meaning of such minor hagiographic programs in different parts of the cathedral, especially when only some of the images are preserved and can be identified. It is clear, however, that the meaning of the iconographic program of St. Sophia as a whole was conceived as a sum of these several groups, and the individual images of saints played their important part in this ensemble.

The conclusions that we draw from our analysis of the St. Sophia hagiographical program may be summarized as follows.

It is evident that all the images of saints in St. Sophia fit within the general idea of its decoration. These images are arranged according to the main principles of hierarchy already established in Byzantine monumental painting. Yet, this system was not very rigid, it allowed for exceptions, special accentuations and a number of seemingly random factors for which we can give no account. It is evident that within this universal program smaller units may be identified, and the principles guiding the choice of saints for them may vary. It is only the complex analysis summing up all these elements and factors that can provide an adequate reading of St. Sophia’s program.

The unprecedented multitude of images of saints is a very important peculiarity of St. Sophia’s appearance compared to other coeval ensembles. One reason for this was the great size and particular structure of the building. Yet the other more important reason was ideological: the newly baptized Rus had just become a member of the Universal Church, and it is the multitude of saints that represented this idea in the most effective way.

Illustration credits
Figs 1, 4-8: photos by Anna Zakharova. Figs 2, 3: schemes by Anna Zakharova based on reconstructed plans by Yu Aseev and others, in Vseobshchina istorii arkhitektury (Universal History of Architecture), 3, Moscow 1966, 540.

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Αγία Σοφία στο Κίεβο, μαζί με άλλα σύνολα του 11ου αιώνα, σημαντικότερα μια σημαντική στοιχείο στην ιστορία της βυζαντινής τέχνης, όπως το κλασικό σύστημα διεικδύσεων ναών έφερε στην αρχή του. Η Αγία Σοφία είναι επίσης το μνημείο-κλειδί για την παλαιότερη φυσική τήξη η επιγραφή του μνημείου στη μετάτροπη ανάπτυξη της ήταν τεράστια. Αυτό τα στοιχεία καθιστούν πολύ σημαντική την ανάγνωση μιας καλύτερης κατανόησης της περιόδου εικονογραφικού προγράμματος της Αγίας Σοφίας (Εικ. 1). Η ταύτιση των μορφών των αγίων αποτελεί μέρος αυτής της διαδικασίας.

Η καλύτερη ένδειξη για την πείθηση μιας μορφής είναι η ανάγνωση της συνοδευτικής επιγραφής, δηλαδή του αγωνισμένης της, όπως τα καταγράφονται αποσπάσματα ή όνομα τέτοιων επιγραφών. Δυστυχώς, τέτοιους περιπτώσεις είναι πολύ λίγες, εξαιτίας της κακής διατήρησης πολλών από τις τοιχογραφίες, οι οποίες καθεστώταν εκτεταμένα κατά τη διάρκεια αυτής της περίοδος του 19ου αιώνα. Επίσης, η ανάγνωση τέτοιων μορφών μερικών και της τέχνης της εποχής της, μερικές φορές και την επίγραφη ανάλυση της συνοδευτικής επιγραφής, δηλαδή της αρχαίας επιγραφής, αποδεικνύεται πολύ χρήσιμη (Εικ. 3). Σε πολλές περιπτώσεις, το όνομα του αγίου εναπόκειται στην ελληνική μορφή του, εκτός από την περίπλοκη διαδικασία κατανόησης της επιγραφής, η οποία καθιστά την ταύτιση μυστηριώδη και πολύ σημαντική την ανάγκη μιας καλύτερης κατανόησης της επιγραφής (Εικ. 3).

