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## FLORAL SYMBOLISM IN UKRAINIAN TEMPLE ART

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*Abstract:* The origins of the formation of plant symbolism in Christian temple art have been investigated, particularly on the example of the texts of the Holy Bible. The primary connotations of the garden's symbolism in Christian sacral art are analyzed as an expression of the idea of a lost paradise, contemplation of the images of which is possible in the space of temples. Plant symbolism is revealed in the holistic art systems of the Sophia of Kyiv and St. Cyril's Church in Kyiv. The fundamental values of plant symbolism in St. Sophia's Cathedral and St. Cyril's Church are highlighted by the idea of the continuity of Christian semiotics with the Old Testament Judaism and the combination of local pre-Christian traditions.

*Keywords:* plant symbolism, temple arts, Christian architecture, St. Sophia's Cathedral, St. Cyril's Church in Kyiv.

### Introduction

A unique communication code is symbolic systems, an essential component of the language of philosophy. A symbol is one of cultural communication's most essential means of encoding and transmitting information. A *symbol* is a tool by which the content of a thought is expressed through the acquisition of appropriate forms (pictorial, action) so that the content becomes a universal dimension. Symbolic communication is a cognitive-semantic, ideal-semantic, and moral-axiological exchange of information. The symbolic dimension of language represents of the metaphysics of the presence of the transcendent, as well as of mentally internalized cultural texts, the pragmatic load of which has a multifaceted

semantic potential for unfolding in the process of cognition. For symbolism filled with philosophical meanings, not only is its transcendent feature important, indicating the absoluteness of the ideal sphere, but also direct evidence of its existence, which determines the culture by its level of development. Symbols express in a laconic form the semantic depth of philosophical and religious concepts and the versatility of artistic images. In the individual process of cognition, a symbol has the potential to act as a conventional means of combining the conscious and the unconscious, the rational and the mystical, the scientific and the artistic.

Symbolism is one of the main cultural identity factors, which has absorbed a centuries-old heritage of traditional connotations and is being

reinterpreted in modern socio-cultural circumstances. Symbols represent ideas of higher abstraction that are difficult to describe verbally, contain philosophical ideas or religious doctrines in a concentrated form, manifest of the eternal in the temporal, and have a multidimensional pragmatic potential for shaping the current cultural discourse.

Religious art is a special discourse of symbolism; functioning, which combines the concepts of certain religions and the form of their figurative embodiment. A separate type of symbol is sacred, whose main characteristic is the designation of the supernatural in the respective religious system. Initially, the subject of a symbolic narrative is a certain religious object (abstract concept, object, person, action, etc.), which is later transformed into a symbolic figurative and sensual form with a plurality of connotative meanings in a communicative situation. In complex symbolic structures, in particular, in religious art, their individual segments act as autonomous semantic objects and artistic and figurative phenomena. Sacred symbolism plays an important role in the formation of not only the consciousness of a religious person but also in the cognition of cultural and religious traditions that have been formed over the centuries.

In the language of religious art, the symbol distinguishes and marks the conceptual beginnings of the religious worldview in a figurative, sensual, and aesthetically artistic way, giving it a systematic unity. The language of architecture is special, as it represents in monumental forms the concepts of the human vision of the universe of a certain historical epoch. Temple architecture,

starting from the most ancient civilizations, symbolically expressed a religious vision of the world, in which the structuring was based on the example of the division of the world into earthly and heavenly, profane and sacred. The concept of the temple as an *imago mundi* (Latin for ‘image of the world’), the postulate that the sanctuary reproduces the essence of the universe, was also accepted by Christian sacred architecture, which symbolically reproduces the Heavenly Jerusalem as it is presented in the texts of the Bible and theological tradition.

Symbols in the language of religious architecture not only convey certain meanings and values but also help a believer to psychologically enter a religious cult, emotionally experience the ritual

actions performed, and create an atmosphere of the importance of the event performed. Temple architecture establishes a correspondence between different planes of existence and building forms.

