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**Χώρα:** Χριστιανικές όψεις μιας πλατωνικής ιδέας

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## ΧΩΡΑ: CHRISTIAN ASPECTS OF A PLATONIC CONCEPT

*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.*

Η έρευνα στα συγγράμματα των Πατέρων της Εκκλησίας στην Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα δείχνει ότι η έννοια του όρου χώρα στις προσωνυμίες ή χώρα τῶν ζώντων και ή χώρα τοῦ ἁχωρήτου, που απαντώνται ως επιγραφές σε μνημειακές παραστάσεις του Χριστού και της Παναγίας αντίστοιχα, για πρώτη φορά στο καθολικό της μονής της Χώρας στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, ανάγεται στον Τίμαιο του Πλάτωνα. Η πρώτη προσωνυμία σημαίνει μια ουτοπία μετά θάνατον όπου οι δίκαιοι θα απολαμβάνουν αιώνια μακαριότητα. Η δεύτερη οφείλεται σε ένα συμφυρμό της πλατωνικής χώρας με την πλατωνική ὑποδοχή και σημαίνει μια ουτοπία όπου όλες οι αδικίες αυτού του κόσμου θα μπορούσαν να αποκατασταθούν.

An investigation in the early Church Fathers' writings shows that the notion of the term χώρα in the epithets ή χώρα τῶν ζώντων and ή χώρα τοῦ ἁχωρήτου, 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.

The first time I came across the term χώρα in a sense that was not the equivalent of "country," which is the most current sense in Modern Greek, was in 1967, in Giorgos Seferis's poem bearing the title "Η ΧΩΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΧΩΡΗΤΟΥ," in capital letters with no indication of the stresses. The poem could be translated into English as follows:

*Good Friday*

Coins fall all day today over the city  
between each knot like a drop of water on the ground  
opens a new realm: the moment has come, raise me up.<sup>1</sup>

### Λέξεις κλειδιά

Χώρα, Πλάτων, Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας, Θεόδωρος Μετοχίτης.

<sup>1</sup> Η ΧΩΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΧΩΡΗΤΟΥ

Μεγάλη Παρασκευή

Πέφτουν όλοένα σήμερα νομίσματα πάνω στην πολιτεία  
ανάμεσα σε κάθε κόμπο σὰ μιὰ σταλαματιά στὸ χῶμα  
ἀνοίγει μιὰ καινούργια χώρα: ἦρθε ἡ στιγμή, σηκῶστε με.  
Γιῶργος Σεφέρης, *Ποιήματα*, Ἰκαρος 1967, 170.

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."<sup>2</sup> 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 (ἁχῶρητου), that is

### Keywords

Χώρα, Plato, Church Fathers, Theodore Metochites.

<sup>2</sup> "Η ΧΩΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΧΩΡΗΤΟΥ. Ἐπιγραφή σὲ μωσαϊκὸ τῆς Μονῆς τῆς Χώρας στὴν Πόλη," Σεφέρης, *Ποιήματα* 1967, 278, see also above, n. 1.

according to the demotic,<sup>3</sup> while in the original inscription the stress is on the second syllable from the end (*ἀχωρήτου*) according to the rules of the Ancient Greek language.<sup>4</sup> Then, the title of the poem should be understood in Modern Greek. In colloquial Modern Greek *χώρα* means “realm,” “country,” while the word *ἀχωρήτος*, unusual in and of itself (in the demotic it should be “ἀχώρετος,”)<sup>5</sup> introduces the sense of a realm beyond the limitations of this world, a realm of a certain otherness.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> She is accompanied by the inscription *μ(ήτ)ηρ Θ(εο)ῦ / ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου*, which means “mother of God, the realm of the uncontainable.”<sup>11</sup> Underwood noted that the inscription was inspired by one of the epithets attributed to the Virgin in the Akathistos hymn.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

The term *χώρα* appears three more times in the church, in the inscription *Ἰ(ησοῦ)ς Χ(ριστὸ)ς / ἡ χώρα τῶν*

<sup>3</sup> 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 Γιώργος Σεφέρης, *Ποιήματα*, Ἰκαρος 2007, 166, 370.

<sup>4</sup> P. A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1 3, New York 1966 (hereafter: Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1 3); P. A. Underwood (ed.), *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4, *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and its Intellectual Background*, London 1975 (hereafter: Underwood (ed.), *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4); these four volumes are indispensable for a serious study of the monastery of the Chora. For the inscription see vol. 1, 40.

<sup>5</sup> *Εγκυκλοπαίδεια Πάπυρος Λαρούς Μπριτάνικα* 1996, vol. 13, 455 456. However, even the “ἀχώρετος” is practically never used in every day speech.

<sup>6</sup> R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’empire byzantin. Première partie, Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat œcuménique*, vol. III, *Les églises et les monastères*, Paris 1969, 531: “L’inscription des mosaïques ... fait penser qu’elle a un sens mystique et qu’elle fait allusion aux attributs du Christ comme sphère de la vie supérieure de l’homme.”

<sup>7</sup> So it appears in G. Seferis, *Complete Poems*, translated, edited and introduced by E. Keeley Ph. Sherrard, London 1995, 115. For the theological background see R. Ousterhout, “The Virgin of the Chora:

An Image and its Contexts,” in R. Ousterhout L. Brubaker, *The Sacred Image East and West*, Urbana Chicago 1995 (hereafter: Ousterhout, “The Virgin of the Chora”), 91 108, 256 269, especially 100 101.