Η καλύτερη ένδειξη για την πείθηση μιας μορφής είναι η ανάγνωση της συνοδευτικής επιγραφής, δηλαδή του αγωνισμένης της, όπως τα καταγράφονται αποσπάσματα ή όνομα τέτοιων επιγραφών. Δυστυχώς, τέτοιους περιπτώσεις είναι πολύ λίγες, εξαιτίας της κακής διατήρησης πολλών από τις τοιχογραφίες, οι οποίες καθεστώταν εκτεταμένα κατά τη διάρκεια αυτής της περίοδος του 19ου αιώνα. Επίσης, η ανάγνωση τέτοιων μορφών μερικών και της τέχνης της εποχής της, μερικές φορές και την επίγραφη ανάλυση της συνοδευτικής επιγραφής, δηλαδή της αρχαίας επιγραφής, αποδεικνύεται πολύ χρήσιμη (Εικ. 3). Σε πολλές περιπτώσεις, το όνομα του αγίου εναπόκειται στην ελληνική μορφή του, εκτός από την περίπλοκη διαδικασία κατανόησης της επιγραφής, η οποία καθιστά την ταύτιση μυστηριώδη και πολύ σημαντική την ανάγκη μιας καλύτερης κατανόησης της επιγραφής (Εικ. 3).
προσωπική σχέση με τον μεγάλο πρίγκιπα, είναι η 
σπάνια μορφή του παλαιοδιαθηκικού βασιλιά Εζεκία 
στο υπερώο, από όπου ο ηγεμόνας συνήθως παρακο 
λουθούσε τη λειτουργία.

Το κτήριο της Αγίας Σοφίας είναι πολύ μεγάλο και 
περίπλοκο (Εικ. 2, 3). Υπάρχουν πολυάριθμοι σταυρο 
σεμοί πεσοί που παρέχουν κατακόρυφες επιφάνειες, 
ακατάλληλες για άλλα θέματα εκτός από μεμονωμένες 
μορφές σε πολλαπλές ζώνες (Εικ. 7, 8). Ο κεντρικός 
πεντάκλιτος πυρήνας περικλείεται από εσωτερι 
κό και εξωτερικό περίστωο (Εικ. 2) και από ευ 
ρύχωρα υπερώα στον όροφο (Εικ. 3) και οι ζωγρά 
φοί έπρεπε να γεμίσουν με τα έργα τους οποιους 
χώρους. Πιθανότατα, οι χώροι αυτοί θεωρούντα 
τα ανεξάρτητοι μεταξύ τους, καθώς οι παραστάσεις κάποιων 
αγίων και ομάδων αγίων επαναλαμβάνονται αρκετές 
φορές σε διαφορετικά σημεία του καθεδρικού. Σε με 
ρικούς χώρους εντοπίζονται ειδικά νοήματα στην επι 
λογή αγίων και σχηματίζονται μικρές έκτασες εικο 
νογραφικά προγράμματα. Συνεπώς, το γενικό νόημα 
του εικονογραφικού προγράμματος της Αγίας Σοφίας 
απαρτίζεται από το σύνολο αυτών των ανεξάρτητων 
χώρων.

Η πρωτοφανής πληθώρα αγίων αποτελεί πολύ ση 
μαντική ιδιαιτερότητα της Αγίας Σοφίας. Ένας λόγος 
που εξηγεί αυτό το φαινόμενο, είναι το μεγάλο μέγ 
θος και η ιδιαίτερη δομή του κτηρίου. Ένας ακόμη 
σημαντικός λόγος ήταν ο ιδεολογικός παράγοντας των 
νεοφώτιστων Ρως είχαν μόλις ενταχθεί στην Οικο 
μενική Εκκλησία και η πληθώρα των εικονιζόμενων 
αγίων εκφράζει αυτή την ιδέα με τον καλύτερο τρό 
πο. Έλπιζουμε ότι οι προσπάθειες μας να ταυτίσουμε 
τις μορφές των αγίων συμβάλλουν στη σωστή κατανό 
ηση του περίπλοκου νοήματος του εικονογραφικού 
προγράμματος αυτού του εκτενούστατου συνόλου του 
11ου αιώνα.

Μετάφραση από τα αγγλικά: Νικόλαος Μελβάν

Δέκατο – Τμήμα Ιστορίας και Θεωρίας της Τέχνης, Σχολή Ιστορίας 
Lomonosov Moscow State University zakharova@inbox.ru

Λέκτωρ ‒ Τμήμα Ιστορίας και Θεωρίας της Τέχνης, Σχολή Ιστορίας, Σχολή Ιστορίας 
Lomonosov Moscow State University zakharova@inbox.ru

ANNA ZAKHAROVA

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