By following certain symbolic imagery and structured space, the temple is considered to be filled with a special sacred power. In ancient temples, we see a direct comparison between architectural proportions and cosmic models, emphasizing the idea of the spiritual descent of divine grace into the earthly world. The geometric symbolism of the temple is based on a vertical vector, similar to a sacred tree or a sacred mountain that unites the world of gods and people. The temple is a symbol of spiritual aspirations and achievements; it contains cosmic symbolism, which represents a model of understanding the universe of a particular civilization. For example, in the language of sacred architecture, all-round shapes express the idea of heaven, the square is the earth, and the triangle symbolizes the interaction between earth and sky. In the symbolic language of architecture, a temple is a form of reflection on the theme of the universe as a whole. Symbols combine a wide variety of objects into one text, while natural language only partially and consistently expresses what symbols represent in a single moment through a specific form. The structure of symbols in the language of architecture is a model of space through immersion in which a person can reach the knowledge of the transcendent world.

The originality of the symbolic worldview can also be traced in Ukrainian sacred church architecture, particularly through floral symbolism in the decoration of churches.

Floral Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Art, originating from the advanced civilizations of the Near East, occupies an essential position by associatively and symbolically expressing the abundance and beauty of the paradise garden. The aspiration to recreate on Earth the state of heavenly existence as the abode of God and saints led to the embellishment of church interiors with floral imagery and symbols. Christian art, during its process of formation and development, creatively borrowed from Jewish and Near Eastern traditions in understanding floral symbolism as the concept of recreating the paradisial

cal existence that the faithful sought in their earthly pilgrimage.

The article aims to investigate the primary meanings of floral symbolism in ecclesiastical art by analyzing comprehensive texts within the interior space of Kyiv Sophia and Kyrylivska Churches in Kyiv.

In the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, flower carvings were ordered to be made on the walls, as stated: “And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 Kings 6:29). Furthermore, the doors were crafted with two-winged doors made of olive wood, featuring carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and hanging flowers, all covered in gold: “And he made two doors of olive wood; and he carved on them figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold, and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 Kings 6:32). The bronze pillars at the entrance to the Holy of Holies, which only the high priest had the right to enter once a year (on the Day of Atonement) to offer sacrifices for the entire Israelite nation, were decorated with lilies and pomegranates: “And he made chains like a necklace and put them on the tops of the pillars; and he made one hundred pomegranates and put them on the chains. Then he set up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand and the other on the left; he called the name of the one on the right hand Jachin, and the name of the one on the left Boaz. Moreover, there were network pillars in front of them. Each with wreaths on the capitals, on the top of each of them, and the work of the pillars was finished with lilies” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 Kings 7:18-22). The so-called “Sea,” a significant molded vessel located in the Temple courtyard, served the purpose of purification for the priests and symbolized the tumultuous world ocean that God subdued. It was additionally adorned with lily flowers as decorative elements (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 Kings 7:26).

The golden temple menorah, with its lamps continuously burning before the presence of the Lord in the Holy of Holies, had seven branches resembling stalks with flowers. “Six branches shall go out from its sides: three branches of the menorah from one side and three branches of the

menorah from the other side. Three cups shaped like almond blossoms, with buds and flowers, shall be on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, with buds and flowers, on the other branch – thus for the six branches going out from the menorah. On the menorah itself, there shall be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, with their buds and flowers. There shall be a bud under the two branches going out from it, a bud under the next two branches going out from it, and a bud under the last two branches going out from it – thus for the six branches going out from the menorah” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Ex. 25:32-35).

Therefore, when the ancient Hebrews entered their grand Temple, they primarily saw plant images associated with heavenly-paradisiacal existence, an immutable and beautiful abode of God, which all believers aspired to enter after their earthly pilgrimage.

