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Χώρα: Χριστιανικές όψεις μιας πλατωνικής ιδέας

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One's body is all one is, one's body is one's self. This self has a native language. I felt that I had to write the following text in a foreign language in an attempt to install a distance between the text and myself.

An investigation in the early Church Fathers’ writings shows that the notion of the term χώρα in the epithets η χώρα τῶν ζώντων and η χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου, appearing as inscriptions on wall mosaics for the first time in the church of the Chora monastery in Constantinople, on images of Christ and the Virgin Mary respectively, originate in Plato’s Timaeus. The first one denotes a utopia in the afterlife, where the faithful will enjoy eternal peace. The second derives from a confusion of the platonic χώρα with the platonic ὑποδοχή and denotes a utopia where what is wrong in this world could be restored.

Seferis explains in a note that the title of the poem refers to “an inscription of a mosaic in the monastery of the Chora in Constantinople.” In the table of contents the title appears in small letters and the stress on the last word is on the third syllable from the end (ἀχώρητου), that is

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according to the demotic, while in the original inscription the stress is on the second syllable from the end (ἄχωρήτου) according to the rules of the Ancient Greek language. Then, the title of the poem should be understood in Modern Greek. In colloquial Modern Greek χώρα means “realm,” “country,” while the word χώρητος, unusual in and of itself (in the demotic it should be χωρήτος,) introduces the sense of a realm beyond the limitations of this world, a realm of a certain otherness. If translated as “The Container of the Uncontainable,” as it is often translated, it cannot be understood without knowledge of the theological background that is behind the inscription of the Chora monastery. The time in the poem is set on a Good Friday, the falling coins allude to the metallic sound of the bells but also to the tinkling of the coins by means of which Christians could buy off their sins and, as it becomes clear in the second and third lines, to drops of rain. The hollow spots made by the raindrops on the ground are likened to openings leading into new realms into the earth. The final phrase, “the moment has come, raise me up” supposedly uttered by the dead Christ, clearly alludes to the rites of the Epitaphios and to the Resurrection. In a world of sorrow, on a day of sorrow, the Man of Sorrows heralds the opening of new realms where things could be restored. Tracing this vaguely positive feeling is corroborated by the fact that the next poem in the collection is entitled “Interlude of Joy.”

In the monastery of the Chora in Constantinople there are two mosaics bearing this inscription: one is in the exonarthex, the other is in the naos. I think there can be no doubt that Seferis had in mind the mosaic of the exonarthex, the emblematic character of which, in terms of form and position in the entire iconographic program of the church, is prominent, as the existing literature on the Chora monastery shows and especially Ousterhout’s insightful studies on the iconography of this remarkable monument. The mosaic is in the lunette above the entrance door of the church, facing east. It depicts the Virgin, orant with Christ Child in an oval aureole on her breast, between two flying angels. She is accompanied by the inscription μητέρ Θεοῦ Χώρα του ἀχωρήτου, which means “mother of God, the realm of the uncontainable.” Underwood noted that the inscription was inspired by one of the epithets attributed to the Virgin in the Akathistos hymn. The same inscription appears once more in the background of the Virgin Hodegetria holding Christ Child on her lap, at the right end of the templon in the naos. The term χώρα appears three more times in the church, in the inscription Πατριάς Χριστοῦ / ή χώρα τῶν

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3 It is only posthumously that a stress was added on the word in the title of the poem transforming it into “ΑΧΩΡΗΤΟΥ,” while at the table of contents the stress was ‘corrected’ to conform with the ancient Greek version, see Σφηνός Πειραμίτης, Συγγραμματια, Ιωάννου 2007, 166, 370.
5 Έγκαλοματισθείσας Μετάφιλον Μητρόπαντος 1996, vol. 13, 455 456. However, even the “χώρητος” is practically never used in every day speech.
8 Διάλειμμα χαρᾶς, see Σφηνός, Πειραμίτης 1967, 171.
10 This type of representation of Virgin Mary had been commonly identified as Blachernitissa. This identification has been revised: Ch. Angelidi T. Papamastorakis, “Picturing the Spiritual Protector: from Blachernitissa to Hodegetria,” in M. Vassilaki (ed.), Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium, Monovision Μητροπόλην Ashgate 2005, 209 223.
11 I have preferred to translate the Greek word χώρα as “realm,” because I think it suggests an entity with a character more composite than a section of the surface of the earth, suggested by words such as “territory,” or “land.”
ζώντων, which means “Jesus Christ, the realm of the living” and accompanies the figure of Christ. First, in the exonarthex, opposite the Virgin Orans, in the lunette above the door leading to the exonarthex, confronting the one who enters the church from the outside. Second, in the esonarthex, in the lunette above the door leading to the nave, with the figure of Christ enthroned, receiving the model of the church from the kiotos Theodore Metochites. Third, only partially preserved, with the figure of Christ at the left end of the templon in the nave, which is positioned symmetrically to the figure of the Virgin Hodegetria mentioned above. Underwood has already noted that the phrase designating Christ as the “realm of the living” has its origins in the Book of the Psalms, and is introduced for the sake of a play on the name of the monastery and on the epithet θάνατος to the θάνατος attributed to the Virgin.  