<sup>8</sup> “Διάλειμμα χαράς,” see Σεφέρης, *Ποιήματα* 1967, 171.

<sup>9</sup> Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, 40 41. See especially Ousterhout, “The Virgin of the Chora,” op.cit.; id., “Temporal Structuring in the Chora Parekklesion,” *Gesta* 34/1 (1995), 63 76.

<sup>10</sup> 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*, Μουσείον Μπενάκη Ashgate 2005, 209 223.

<sup>11</sup> 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.”

<sup>12</sup> Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, 41; L. M. Peltomaa, “Epithets of the Theotokos in the Akathistos Hymn,” in L. Brubaker M. Cunningham (eds), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium. Text and Images*, Ashgate 2011, 111 112.

<sup>13</sup> Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, 168 171.

ζώντων, which means “Jesus Christ, the realm of the living” and accompanies the figure of Christ. First, in the exonarthex, opposite the Virgin Orant, in the lunette above the door leading to the esonarthex, and accompanies the figure of Christ Pantokrator, 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 *ktetor* 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 ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου attributed to the Virgin.<sup>14</sup> Having in mind that the term *χώρα* was introduced by Plato,<sup>15</sup> 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 predestined 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 cause 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.”<sup>16</sup>

Eusebius of Caesaria (263-339), some decades earlier, used almost the same words in describing the “χώρα τῶν ζώντων.”<sup>17</sup>

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.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 39. Psalm 114. 9: “I will be pleasing before the Lord in the land of the living,” see *Septuaginta*, Bibelenstalt Stuttgart 1935 (8th ed. 1965), vol. II, 128: “Εὐαρεστήσω ἐναντίον κυρίου ἐν χώρᾳ ζώντων.”

<sup>15</sup> T. Tanoulas, “Aspects of Architectural Space in Byzantine Literature,” in E. Hadjistryphonos (ed.), *The Notion of Space in Byzantine Architecture, Proceedings of the 4th Seminar of the 2nd seminar series II: Theoretical Issues in Medieval Architecture* (Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum, June 13, 2008), Thessaloniki 2011, 75-76 (in Greek). Idem, “Αναζητώντας την αντίληψη του αστικού χώρου στο Βυζάντιο,” in T. Kioussopoulou (ed.), *Οι βυζαντινές πόλεις (8ος-15ος αι.)*. Προοπτικές της έρευνας και νέες ερμηνευτικές προσεγγίσεις, Rethymno 2012, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Basilus Caesariensis, *Homiliae in Psalmos*, PG, vol. 29, 492-493: “Διότι οὐκ ἐνὶ ἄρσεν καὶ θήλει ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει, ἀλλὰ μία τις ἐστὶ ζωὴ καὶ μονότροπος, εὐαρεστούντων τῷ ἑαυτῶν Δεσπότῃ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῶν ζώντων. Ὁ κόσμος οὗτος αὐτὸς τέ ἐστι θνητός, καὶ χωρίον ἀποθησκόντων. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ σύνθετός ἐστι τῶν ὁρωμένων ἢ σύστασις, τὸ δὲ σύνθετον ἅπαν διαλύεσθαι

πέφυκεν, οἱ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ὄντες, μέρη ὄντες τοῦ κόσμου, ἀναγκάως τῆς τοῦ παντὸς φύσεως ἀπολαύομεν. ... Ὅπου δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλλοίωσις οὔτε σώματος οὔτε ψυχῆς ... χώρα ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνη τῇ ὄντι ζώντων, ὁμοίῳ ὄντων ἀεὶ αὐτῶν ἑαυτοῖς. .... Ζώντων ἐκεῖνη χώρα, ἐν ᾗ οὐκ ἐνὶ νύξ, οὐκ ἐνὶ ὕπνος τὸ τοῦ θανάτου μῆμα: ἐν ᾗ οὐκ ἐνὶ βρώσις, οὐκ ἐνὶ πόσις, ... οὐκ ἐνὶ νόσος, οὐκ ἐνὶ ἀλγήματα, .... οὐ χρήματα, τῶν κακῶν ἡ ἀρχή, ἡ τῶν πολέμων ὑπόθεσις, ἡ ῥίζα τῆς ἔχθρας: ἀλλὰ χώρα ζώντων. .... τὴν ἀληθῆ ζῶν τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.”

<sup>17</sup> Eusebius Caesariensis, *Commentaria in Psalmos*, PG, vol. 23, 1359-1360.

<sup>18</sup> *Apocalypse* XXI 3-6: “Ἰδοὺ ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ σκηνώσει μετ’ αὐτῶν, καὶ αὐτοὶ λαοὶ αὐτοῦ ἔσονται, καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς μετ’ αὐτῶν ἔσται [αὐτῶν θεός], καὶ ἐξαλείψει πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν, καὶ ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι οὔτε πένθος οὔτε κραυγὴ οὔτε πόνος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι [ὅτι] τὰ πρῶτα ἀπῆλθον. καὶ εἶπεν ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ Ἰδοὺ καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα. ... ἐγὼ τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος. ἐγὼ τῷ διψῶντι δώσω ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος τῆς ζωῆς δωρεάν ...”.