Christian sacred architecture borrowed numerous structural elements from temple architecture of the Ancient East, specifically, it drew from the Old Testament directives regarding the embellishment of holy places, the symbolic significance of which pertained to the intention of portraying transient earthly replicas of the eternal heavenly reality.

During the construction and decoration of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv and other sanctuaries of Kyivan Rus, a conceptual model of the Christian church had already been established, which underwent a long evolution, starting from the ancient sacred structures of the Ancient Near East and the Jewish-Old Testament understanding of the place of worship to the One God, as expressed in the narratives of the Old Testament and represented in the Tabernacle and the magnificent Jerusalem Temple, which was constantly rebuilt or restored from the time of King Solomon to Herod the Great. It was natural that the ancient Kyivans embraced the idea of a Christian church from Byzantium, which, in theological treatises, architectural forms, and various aspects of interior decoration, had a cohesive organic paradigm of sacred architecture as a model of the Heavenly Jerusalem, to which the faithful aspired in their earthly pilgrimage.

The idea of the temple as a paradise garden is one of the fundamental concepts in Christian sacred architecture. To embody this idea, a series of artistic, ornamental, and ritual-cultural factors

were carefully considered, each endowed with profound symbolic meaning. The semantics of these factors can be traced throughout the extensive history of the development of the temple concept as a dwelling place of the gods, a realm of heavenly bliss, and an image of eschatological perspective that emerges as a source of hope and solace during the earthly lives of the faithful. They are granted the opportunity to contemplate the Edenic realm within the semiotic framework of the temple space.

The vegetal imagery found in the ancient mythological narratives of the Near East, depicting an idyllic and blissful existence, was undoubtedly derived from observations of nature. The coolness of gardens, the majesty of trees, and the vibrant colors of plants became associated in human perception with the abode of gods and the hope of attaining such a realm after the toils and trials of earthly life. A garden with lush vegetation represented not only a place of physical and psychological relaxation and aesthetic pleasure but also served as an ancient symbol of paradise within architectural temple structures.

In the earliest civilizations, templegardens served as the focal points of cities, where the main paths converged and the prayers of inhabitants and pilgrims were directed, with the intention of attaining a glimpse of paradise and the hope of eternal existence in Eden after death. This concept of the garden as an image of paradise has been inherited by Christian sacred architecture. Trees offer humans shelter and coolness, bear fruits, and provide solace, they reach towards heavenly heights, indicating the direction to the celestial realm. They are deeply rooted, symbolizing the steadfast wisdom of humanity, which honors the earth and turns to God. Flowers fill the human heart with beauty and inspiration, often lacking in earthly life.

In the biblical books, we can find rich symbolic imagery of trees and flowers. Let's provide just a few quotes from the Holy Scripture. In the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, we read: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit!" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Jeremiah 17:7-8). In the Book of Sirach, "the godly children" are

compared to "a rose planted by flowing waters" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Sirach 39:13). The poetic Psalm 92 compares: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Ps. 92:12-16).

It can be said that nature, trees, and flowers, including cultivated garden complexes, brought humanity closer to the world of divine paradise existence.

Particular attention should be paid to the plant ornaments in the interiors of the Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, the main church of Kyivan Rus, which stands as an enduring spiritual archetype and a meaningful image that permeates all spheres of our culture throughout the centuries.

