

THE INVERSE PERSPECTIVE AS A SYMBOLIC FORM

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the Inverse perspective as a system for graphic communication used in space representations in Byzantine art. The research and following of the system's evolution is more complicated than one might expect, because inverse perspective is not based on objective projective methods. If analyzed, according to the criteria of the modern, strictly defined and objectively understood perspective, one would categorize it as vague, inaccurate and even confusing graphic systems of communication, as it has been done in some previous superficial views on this construction. But if one perceives the wider picture, considering its genesis and context, then one can question their correctness in relation to the objective treatment of space, but still, in relation to the subjective treatment of space, these systems are completely unique and basically represent methodically designed means of artistic expression according to the Medieval Orthodox worldview.

Considering the strict canonization of all aspects of Byzantine sacral architecture and art, it would be naive to assume that the compositional arrangement of the setting and space in the painting was completely left to free interpretation by master painters and their skillfulness to "correctly" and accordingly represent these aspects. Byzantine painting was a substitute for the literary work in the eyes of the vast number of illiterate believers. Inverse perspective was a tool used to express religious thoughts, from the most ordinary historical comments on the lives of the Saints to the most profound theological reflections that transported the observer to the immaterial and transcendent idealistic world of thought. With the very need for such refined visual interpretations of the thoughts of the Byzantine theologians, master painters had to become real expert interpreters and translators of these theological texts with a painterly language. The uniqueness of this painting language lies in the emphasis on spirituality, the irrational and supernatural view of the painted object, same as in the words of liturgists, monks and other theological thinkers.

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