Having in mind that the term χώρα was introduced by Plato, I was surprised that this was not mentioned in relation to the inscriptions at the Chora monastery church. Being, also, aware of the fact that some of the early Church Fathers have written comments on the Psalms, I was challenged to check about any possible connections. I found that Basil of Caesaria (329 or 330-379) in his homilies on the Psalms describes the “Χώρα τῶν ζώντων” in the following manner:

“There is no male or female in the resurrection, but life is one and in one way: in the way of the ones who reside in the realm of the living and please their Lord. This world is mortal and, at the same time, a place for mortals. Because the making of anyone visible is composite, and because all that is composite is pre destined to decompose, all we, the ones being in the world, being parts of the world, we have to share everyone else’s fate. Where there is no change of either body or soul, that is where the realm of the living indeed is, [the realm] of the ones who remain forever the same. ... The realm of the living is where there is no night, no sleep that imitates death; where there is no eating, no drinking, ... no illness, no pains, ... no money, the beginning of all evil, the case for wars, the root of enmity; but [it is] the realm of those who live the real life in Jesus Christ, whose is the glory and the power forever.”

Eusebius of Caesaria (263-339), some decades earlier, used almost the same words in describing the “χώρα τῶν ζώντων.”

One has to admit that what is described in these texts is not far from John’s apocalyptic utopia:

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away. And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.”

**References**


16 Basilius Caesariensis, Homilie in Psalmos, PG, vol. 29, 492 493: “Διότι οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει, ἀλλὰ μία τίς ἐστι ἀλλοίωσις οὔτε σώματος οὔτε ψυχῆς ... χώρα ἐστὶν ἐκείνη τῷ Ἰησοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.”


18 Αποκάλυψις ΧΧΙ 3: “Ἰδοὺ ἡ σκήνη τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ συναφεῖς μετ᾽ αὐτῶν, καὶ αὐτῶν λοιπόν ἐπονομάστηκαν, καὶ αὐτῶν ὁ θεὸς μετ᾽ αὐτῶν ἐσται [αὐτῶν θεός], καὶ ἐξελέησεν σὺν δικαίωμα ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν, καὶ ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἐπὶ πένθος ὁτι οὕτως ἐρχεται αὐτῶν ὡς ἔσται ἐκ τῆς πρώτης ἐποχῆς, καὶ ἔσται ὁ καθότητος ὑπὸ τὸν θρόνον Ἰησοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ τελές, ἀργὸς τῆς ἔνωσεν ὑπὸ τῆς πυρος τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ τοῦ γεγονότος ὡς ἔσται ἐρχώμενος ἐκ τῆς πυρός τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ζωῆς διάσωσε.”
What is anticipated in this passage of the Apocalypse is similar with what is defined as the “realm of the living” by Basil of Caesaria, only the latter has modeled it on Platonic terms: God, who in the Old Testament is named ὁ ὢν, synonyms to the Platonic Being, is “the land of the living” in which “the living indeed” live eternally “remaining forever the same,” exactly in the same way as ideas do in the Platonic Being. There is no doubt, also, that this “realm of living” concerns the afterlife, a life promised to the faithful in this life but which will be in a future, in a place where everything that is wrong in this life will not be then. This is a Christian utopia described in terms of the Platonic Being. In fact, the “realm of the living” is a euphemism for death. At the same time the beings of this world are described as composite, having to decompose, in the same way that beings in Plato’s sensible world do.