Nadia Nikitenko (2003) rightly emphasizes the significance of the ornaments in Saint Sophia Cathedral not only on a purely aesthetic level but also in a profound conceptual theological dimension, which was intended to instill hope for eternal bliss in the faithful who contemplated the imagery and ornamental language conveying Christian doctrine. "The elevated atmosphere of triumph and festivity is created by luxurious ornaments reminiscent of precious fabrics used to adorn royal chambers. The ornaments generously cover the vaults, walls, and columns of the entire cathedral. Emphasizing its architectural forms and framing the narratives, they enhance the visual and symbolic impact of their perception. As symbols of a blossoming paradise garden, they depict the image of the heavenly world and evoke a joyful sense of the miracle of salvation received" (Nikitenko, 2003, p. 53). In the exploration of the history of art research, regarding the frescoes of Saint Sophia Cathedral, particularly in the works of D. Ainalov and Ye. Redin, the scholars make the following observation: "Regarding the rich ornamentation of the vaults and towers of the cathedral, Ainalov and Redin limit themselves to a brief comment: ...in the vegetal ornamentation that generously adorns the entire cathedral, they see a 'mixture of ornamental forms from classical and Eastern art, such as Persian art'. According to their conviction, the motifs of the vegetal ornamentation were bor-

rowed from Byzantine art, influenced by Eastern art, and known in the ornaments of Serbian and Bulgarian art, which derive from classical ornamentation.” In our opinion, the conclusions of these early researchers, despite the importance of their work, somewhat overlook the theological and symbolic aspects of the cathedral’s interior, which are more significant than purely formal comparisons and the influence of local cultural and artistic traditions.

Nadiia Nikitenko (2018) analyzes the semantics of ornaments in the decor of the main altar, tracing allusions to biblical and liturgical-poetic images that create a coherent text representing heavenly reality: “The conch of the apse is an image of the celestial vault, in which the Oranta is depicted, framed by a bright floral-leafy ornament. This rich ornament on a golden background obviously corresponds to the inscription above the Oranta, which refers to the Heavenly Jerusalem. Not without reason, the ornament contains 25 medallions, which are associated with the 25 stanzas of the Akathist Hymn, in which the Virgin Mary is glorified as the Unshakeable Wall of the Kingdom” (p. 30).

It is also worth noting that the author of the Book of Revelation had in mind the actual appearance of the Mount of Olives, which is well known from the texts of the Old and New Testaments and is particularly significant in the history of the Jewish people and Christian narratives. This oronym is first mentioned by the prophet Zechariah: “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Zech. 14:3-4). Ezekiel assigns special significance to the summit of the Mount of Olives in his eschatological prophecies: “And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Ezek. 11:23). From the height of the range of the Mount of Olives, which extends from north to south opposite the wall of the Old City on the other side of the Kidron Valley, a magnificent panorama of the Temple Mount is revealed (in blue , mainly when there were no

high-rise buildings in the new districts of Jerusalem), and in golden (today represented by the Dome of the Rock shrine, and in the time of Christ - the gilded decoration of the Second Temple, which was beautifully built and adorned by Herod the Great), colors, we see the main altar of St. Sophia’s Cathedral in Kyiv, which are in harmony with the biblical semantics of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the symbolic representation of which was taken from the actual appearance of the ancient holy city.

The inscription (the 6<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 45 in synagogue tradition, which is Psalm 46 in Christian tradition) - “God is in the midst of it, it shall not be moved; God shall help it when the morning dawns” (translated by Ivan Ohiyenko), holds a special significance. It is positioned above the central apse’s conch in the cathedral. Its deep analysis was conducted by Sergei Averintsev (2004), who referred to the continuous heritage of Christian semiotics from ancient and Jewish traditions. He states, “The entire psalm is constructed on the contrast between two images: the worldly chaos and the unshakable God-protected city. Around this city, elemental cataclysms and war storms rage... But for the city and the house of God, all these cosmic forces become a source of consolation, as they are securely protected by the presence of God... The inscription is placed above the head of the mosaic figure of the Virgin Orans in the conch of the apse and is clearly connected in meaning with this figure” (Averintsev, 2004, p. 35). Furthermore, the scholar concludes based on the symbolism of St. Sophia and a deep textual analysis: “The ‘Mother of God’ is a ‘city’ because her virtue is symbolically associated with the integrity, invulnerability, and orderliness of a city. We recall that in the Byzantine hymnography, attributed to Roman the Melodist, and possibly even earlier, the Mother of God is referred to as the ‘twelve-gated city’ of the Apocalypse” (Averintsev, 2004, p. 37). Therefore, the inscription above the head of the Orans signifies “Mother of God, but to the extent that she is the Guardian of the City, or rather, to the extent that she is the City, an image of spiritualized matter, an image of human community embodying the cosmic meaning; a church community, but to the extent that it is directed towards the union of the heavenly and the earthly; a temple building, but to the extent that it is, as an ‘icon,’ the cosmic House of Wisdom, sim-

ultaneously turned towards the city, providing it with meaningful support and a hopeful expectation of victory over visible and invisible enemies” (Averintsev, 2004, p. 38). Although the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm was called “the song of Zion” and it was assumed that the mentioned city refers to Jerusalem, it can be understood in a broader sense as the celestial city, the Heavenly Jerusalem.

The fragment of the “Zion” psalm in the central cathedral of Kyivan Rus signifies the special status of the capital city as an authentic sacred center of Slavic culture, following the pattern and analogy of ancient cities in the Near East, where the focal point was the sacred precinct representing and symbolizing the heavenly abode of gods, often through the presence of plants and water. Therefore, in Kyiv’s Saint Sophia Cathedral, the ornamental plant motifs serve the same idea - the concept of the church as an earthly replica of the Heavenly Jerusalem (in the Christian interpretation of sacred architecture). In verses 4-5 of the same 46<sup>th</sup> psalm, there is an analogy to a celestial river, which says, “The waters thereof roar and be troubled, the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Psalm 46:4-5). Here, we see a gentle river that fills the city of God with life, contrasting the chaotic waters that pose a threat to humanity, as often encountered in Near Eastern myths and biblical narratives. At the beginning of the Book of Genesis, we also read about a peaceful river: “And a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Gen. 2:10). In the final chapter of the Book of Revelation, the concluding book of the Bible, the imagery of a life-giving river emerges again: “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manners of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Rev. 22:1-2). As we can see, the image of the heavenly river is mentioned in the first and last books of the Holy Scriptures, which recount the

loss of paradise by the first humans and the promise of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the afterlife following the end of the world and the Final Judgment. Therefore, the verse about the highest protection of the city by the Almighty God follows the mention of the river, whose waters, along with the vegetation, are associated with paradise - a place of refreshment and joy, where the Lord and the righteous dwell.

The concept of life-giving rivers mentioned in biblical texts received a new interpretation in Christian churches through the construction of baptisteries. Baptisteries, derived from the Greek word “βαπτιστήριον” (baptisterion) and the Latin word “baptisterium,” refer to structures or rooms designated for the sacrament of baptism. In ancient Rome, the term was originally used in a secular context to denote a pool for bathing and swimming or a plunge bath in Roman frigidariums (cooling rooms in thermal baths). From the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the term started to be used to designate places or cultic spaces for the reception of the sacrament of baptism. Another name that can be encountered is “fotisterion” (the “house of enlightenment”), as baptism was understood as the enlightenment of an individual for a new life (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Jus. Mart. “Apology,” I, 65).

Most likely, during the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, baptisms were performed either in open bodies of water or in thermal baths. It was only at the beginning of the Constantinian era when the number of individuals eager to become Christians increased significantly that separate structures for this sacrament began to be constructed. Historians note that there were at least six baptisteries in Chersonesos during the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most famous among them is the so-called Rotunda of 600 AD, also known as the “Church of Vladimir,” where it is believed that Vladimir the Great was baptized. In the monumental architecture of Kyivan Rus, baptisteries were also constructed within the general space of the main church (such as the St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, the Church of the Saviour at Berestove, the Illinska Church in Chernihiv, and others).

In the St. Volodymyr’s Cathedral in Kyiv, on the fresco “The Baptism of St. Prince Volodymyr” by Viktor Vasnetsov, characterized by clear centrality, harmonious colors and light, the Baptizer of Kyivan Rus is depicted in a hexago-

nal baptismal font on a raised platform.

Here is a description of a specially arranged baptismal place in the Kyrylivska Church in Kyiv: “In the southern part of the narthex, a baptistery was located... The presence of the baptistery is confirmed by the following findings: remains of a semi-circular niche (apse) with a diameter of 137 cm, wall fragments located 18-20 cm from the ancient floor, a width of 130 cm, as well as remnants of the floor discovered during the research conducted by M. Kholostenko in 1950-1955. This researcher believed that the eastern wall of the baptistery constituted a niche-apse within the thickness of the wall between the southern pier and the pilaster and was constructed up to the level of the slate cornices (a similar niche was present in the Uspensky Cathedral of the Eletsy Monastery in Chernihiv, but instead of projecting outside as a small apse, it was only within the walls of St. Sophia’s Cathedral)” (Nikitenko, 2003, p. 79).

During restoration work in 1977, beneath layers of later additions, small fragments of fresco compositions were discovered on the side parts of the pier and pilaster in the baptistery. These frescoes were created in the 12th century. Researchers determined that the ancient plaster base in these areas and other adjacent surfaces was applied simultaneously. Therefore, the baptistery was constructed before the commencement of the painting work. The “death” of a person to the old life in sin and their “birth” into a new, saved, heavenly existence is also an integral part of creating an analogy to the cosmic reality of the heavenly realm in a Christian church.

In St. Kirill’s Church, there are preserved plant ornaments on the walls, totaling 3311, with various depictions but a common symbolic meaning - the reflection of paradise’s existence. “The ornaments of Kirill’s church are intended not only to decorate the temple but also to emphasize its architecture, divide compositions, and soften the stern features of the fortress-like structure. It is worth noting that the diversity of frescoed Kirill’s ornaments, their skillful drawing, and colorful execution do not distract from the overall painting when observed. Therefore, the ornaments exist in a harmonious pictorial symphony with the main frescoes, and their disappearance from the walls would undoubtedly destroy this polyphonic enchanting harmony... A widely used ornament consisted of circles with

stylized five-petal flowers inscribed within them. The space between the circles is filled with three-petal flowers” (Bezverkhyi et al., 2001, p. 387).

Returning to the image of the Oranta from St. Sophia of Kyiv, whose image is framed by heavenly text and ornamental attributes, let us turn our attention to another depiction of the Mother of God from the Kirill’s Church, which is part of a composition attributed to Ivan Yizhakevych - the “Procession to Paradise”. This iconographic representation is divided into two parts. In the first part, an angel is depicted turning towards the Apostle Peter, who leads people to salvation with an anchor cross, towards the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom. The second part, above the described scene, portrays the actual paradise: “The plane on which the composition is depicted is divided into two parts by a window opening. On the left are the doors to Paradise, which can be accessed by stairs. At the doors stands a guardian - a six-winged seraph, whose red wings signify fervent love for God. On the opposite side is the Mother of God, standing on either side archangels. The Mother of God has opened her palms as if indicating her readiness to embrace all the righteous into her embrace. The background of the composition is lavishly adorned with flowers, grapevine garlands, birds and intricate lacework of trees with green, pink, and blue leaves. Such a combination creates an impression of a delicate, lace-like tapestry” (Bezverkhyi et al., 2001, p. 385).

Nadia Nikitenko (2014) reveals the symbolism of geometric and plant ornamentation in St. Sophia of Kyiv: “Two magnificent ornamental friezes run along the cornice that separates the figure of the Oranta from the ‘Eucharist’: the upper one is of a geometric type, while the lower one is of a floral nature. Particularly striking is the exquisite upper ornament, laid out in light white lines against a dark blue background, creating an impression of sparkling iridescence. The ornament above the ‘Eucharist’ resembles a conch frieze, but its motifs are not separated; instead, they form a continuous vine, which is the thread of the overall pattern. This motif embodies the symbol of unity between Christ and the apostles depicted in the ‘Eucharist’: ‘I am the vine; you are the branches’ (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, John 15: 5). As a symbol of infinity, the ornament emphasizes the timeless and transcendent nature of the Eucharistic sacri-



face” (Nikitenko, 2014, p. 83).

Let us add something to the previously quoted conclusion. From the perspective of Christian symbolism, which continues the tradition of the Old Testament and Jewish symbolism, the grapevine, together with wheat, holds the highest position in the “symbolic hierarchy” of plants. As it is known, symbolic references to a particular image are often given based on its external or natural characteristics. Therefore, considering that the grapevine, especially in the Near East and Southern European regions, vigorously entwines trees, creating shady arbors and canopies, it has acquired interesting significance in early Christian apocryphal literature, written in the genre of revelation (similar to the canonical last book of the Holy Scriptures, the Book of Revelation of John the Theologian). In the “Shepherd of Hermas,” the grapevine is described as a symbol of mutual brotherly assistance between the wealthy and the poor members of the Christian Church. The rich (grapes) clothe the poor (the tree), who, in turn, envelop them with sincere prayers and, at the same time, enable them to perform good deeds, which develop their spirituality and help them progress towards the Kingdom of Heaven the texts of the Church Fathers compare the grapevine to the Church, and in wine, considering the context of Acts 2:12-18 (And they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine”). However, Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted his voice and addressed them) and he addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy!’” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Acts 2:14-18) and Ephesians 5:18: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” In these passages, the Church Fathers see the fervor of the Holy Spirit and the symbol of Christian unity

(individual grapes being transformed into one cup of wine).

Pope Benedict XVI (2011), a brilliant scholar of the patristic corpus and a great admirer of the classical Church tradition, during his sermon at the Holy Mass in Berlin on September 23, 2011, analyzes the grapevine as a “symbol of vitality and a metaphor for the beauty and dynamism of Jesus’ relationships with His disciples and friends”. He draws the following theological conclusion from the biblical text: “‘As you are united with me, so you are united with one another.’ This belonging to one another and to Him is not merely an ideal symbolic relationship, but - I would say - a biological, life-giving condition of belonging to Jesus Christ. This is what the Church is, this communion of life with Him and for one another, a communion that is rooted in baptism, deepened and receives increasing vitality in the Eucharist. ‘I am the true vine’ actually means: ‘I am in you, and you are in me’ - an unprecedented identification of the Lord with us, His Church”.

## Conclusion

Therefore, the plant ornaments in a Christian church primarily serve a symbolic function, being endowed with connotative characteristics of the paradise garden as an overall idea of the temple - a place separated from the secular space and inhabited by God (or gods in polytheistic religious systems). The formation of the model of Christian sanctuaries can be traced from the ancient temples of the Ancient Near East, which, among other things, expressed through lush vegetation the lost paradise existence and the longing for eternal bliss that humans sought, as seen in various mythical narratives (such as the Epic of Gilgamesh). The concept of the temple as a paradise garden was adopted by the Jews during the formation stage and the formation of the temple cult in Jerusalem. The First and Second Temples featured distinct plant ornaments (palmettes) in their decoration, and the central seven-branched menorah held one of the primary symbolic meanings as the embodiment of the Tree of Life from Eden. In Christian liturgical worship and the embellishment of churches, the ancient tradition of using plant symbolism was continued. It is also worth noting that plant ornaments

in Christian churches serve significant aesthetic, decorative, and visual-spatial functions (such as vertical ornaments creating an effect of “growth” towards the celestial realm). A vivid and artistically rich example of lavish plant symbolism is the adornment of the Kyiv Sophia and Kyrilivska churches. On the one hand, it was a reception of the already established Byzantine model of interior decoration in Christian churches. On the other hand, it incorporated the local significance of vegetation in pagan religious cults and folk rituals.

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