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Visualizing the Divine
Mandorla as a Vision of God in Byzantine Iconography

The visual culture of Byzantium was profoundly religious in its character and was intended to serve as “theology in images” equal to theology in words. The gradual development of the Orthodox theology over the centuries has caused noticeable changes in the visual paradigm of Byzantine art. Therefore, all Byzantine visual models can be seen as visual interpretations or “translations” of the then contemporary theological thought, and it is possible to “read” them through the theological writings and religious mainstreams of the time. One of the best examples in this regard is the mandorla as a visual sign of the indescribable phenomenon of God’s Glory, mentioned in the Old and the New Testaments. Byzantine art had established two main types of mandorla representing the spatio-temporal and resplendent manifestations of the Glory of God. These visual models have been reflecting every alteration of the theological milieu concerning the current concept of how God reveals Himself to humankind. More and more elaborated notions about the Vision of God resulted in more and more elaborated visual paradigms of the Glory of God and moulded various patterns in its iconographic expression - the mandorla.