“what is that is Existent always and has no Becoming? And what is that is Becoming always and never is Existent? Now the one of these is .... ever uniformly existent; whereas the other .... becomes and perishes and is never really existent.”

The inscription ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου (εchora tou achorotou) that accompanies the figure of the Virgin was, as already noted, inspired by one of the epithets attributed to the Virgin in the Akathistos hymn, that is, Θεοῦ ἀχωρήτου χώρα. In the 5th century Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376-444), in one of his homilies, hails the Virgin as τὸ χωρίον τοῦ ἀχωρήτου. The earliest allusion to the χωρίον τοῦ ἀχωρήτου I know of is indirect and is found in the Comments on Psalms by Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339): “… like Sion which, being the city of God, is the chora of the man who has been born in it, so this man becomes the chora and the container of the Word of God who has been born in it, as in a holy sanctuary and temple or, rather, as in a statue that is the container of the deity that has made it its abode…” Sion, one of the commonest metaphors for the Mother of God, is the chora of Christ’s body that, in its turn, is the chora and the container of the Word of God. In other words, the Virgin, having contained the body of Christ which contained the Word of God, is also the chora and the container of the latter (of the Word of God); shortly, the Virgin is the chora of the achorotes. Eusebius uses the words χώρα and ἀχωρήτος not as synonymous but as supplementary; to the word χώρα he attributes the sense of place one is borne by, born in and bred in. The word ἀχωρήτος is for Emmanuel’s body, the material container of God; strangely enough, it is paralleled with a statue in which a (necessarily) pagan deity is residing. It is this meaning that, by its relation to material utilitarian objects, is convenient for exploitation in figural terms, as it is the case in the iconography of the Chora monastery church: for example, baskets for the bread and jars for the wine or water in the depiction of Christ’s miracles.

Some decades before, Clement of Alexandria (150-215) in his Stromateis uses the word χώρα in a purely Platonic context referring directly to Plato: “Plato says that the contemplative-intellectual god of ideas will live among the humans; and that mind is the realm (χώρας) of ideas, and god himself is mind. He has said [also] that the contemplative-intellectual god of the invisible god lives in the humans.” Elsewhere he says: “because hard is to take hold
of (δυσάλωτος) the realm of god, [the god] whom Plato has named the realm (χώρα) of ideas. 25 He is obviously alluding to Timaeus' attempt to define the ὑποδοχή, “the Mother and the Receptacle of this generated world, perceptible by sight and all the senses, ... if we describe her as a Kind invisible and unshaped, all-receptive, and in some most perplexing and most baffling (ὑποδοχήτάτον) way partaking of the intelligible, we shall describe her truly.” 26 As usual since Antiquity, Clement identifies the concept of χώρα with that of ὑποδοχή. 27 Plato introduces and explains the ὑποδοχή as following:

“... it should be the receptacle, and as it were, the nurse, of all Becoming” 28  ... is the Mother and the Receptacle of this generated world, which [world] is perceptible by sight and all the senses.” 29 By means of a metaphor, ὑποδοχή is given a gender that is female; in this context the word “receptacle” (τὸ ἐνδοχεῖον) can only be understood as the womb of a woman, in which all becoming is sown and borne. The metaphor leads to a parable by the introduction of the following phrase:

“... moreover, it is proper to liken the Recipient to the Mother, the Source to the Father, and what is engendered between these two to the Offspring ...” 30

Father, mother and son corresponding to the Being, the ὑποδοχή and the Cosmos (the sensible copy of the Being); there can be no doubt that the scheme fits perfectly the triad Father-Virgin Mary-Christ, providing meaningful images and narrative to be used in literature and illustrations serving the Christian faith. It is not without significance that the Nicene Creed attributes to the Son of God the epithet μονογενής (only son, unique of his kind), which Plato attributes to Heaven-Cosmos 31 which he parallels to the Son engendered between the Being and the ὑποδοχή.

