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The Great Entrance Iconography in the 16th–17th Century Russian Art

My research is devoted to the issue of the Great Entrance iconography in the Late medieval Russian art. So, the tasks, that have been set, are the following:

- To determine the basic distinguishes between Russian The Great Entrance scenes and related subjects in Byzantine and Post Byzantine iconography
- To examine the fundamental types of The Great Entrance scene and determine its features
- To investigate the meaning of this iconography
- To trace the development of The Great Entrance iconography during the second half of the 16th – 17th cc.

The research will be written on the basis of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy and Russian The Great Entrance images. They will be analyzed mostly with iconographical and iconological methods, but liturgical texts and features of the Orthodox rite are also attracted for deeper understanding of the subject.

The hypothesis of my work is the following. In Byzantine art The Divine Liturgy scene have been formed by the beginning of the 14th c. It depicts the Great Entrance procession of angels-deacons and angels-priests with the Holy Gifts that is coming to the altar with Christ the High Priest behind it. In Russian art there are three compositions on this theme. They are named after hymns which can be sung during the Great Entrance: Cherubikon, Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence and Now the Powers of Heaven. In general, they all are close to the Byzantine images, having the Great Entrance as a core, but demonstrate a lot of differences in detail. Cherubikon is the closest scene to The Divine Liturgy: the procession of angels-deacons and angels-priests who bring the shroud, as well as the image of Christ the High Priest behind the altar can be seen there. But the Byzantine core is complicated by the addition of believers, the Lord Sabaoth and the image of a church. Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence strongly reworks the initial motif, it saves only the theme of the liturgical procession performed by anonymous mortal clergymen who approach the Three Holy Hierarchs. While Byzantine composition of The Divine Liturgy is frequently located in a dome of a church and rarely in an apse, this Russian scene is always located in an apse. Now the Powers of Heaven doesn't contain The Great Entrance theme and shows only the believers' pray, but its iconography is related to those two Russian compositions.

The Cherubikon subject seems to be the most ancient variant that has appeared by the middle of 16th c. (the first known image of this name is the altar door in the Archangel Michael church in Riga). The Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence composition was widespread

across Russia and its iconography remained unchanged, while Cherubikon and Now the Powers of Heaven subjects have been disappeared by the middle of the 17th c. The Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence was used mainly in church murals, while the Cherubikon (as a rule) and Now the Powers of Heaven – in icons.

Initially, the Cherubikon and Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence subjects didn't have a lot of differences in the meaning, so they were understood as complimentary subjects (e.g. two late 16th c. icons from Solvychevodsk cathedral) revealing the basic aspects of the Eucharist. Nevertheless, each variant has got a symbolic meaning of its own. The Cherubikon represents the Heavenly Church, mysteriously acting during the earth Eucharist, while the Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence rather demonstrates the meeting of earthly and heavenly worlds, being possible for people thanks to their common participation in the Liturgy. An image of the open sky with the Lord Sabaoth, and the Host of Heaven add the subject a transcendental meaning, but the figures of mortal believers emphasize crucial importance of real clergy and religious community in the process of human salvation. So, it seems that the late Medieval Russians wanted to be convinced in possibility of contact with the Divinity, being in the bosom of the Church.