



## [The new volume of Ierotopiia](#)

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The new volume of *Ierotopiia*

*Ierotopiia Ognia i Sveta v kul'ture vizantiiskogo mira / Hierotopy of Light and Fire in the Culture of the Byzantine World*. Ed. Alexei Lidov. Moskva: OOO "Feoriia," 2013. 558 pp. ISBN 978-5-91796--39-5.

Published under the auspices of the Moscow University Research Centre for Eastern Christian Culture, this latest substantial volume in the productive series inspired and led by Aleksei Lidov should encourage those not yet acquainted with the books to read them. He invented (out of two Greek words) the term Hierotopy /*Ierotopiia*, which he explains in one of the earlier volumes as "the creation of sacred spaces regarded as a special form of creativity, and a field of historical research which reveals and analyses the particular examples of that creativity." He has organized conferences that have produced a broad array of stimulating contributions, the main focus being on the Eastern Orthodox world, but also with a much broader comparative interest. As he indicates, a full bibliography of the publications which have resulted may be found under *Ierotopiia* on the Russian Wikipedia <<http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki>>.

As in the earlier volumes, a good many of the contributions are in English. Here longer English texts may be provided with often extensive Russian summaries, or vice versa if the original paper was in Russian. There are a good many b/w illustrations, though often unfortunately small and dark. In the case of one paper with figure references, the illustrations are absent, suggesting that they might be found in a different published version of the same essay. There are some other editorial glitches. However, it is laudatory that a serious effort is being made here to ensure that this scholarship is accessible to a wide audience, many members of which may not read Russian.

I have but quickly skimmed in the book, often relying on the summaries. Among the essays that will be of particular interest for H-EarlySlavic is one by the late Victor Zhivov, arguing that there is no hard evidence Byzantine Hesychasm had any impact in Russia before Nil Sorskii. Given the emphasis of this volume on light and fire in belief, ritual and its setting, it is not surprising that hesychasm enters the discussion in other essays as well. A number of the essays focus on natural and artificial illumination within churches. I had been unaware that on Mt. Athos, certain liturgies involve the deliberate swinging or rotation of candelabra. A. V. Murav'ev's essay on Old Believer attitudes regarding light and fire includes interesting material on the responses to the introduction of uniform, artificial (eventually electric) illumination by the official (Nikonian) Church. Among the most interesting essays is one by Vsevolod Rozhiatovskii in which he illustrates how the interior space of a church looks very different depending on time of day and whether the illumination is natural or artificial. The movement and resulting emphasis of light during the day was calculated to correlate with and reinforce the liturgy. Vladimir Sedov discusses the impact of the evolution of Russian church architecture in which the larger windows of Byzantine models shrank or were eliminated, or the positioning of windows changed. Galina Zelenskaia's long essay on the Resurrection Cathedral of



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Patriarch Nikon's New Jerusalem Monastery emphasizes how there was a conscious decision to open up as much of the space as possible to natural light, with results that differed from what the architecture of its model in Jerusalem may have achieved.

Other essays focus on Byzantine ceremonial, with Eleni Dimitriadou cautioning her readers at the outset that to enter Istanbul's Hagia Sophia today is not to experience what Byzantine celebrants would have in the Church as originally planned — polished marble is dimmed with dirt, windows have been bricked up, of course most of the mosaic decoration is gone, and the artificial lighting on that which remains distorts how the images would have looked when illuminated by natural and/or lamp light coming from a different angle. In her essay and some of the others, ritual "performance" is an important consideration. Maria Cristina Carile's essay attempts to reconstruct the effects of light on the no longer extant Byzantine Great Palace, in the process considering not only the interior spaces but the question of whether roofs were gilded or sheathed in lead (which, depending on the angle of the sun, can appear to be white). Even though Lidov's comparative project has, as far as I know, not taken us to East Asia, I could not but think here of the fact that Liao Dynasty pagodas in northern China built in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries often included mirrors on their exteriors. Studying the hierotopy of light in the Orthodox world undoubtedly could inspire new considerations of the interior spaces of Buddhist temples too, where it is clear their patrons and decorators were very much concerned with the effects produced by lighting and its close connection with ritual practice and belief.