It is true that the early Church Fathers acted in and reacted to a Platonic or neo-Platonic philosophical milieu, and that this influenced their formation, their writings and the interpretation of Christian faith and concepts. 32 Timaeus, especially, was at the centre of their interests concerning natural theology, the deity and many other things. 33 This explains the way in which they use the term chôra (χώρα) and leaves no doubt that it originates in the Platonic χώρα as defined in Plato’s Timaeus. I have noted above that, commonly, the concept of χώρα is treated as identical with that of ὑποδοχή. 34 Nevertheless there is an essential difference between them. The way Plato defines the word initially in Timaeus makes it clear to me that χώρα is the whole of space in which beings can exist only by occupying a part of it. Χώρα is the totality of all places

25 Clemens Alexandrinus, Stromata V, Cap. XI, 73, 3: “δυσάλωτος γὰρ ἡ χώρα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃν χώραν ἰδεῶν ὁ Πλάτων κέκληκεν,” see Früchtel et al., op. cit., vol. II, 375. For interesting comments on Clement's approach to the Platonic ideas, see E. von Ivánka, Plato Christianus. La réception critique du platonisme chez les Pères de l’Église, Paris 1990 (original title: Plato Christianus, Einsiedeln 1964), 87 88. Also see below, n. 34.

26 Plato, Timaeus, 51a, b: “καὶ δυσαλωτότατον αὐτὸ λέγοντες οὐ ψευσόμεθα.” ἄμορφον, πανδεχές, μεταλαμβάνον δὲ ἀπορώτατά πῃ τοῦ νοητοῦ οἶον τιθήνην.”

27 Plato Christianus, La chôra (original title: ΧΩΡΑ Α: CHRISTIAN ASPECTS OF A PLATONIC CONCEPT) of ideas.” 25 He is obviously alluding to Timaeus' attempt to define the ὑποδοχή, “the Mother and the Receptacle of the realm of god, [the god] whom Plato has named the realm (χώρα) of ideas.” 25 He is obviously...
to be the perfect rendering of the aforementioned ideas. This image is interpreted as a symbol of the incarnation of God in the body of Christ in Mary’s womb and its origins can be traced early in the Christian Era. In that sense, the incarnation can be understood as a parallel of the Being’s becoming the sensible and material world by means of being copied by the Demiurge in the ὑποδοχὴ. The aureole enclosing child Christ may be seen as an allusion to the world’s being

“... round, in the shape of a sphere ...”

The depiction of the ὑποδοχὴ as a woman, in this case as the Virgin Mary, gives a visual-sensible form to χώρα (see ὑποδοχὴ) according to the metaphor provided in Plato’s Timaeus, as mentioned above. Besides this metaphor or, rather, the personification of the ὑποδοχὴ, the actual main quality of the latter is that she has no sensible qualities but, by being the hostess of every being of the sensible world, takes every sensible being’s appearance, remaining always essentially identical to herself and formless:

“And of the substance which receives all bodies the same account must be given. It must be called always by the same name; for from its own proper quality it never departs at all; for while it is always receiving all things, nowhere and in no wise does it assume any shape similar to any of the things that enter into it. For it is laid down by nature as a moulding-stuff for everything, being moved and marked by the entering figures, and because of them it appears different at different times. And the figures that enter and depart are copies of those that are always existent, being stamped from them in fashion marvelous and hard to describe, ...”

35 My translation; Timaeus, 52b: “… κατ’ οὐρανὸν οὐδὲν εἶναι.”
37 Derrida, op.cit. (n. 27), 30, puts the question rhetorically: “Il y a kkóia, on peut même s’interroger sur sa physis et sa dynamis ...”; he does not aim to providing any answer to his potential question.
39 Timaeus, 33b: “... ὑποδοχὴς ... κυνοτοτερής...”
40 See also n. 28 30.
41 Timaeus, 50b, c: “... ω τόπος δέ λόγος καὶ περὶ τῆς τε πάντες διερχόμενος οὐσίας φώσας τοῦτον ὑποδοχήν ἐκ γῆς τῆς έσωτης τοῦ παράγειν οἷη ἔξωπται δυνάμεως δείχνει τε γῆρα
Therefore, the identification of the Virgin Mary with the χώρα/ὑποδοχὴ may explain why she is often depicted in the form of other material substances, different between them but which, by means of elaborate mental associations, are understood as pictorial substitutes for the Mother of God. These verbal or pictorial metaphors are known as τύποι or prefigurations and they usually bear an indication that allows the spectator to understand that the image is symbolizing Virgin Mary. I believe that the term τύπος, could originate in Timaeus, 50c,d, where the υποδοχή is described as a medium in which the beings of the sensible world are stamped (τυπωθέντα, ἐκτυπωθέννον). Because they act exactly in the same way as written metaphors do (that is, they substitute the real substance behind the metaphor), they can be depicted without the provision of any written or pictorial help for their interpretation, as happens for instance in the Kokkinobaphos manuscripts.

The preceding investigation has made it clear that by the early 14th century “chora,” the name of the establishment that Theodore Metochites undertook to renovate, had already been laden with meanings resulting from a history that could be summarized as follows: χώρα is a term introduced by Plato in his Timaeus in order to define a concept synonymous with the modern Greek term χώρας, i.e., space. Υποδοχή is a parallel platonic term that defines space (χώρα) in function, that is, filled with the beings which cannot exist outside space. Already in antiquity, the confusion of these two concepts endowed χώρα with properties that were associated with the υποδοχὴ by means of metaphors used by Plato in his Timaeus. In the Christian era, the early Church Fathers, in their attempt to create Christian theology and hymnology, often had recourse to Plato’s writings, especially Timaeus. In this context, the Platonic term χώρα (see υποδοχή), was imbued with Christian metaphysical connotations related to Plato’s metaphors for ἐπιτύπωσις. The epithet ἡ χώρα τῶν ἔντονων for Christ as the Being (ό Ἰση) appears the latest in the early 4th century and refers to eternity in the afterlife. The epithet ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἄνθρωπος for Mary as the instrument of God’s incarnation refers to the Akathistos hymn, dated in the 6th century but, before that and with minimum variations, it appears the latest in the early 4th century.

In spite of their long and interesting history, these epithets of Christ and the Virgin Mary appeared as inscriptions accompanying the relevant figures for the first time in the aforesaid mosaics of the Chora monastery church in the second decade of the 14th c. Theodore Metochites, κτητός of the church and, undoubtedly, the intellectual author of the iconographic program, chose the epithets as a play upon the name of the monastery. Not having any pictorial tradition for either of the two figures that would illustrate the inscriptions, Metochites used older types, which he distributed in the overall scheme of the pictorial program in a way that would serve his purpose with regards to the transmission of specific messages. Metochites was conscious of the fact that the “realm of the living” alludes to salvation in Christ in the afterlife. By inscribing it in the most conspicuous places on the central axis on the way into the naos, he intended to stress the sepulchral character of the church. In the naos, the figure of Christ bearing the inscription ἡ χώρα τῶν ἔντονων holds an open book on which we can read: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28), leaving no doubt that the stress on the afterlife is intentional. This supports Ousterhout’s remark: “Looking at the entry sequence as a whole, we might say that the easter view, toward the sanctuary and altar, stresses Christ and salvation, leading to the Eucharist at the altar.”