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*,<sup>19</sup> synonymous 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 the 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.”<sup>20</sup>

The inscription *ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου* (*e chora tou achoretou*) that accompanies the figure of the Virgin was, as already noted above, 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*.<sup>21</sup> The earliest allusion to the *χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου* I know of is indirect and is found in the Comments on Psalms by Eusebius of Caesaria (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...”<sup>22</sup> 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 *achoretos*. Eusebius uses the words *χώρα* and *δοχεῖον* 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 *δοχεῖον* 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.<sup>23</sup>

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 (*χώρα*) of ideas, and god himself is mind. He has said [also] that the contemplative-intellectual god of the invisible god lives in the humans.”<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere he says: “because hard is to take hold

“... Ὡςπερ γὰρ ἡ Σιών, πόλις οὖσα τοῦ Θεοῦ, χώρα τυγχάνει τοῦ τεχθέντος ἐν αὐτῇ ἀνδρός, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ χώρα γίνεται καὶ δοχεῖον τοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ γεννηθέντος Θεοῦ Λόγου, ὡς ἐν ἱερῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ναῷ, μᾶλλον δὲ ὡς ἐν ἀγάλματι καὶ δοχείῳ τῆς αὐτοῦ θεότητος ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικησέως.”

<sup>19</sup> *Exodus* 3:14, see *Septuaginta* 1965, vol. I, 90: “Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν...”.  
<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 27d 28a: “τί τὸ δὲν αἰεὶ, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν αἰεὶ, δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ μὲν δὴ ... αἰεὶ κατὰ τ’ αὐτὰ ὄν, τὸ δ’ αὖ ... γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολύμενον, ὅντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν.” Ibid., 49a e, 50a, where the cyclic change (composition and decomposition) of all sensible things in the receptacle (*ὑποδοχή*) is discussed. I am citing from Plato IX, *Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles* (transl. R. G. Bury), Loeb Classical Library 234, 10th edition, Cambridge Mass. London 2005, 48 49, 112 115. I have also used the following: Πλάτων, *Τίμαιος* (ed. B. Kalfas), Athens 1995. Πλάτων, *Τίμαιος* (ed. Th. G. Mavropoulos), Thessa Ioniki 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, 41; Ousterhout, “The Virgin of the Chora,” 93, 97.  
<sup>22</sup> Eusebius Caesariensis, *Commentaria in Psalmos*, PG, v. 23, 1049:  
“... Ὡςπερ γὰρ ἡ Σιών, πόλις οὖσα τοῦ Θεοῦ, χώρα τυγχάνει τοῦ τεχθέντος ἐν αὐτῇ ἀνδρός, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ χώρα γίνεται καὶ δοχεῖον τοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ γεννηθέντος Θεοῦ Λόγου, ὡς ἐν ἱερῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ναῷ, μᾶλλον δὲ ὡς ἐν ἀγάλματι καὶ δοχείῳ τῆς αὐτοῦ θεότητος ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικησέως.”  
<sup>23</sup> Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. I, 41, 117 124; Ousterhout, “The Virgin of the Chora,” 98 100.  
<sup>24</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* IV, Cap. XXV. 155, 2: “εἰκότως οὖν καὶ Πλάτων τὸν τῶν ἰδεῶν θεωρητικὸν θεὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ζῆσεσθαι φησὶ νοῦς δὲ χώρα ἰδεῶν, νοῦς δὲ ὁ θεός, τὸν <οὖν> ἀοράτου θεοῦ θεωρητικὸν θεὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ζῶντα εἴρηκεν,” see L. Früchtel O. Stählin U. Treu, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol. 2, Berlin 1985, 317. *Apocalypse* XXI 3 6 claims too that God “shall dwell with” men (see above, n. 19).



of (δυσάλωτος) the realm of god, [the god] whom Plato has named the realm (χώρα) of ideas.”<sup>25</sup> 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 (δυσάλωτότατον) way partaking of the intelligible, we shall describe her truly.”<sup>26</sup> As usual since Antiquity, Clement identifies the concept of χώρα with that of ὑποδοχή.<sup>27</sup> Plato introduces and explains the ὑποδοχή as following:

“... it should be the receptacle, and as it were the nurse, of all Becoming”<sup>28</sup>; “... is the Mother and the Receptacle of this generated world, which [world] is perceptible by sight and all the senses...”<sup>29</sup>

By means of a metaphor, ὑποδοχή is given a gender that is female; in this context the word “receptacle” (ὑποδοχή) 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 ...”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 51a, b: “Διὸ καὶ τὴν τοῦ γεγονότος ὄρατοῦ καὶ πάντως αἰσθητοῦ μητέρα καὶ ὑποδοχὴν ... ἀνόρατον εἶδος τι καὶ ἄμορφον, πανδεχές, μεταλαμβάνον δὲ ἀπορώτατά πη τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ δυσάλωτότατον αὐτὸ λέγοντες οὐ ψευσόμεθα.”

<sup>27</sup> For the publications of Plato’s *Timaeus* I refer to in this paper, see above n. 20. Also see J. Derrida, *Khôra*, Paris 1993. Throughout his book, Derrida speaks of “χώρα” and “ὑποδοχή” indiscriminately. Also see A. Berque, “La chôra chez Platon,” in Th. Paquot Chr. Younès (eds), *Espace et lieu dans la pensée occidentale*, Paris 2012, 13 27. See also below, n. 34.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 49a: “... πάσης εἶναι γενέσεως ὑποδοχὴν αὐτό, οἷον τιθήνην.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 51a, “... τὴν τοῦ γεγονότος ὄρατοῦ καὶ πάντως αἰσθητοῦ μητέρα καὶ ὑποδοχὴν ...”

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 50d: “... καὶ διὰ καὶ προσεικάσαι πρέπει τὸ μὲν δεχόμενον μητρὶ, τὸ δ’ ὅθεν πατρὶ, τὴν δὲ μεταξὺ τούτων φύσιν ἐκγόνῳ, ...”

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 31b, “... ἀλλ’ εἰς ὃδε μονογενὴς οὐρανὸς γεγονὼς ἔστι τε καὶ ἔτ’ ἔσται.” See also Derrida, op.cit., 44: “Le cosmos est le ciel (*ouranos*) comme vivant visible et dieu sensible. Il est unique et seul de sa race, «monogène».” J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*.

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<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> *Timaeus*, especially, was at the centre of their interests concerning natural theology, the deity and many other things.<sup>33</sup> This explains the way in which they use the term *chora* (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.<sup>34</sup> 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

*he Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, New Haven 1993, 188, 199. In the 1st c., Philo of Alexandria in his *De somniis* I, 61 64, identifies three notions in the words χώρα, corresponding to the Platonic concepts of ὑποδοχή, Cosmos and Being; see P. Wendland, *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, vol. 3, Berlin 1898 (reprint 1962).

<sup>32</sup> Ivánka, op.cit., 83 289; Pelikan, op.cit., especially 9 10, 18 21, 94 97, 111, 114, 170, 187 188; H. Hunger, *Βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία. Ἡ λόγια κοσμικὴ γραμματεία τῶν Βυζαντινῶν*, vol. A’, Athens 1987 (original title: *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, Munich 1978), 50 54, 56 57 ff, 92 96; C. Mango, *Βυζάντιο. Ἡ αὐτοκρατορία τῆς νέας Ρώμης*, Athens 1988 (original title: *Byzantium. The Empire of New Rome*, London 1980), 160 161; I. Ševčenko, “A Shadow Outline of Virtue: The Classical Heritage of Greek Christian Literature (Second to Seventh Century),” in K. Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, New York 1980, 53 73; H. Chadwick, “Philosophical Tradition and the Self,” in G. B. Bowersock P. Brown O. Grabar (eds), *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World*, Cambridge Mass. London 1999, 60 81, especially 61 63, 75 77; N. Constan, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity*, Leiden 2003, 16 22, especially 21.

<sup>33</sup> See previous note but especially Pelikan, op.cit., 20, 95 96, 188.

<sup>34</sup> *Timaeus* (ed. Bury), op.cit. (n. 20), 10 11. *Τίμαιος* (ed. Kalfas), op.cit. (n. 20), 135 136 ff. *Τίμαιος* (ed. Mavropoulos), op.cit. (n. 20), 466 470. See also above, n. 27.

(τόποι) where beings can be. It has the same sense as in the phrase λαμβάνω χώραν, ἔχω χώραν, that is, “to have place,” to happen or, in French, *avoir lieu*. This phrase, colloquial in antiquity, is used in the introductory definition of *chora* in *Timaeus* in order to explain it in a fairly “simple” manner: “... we say that it is necessary that every being should be in some place (ἐν τινι τόπῳ) and occupy some space (χώραν τινά), and that what is not in the earth or somewhere in the sky is nothing.”<sup>35</sup> It is the concept of what later was defined by Descartes as the geometric three-dimensional space.<sup>36</sup> Ὑποδοχή is the χώρα filled with the matter of sensible beings - matter that changes perpetually. Χώρα has no material substance, ὑποδοχή has adopted matter. If χώρα is space, room (in the sense of the German *Raum*), ὑποδοχή is space’s adopted properties, its δύναμις.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, ὑποδοχή can be described through its multiple adopted properties and the innumerable metamorphoses it appears to go under. Χώρα cannot be described, it can be grasped only in terms of words (λόγος). Ὑποδοχή can be grasped in terms of imagery and narrative. I think this might explain why in later times and in Christian contexts, the term χώρα, understood as bearing the physical properties adopted by the ὑποδοχή, has prevailed.

After all, it seems as a matter of course that the Mother of God was identified with the *chora* (see *hypodochē*) as God’s receptacle during pregnancy. The musical assonance and the intellectual associations in the Greek phrase *He chora tou achoretou* contribute a metaphysical depth that escapes any translation. Especially the “container of the uncontainable,” which sometimes is preferred because it sounds technically correct, deprives *chora* of all its depth. In visual terms, the image of Virgin Mary with Child Christ in an aureole on her breast seems

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.<sup>38</sup> 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 ὑποδοχή. The aureole enclosing child Christ may be seen as an allusion to the world’s being

“... round, in the shape of a sphere ...”<sup>39</sup>

The depiction of the ὑποδοχή as a woman, in this case as the Virgin Mary, gives a visual-sensible form to χώρα (see ὑποδοχή) according to the metaphor provided in Plato’s *Timaeus*, as mentioned above.<sup>40</sup> Besides this metaphor or, rather, the personification of the ὑποδοχή, 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, ...”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> My translation; *Timaeus*, 52b: “... καὶ φαμεν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναί που τὸ δὴν ἅπαν ἐν τινι τόπῳ καὶ κατέχον χώραν τινά, τὸ δὲ μήτε ἐν γῇ μήτε που κατ’ οὐρανὸν οὐδὲν εἶναι.”

<sup>36</sup> R. Descartes, *La Géométrie*, Paris 1886 (new edition).

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, op.cit. (n. 27), 30, puts the question rhetorically: “Il y a *khôra*, on peut même s’interroger sur sa *physis* et sa *dynamis* ...”; he does not aim to providing any answer to his potential question.

<sup>38</sup> For a 4th century image of the Virgin (or possibly a diseased mother) orant with Christ child (or possibly the diseased child of the mother) in her breast see: A. Grabar, *Le premier art Chrétien (200-395)*, Paris 1966, 211, fig. 232; also M. Andaloro, *La pittura medievale a Roma. L’orizzonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468*, Rome 2006, 158-159. For the Virgin holding the Christ child in an aureole (dating from the 400 to the 7th c.), see A. Grabar, *L’age*

*d’or de Justinien*, Paris 1966, 170-174, figs 180, 193; Chr. Baltayan ni, “The Mother of God in Portable Icons,” in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, Athens-Milan 2000, 139-142. The very moment of the incarnation of God’s Word in Virgin Mary’s womb is elegantly but forcefully rendered in the Annunciation icon at the monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai, see H. C. Evans-W. D. Wixom (eds), *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era. A.D. 843-1261*, New York 1997, 374-375, fig. 246 (A. Weyl Carr).

<sup>39</sup> *Timaeus*, 33b: “... σφαιροειδὲς ... κυκλοτερές...”

<sup>40</sup> See also n. 28-30.

<sup>41</sup> *Timaeus*, 50b, c: “ὁ αὐτὸς δὴ λόγος καὶ περὶ τῆς τὰ πάντα δεχομένης σώματος φύσεως ταῦτ’ οὖν αὐτὴν ἀεὶ προσρητέον· ἐκ γὰρ τῆς αὐτῆς τὸ παράπαν οὐκ ἐξίσταται δυνάμει δέχεται τε γὰρ

Therefore, the identification of the Virgin Mary with the *χώρα/ὑποδοχή* 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.<sup>42</sup> 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 *ὑποδοχή* is described as a medium in which the beings of the sensible world are stamped (*τυπωθέντα, ἐκτυπούμενον*).<sup>43</sup> Because they act exactly in the same way as written metaphors do (that is, they substitute the real substance behind the metaphor),<sup>44</sup> they can be depicted without the provision of any written or pictorial help for their interpretation, as happens for instance in the Kokkinobaphos manuscripts.<sup>45</sup>

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 *χώρος*, i.e., space. *ὑποδοχή* 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 *ὑποδοχή* 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 *ὑποδοχή*), was imbued

with Christian metaphysical connotations related to Plato’s metaphors for *ὑποδοχή*. The epithet *ἡ χώρα τῶν ζώντων* for Christ as the Being (*ὁ Ὄν*) appears the latest in the early 4th century and refers to eternity in the afterlife. The epithet *ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου* for Virgin 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, *ktetor* of the church and, undoubtedly, the intellectual author of the iconographic program, chose the epithets as a play upon the name of the monastery.<sup>46</sup> 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 ζώντων* 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 eastward view, toward the sanctuary and altar, stresses Christ and salvation, leading to the Eucharist at the altar.”<sup>47</sup> Ousterhout continues: “However, looking back from the

αἰεὶ τὰ πάντα, καὶ μορφὴν οὐδεμίαν ποτὲ οὐδενὶ τῶν εἰσιόντων ὁμοίαν εἴληφεν οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς· ἐκμαγεῖον γὰρ παντὶ κεῖται, κινούμενον τε καὶ διασηματιζόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν εἰσιόντων φαίνεται δι’ ἐκείνα ἄλλοτε ἄλλοιον. τὰ δὲ εἰσιόντα καὶ ἐξιόντα τῶν ὄντων αἰεὶ μῦήματα, τυπωθέντα ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τρόπον τινὰ δύσφραστον καὶ θαυμαστόν, ...”

<sup>42</sup> Conostas, Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin. M. B. Cunningham, “The Meeting of the Old and the New: the Typology of Mary the Theotokos in Byzantine Homilies and Hymns,” in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *Studies in Church History*, vol. 39, *The Church and Mary*, Woodbridge Suffolk 2004 52 62.

<sup>43</sup> See *Timaeus*, 50c, d. See also above n. 41.

<sup>44</sup> T. Tanoulas, “‘Ὅραμ’ ἐρατεινόν. Architecture and Rhetoric (eleventh to fifteenth centuries),” *Byzantium matures. Choices, Sensitivities, and Modes of Expression (eleventh to fifteenth centuries)*, in Chr. A. Angelidi (ed.), Athens 2004, 313 339, especially 313.

<sup>45</sup> 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. (n. 12), 133 149, pl. 9.1 9.5.

<sup>46</sup> Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, 39; Ousterhout, “The Virgin of the Chora,” 96.

<sup>47</sup> Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, 168 169; Ousterhout, “The Virgin of the Chora,” 99 100.



inner narthex, it is the Virgin and the Incarnation that are given prominence.”<sup>48</sup> There is no doubt about this. I think that the sequence starts with the Hodegetria of the templon, inscribed *ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου*, goes to the Koimesis 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 culminates in the figure of the Virgin orant with Christ Child in a medallion, inscribed *ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου*, 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.<sup>49</sup> 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 stresses 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 reputation after his death. In Ihor 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, remembered by unending generations of other mortals.”<sup>50</sup> There can be no doubt that most of the information provided 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 astonishing polymath in virtually every field of classical or Christian literature.<sup>51</sup> In his writings he shows a preference for using the word *χώρα*, most probably for the multiple nuances it was endowed with by Plato, Platonist and neo-Platonist philosophers, the early Church Fathers and hymnographers.<sup>52</sup> For example, in his poems, Metochites names the Virgin Mary with some versions of the epithet *χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου*.<sup>53</sup> He also uses the expression *χώρα ... ἄσυλος* when asking Gregoras to become an unassailable domain around his mental offspring in order to protect them against every possible vicissitude. In this context, *χώρα* has a sense very close to the sense traced in the epithets of Christ and the Virgin Mary discussed above.<sup>54</sup> He also often uses the expressions *χώραν διδόναι* (to make- or allow to- happen, to bring into existence)<sup>55</sup> and *χώραν ἔχειν* (to happen, to come into existence) which were colloquial in classical antiquity.<sup>56</sup> Metochites also uses the expression *χώρα τοῦ νοῦ* in the same way we have seen it above used by Clement of Alexandria.<sup>57</sup> In his Epitaph for Theodora Palaiologina he uses the expression *ταῦτα χώραν τινά ... ἔχει* which could have derived directly from Plato, *Timaeus* 52b.<sup>58</sup> He also uses the word often in its common sense of “territory,” “land,” “place” etc. As far as Metochites’s “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 Metochites’s intellectual persona was essentially relying on his readings and his writings. He was indeed a prolific reader

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> 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.

<sup>50</sup> I. Ševčenko, “Theodore Metochites, The Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of his Time,” in Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4, 55.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., especially 37–51.

<sup>52</sup> The influences of hymnography on the decorative program of the Chora have already been noted; see Ousterhout, “The Virgin of the Chora,” 97.

<sup>53</sup> J. M. Featherstone, “*Theodore Metochites’s Poems to Himself*,” Vienna 2000, 90 (Poem XVII, lines 393–394): “... ἀχωρήτοιο διὰ πάντεσσι χώρα, ...”; 110 (Poem XVIII, line 394): “... χώραν νύ τ’ ἀχωρήτου ...”; 130 (Poem XIX, line 384): “... ἀχωρήτοιο χώραν ...”

<sup>54</sup> J. M. Featherstone – I. Ševčenko, “Two Poems of Theodore Metochites,” *GOTHR* 26 (1981), 1–46 (Poem IV, line 341); J. M. Featherstone, “Metochites’s Poems and the Chora,” in H. A. Klein – R. G.

Ousterhout – B. Pitarakis (eds), *The Kariye Camii Reconsidered / Kariye Camii, Yeniden*, Istanbul 2011, 213–237, especially 222, 235–236.

<sup>55</sup> Θεόδωρος Μετοχίτης, *Γνωμικαὶ σημειώσεις, Περὶ τῆς ἀσαφείας τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους συνταγμάτων*, Γ’, 7, line 1, see K. Hult, *Theodore Metochites on Ancient Authors and Philosophy*, Göteborg 2002, 44, line 20.

<sup>56</sup> Θεόδωρος Μετοχίτης, *Ἡθικὸς ἢ περὶ παιδείας*, 10, line 16 (fol. 195v), I. D. Polemis (ed.), Athens 1995, 82, line 18.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 32, lines 50–51 (f. 211), see Polemis (ed.), *op.cit.*, 164, lines 14–15.

<sup>58</sup> Θεόδωρος Μετοχίτης, *Μονωδία ἐπὶ τῇ βασιλίδι Θεοδώρα, τῇ τοῦ βασιλέως μητρὶ*, lines 20–21 (ed. A. Sideras), *25 unedierte byzantinische Grabreden* (Κλασικὰ Γράμματα), Thessaloniki 1990, 256; *id.*, *Die byzantinische Grabreden*, Vienna 1994, 262–264. For Plato’s text see above n. 35.

and writer. In his writings, for which he coined his own peculiar “ancient Greek,”<sup>59</sup> 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<sup>60</sup> 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 Achoretou* 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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 *Ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου* and *Ἡ 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.<sup>63</sup> 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 notional network discussed above, has preserved the meaning 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 Seferis’s poem “Ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχώρητου.” 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.

“There 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 wild pains  
the heart will be purified  
.....  
will set me free,  
will give me back myself,  
...”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Ševčenko, “Metochites and Intellectual Trends,” op.cit. (n. 50), 28; Featherstone, “Metochites’s Poems and the Chora,” op.cit., 217.

<sup>60</sup> This becomes clear when trying to visualize what Metochites’s “descriptions” are about. See: T. Papamastorakis, “The Discreet Charm of the Visible,” in *Byzantium Matures*, op.cit. (n. 44), 123–126; Tanoulas, “Ὅραμ’ ἐρατεινόν. Architecture and Rhetoric,” op.cit. (n. 44), 336–337; id., “Aspects of Architectural Space in Byzantine Literature,” op.cit. (n. 15), 82–83, 86–87; P. Magdalino, “Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and Constantinople,” in Holger et al. (eds), *The Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, op.cit. (n. 54), 171–172; Featherstone, “Metochites’s Poems and the Chora,” op.cit. (n. 54), 220–221.

<sup>61</sup> Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 1, pp. 217–222; Ousterhout, “Temporal Structuring,” op.cit. (n. 9), 69–70.

<sup>62</sup> 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 *recherché* 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.”

<sup>63</sup> I. Vitaliotis, “A Byzantine Depiction of the Mother of God ‘The Dwelling Place of the Uncontainable’ (*Ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου*) in a Church of SE. Albania,” *Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies* (Sofia, 22–27 August 2011), vol. III, Abstracts of Free Communications, Sofia 2011, 341–342.

<sup>64</sup> “Es gibt ein Reich, wo alles rein ist:  
Es hat auch einen Namen:  
Totenreich.  
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 4<sup>65</sup> 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 σκήσει χόραν*,<sup>66</sup> 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,  
....."<sup>67</sup>

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Hermes heissen sie ihn.  
Mit seinem Stab  
Regiert er die Seelen:

.....  
Ach, von allen wilden Schmerzen  
Muss das Hertz gereinigt sein.

.....  
Du wirst mich befreien,  
Mir selber mich geben'

.....".

<sup>65</sup> Or from Paul's Epistle to the Romans VI, 9, see Cl. Emery, *The*

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*World of Dylan Thomas*, Miami Beach 1962, 210.

<sup>66</sup> It has been noted above (see also above n. 35) that in classical Greek "χόραν ἔχειν" means to be, to happen.

<sup>67</sup> "Εἶναι μιὰ χόρα κι' ἕνας χρόνος  
ὅπου χωρεῖ ὅ,τι δὲ χώρεσε ἡ ζωὴ μας  
ὅπου ἡ θάλασσα σὰν τὸ γυαλὶ ἀστράφτει  
μὲ τὰ χρώματα ὀνείρων ποὺ παγίδεψε ἡ ψυχὴ μας  
ἀπ' τοὺς στρατοὺς τοῦ ἔρωτα στὸ φύλλωμα τοῦ ἀπείρου.  
'Εκεῖ τότε,  
....."

## ΧΩΡΑ: ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΕΣ ΟΨΕΙΣ ΜΙΑΣ ΠΛΑΤΩΝΙΚΗΣ ΙΔΕΑΣ

Η λέξη *χώρα* απαντάται σε επιγραφές παραστάσεων μνημειακής ζωγραφικής, για πρώτη φορά στο α' τέταρτο του 14ου αιώνα, στη Μονή της Χώρας στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Η επιγραφή *ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου* συνοδεύει τη μορφή της Παναγίας σε δύο περιπτώσεις, ενώ η επιγραφή *ἡ χώρα τῶν ζώντων* συνοδεύει τη μορφή του Χριστού σε τρεις περιπτώσεις.

Έχει εντοπιστεί η καταγωγή της προσωνυμίας *ἡ χώρα τῶν ζώντων* από τους Ψαλμούς του Δαυΐδ (114, 9). Μια έρευνα, όμως, στα σχόλια που έγραψαν για τους Ψαλμούς του Δαυΐδ ο Μέγας Βασίλειος (4ος αι.) και ο Ευσέβιος Καισαρείας (3ος-4ος αι.) δείχνει ότι *χώρα τῶν ζώντων* είναι η μετά θάνατον ζωή των πιστών Χριστιανών, δηλαδή μια χριστιανική ουτοπία όπου οι πιστοί θα ζουν σε αιώνια μακαριότητα. Τα σχόλιά τους εμπνέονται από το χωρίο XXI 3-6 της Αποκάλυψης του Ιωάννη, όμως οι όροι που χρησιμοποιούν προέρχονται από τον *Τίμαιο* του Πλάτωνα. Έχει ήδη αναγνωριστεί ότι η προσωνυμία *ἡ χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου* προέρχεται από τον Ακάθιστο Ύμνο, καθώς και η ύπαρξη άλλων διατυπώσεων, όπως *τὸ χωρίον τοῦ ἀχωρήτου* του Κυρίλλου Αλεξανδρείας (4ος-5ος αι.). Ανατρέχοντας, όμως, σε παλαιότερες πηγές, βλέπουμε ότι ο Ευσέβιος Καισαρείας, τουλάχιστον ένα αιώνα νωρίτερα, ορίζει έμμεσα, πλην όμως σαφώς, την Παναγία ως *χώρα τοῦ ἀχωρήτου*, ενώ ο Κλήμης Αλεξανδρείας (2ος-3ος αι.), στους *Στρωματεῖς*, ορίζει τη *χώρα* με καθαρά πλατωνικούς όρους. Επίσης, ο Κλήμης ορίζει τη *χώρα* ως *δυσάλωτον*, ενώ ο Πλάτων χρησιμοποιεί το ίδιο επίθετο για να ορίσει την *ὑποδοχή*, μια πλατωνική έννοια σε άμεση συνάρτηση με τη *χώρα*.

Στον *Τίμαιο*, η λέξη *χώρα* αναφέρεται δύο μόνο φορές με όρους συνοπτικούς και αφηρημένους και δεν υπάρχει αμφιβολία ότι αντιστοιχεί στη νεοελληνική λέξη *χώρος*. Σημαίνει, δηλαδή, το τρισδιάστατο διάστημα του Καρτέσιου, που ο Καντ θεώρησε ως *a priori* συνθήκη για τη διά των αισθήσεων κατανόηση των φαινομένων αυτού του κόσμου. Αντίθετα, η έννοια της *ὑποδοχής* περιγράφεται στον *Τίμαιο* με εικόνες, μεταφορές και παραβολές, που δηλώνουν ότι για τον Πλάτωνα η *ὑποδοχή* είναι μεν η *χώρα*, αλλά γεμάτη με τα δημιουργήματα

του αισθητού κόσμου. Για τον Πλάτωνα η *χώρα* γίνεται αντιληπτή μόνο διά του λόγου, ενώ η *ὑποδοχή* γίνεται αντιληπτή μέσα από τα πράγματα τα οποία την καταλαμβάνουν και αποτυπώνονται σ' αυτήν όπως σε *τύπο* (εκμαγείο), με αποτέλεσμα η *ὑποδοχή* να φαίνεται ότι μπορεί να λάβει τη μορφή οιοδήποτε αισθητού όντος, ενώ στην πραγματικότητα μένει πάντοτε αναλλοίωτη, δηλαδή παραμένει πάντοτε αυτούσια η *χώρα*. Ήδη στην αρχαιότητα, οι έννοιες της *χώρας* και της *ὑποδοχής* συμψύρονται. Οι Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας στους πρώτους αιώνες της ιστορίας της, προκειμένου να διαμορφώσουν μια φυσική θεολογία μέσα σε χριστιανικά πλαίσια, καταφεύγουν στο έργο του Πλάτωνα και, κατ'εξοχήν, στον *Τίμαιο*. Ο ιδεαλισμός και οι μεταφυσικές προεκτάσεις του πλατωνισμού ήταν μια υποδομή που υπηρέτησε τα ζητήματα του χριστιανισμού, παρέχοντάς τους μια έτοιμη ορολογία και οργάνωση, που τους επέτρεψε να εμφανιστούν με φιλοσοφική δομή και κύρος. Στο πλαίσιο αυτό, υιοθετήθηκαν πολλές εικόνες, μεταφορές και παραβολές, μέσω των οποίων ο Πλάτων ορίζει τις ιδιότητες που φαίνεται να διαθέτει η *ὑποδοχή*, και χρησιμοποιήθηκαν για τη δημιουργία μορφών στην υπηρεσία της νέας θρησκείας, σε επίπεδο τόσο εικονογραφίας όσο και λόγου. Εν τέλει, ο πρωτογενής όρος *χώρα*, που ανταποκρίνεται σε μια έννοια αφηρημένη και αντιληπτή μόνο μέσω του λόγου, επικράτησε του δευτερογενούς όρου *ὑποδοχή*, κληρονομώντας και όλα τα αισθητά χαρακτηριστικά μέσω των οποίων η *ὑποδοχή* γίνεται αντιληπτή. Τα παραπάνω εξηγούν το γεγονός ότι η *χώρα/ὑποδοχή* ταυτίζεται με την Παναγία. Πράγματι, ο Πλάτων παρομοιάζει την *ὑποδοχή* με τροφό που υποδέχεται και φιλοξενεί όλα τα όντα του αισθητού κόσμου, δηλαδή του δικού μας κόσμου που είναι και το μοναδικό αντίγραφο του (πλατωνικού) *ὄντος*. Επιπλέον, παραβάλλει τη σχέση του *ὄντος*, της *ὑποδοχής* και του αισθητού κόσμου με τη σχέση πατέρα-μητέρας-τέκνου. Οι αναλογίες αυτού του σχήματος με το σχήμα Θεός Πατήρ-Παναγία-Χριστός είναι προφανείς. Όπως, λοιπόν, ο αισθητός κόσμος (που παραβάλλεται ως τέκνο του *ὄντος* και της *ὑποδοχής/χώρας*) είναι κατά τον Πλάτωνα *μονογενής*, έτσι και ο Χριστός,



στο Σύμβολο της Πίστεως ονομάζεται μονογενής υιός του Πατρός. Η μορφή της δεομένης Παναγίας με τον Χριστό μέσα σε μετάλλιο στο στήθος της, όπως εικονίζεται στον εξωνάρθηκα του καθολικού της Μονής της Χώρας, φαίνεται να εικονογραφεί ιδανικά την ιδέα της *χώρας τοῦ ἄχωρήτου*, όπου ο Χριστός συνελήφθη και κυφορήθηκε, για το λόγο αυτό και συμβολίζει την ενσάρκωσή του. Με τις άπειρες μεταμορφώσεις στις οποίες φαίνεται να υπόκειται η *ὑποδοχή*, φαίνεται να συνδέονται και οι άπειρες μορφές (τύποι ή προεικονίσεις) 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 του διάκοσμος ήταν σπουδαία επιτεύγματα, αντιπροσωπευτικά της προσωπικότητάς του ως εκπρόσωπου της ανώτατης κοινωνικής και πνευματικής ελίτ

της εποχής του. Δεν υπάρχει αμφιβολία ότι η επιλογή των προσωνυμιών *ἡ Χώρα τοῦ ἄχωρήτου* και *ἡ Χώρα τῶν ζώντων* έγινε συνειδητά από τον ίδιο και τοποθετήθηκαν σε καίριες θέσεις μέσα στο συνολικό εικονογραφικό διάκοσμο του ναού, με στόχο να τονίσουν τον κοιμητηριακό χαρακτήρα του και τη μετά 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 απαντά η επιγραφή *ἡ Χώρα τοῦ ἄχωρήτου*. Εντούτοις, η λέξη *χώρα*, στην ελληνική γλώσσα, αλλά και στις αποδόσεις της σε άλλες ευρωπαϊκές γλώσσες, εξακολουθεί να διατηρεί, ιδιαίτερα στην ποίηση, τον υπερβατικό χαρακτήρα που συνδέεται με την πλατωνική και νεοπλατωνική παράδοση, καθώς και με την παράδοση που καλλιεργήθηκε από τους Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας στην Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα.