

Einladung zum Gastvortrag von

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The Byzantine Vision of the Cosmos in Church Architecture

Zeit: Montag, den 20. Juni 2022, 18.00 Uhr

Ort: 107b Seminarraum B I der USB, Kerpener Straße 20

This talk explores Byzantine architecture with focus on Hagia Sophia as a conceptual construct: what visions of the cosmos does the Great Church conjure and how do these theōriai (visions) gradually elucidate a particular identification of the divine with water. The analysis starts with the Neoplatonic origins of the architectural design and the monad. But then it uncovers the supersession of this worldview by Christian cosmography that insists on the cosmos as a cube surrounded by the ocean and paradoxically sustaining supracelestial waters above the heavenly vault. This vision attested in the sixth-century topography of the Christian monk Cosmas among other works emphasizes the prominence of water in the Christian imaginary. The enkainia kontakion (inauguration sung sermon) for re-inauguration of Hagia Sophia in 562 further re-enforces this particular worldview. And while the Justinianic age gave prominence to the elemental—water and light—in Hagia Sophia, during and after Iconoclasm this phenomenal and aniconic manifestations became translated into figural and representational art. By 867 a mosaic of Christ appeared in the dome; the image of the Virgin and Child in the apse of the Great Church; narrative scenes in the vaults of the gallery level; and portraits of the Church Fathers and more recent patriarchs in the grand North and South tympana. The later portion of this talk focuses on this change in structuring sacred space in the Middle Byzantine period. Since no extensive narrative images survive from Constantinople in this period, the focus shifts to the exploration of the well-preserved mosaic program at Hosios Loukas (1011) near Steiris, Greece.

