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Εικονογραφία στην Ελληνική Εκκλησία

Voiles du Bêma orthodoxe-grecs d'époque ottomane : symbolismes et iconographie dans l'Église grecque

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Notes on the Sanctuary Curtain: Symbolisms and Iconographies in the Greek Church

Abstract: This article will discuss the different types of textiles used as curtains for the sanctuary door by the Greek Orthodox Church during the Ottoman period. For this case study, our selection of representative pieces offers a survey of the Church's dominant textile consumption and exhibition practices, providing new insights on ecclesiastical material culture. Sanctuary doors are situated in the middle of the iconostasis, usually a wooden wall separating the *naos* (nave) from the sanctuary. First of all, we analyze the symbolisms of the sanctuary door and of the veil, in order to proceed with the survey of textiles used as curtains for this particularly holy location in the church. Then, our survey is divided into two different sections: one dedicated to the examples which follow the Byzantine tradition of embroidery; and another to the Ottoman and Safavid textiles used by the Greek Church as substitutes. One of this paper's important contributions lies on the fact that it reveals a complex set of parallel usages of textiles which belong to different artistic traditions, thus, illuminating another point of contact between the enduring Byzantine tradition and the Ottoman cultural environment.

Keywords: ecclesiastical material culture, iconostasis, Ottoman period, sanctuary door curtain

Παρατηρήσεις πάνω στα Πετάσματα Ωραιάς Πύλης: Συμβολισμοί και Εικονογραφία στην Ελληνική Εκκλησία

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει τα υφάσματα που χρησιμοποιούνταν ως Πετάσματα Ωραιάς Πύλης από την Ελληνική Εκκλησία κατά την Οθωμανική περίοδο. Σκοπός είναι να διαφωτιστεί ένας σχετικά άγνωστος τομέας του εκκλησιαστικού υλικού πολιτισμού της εποχής με αντιπροσωπευτικά δείγματα. Το βημόθυρο βρίσκεται στη μέση του τέμπλου/εικονοστασίου, που χωρίζει τον κυρίως ναό από το ιερό. Το άρθρο αγγίζει πρώτα τους συμβολισμούς της Ωραιάς Πύλης και του Πέπλου/Πετάσματος, προκειμένου να προχωρήσει στην επισκόπηση των διαφόρων υφασμάτων που χρησιμοποιούνται για αυτή

την ιδιαίτερα ιερή θέση στην εκκλησία. Η έρευνα χωρίζεται σε δύο τμήματα: το ένα, αφιερωμένο στα πετάσματα που ακολουθούν τη Βυζαντινή παράδοση, και το δεύτερο, στα Οθωμανικά και Σαφαβιδικά πετάσματα που χρησιμοποιούνται από την Ελληνική Εκκλησία. Μια από τις σημαντικές συμβολές της παρούσας μελέτης έγκειται στο ότι αποκαλύπτει τις παράλληλες χρήσεις των πετασμάτων που ανήκουν σε διαφορετικές καλλιτεχνικές παραδόσεις. Ουσιαστικά, η ποικιλομορφία των Πετασμάτων Ωραίας Πύλης φωτίζει ένα ακόμη σημείο ώσμωσης μεταξύ Βυζαντινής παραδόσεως και ανατολικών πολιτιστικών στοιχείων κατά την Οθωμανική περίοδο.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά : εικονοστάσιο, Οθωμανική περίοδος, Πετάσματα Ωραίας Πύλης, υφάσματα στην Ελληνική Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία

Voiles du Bêma orthodoxe-grecs d'époque ottomane

La présente étude a comme but d'examiner un secteur d'art religieux orthodoxe grec de la période ottomane relativement inconnu en utilisant des exemples représentatifs. Le Bêma se trouve au milieu de l'iconostase qui sépare le chœur du naos. L'étude s'occupe, d'abord, des valeurs symboliques attachées au Bêma et au Voile et, ensuite, d'une recherche des textiles utilisés dans ce lieu sacré. Elle se divise en deux parties : une première partie est dédiée aux voiles du Bêma brodés selon la tradition byzantine et une seconde, à ceux faits de tissus de base ottomans et safavides et utilisés par l'Église orthodoxe grecque. Une des contributions de cette étude consiste à ce qu'elle découvre les usages parallèles des voiles du Bêma qui appartiennent à des cultures différentes. En fait, ces usages parallèles mettent en valeur un autre aspect de l'osmose entre la tradition byzantine et divers éléments de cultures orientales durant l'époque ottomane.

Mots-clefs : Bêma, époque ottomane, iconostase, textiles dans l'Église orthodoxe grecque, Voile du Bêma,

Notes on the Sanctuary Curtain: Symbolisms and Iconographies in the Greek Church

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Introduction: The Symbolism of the Sanctuary Door

In later Byzantine churches the sanctuary curtain comprises part of the icon screen (*templon*/iconostasis), which shields the altar from the congregation's view.¹ This screen developed from a low barrier in the churches of the Early Christian era,² before finally crystallizing as a taller screen in the late Byzantine period.³ This

1. See principally GRABAR, 1961, p. 13-22; CHATZIDAKIS, 1966, p. 326-353; WALTER, 1993, p. 203-228; LIDOV, 2000. On the theology of the icon screen, see CONSTAS, 2006, p. 162-183.

2. Read the monograph by STOUFFI-POULIMENOU, 1999.

3. For an interesting analysis of the evolution of the sanctuary screen during the Late Byzantine period, see GERSTEL, 2006, p. 134-161. Also see PAPADEMETRIOU, 2008.

enclosure and its veiled portal were inspired by two Jewish monuments of the Old Testament, the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon, which were divided between the areas known as the Holy of Holies and Greater House by means of a curtain; it is linked also to the expressions of Christian belief that the invisible God had been revealed to the world through paradoxical concealment behind a veil of flesh. Thus, the sanctuary curtain is symbolically connected to the most sacred part of the Byzantine church, the sanctuary, which in turn symbolically leads to Heaven. It is also related to the notions of the door and the veil. In the first part of this paper we analyse this symbolism.

The Sanctuary

The Church is correlated to the universe in Christian thought and consists of symbols representing both the intelligible and sensible worlds.⁴ The invisible heavenly world is symbolised by the sanctuary whereas the rest of the church represents the sensible, earthly realm. As a barrier, the icon screen represents the limits of these separate worlds.⁵ However, these two spheres are in conjunction (συζυγία or σύζευξη) and lead to the unity of the human body and soul, as well as to the unity of the militant and the triumphant Church.⁶ Such symbolic meaning dominated the thought of Greek theologians in early Christian times.⁷ The Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon hold an important place in theological literature on typology and allegory.⁸ A correlation was made between the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies of the Jewish temple: for Apostle Paul, the Tabernacle prefigured the true tent set up, not by man, but by God.⁹ Theological approaches

4. EUSEBIUS OF CAESARIA, PG. 20, col. 877-880; DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, PG. 3, col. 137A-C, 425C and 445C. Also PROCOPIOU, 1980. In this article the abbreviation PG. is used for MIGNE's *Patrologia Graeca*.

5. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, PG. 37, col. 1232-1233: «Βῆμα τὸδ' ἀγγελικῇ συχοροστασίῃσι τεθελὸς / Κιγκλίδα τὴν μέσα τῶν κόσμων δύο, τοῦδε μένοντος / Τοῦ τε περιπταμένοιο».

6. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, PG. 35, col. 988C: «... καὶ τῆς κατὰ σῶμα καὶ ψυχὴν συζυγίας καὶ διαζεύξεως, καὶ τῶν κόσμων, τοῦ τε παρόντος καὶ οὐχ ἑστῶτος, καὶ τοῦ νοουμένου καὶ μένοντος».

7. See also DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, PG. 3, 137AC, 425C and 445C; SYMEON OF THESSALONICA, PG. 155, col. 345.

8. STOUFFI-POULIMENOU, 1999, p. 128.

9. *Hebrews* 8, 2-3. "...a minister (=Christ) in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord"; *Hebrews* 9, 11-12: "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent

underline the typological interpretation of the tent and its symbolic connection with the Incarnation and Church (Ecclesia).¹⁰ Just as the Holy of Holies was accessible only to the archpriest, the sanctuary was accessible principally to the priests and the bishop. Both places have allegorical connections with the heavenly and intelligible world, whereas the rest of the temple or church symbolises the earthly and sensitive reality of this world.¹¹ Like the veil that separated the temple into its two parts allegorically representing the firmament, the church icon screen represents the limit of two worlds, one of the deity and the other of humans.¹² The Holy of Holies is the place of epiphany and of the revelation of the Divine Will.¹³ Thus, from the early Christian era until the later Byzantine period, the sanctuary (ιερόν βήμα), and the cupola were seen by the Church Fathers as symbolic of the heavenly realms above the firmament.

The Door and the Veil

The curtain on the icon screen's sanctuary door is related also to two other notions discussed within a theological hermeneutic framework: the "door" and the "veil". Within that context, Christ is the "door" through which the faithful enters into life: «Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ἡ θύρα. Δι' ἐμοῦ ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ σωθήσεται» ("I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he will be saved": *John*, 10:9). The idea of the

(not made with hands, that is not of this creation) he entered once and for all into the Holy Place taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption'.

10. For the Incarnation, see GREGORY OF NYSSA, PG 44, col. 380-385; on Ecclesia, see, PG. 1, col. 660D: «τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἥτις ἦν τύπος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας κατὰ πάντα».

11. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, PG. 9, col. 57A sq; JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, PG. 63, col. 117a': «λέγει δὲ Ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων τὸν οὐρανόν, τὸ αὐτὸ δὲ καὶ καταπέτασμα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ». THEODORET OF CYRUS, PG. 80, col. 281A-B.

12. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, PG. 63, col. 117a'. THEODORET OF CYRUS, PG. 80, col. 281A-B: «ἐν μέσῳ δὲ τὸ καταπέτασμα διατείνας, ἐν τύπῳ στερεώματος, διχῇ διεῖλεν αὐτήν, καὶ τὸ μὲν παρὰ τὴν θύραν μέρος ἐκάλεσεν ἅγια. Τὸ δὲ τοῦ καταπετάσματος ἔνδον Ἅγια ἁγίων ὠνόμασεν... οὕτως ἔξω μὲν τοῦ καταπετάσματος εἰσιτοῦς ἦν τοῖς ἱερεῦσι. Τὰ δὲ ἔνδον ἄψαυστα ἦν, καὶ ἄδυστα, καὶ ἀνάκτορα». EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, PG. 20, col. 1320B: «μέσος δ' ἀμφιβέβληται μέγας οὐρανὸς περιπέτασμα κυάνεον, τοὺς ἐκτός, τῶν εἰσω βασιλικῶν οἰκῶν διεῖργον».

13. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, PG. 49, col. 357ε': «Εἰ τοίνυν, ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς Σκηνοπηγίας εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς μόνος, φέρε λοιπὸν ἀποδείξωμεν, ὅτι τότε ὥφθη ὁ ἄγγελος τῷ Ζαχαρία ἡνίκα εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων ἦν... Ὅρᾳς ὅτι ἐσωτέρω τοῦ καταπετάσματος ἦν. Τότε τοίνυν εὐηγγελίσθη».

“closed door” is correlated with the impenetrable veil of Holy of Holies,¹⁴ both of which are also metaphors for the Virgin Mary’s purity. Since Antiquity, the veil has had a very rich allegorical interpretation in connection with religious rites. The Greek words *καταπέτασμα* or *παραπέτασμα*, and the Latin word “velum” generally refer to a curtain extended to a threshold, placed before a window, or on a wall.¹⁵ “Velum” more precisely denotes the curtain of a temple used to shield the Divine image, opened only on the occasion of the great feasts. Associations of cult and religion in relation to the veil continue to exist in the Christian Church and its arts.¹⁶ In the Old Testament the velum had different connotations: first, it signified the veil in the aforementioned tent between the Holy of Holies and the rest of the space;¹⁷ secondly, it recalled the curtain (screen) for the gate of the court of the tabernacle.¹⁸ On the other hand, in the New Testament the veil of the temple is torn apart the moment Christ died.¹⁹ Thus, the idea that the sacrifice of Christ paved the way for the Holy of the Holies is connected with this event. Theologians comparing the earthly temple to the archetypal heavenly one recall that the Great Priest, meaning Christ, went through the veil and, with Him, the rest of mankind.²⁰ Moreover, like the veil and firmament symbolically separating heaven from the earth, Moses separated the Temple using a veil.²¹ For

14. EZEKIEL 44, 2: “... This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel has entered by it. Therefore, it shall remain close”; for the exegetic literature on the issue see HIERONYMUS, *Comment, in EZEKIEL*, PG. 25, col. 430A; CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, PG. 33, col. 725-770; JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, PG. 56, col. 247-256. See BABIĆ, 1968, p. 146-151.

15. KITTEL, 1938, p. 630.

16. On the typological meaning of the veil and on its symbolism in the iconography of the Mother of God, see: PAPASTAVROU, 1993, p. 141-169; *id.* 2007, p. 323-355. Also see LIDOV, 2014b, p. 97-108; PAPASTAVROU, 1992, p. 22-24; *id.* 1995, p. 31-39. On the Byzantine phenomenon of hangings and textile installations read LIDOV, 2014a, p. 40-57. On the symbolism of curtains in Byzantine culture read PARANI, 2019. On textiles as mediators in Byzantine culture read EVANGELATOU, 2019.

17. *Exodus*, 26, 31-35; 27, 21; 30, 6; 35, 12; 37, 3 ff; *Leviticus*, 4, 6, 17; 16, 2, 12-15; 21, 23; 24, 3; *Numbers* 4, 5; 2 *Chronicle*, 3, 14; 1 *Maccabeus*, 1, 22.

18. *Exodus*, 26, 3; 35, 15; 37, 5 ff; 38, 18; 39, 4 ff; 40, 5; *Numbers*, 3, 10 ff; 4, 32; 18, 7; 3 *Romans*, 6, 36; *Sirach*, 50, 5.

19. *Matthew* 15:51; *Mark* 15:38; *Luke* 23:45.

20. THEODORET OF CYRUS, PG. 80, col. 281A-B: «ἐν μέσφ...τὸ καταπέτασμα διατείνας ἐν τύπῳ τοῦ στερεώματος, διχῇ διείλεν αὐτήν [sc. τὴν σκηνήν]».

21. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, PG. 12, col. 152A; COSMA INDICOPLEUSTES, PG. 88, col. 56D: «...τὴν σκηνὴν ἣν καὶ διελὼν Μωυσῆς διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τὴν μίαν εἰς δύο

many exegetes the veil represents the flesh of Christ, His human nature, which is directly connected with the Mother of God.²² It is argued also, in relation to the terrestrial existence of Christ, that there is a dual meaning: on one hand, the veil is situated between the Holy of Holies and the commune in the holy part of the church; on the other hand, the notion that the believer can be brought into the Holy of Holies is the idea that introduced the veil into the liturgy.²³ Within the framework of theological interpretations concerning the veil, it is useful to keep in mind that the biblical passages regarding the Tabernacle and the objects that were preserved in it represent typological images of the Mother of God. It is indicative that during the annual Vespers of the Presentation of Mary in the temple, held on 21 November, a passage from *Exodus* is read,²⁴ which concerns the Tabernacle and the objects that were inside it.²⁵ Additionally, there are innumerable liturgical hymns that insist on the same idea.²⁶

Before being adapted within a Christian context in churches, veils were lavishly used in both religious and secular Jewish and Greco-Roman architecture, and in the worship of other mystic cults, for example, that of Mithras.²⁷ Since the second half of the fourth century, veils were employed to shield the sanctuary from the view of the people. They are first known to have been used in fourth-century Eastern Christian churches in Cappadocia, Syria, Antioch and Alexandria, to name a few places. During the fifth century, veils were also in use in Constantinople and Greece, whereas in the sixth century their use diffused into Illyricum, Italy,²⁸ and Asia Minor. Their use in front of the sanctuary was most probably to aid in the Faithfull's spiritual preparation by helping prepare them to receive the revelation of the mystery of the Divine Eucharist. For Apostle Paul the

πεποίηκεν, καθάπερ καὶ ὁ Θεὸς ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὸν χώρον τὸν ἔαν τὸν ἀπὸ γῆς ἕως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ διὰ τοῦ στερεώματος διήλθεν εἰς δύο χώρους».

22. PROCLUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE, PG. 85, col. 433B: «...τὸ τῆς σαρκὸς καταπέτασμα περιβαλλόμενος [sc. ὁ Χριστός] ...»; also cf. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, PG. 75, col. 1253.

23. WENSCHKEWITZ, 1932, p. 207.

24. *Exodus*, 40:1-5, 9-10, 16, 34-35.

25. Read KOUTLOUMOUSIANOS, 1972; MOURIKI, 1970, p. 225.

26. For example, see the *theotokion* of the 4th *Ode of the Matins* on the day of the Nativity of Virgin Mary: "... in your nativity are accomplished the prophecies of the inspired humans that have called thy tabernacle, gate, spiritual mountain, briar, and rod of Aaron that sprouted on the David's root" (MERCENIER, 1948, p. 93).

27. STOUFI-POULIMENOU, 1999, p. 132-142.

28. On the multiple uses of curtains in the Latin West read MARTINIANI-REBER, 1999, p. 289-305.

symbolic meaning of the sanctuary veil was connected with the Incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.²⁹ The same meaning is attributed by the Church Fathers, Basil,³⁰ Gregory,³¹ and Chrysostom.³² It is interesting that the third of these goes further, saying: 'when Christ's flesh rose (in the Ascension), at that moment the heavens were revealed'.³³ These theological views obviously influenced the liturgical function of veils, as part of the time they must remain extended and the rest of the time they must be lifted.³⁴ During the Palaiologan period, when the iconostasis made its first appearance as a high screen in front of the sanctuary, the writings of Symeon of Thessaloniki, whose views emanate from the interpretations of the Early Christian Fathers, are particularly interesting. Symeon emphasised the relation of the sanctuary door's veil with the Incarnation and the Sacrament, where he found parallel symbolism between the monumental decoration and the veil of the sanctuary.³⁵ In church iconography it is frequently the case that the Incarnation (that is, the Annunciation) marks the entrance to the sanctuary: most of the time it is depicted on the eastern wall over the arc of the *apsis* and on the iconostasis door. This is because the sanctuary is the place of Epiphany, where the Incarnation, the first presence of Christ on Earth, is prolonged through the sacrament of the Eucharist, via the intercession of the Holy Spirit.³⁶ These symbolic meanings are connected with the sanctuary curtain and, of course, with the Virgin Mary. It is not pure coincidence that the Mother of God is spinning purple silk yarn for the Temple's veil at the very moment of the Annunciation.³⁷

29. *To the Hebrews*, 10: 19-23.

30. BASIL, PG. 31, col. 197.

31. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, PG. 36, col. 564.

32. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, PG. 63, col. 117.

33. *Ibid.*, col. 139.

34. STOUFFI-POULIMENOU, 1999, p. 136 & 141-2. There is also the "prayer of the veil" which antedates the "anaphora", when the veils are raised; see TREMPER, 1961, p. 156-157 and 1935, p. 73-74.

35. These views are analyzed in his works *Dialogue against Heresies* and *Interpretation of the Christian temple and its Rituals*. On Symeon's views concerning the icon screen see CONSTAS, 2006, p. 162-83.

36. In the Bible, it is in the sanctuary that Zacharias had received the appearance of Gabriel announcing to him the conception and birth of John. In the iconographical programs especially of the Early Christian period, all theophany subjects were depicted in the sanctuary.

37. PAPASTAVROU, 2007, p. 330-331; CONSTAS, 2003, p. 315-358; *id.* 1995, p. 169-194; EVANGELATOU, 2003, p. 269-285. Also, on the association of the curtain motif to the

In hymnography, it is symbolically used in parallel with the *chiton* (garment), another metaphor for the human nature of Christ. It is important to note an inscription on a ninth-century icon of the Crucifixion in Sinai, which reads “who is not troubled, and scared, and who is not trembling, when he sees you, O Lord, hanging on the wood, Thy who have torn apart the garment of death and have dressed in the garment of eternity...”³⁸

Iconography in Embroideries of Byzantine Tradition

The symbolic values connected with sanctuary veils also impact upon their embroidered or woven decoration, known mostly through post-Byzantine objects as extant Byzantine sanctuary curtains are very rare. In the first place, there are compositions that stress the liturgical character of the object. Other scenes are related to the Mother of God or a saint, depending on the feast or the sacred person to whom the church is dedicated. Indicative of its liturgical or sacramental value is the embroidered sanctuary curtain at Hilandar Monastery (1398-9). It is a precious artefact, and regal donation by Helena Uglješa of Serres, on which Christ as Archpriest is depicted standing, facing the viewer frontally with both arms extended in a sign of blessing (Fig. 1).³⁹

FIGURE 1. SANCTUARY CURTAIN,
CHRIST AS ARCHPRIEST, 1398-1399,
HILANDAR MONASTERY,
MOUNT ATHOS

Image courtesy of Bojan Miljkovic
(photographer: Branislav Strugar)

Christ is flanked by two hierarchs
holding open scrolls, Saints Basil and

Virgin in a Western Medieval case study,
read EBERLEIN, 1983, p. 61-77.

38. SOTIRIOU & SOTIRIOU, 1958, Fig. 27: “...τίς οὐ κλονεῖται καὶ φοβεῖται καὶ τρέμει ἐπὶ ξύλου σὶ κρεμάμενον, ὦ Σῶτερ, βλέπων ῥηγνύντα τὸν χιτῶνα τῆς νεκρώσεως ἀφθαρσίας δὲ τῆς στολῆς...”.

39. WOODFIN, 2011, p. 382 and Fig. 17; VASSILAKI, 2008, p. 228.

John Chrysostom (identified according to their physiognomic traits), and by two angels depicted slightly to the rear, holding *rhipidia*. Christ is dressed as a patriarch in a short-sleeved *sakkos* and a crossed stole, or *omophorion*, which is a bishop's attribute.⁴⁰ The two saints wear bishop's garments in the form of the *phelonion* and *omophorion*, but they appear smaller in size and are depicted in a three-quarter profile as they turn towards the Lord, a pose that could be attributed to the role of bishops assisting a patriarch at a Divine Liturgy. On the other hand, the angels, like deacons, wave liturgical fans. On this matter Warren Woodfin has observed: "...when the curtain was drawn aside in the course of the liturgy, it would have revealed the human celebrant standing in Christ's place at the altar table".⁴¹

The themes that occur during the post-Byzantine period mostly show Christ standing as Archpriest, coming out the chalice, or as Christ-Angel. As a matter of fact, in the Cathedral of Kastoria is a curtain with the Christ-Angel depicted, signed by famous Constantinopolitan embroiderer, Despineta tou Argyri, in 1692.⁴² As is well-known, this theme is related to Old Testament texts, in which, through patristic interpretations and hymnography, the Christ-Angel can be read as a symbol of salvation, as a Messiah-Angel of the Divine Word, as a representation of the resurrection of the divinised human, and, finally, as the Church and the notion of the Eucharist.⁴³ The iconographic theme of Christ-Angel appears in prophetic visions of Early Christian and Byzantine art,⁴⁴ and is expanded in post-Byzantine monumental art in Greece, Russia and Romania.⁴⁵ The same theme can be seen

40. VASSILAKI, 2012, p. 13-20.

41. WOODFIN, 2011, p. 382.

42. CHATZOULIS, 2011, p. 965-990.

43. On the theme of the Christ-Angel, see AMANN, 1938, p. 12-156; FLOROVSKIJ, 1950, p. 229-230; MEYENDORFF, 1959, p. 259-277; PALLAS, 1991, p. 119-144; VELMANS, 2001, p. 385-392. On its relation with the Old Testament, see *Proverbs* 9,1-10, *Malachi* 2, 1, *Habbakuk* 2, 1, *Isaiah*; for references to the "angel", see MEYENDORFF, 1959, p. 269-277. On the patristic interpretations, see *ibid.*, p. 260-261; VELMANS, 2001, p. 386-392.

44. For example, the fifth-century mosaic of Osios David. For relevant Byzantine paintings see the following list: Backovo (1100), St. Clemens of Ochrid (1295), Lesnovo (1349), icon of Poganovo (1500). All are cited in LIVA-XANTHAKI, 1980, p. 18.

45. Monastery of Barlaam in Meteora, Monastery of Diliou, (LIVA-XANTHAKI, 1980, p. 18); Monastery of Philanthropinon (ACHIMASTOU-POTAMIANOU, 2004). On the dissemination of the theme in the post-Byzantine painting, see VELMANS, 2001, p. 385-392; SEMOGLU, 2010, p. 382.

on many priests' garments.⁴⁶ As a final example of the representation of liturgical themes, we might refer to the veil decorated with Christ in the Chalice surrounded by seraphs, the sun, the moon and stars, in the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, attributable to nineteenth-century Constantinople (Fig. 2).

FIGURE 2. SANCTUARY CURTAIN, CHRIST COMING OUT OF THE CHALICE, CA. 1800, CONSTANTINOPOLITAN WORKSHOP

© Byzantine & Christian Museum (BXM 1708, photographer: Nikos Mylonas)

To the category of curtains with scenes of the Twelve Feasts of the liturgical year (*Dodekaorton*) belongs an example with the Nativity represented on it, made by the monk Kallinikos and dated 1627, kept in Simonopetra. The theme comes as no surprise as the Athonite monastery is dedicated to the Nativity (Fig. 3).⁴⁷

46. For example: the *epigonation* kept in the Monastery of Chrysospege, see CHANIA, 2006, p. 11; for the *epigonation* of the Patmos Monastery, see THEOCHARI, 1988, 198 and Fig. 17.

47. KARAKATSANIS, 1997, cat. 11.31.

FIGURE 3. SANCTUARY CURTAIN,
THE NATIVITY, 1627, MADE BY
MONK KALLINIKOS

© Simonopetra Monastery,
Mount Athos

Another curtain of the nineteenth century, this time with the Hypapante embroidered by Kokona tou Rologa, and very likely a commission of the monks of the Hypapante Monastery at Naoussa around 1812, is found in the Byzantine and Christian Museum (Fig. 4).⁴⁸

FIGURE 4. SANCTUARY CURTAIN,
THE PRESENTATION TO
THE TEMPLE, CA. 1812-1819,
CONSTANTINOPOLITAN
WORKSHOP, SIGNED BY
KOKONA OF ROLOGA, FROM
THE MONASTERY OF THE
HYPAPANTE (NAOUSSA)

© Byzantine & Christian Museum
(BXM 21055, photographer:
Charis Psychopaidi)

48. PAPASTAVROU & FILIOU, 2016, p. 543-555; PAPASTAVROU & FILIOU, 2012, p. 301-314.

Furthermore, the same museum boasts a curtain with the Baptism (Fig. 5), a scene obviously related to the Monastery of Saint John in Serres, from which the piece originated.

Figures of saints decorating curtains appear from the Early Christian period, as proved by the famous fifth-century Coptic veil in the Benaki Museum.⁴⁹ Another example is a seventeenth-century representation of Saint John the Baptist standing in a frontal position on another veil of the Byzantine and Christian Museum (Fig. 6).⁵⁰

Another interesting representation of a saint in frontal position comes from Stavronikita Monastery: it is a seventeenth-century embroidery of Saint Nikolaos, the monastery's patron saint, framed by rich Ottoman floral ornament (Fig. 7).

It has been attributed by Maria Theochari to an Asia Minor workshop.⁵¹

FIGURE 5. SANCTUARY CURTAIN, THE BAPTISM, NINETEENTH CENTURY, FROM THE MONASTERY OF SAINT JOHN THE FORERUNNER (SERRES)

© Byzantine & Christian Museum
(BXM 21057)

49. CORMACK & VASSILAKI, 2008, cat. 180.

50. On the iconography of the winged Saint John the Baptist, see YANDIM, 2010, p. 626-633.

51. See KARAKATSANIS, 1997, cat. 11.25; PATRINELIS, KARAKATSANI & THEOCHARI, 1974, p. 198-199.

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FIGURE 6. SANCTUARY
CURTAIN, SAINT
JOHN THE BAPTIST,
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY,
FROM SKIATHOS

© Byzantine & Christian
Museum (BXM 21055,
photographer: Nikos Mylonas)

FIGURE 7. SANCTUARY
CURTAIN, SAINT NIKOLAOS,
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, ASIA
MINOR WORKSHOP (?)

©Stavronikita Monastery,
Mount Athos

Ottoman and Iranian Textiles as Sanctuary Curtains

Apart from the embroidered curtains produced by workshops that followed the Byzantine tradition, the Greek Church used textiles created according to other traditions. The Greek Church's receptivity to foreign imports and its adoption of contemporary trends was often accompanied by a process of filtering, which ensured the compatibility of these objects to its religious dogma, as we will see from the following analysis. Moreover, the examples discussed should be viewed within the frame of the acculturation that took place after the conquest of Constantinople and the evolution of ecclesiastical aesthetics. Ecclesiastical material culture underwent a transformation as new elements melded with Byzantine tradition: the Church patronised arts associated with the court, such as Iznik ceramics; moreover, Ottoman motifs were incorporated into the decorative vocabulary of Greek artisans.⁵² Probably a major difference between Iznik for example, which had solely a decorative purpose, and the sanctuary curtains is that the latter were charged with an especially sacred meaning, as thoroughly explained earlier in this article. These curtains conveyed far more complex theological meanings than many other objects of the period, and went way beyond the aesthetic value that colourful tiles used as wallpaper had. Therefore, beyond notions of shared culture between Christians and Muslims the curtains to be discussed reveal the process of filtering in relation to the symbolism of the sanctuary door.

The splendid Safavid curtain from the Monastery of Saint Chariton, nearby Sille in Ikonion (Konya), is an interesting case study from this perspective (Fig. 8).⁵³

52. On the atmosphere of change in ecclesiastical art of Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia see BALLIAN, 1989, p. 51-73; *id.* 2011, cats. 11-2, 19, 44, 46-8, 56, 65; *id.* 2015, p. 11-36; MERANTZAS, 2017, p. 96-107; STANKOVA, 2013, p. 737-745; *id.* 2016, p. 195-205; VRYZIDIS, 2017, p. 177-191; *id.* 2018a, p. 92-114. On Iznik pottery in Greece see KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, 2004; CARSWELL, 1966, p. 77-90.

53. This is one of the relatively few surviving pieces from an Anatolian monastery accompanied by official documentation. The Greek archive of exchangeable property attests this luxurious seventeenth-century Safavid textile was used as a curtain in the Church of Panaghia Speliotissa, Saint Chariton Monastery (Συλλογή Ταμείου Ανταλλαξιμων/Benaki Museum collection of Asia Minor Relics: TA 969), nearby the village of Sille in the province of Konya. The many Safavid and Qajar textiles coming from Anatolian Christian communities, from the seventeenth century and on, shows the Persian mercantile penetration in the region (VRYZIDIS, 2018b, p. 228-236).

FIGURE 8. SANCTUARY
CURTAIN, EARLY
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY,
SAFAVID SILK, FROM THE
MONASTERY OF SAINT
CHARITON IN SILLE

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photographer: Vassilios Tsonis)

The *mihrab*-style arch and the central floral composition recall other well-known Persian hangings produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁴ The most striking difference between such hangings and the example in discussion is its depiction of three pairs of birds (represented facing each other) around the central floral composition; representations of animate beings are limited to the discreet presence of butterflies in the other hangings. Despite the *mihrab*-style niche it seems highly improbable that in an Islamic context such a hanging, with the birds so prominent, would have had a religious use.⁵⁵ However, within a Christian context the decorative composition does not seem problematic at all. While exotic in its aesthetic, the Sille curtain does recall earlier forms and decorative programs quite popular in Byzantine ecclesiastic art; probably leaning on the symbolism of birds in Byzantine art and religious thought.⁵⁶ For example, this curtain seems to recall the Tree of Life, an iconographic theme suitable for the sanctuary door.⁵⁷ This is especially true in relation to the pairs of birds depicted approaching the

54. STANLEY, ROSSER-OWEN & VERNIT, 2004, p. 71 and pl. 85. For *mihrab*-style arches in Persian prayer cloths see WEARDEN & BACKER, 2010, cats. 57-58.

55. One should not forget, however, the monastery's relationship with the Mevlevi Sufi order and the impact that Sufi thought had on Safavid art. The specific artifact was incompatible to Ottoman Orthodoxy (Sunni Islam) but it is unclear if this was also the case with Sufism. For the relationship between the monastery and the Sufi order, see SALKITZOGLOU, 2009, p. 119-164.

56. The hanging is discussed in VRYZIDIS, 2015, p. 193-204.

57. On the multiple Christian symbolisms conveyed by the Tree ("δέντρο") see LAMPE, 1961, p. 336. Papastavrou, 2007, p. 248-258.

Tree, which could be interpreted as a metaphor for the believers coming to the Church and receiving Eucharist. The Tree and the Fountain of Life convey the same symbolism and reference to Christ and his teachings, which are spread via the Church, like the perfume of flowers on a tree.⁵⁸ Hence, it seems that via the active reception and interpretation of this Safavid curtain a new iconographic “type” for sanctuary curtains was created. Another interesting case featuring representations of birds is an eighteenth-century embroidered curtain from Argypolis (Gümüshane) (Fig. 9).

Although it largely deconstructs and reconfigures standard motifs from Ottoman silks and velvets, it features also two pairs of self-facing birds (Fig. 10). In this case, the birds may again loosely convey Christian symbolism.⁵⁹

FIGURE 9. SANCTUARY CURTAIN, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, FROM ARGYROUPOLI/GÜMÜŞHANE

© Benaki Museum (TE 33731, photographer: Vassilios Tsonis)

FIGURE 10. DETAIL: PAIRED BIRDS

58. VELMANS, 1968, Fig. 2.

59. On the Greek Church's preference for silks patterned with animal motifs, which could be symbolically interpreted, see VRYZIDIS, 2020, p. 155-184.

Another type of drapery for sanctuary doors in which a similar encounter of Christian and Islamic art occurs are those with the same or very similar compositions found in contemporary Ottoman prayer mats. Most of these mats feature an arch or arches supported by colonnades, representing a mosque prayer niche, or *mihrab*.⁶⁰ An important piece, probably dating to the nineteenth century, comes from a Greek church in Caesarea (Kayseri). It depicts an arch inside of which there is a representation of a church, the architecture of which seems more Armenian (especially its towers) than Greek. Underneath there is a vase with flowers (Fig. 11).⁶¹

FIGURE 11. SANCTUARY CURTAIN, NINETEENTH CENTURY, FROM CAESAREA/KAYSERI

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The rest of the composition is filled with typical Ottoman baroque stems and floral spirals.⁶² This drape strongly recalls those Islamic prayer mats on which the central representation is that of a mosque.⁶³ This probably indicates that the

60. BİLGİ & ZANBAK, 2012, p. 25-26. For prayer rugs at the Topkapı collection see ROGERS & TEZCAN, DELİBAŞ, 1987, cats. 1-41, p. 48 and 52.

61. The vase with flowers motif appears very often in Annunciation scenes, sporadically throughout the Middle Ages and systematically in Palaiologan and post-Byzantine iconography. Although doubtful that the embroiderers knew such details and subtleties, the fact that it is placed underneath the Church could have been interpreted by the clergy as a reference to the Virgin, a prefiguration of the Ecclesia/Church; see PAPASTAVROU, 2007, p. 258-260. We are thankful to Marielle Martiniani-Reber for pointing out to us the Armenian aesthetic in the church motif of this drape.

62. For examples of Ottoman Baroque floral decoration on these types of prayer mats/hangings, see BİLGİ & ZANBAK, 2012, cats. 43-5 & 47; MARCHESE & BREU, 2010, p. 33.

63. Indicative of the flexibility of architectural representations is a prayer mat from the Sadberk Hanım Museum (Istanbul) which features the representation of military buildings (BİLGİ & ZANBAK, 2012, cat. 43). The representation of twin mosques can be

artisans of that time had standard compositions and designs which could easily be adapted to the needs of different clienteles. Also, other religious communities could buy textiles destined for an “Islamic” use and adapt them via necessary additions. An example indicative of this process is an eighteenth-century Ottoman Torah Ark Curtain (*parochet*) now at the Jewish Museum of New York (inv.no. S4), featuring a composition similar in its logic.⁶⁴ Despite the fact that the central motif is a mosque, this object was deemed fit for use in a synagogue through just the addition of an inscription in Hebrew and a small apotropaic *hamsa* (hand-shaped sign). The floral decoration is again quite typical of Ottoman Baroque style.⁶⁵

Another sanctuary curtain from Anatolia features Christ coming out of the chalice in what appears to be a “Christianizing” addition (Fig. 12).

When examining this curtain, it becomes clear that that the embroidered Christ was not

FIGURE 12. SANCTUARY CURTAIN, EIGHTEENTH/NINETEENTH CENTURY, PROBABLY AN EMBROIDERED PRAYER MAT WITH THE ADDITION OF CHRIST COMING OUT OF THE CHALICE, FROM ANATOLIA

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found in the seventeenth-century Chios prayer rug, now in the Convent of the Carmelite Sisters in Cracow (ATASOY *et al.*, 2001, cat. 71).

64. MANN, 1982, p. 158-159; JUHASZ, 1990, pl. 20b ; YANIV, 2019, p. 193-252.

65. On Ottoman Jewish acculturation as reflected on its ceremonial art, read MANN, 1994, p. 559-573.

FIGURE 13. SANCTUARY CURTAIN, EIGHTEENTH/ NINETEENTH CENTURY, FROM ANATOLIA

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part of the original object.⁶⁶ It again features an arch similar to those depicted on contemporary prayer mats, while the decoration is typical of Ottoman Baroque. An interesting element is the peacock tail motif inserted into the frame, recalling aniconic motifs from the animal kingdom, so dear to the Ottomans. In this case, it is the “Christianizing” addition that makes this mat suitable for ecclesiastic use.⁶⁷ Moreover, the addition is the same iconographic type we see in an already mentioned contemporary drape (Fig. 2). There is therefore considerable overlap in Ottoman and Post-Byzantine art, strongly indicating cross-cultural fertilization and exemplifying the interpretation of Ottoman and Middle Eastern trends from a Christian point of view.

The final curtain to be discussed features another popular motif: the suspended lamp (Fig. 13).⁶⁸

66. A similar practice can be seen in the eighteenth-century Armenian Holy Altar Curtain from the Kalfayan collection. A prayer rug was made suitable for Christian use by adding embroidered roundels with the Apostles and a central rectangle featuring Christ and the donor’s inscription in Armenian (CHONDROGIANNIS, 2010, cat. 6).

67. VRYZIDIS, 2015, p. 215-224; PAPASTAVROU & VRYZIDIS, 2018, p. 265-269.

68. Another hanging featuring baroque columns and a hanging lamp can be found at Panachrantou Monastery in Andros (FYSSAS, 2007, cat. A 14), and the Ecclesiastical Museum of Hydra (HYDRA, 2009, cat. 37). Similar unpublished hangings, with suspended lamps as the central motif, can also be found in the collections of Iveron and Xeropotamou monastery. In a few cases Ottoman baroque hangings decorated with suspended lamps are also mentioned as booty. For example, in the Museum of the Prousou Monastery (Evrytania), such a mat is mentioned as a gift of the Greek rebels who took it from a mosque (PALIOURAS, 1997, Fig. 215). It is unclear whether the hanging was repurposed before finding its place in the Museum.

Islamic prayer rugs and mats featuring variations of the suspended lamp as the central motif were very popular at the Ottoman court.⁶⁹ The most famous example is a sixteenth-century prayer rug in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, reputed to have been produced by a court workshop. Its composition displays patterned columns supporting three arches, with a mosque lamp hanging in the centre.⁷⁰ In Islamic iconography, the lamp is symbolic of God's radiance.⁷¹ In an eighteenth-century Ottoman *sitarah* at the Ashmolean Museum the lamp is associated with an embroidered inscription from the *surat al nur* (Quran 29:35), "God is the light of the Heavens and Earth".⁷² In Ottoman synagogues, we then see the same type of hangings featuring the suspended lamp used as *parochets*.⁷³ In the Jewish tradition,

FIGURE 14. *PAROCHET* FROM
 GÖRDES, MANISA (TURKEY),
 LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

© The Jewish Museum, New York
 (inv. no. F5182)

69. The examples in the Topkapı are dated from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century (TEZCAN & OKUMURA, 2007, cats. 8, 10, 11, 15-7, 35, 44-5 & 59; BİLGİ, 2007, cats. 14 & 47).

70. ETTINGHAUSEN, 1974, cat. 1.

71. KHOURY, 1992, p. 15-22. For the relevant chapter on light in the Qu'ran, see HALEEM, 2004, p. 220-226.

72. The lamp continues to be a popular central motif in Ottoman prayer mats until the twentieth century. Ex. see KRODY, 2000, cat. 42. See http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection/3/per_page/25/offset/0/sort_by/date/object/15065 (Accessed 25 January 2017.)

73. One of the earliest datable Ottoman-made *parochets* is in the Lvov synagogue in Ukraine, originally made in Chios in 1698 (ATASOY *et al.* 2001, cat. 72). For another synagogue rug featuring the suspended lamp motif, see ETTINGHAUSEN, 1974, cat. 5. More *parochets* with hanging lamps can be found at the Jewish Museum of New York: JM 7-50, S 450. The writers would like to thank Christina Meri of the Jewish Museum of Greece for her useful comments on the aesthetic of Ottoman *parochets*.

the lamp symbolises the eternal light that hangs in the synagogue, in front of the *heikhal* (Fig. 14).⁷⁴

The Greek curtain under discussion presents a very typical Ottoman Baroque composition, with a hanging lamp as the most prominent element as it is placed in the centre of the design, framed by colonnades and floral decoration. In the Greek tradition, the lamp can convey so many different meanings relevant to the sanctuary: the Church, the Sanctuary Lamp in the church, Christ's mercy metaphorically represented as light and the light of God burning heresy.⁷⁵ Quite similar is also an altar curtain at the Sadberk Hanım Museum, which comes from the Armenian Church of Surp Nişan. Its inscription dates it to 1812, roughly the same date as the Greek piece in discussion.⁷⁶ In a way, the lamp better indicates how certain motifs that were widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean projected different meanings according to their specific religious context.

Conclusion

Some aspects of Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical art are marked during the Ottoman period by a certain degree of secularisation and the appropriation of court aesthetic, in order to project social symbolisms. However, in the case of certain liturgical objects like the sanctuary curtains, the mechanism of acculturation seems to take a different path. No doubt, the curtains used follow either the Byzantine tradition or the contemporary Ottoman and Persian trends, two parallel tendencies seen in Early Modern Greek art. The difference is that in the examples discussed here, the projected religious symbolism onto objects foreign to Byzantine tradition seems more important than the social message. The importance of the sanctuary door as a gate to the invisible and heavenly world guaranteed that the curtain resisted secularisation, but not acculturation. On the contrary, its variations vividly illustrate how the dynamic of shared Ottoman culture and fluidity of aesthetics pushed the Greek Church into finding ways of retaining its cultural autonomy via a remarkable process of interpretation.

74. JUHASZ, 1990, p. 97-98. Also see YANIV, 2009, p. 205-222, esp. Fig. 143.

75. For the Christian symbolisms conveyed by the lamp (Lychnia/Λύχνη) see LAMPE, 1961, p. 817.

76. BİLGİ & ZANBAK, 2012, cat. 45. Another hanging of this type, but without a lamp, can be found in the collection of the Armenian Patriarchate in Kumkapı (MARCHESE & BREU, 2010, p. 33). On Armenian altar curtains read the essays by KOUYMJIAN, MARTINIANI-REBER & GUELTON, 2007, p. 28-75. Also read KOUYMJIAN, 2020, p. 257-278.

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