Ousterhout continues: “However, looking back from the

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45 K. Linardou, “Depicting the Salvation: Typological Images of Mary in the Kokkinobaphos Manuscripts,” in Brubaker Cunningham (eds), The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium, op.cit. (p. 12), 133-149, pl. 9.1 9.5.
inner narthex, it is the Virgin and the Incarnation that are
given prominence.48 There is no doubt about this. I think
that the sequence starts with the Hodegetria of the tem-
plon, inscribed ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἄχωρήτου, goes to the Koime-
sis on the west wall of the naos above the central door, 
then continues with the Presentation of the Virgin in the
Temple on the central axis of the exonarthex, and culmi-
nates in the figure of the Virgin orant with Christ Child in
a medallion, inscribed ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἄχωρήτου, in the lunette above the west entrance of the exonarthex. We
might say that, on the way in, the iconography alludes to
spirituality and the afterlife, and on the way out, the
iconography suggests a gradual return to the present
world.49 Metochites’ renovation of the katholikon of the
Chora monastery included the south parekklesion which
was then added to serve as a funeral chapel for Theodore
Metochites and his family. This would suffice to explain
why the decoration of the central part of the church stress-
es salvation in the afterlife in a conventionally Christian
sense. But Chora could also be seen as a metaphor of the
chief interest or even the anxiety of Metochites, with
regards to the fate of his writings, his works and his reputa-
tion after his death. In Ibor Ševčenko’s words: “Several of
his achievements might assure him immortality, he said ...
but among all his works, the Chora constituted his chief
claim to it: a claim not so much to the eternal life in which
the righteous contemplate God – for when he spoke of the
Christian beyond, Metochites usually saw there the threat
of eternal punishment – as to the glory of a mortal, re-
membered by unending generations of other mortals.”50
There can be no doubt that most of the information pro-
vided above and concerning Plato, the writings of the
Church Fathers, and hymnography were in Theodore
Metochites’ knowledge while he was striving to elaborate
an iconographic program that would do justice to his
learning, intelligence, and taste. He is recognized as an as-
tonishing polymath in virtually every field of classical or
Christian literature.51 In his writings he shows a prefer-
ence for using the word χώρα, most probably for the mul-
tiple nuances it was endowed with by Plato, Platonist and
neo-Platonist philosophers, the early Church Fathers and
hymnographers.52 For example, in his poems, Metochites
names the Virgin Mary with some versions of the epithet
χώρα τοῦ ἄχωρήτου.53 He also uses the expression χώρα...
ἄσυλος when asking Gregoras to become an unassail-
able domain around his mental offspring in order to pro-
tect them against every possible vicissitude. In this con-
text, χώρα has a sense very close to the sense traced in
the epithets of Christ and the Virgin Mary discussed above.54
He also often uses the expressions χώραν διδόναι (to make- or allow to- happen, to bring into existence)55 and
χώραν ἔχειν (to happen, to come into existence) which
were colloquial in classical antiquity.56 Metochites also
uses the expression χώραν τοῦ νοῦ in the same way we
have seen it above used by Clement of Alexandria.57 In
his Epitaph for Theodora Palaiologina he uses the expres-
sion ταῦτα χώραν τινά ... ἔχει which could have derived direct-
ly from Plato, Timaeus 52b.58 He also uses the word often
in its common sense of “territory,” “land,” “place” etc.
As far as Metochites’ “humanism” is concerned, that is
too complicated a topic to deal with and far beyond the
scope of this paper. However, it seems to me that Meto-
chites’s intellectual persona was essentially relying on his
readings and his writings. He was indeed a prolific reader

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 102 104. Ousterhout suggests that “an interpretation of the
mosaic must take into consideration its relationship to the walls of the
city,” ibid., 102.
Ousterhout  B. Pitarakis (eds), The Kariye Camii Reconsidered / Kariye Camii, Yeniden, Istanbul 2011, 213 237, especially 222, 235
236.
51 Θεόδωρος Μετοχίτης, Μονῳδία ἐπὶ τῆ βασιλίδι Θεοδώρᾳ, τῇ ἐπιτάφια ἔννοια ἔχει (to make- or allow to- happen, to bring into existence)55 and
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readings and his writings. He was indeed a prolific reader

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and writer. In his writings, for which he coined his own peculiar “ancient Greek,” objects and works of art or architecture are not described in concrete visual terms, but always in terms of abstract concepts concerning social, financial, moral or other invisible qualities. I understand that his communication with images must have functioned through words and this may explain the fact that he was not interested in creating new iconographic types for the Chora ton Zonton and The Chora tou Acheiropoietou or, at least, in identifying each of them with a unique iconographic type. In this context, I consider the depiction of hymnographers in the pendentives below the dome of the Parekklesion crowned by the Virgin Mary in a medallion, as an additional indication of his interest in the world of the written word: if Christ is supported by the prose of the God-inspired evangelists, then it is appropriate for the Virgin to be supported by the poetry of the hymnographers who praised her. As already noted, one should not expect to see more concrete manifestations of Theodore Metochites’s “humanism” in the iconographic program of the Chora katholikon. However, the fact that he brought out the metaphysical qualities of the word Χώρα as inherited from Antiquity is, on its own, a considerable accomplishment.

The epithets Η χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου and Η χώρα τῶν ζώντων did have a long past, but as attributes on images of Christ and Virgin Mary in the way introduced by Theodore Metochites in his chef d’oeuvre, they had practically too little and insignificant future. This, I believe, is due to the fact that, in the church of the Chora where they appeared, they were not identified with specific iconographic types, but were applied to different ones and integrated in the decorative program of the church.

On the contrary, the concept of χώρα, rooted in the notion of a utopian realm where beings and events that are impossible in this world, can ultimately find place and come into existence. This notion underlies Giorgos Serfis’s poem “η χώρα το το ζώον τον,” There is an example from modern literature, which bears witness that the notion of the “χώρα τῶν ζώντων” has also survived to our days. In Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s “Ariadne auf Naxos,” put into music by Richard Strauss, the aria es gibt ein Reich... (there is a realm...) makes clear reference to that realm of the dead (the literally opposite of “the realm of the living”) where Ariadne will find relief from the pain caused to her by Theseus.

“This is a realm, where all is clean:
It has also a name:
Realm of the dead.
Here nothing is clean! Here all is in complete disorder!
But soon a herald will come,
his name is Hermes.
With his wand he rules the souls
.....
Ah, of all the mild pains
the heart will be purified
.....
will set me free,
will give me back myself,
.....”

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62 Ševčenko, “Metochites and Intellectual Trends,” op.cit. (n. 50), 51 55, especially 53: “... to expect traces of bold experimentation in the program of the Chora is to expect the unlikely. For Metochites as I know him, the Chora had to be recherche but conservative.” J. Meyendorf, “Spiritual Trends in Byzantium in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries,” in Underwood, The Kariye Djami, vol. 4, 106: “As long as these new humanistic elements were coexisting peacefully with tradition, the results could be very remarkable and the Kariye Djami is an example, in the field of art,...” O. Demus, “The Style of the Kariye Djami and its Place in the Development of Palaeologan Art,” in Underwood, The Kariye Djami, vol. 4, 159: “... the Kariye phase would correspond to a humanistic ‘Late Renaissance’ with definite leanings toward mannerism.”


64 “Es gibt ein Reich, wo alles rein ist:
Es hat auch einen Namen:
Totentreich.
Hier ist nichts rein! Hier kam alles zu allem!
Bald aber naht ein Bote,”
In Dylan Thomas’s poem *And Death Shall Have No Dominion* we find a phrase from Apocalypse XXI 465 as the title, and at the beginning and the end of the stanzas. The phrase is understood metaphorically. By using this phrase, that is the equivalent of καὶ ὁ θάνατος οὐ σχήμα χώραν,66 Thomas allows space for the images in the collective memory of the humans who will live in the future:

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean
and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

Yet another poem emerges from my memory of older readings. I cannot identify the author or the title. It was copied years ago and sent to me in a letter by a friend, now dead. It sounds precisely like the aspiration to an apocalyptic utopia, a chora where justice will be restored and make us happy after all. The third verse, especially, betrays direct influence from Apocalypse XV 2. In English the beginning of this poem could be rendered as follows:

“There is a realm and a time
where is all that could not be in our life
where the sea glitters like glass
with the colours of dreams trapped by our soul
from the legions of love in the foliage of the Infinite.
There then,

67

65 Or from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans VI, 9, see Cl. Emery, The World of Dylan Thomas, Miami Beach 1962, 210.
66 It has been noted above (see also above n. 35) that in classical Greek “χώραν ἔχειν” means to be, to happen.

67 “Εἷναι μιὰ χώρα κι’ ἑνὸς χρόνος
ἔσον χωρὶς ὁ πετ χώραν ἡ ζωή μας
ἔσον ἡ θάλασσα σὰν τὸ γυαλὶ ἀστράφτει
µε τὶς χρωματικὰς ὀνείρους τοὺς παγίδεψε ἡ ψυχή μας
ἀπ’ τοὺς στρατοὺς τοῦ ἔρωτα στὸ φύλωμα τοῦ ἀπείρου.
‘Εστὶ τότε,“
ΧΩΡΑ: ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΕΣ ΟΨΕΙΣ ΜΙΑΣ ΠΛΑΤΩΝΙΚΗΣ ΙΔΕΑΣ

Τάσος Τανούλας

Η λέξη χώρα απαιτείται σε επιγραφές παραστάσεων μνημειακής ξονομασίας, για πρώτη φορά στο Α' τέταρτο του 14ου αιώνα, στη Μονή της Χώρας στην Κονσταντινούπολη. Η επιγραφή ή χώρα του άρχοντος υποδέχεται τη μορφή της Παναγίας σε δύο περιπτώσεις, ενώ η επιγραφή ή χώρα των ζώντων συνοδεύει τη μορφή του Χριστού σε τρεις περιπτώσεις.

Έχει εντοπιστεί η καταγωγή της προσωνυμίας χώρα σε παλαιότερες πηγές, που δηλώνουν ότι για τον Πλάτωνα η χώρα γίνεται αντιληπτή μόνο διά του λόγου, ενώ η χώρα είναι κατά τον Πλάτωνα χρησιμοποιεί το ίδιο επίθετο για να ορίσει την υποδοχή του δευτερογενούς όρους συνοπτικούς και αφηρημένους και δεν υπάρχει αμφιβολία ότι αντιστοιχεί στη νεοελληνική λέξη χώρα.

Διαφορετικά, η έννοια της χώρας συνοδεύει τη μορφή του τοῦ ἀχωρήτου του Κύριλλου Κλήμης Αλεξανδρείας (4ος-5ος αι.), στους οποίους ο Κλήμης ορίζει την Παναγία ως το τουλάχιστον ένα αιώνα νωρίτερα, ορίζει έμμεσα, πλην ως αυτού του κόσμου. Ανατρέχοντας, όμως, στα σχόλια που έγραψε για τους Ψαλμούς του Δαυΐδ (114, 9). Μια θεωρία του Δαυΐδ ο Μέγας Βασίλειος (4ος αι.) και ο Ευσέβιος Καισαρείας, δείχνει ότι η λέξη υποδοχή περιέχει μια πλατωνική έννοια σε άμεση συνάρτηση με την αναφορά των ζώντων στην αρχαιότητα, οι έννοιες της χώρας τῶν ζώντων συνοδεύει τη μορφή της Παναγίας σε δύο περιπτώσεις.

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στο Σύμβολο της Πίστεως ονομάζεται μονογενής υιός του Πατρός. Η μορφή της δευτερεύουσας Παναγίας με τον Χριστό μέσα σε μετάλλιο στο στήθος της, όπως εικονίζεται στον εξωναρθηκό του καθολικού της Μονής της Χώρας, φαίνεται να εικονογραφεί ιδανικά την ιδέα της χώρας του άχωρητου, όπου ο Χριστός συνελήφθη και κυοφορήθηκε, για το λόγο αυτό και συμβολίζει την ενσάρκωσή του. Με τις άπειρες μεταμορφώσεις στις οποίες θεωρείται να υπόκειται η ισόδυνη, φαίνεται να συνδέονται και οι άπειρες μορφές (τύποι ή προεικόνισεις) με τις οποίες η Παναγία εικονίζεται ή αναφέρεται σε κείμενα.

Ο Θεόδωρος Μετοχίτης, κτήτωρ της μονής, εκτός από εξέχουσα πολιτική προσωπικότητα, ήταν και ένας από τους επιφανέστερους και πολυμαθέστερους διανοούμενους του Βυζαντίου. Θεωρούσε ότι η μονή, η βιβλιοθήκη, η αναμόρφωση της αρχιτεκτονικής του ναού και ο εικαστικός διάκοσμος ήταν σπουδαία επιτεύγματα, αντιπροσωπεύοντα σπουδαία επιτεύγματα, αντιπροσωπεύοντα η προσωνυμία της Χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου και της Χώρα τῶν ζώντων, και συμβολίζει την ενσάρκωσή του, και τη μετα θάνατον σωτηρία. Ο Μετοχίτης δεν φρόντισε να συνδέσει ένα ιδιαίτερο εικονογραφικό τύπο με καθεμία από τις παραπάνω προσωνυμίες του Χριστού και της Παναγίας. Αυτή πρέπει να είναι και η αιτία για το γεγονός ότι οι συγκεκριμένες επιγραφές δεν εφαρμόστηκαν ξανά σε εικονογραφικά προγράμματα ναών, παρά μόνο σε ένα μικρό ναό στη σημερινή Αλβανία, όπου απεικόνισε απεικόνισε και την Χώρα τοῦ άχωρητου. Εντούτοις, η λέξη χώρα, στην ελληνική γλώσσα, αλλά και στις αποδόσεις της σε άλλες ευρωπαϊκές γλώσσες, εξακολουθεί να διατηρεί, ιδιαίτερά στην ποίηση, τον ιδιαίτερο χαρακτήρα που συνδέεται με την πλατωνική και νεοπλατωνική παράδοση και με την παράδοση που καλλιεργήθηκε από τους Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας στην Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα.