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Theology and History in Romanian Iconography of Byzantine Tradition of Wallachia and Moldavia between the 14th and 17th Centuries

SUMMARY

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SUMMARY

The present thesis is an interdisciplinary research performed in a field where theology, history and art history meet, intended to highlight the connections the historical and the political events share with the religious images in Romanian iconography of Wallachia and Moldavia from the 14th to 17th centuries. It became clear that the iconographical interest in history appeared at the same time as certain themes: for instance, the Mother of God appeared as a heavenly protectress against the perils of time, and the Holy Cross was victorious in the fight against those who endangered national unity and identity. The Holy Cross is also depicted alongside certain saints (Holy Emperors Constantine and Helena, martyrs, military saints) and in roughly the same period as the depiction of Orthodox capitals of great religious and historical significance. Other undoubtedly historical presences playing both a historical-political role and a religious one are the votive images of the princes and boyars of Wallachia and Moldavia. Last but not least, the Last Judgement scenes show fragments of the contemporary history of their authors: the painters portrayed the political enemies among the sinners.

The Mother of God, the Protectress

The Mother of God is very frequently depicted in Wallachian and Moldavian iconography of the 14th-17th centuries. In Wallachia, the culture generated by the reign of prince Brâncoveanu extensively promoted Marian themes in painting as well as in literature. A rich literature dedicated to the Virgin was created during this period, one that was further enriched in the 17th century. This Virgin centred cult was also illustrated in the painting of that era where the Mother of God was most often represented as a Protectress of the faithful, and as an Empress.

A very common image in Wallachia was that of the 'Protecting Veil of the Theotokos': there was one such scene inside the porch of the parecclesion of the Hurezi monastery, one on the façade of the refectory at Polovragi, and a particular scene at Govora, one in which the winged Virgin protects the faithful.

In Moldavia, the Theotokos as Protectress is shown at Sucevița, in a scene called the ‘Synaxis of the Virgin’ belonging to the Akathistos, where Mary is portrayed sitting on a throne with her divine child and surrounded by archangels, angles and saints. Underneath, a great number of saints with haloes around their heads are praying. This emphasis laid on the Marian cult should also be regarded as a way by which the Orthodox protected themselves against the Protestant attacks of those times.

Another theme worthy of our attention is that of the ‘Glorification of the Virgin’ found at the Sucevița monastery, the 24th scene of the Akathistos. The Theotokos is depicted as a mother who is stretching out a mantel-like tent and offering protection to the whole of mankind under it, or in this particular case, the Moldavian people. The same monastery also has a depiction of the ‘Pokrov’ scene, which seems to have replaced the former ‘Siege’ scene.

Another theme analysed is that of the Siege of Constantinople, found in three monasteries: Moldovița, Humor, and Arbore. What is amazing in these images is the fact that the attackers are wearing Turkish clothes and not only are they wielding spears and arrows but also artillery (with the exception of the Arbore image), an element which gives this scene its historical significance. Although the Proemion of the Akathistos refers to the help given by the Theotokos to the Byzantines during the Persian attack on Constantinople in 626, in Moldavia two of the above mentioned monasteries (Moldovița and Humor) are decorated with frescoes depicting the 1453 siege of the Christian capital, a view which most scholars agree upon. Contrary to this opinion, some believe that it would have been inconceivable to have the biggest defeat of eastern Christians painted on the walls of monasteries. The answer given by Sorin Dumitrescu to this idea is based on contemporary literature, more precisely, ‘The Great Supplication’ of Ivan Peresvetov, and asserts that Petru Rareș wanted to have the scene of the Siege of Constantinople shown as often as possible to be seen by everyone and especially by the Christian princes, so that they would never forget that the divine Providence punishes those who embrace heresies. Consequently, the scene painted at these monasteries is in fact the Fall of Constantinople. At the Arbore monastery the siege is actually that of 626, as attested by the inscription, because during his second reign Petru Rareș (who had regained his throne with the help of the Turks) could no longer afford to have daring themes on display on the walls of the sacred buildings he founded at a time when the Ottoman Empire was flourishing. Nonetheless, the idea of the Virgin’s protection is still very much present: we are dealing here with a hymn which suggests that the Mother of God will help the Moldavians

against the Turks just as she had been the one to help the Byzantines withstand the attacks of barbarian populations in 626.

To conclude, the frequency of these portrayals of the Theotokos proves that on the one hand, the struggle against Ottoman domination had influenced church painting and, on the other hand, that the icons served a militant purpose, promoting the preservation of national identity. The Reformation had begun to threaten the peace of Moldavia and Wallachia, objecting to the cult of the Mother of God, and therefore the sumptuous representations of the Empress of heavens may also be interpreted as a form of defence of the Orthodox faith and of national unity. Although painting the Virgin Mary may have seemed an exclusively religious act, it does have a strong historical substratum. The icon would thus play a double part: both a religious and a historical and political one.

The Victory of the Holy Cross

The Byzantine emperors had often employed iconography in order to express and promote their religious and political ideas and the Romanian princes did the same thing. I attempted to analyse a series of iconographical subjects depicting the struggle against the Ottoman domination after I had stressed the fact that the role of the icons had been both theological and historical in nature, supporting national identity. Moreover, I also intended to emphasise that the idea of victory was of crucial importance since it could give courage to those fighting the Ottomans. Actually, the entire Moldavian and Wallachian painting is permeated by these two ideas: victory and protection (especially in this historical period). Quite naturally, victory in the name of the Holy Cross could only come at the hand of military saints, on horseback or not, slaughtering dragons or killing infidel emperors (Saint George or Saint Demetrius). An equally significant fact is that the representation of Saint George killing the dragon was embroidered on the battle flag of Stephen the Great found on Mount Athos; here the saint is portrayed as a Byzantine emperor, crowned and armed by angels, and trampling the dragon. The monastery of Putna has a similar representation: an embroidered item on which Saint George is dressed as a Roman emperor, wearing a crown, with the defeated dragon at his feet. What differentiates these two images is the antique throne on which Saint George is sitting in the Putna piece of embroidery. One needs to remember that even the Saviour Jesus Christ is depicted as a Byzantine basileus, fighting

alongside them from the Kingdom of Heavens (see the Deesis at Voroneț and the one in the church of the Dormition in Râmnicul Sărat).

The presence of the Holy Emperors Constantine and Helena holding the Cross between them as a banner of Salvation conveys the same idea of victory. The images of these two Byzantine emperors are found both in Wallachia, at the monasteries of Hurezi and Snagov, and in Moldavia, at the churches of Pătrăuți, Popăuți etc.

At the Hurezi monastery, the icon of Constantine and Helena is painted in the great church, which is dedicated to them, but also in the refectory and the skete of the Holy Apostles. Corina Popa believes that this image marks the birth of a new iconographical scheme in Romanian art: the two emperors are flanking a Cross with the crucified Christ on it and at their feet they have the Brâncoveanu family. The message of this votive image is as obvious as possible, namely that the members of this family, who gave their lives for Christ (later to be canonised on June 20th 1992) are honoured as Christian martyrs and deserve to be placed beside the Holy Emperors due to their supreme sacrifice. For the Wallachian prince, the name of his patron saint, Constantine, is extremely important as both he and his son bear it.

Another instance of this scene is that of the Dobrovăț monastery, one in which tradition is strictly observed. Celebrated on September 14th, the Holy Cross has been venerated from the 4th century onward after it had been discovered by Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine.

The theme of the Orthodox capitals painted at Dobrovăț illustrates the same idea of victory. After the fall of Constantinople under the Turks, the only autonomous places left were Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, and Jerusalem, a sad reality also reflected in art. André Grabar sees the cycle of the Orthodox capitols painted of Dobrovăț as a merely symbolical work representing sacred places of the Orthodox world. This is actually an old tradition: in late Antiquity the Roman Empire was also illustrated in art by its four major cities – Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Trier. In the Dobrovăț cycle each Christian space is remembered by a miracle performed by a saint: Mount Athos commemorates the miracle of Saint Athanasius, Saint John Climacus is the effigy of Saint Catherin's Monastery on Mount Sinai, and Saint Sabbas represents Jerusalem.

The representation of Mount Athos found at the Polovragi monastery in Oltenia, the work of the painters Constantinos, Andrei, Gheorghe, Istrate, and Hranite (belonging to the School of Hurezi) is also quite an unusual theme, unique in old Romanian art. Vasile Drăguț believes that the scene – painted in the porch of the monastery – had been designed after a very popular engraving which had circulated in the Christian East. Just as the scene from Dobrovăț I mentioned earlier, it conveys the same message: a symbolic Orthodox free space that does not fall under the influence of time, a place whose mission is to encourage those who look at its image and give them hope that better times await them.

The Cavalcade of the Holy Cross is one of the rare themes of Byzantine iconography, depicted in the church of Saint Polyeuctus of Constantinople (4th century), the church of the Holy Emperors of Ohrid (14th century) and the Banja church of Bosnia, built by King Stephen Dečanski.

In Moldavia this image of victory is first painted at the church of Pătrăuți, followed by the churches of Bălinești and Arbore. The Cavalcade of the Military Saints of Pătrăuți is a hymn of Christian victory; painted on the western wall of the pronaos, above the entrance portal, it is one of the most majestic scenes in old Romanian painting, dating back to the time of Stephen the Great. Leading the Cavalcade, Archangel Michael – the head of the heavenly armies – is dressed like a warrior; the next figure is that of Emperor Constantine the Great wearing the dalmatic of Roman Emperors and a crown, riding a chestnut coated horse. Then comes a Cavalcade of thirteen Military Saints, amongst which the figures of George, Demetrius, Theodor Tyron, Theodor Stratelates, Procopius, Mercurius, Nestor, Artemius, and Eustace are clearly recognisable. Saints George and Demetrius are the ones the painter paid most attention to. The thirteen saints have elegant and dignified attitudes, with their capes blowing in the wind, riding horses with a supple and gracious gait, giving the whole image a wonderful elegant tone. In order to suggest the time and space of the eighth day the artist resorted to a well known method employed by the Byzantine painters: the juxtaposition of figures belonging to different places and historical periods, with different lives, all these heavenly characters coming together by the will of God for a sacred cause, represented by the cross in the sky. Despite the fact that the enemy isn't depicted, we can easily make out the message being conveyed: if these military saints and martyrs fought the devil with the power given them by God, the Moldavians will fight the pagan attackers, namely the Muslim Turks, with the same power.

Virgil Vătășianu asserted that the Cavalcade of the Military Saints of Pătrăuți shows strong Russian influences, resembling an icon of the Theotokos 'of the Sign' painted during the reign of Prince Andrey Bogoliubsky, more precisely the scene of the 'Battle of the Novgorodians with the Suzdalians' in which the former are protected by the Mother of God and Saints George, Boris, and Gleb.

The scene of the Cavalcade is not necessarily a mere illustration of a historical event, it also symbolically charged. Art historian André Grabar goes as far as to say that this scene expresses in religious-artistic language the message of the anti-Ottoman war of the one who had commissioned the work, prince Stephen the Great of Moldavia, a message addressed to his people as well as to the whole of Christendom. Therefore, the Pătrăuți scene has a double significance: religious and historical. As to the style, the painter of Pătrăuți, Gheorghe of Triacala employs the Greek idealism of Byzantine painting, a compositional logic, and a great finesse of the lines that are rarely paralleled in Moldavian painting.

The Victory of the Holy Cross is also depicted in the Vision of Saint Constantine of Hurezi painted in the 17th century by a team of painters composed of Constantinos the Greek, Ioan, Andrei, Stan, Neagoe and Ioachim, commissioned by Constantin Brâncoveanu, Prince of Wallachia. The scene is placed on the eastern wall of the pronaos where the icon of the patron saint is usually found, and it is made up of a cycle of four events of the lives of the Holy Emperors Constantine and Helena. The moment of the miraculous vision of the Cross in the sky occupies the first scene of the composition. The second image is that of the baptism of Emperor Constantine (it is a known fact that he was only baptised on his death bed, in May 337). In the third scene the Emperor is joined by Saint Silvester who is talking with a Jew named Zambri and his disciples, surrounded by clergy and courts men. The fourth and last scene depicts the dormition of Saint Constantine.

The moment when the emperor and Zambri enter a dispute is inconsistent with the historical data; the emperor should have been depicted at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Pope Silvester I of Rome was not at that council: he sent two legates, priests Vitus and Vincentius, to represent him. This scene reflects the fact that the painter wanted to provide the viewer with an idealised image of the Byzantine emperor. Another hypothesis is that the painter actually alluded to the theological debates of the 17th century and wanted to get the following message across: the heretics who convert are welcomed by the Orthodox Church. The baptism is equally misplaced in the timeline, as the emperor was only baptised

right before his death, in his villa at Ancyrona, by the semi-Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia.

The episode of the battle of the Milvian Bridge near Rome is depicted differently than at the church in Pătrăuți. The latter representation has two armies on either sides of a river. The Christian army is led by Emperor Constantine wearing imperial attire and a crown; he also has the halo of a saint. He has just seen the sign of the Holy Cross which miraculously appeared before the battle. The Christian army is real, composed of cavalry and pedestrian contingents and whereas the knights have swords and spears, the pedestrians have muskets and guns that were not in use in antiquity, a fact implying that just as the scene of the Siege of Constantinople of the Moldovița monastery, this painting too hints at the inter-faith wars of those times – the social-historical and religious reality.

The style of the painting of Hurezi is that developed during the reign of Brâncoveanu: rich forms, chromatic harmony, a penchant for the narrative, motives of Baroque origin, compositional balance.

The short presentation of these aspects clearly indicate that both the scene of the Cavalcade of the Holy Cross from Pătrăuți and that of the Vision of the Holy Emperor Constantine from Hurezi, illustrate the historical atmosphere of an era dominated by the Ottoman threat, and were designed to inspire courage to the Christians by the sign of the Cross which had become a sign of their victory against the pagans.

To conclude, the theme of the victory was developed based on the analyses of the icons of the Holy Emperors Constantine and his mother Helena, the Cavalcade of the Holy Cross, Saint Nicholas who was considered a fierce opponent of heresies, the Ecumenical Councils, martyrs and military saints. Finally, the theme of the Orthodox capitals and that of Mount Athos – unusual though it may be since it was not painted according to Byzantine iconographic tradition – support this idea: the representation of symbolical Orthodox spaces that were still free and not conquered by the enemies were supposed to encourage the beholder and bring hope for times to come.

The cultural crusade waged by the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia proved to be a specific trait of mediaeval times when the two Romanian territories were threatened by Ottoman conquest and by Catholic and Reformed propaganda. The premise of this crusade was that the princes of these two Christian countries felt it was their duty to carry on the true

faith and for this ideal they acted like genuine Byzantine basileis. Their model was Constantine the Great and he therefore was often portrayed in Wallachian and Moldavian iconography.

All these analyses are centred on the idea that along their indisputable theological function, the icons also had a militant function. In a time when the Ottoman danger was real, these icons were meant not only to strengthen the faith of their beholders, but also to convey a message of freedom.

Portraits of Princes and Boyars from Wallachia

This chapter focuses on a series of votive portraits of princes and boyars from Wallachia painted in the 14th-17th centuries in order to identify the presence of the historical-political factor which was meant to educate the beholders and to preserve Romanian identity in the context of those times when the Ottomans were advancing and various heresies were spreading. In view of achieving this goal it was first of all necessary to circumscribe the images to their specific historical contexts because their significance was both theological and historical. These images actually attempt to illustrate contemporary history and realities in their own language and for that reason, their elements – gestures, attitude towards God, clothing, jewellery and specific princely insignia – were analysed from the perspective of their mediaeval semantics. Furthermore, for a more accurate interpretation the results of these analyses were corroborated with the data obtained from contemporary chronicles.

Among these portraits, the one of Nicolae Alexandru found at the ‘Sfântul Nicolae Domnesc’ church in Curtea de Argeş, is considered to be the prince’s oldest portrait in extant: it is placed within the Deesis scene – where the painter replaced Saint John the Baptist with the patron saint of the ruler. This is the image of a man who humbles himself before God (his position is specific to the Romanian Middle Ages), a prince who succeeded in obtaining the canonical recognition from the Patriarchy of Constantinople for the Metropolis of Wallachia and was also the first Romanian prince to sponsor Mount Athos. His clothes are western, which indicates his political orientation towards the western states in contrast with his religious orientation.

Other portraits taken into consideration are those of Mircea the Elder from Cozia, the cathedral of Argeş, the parecclesion of Cozia monastery, the pronaos of the Cozia’s spital,

Brădet and Cotmeana. In all of these the prince is dressed as a western knight (with a 'pourpoint' tunic and chlamys). He appears as a donor with his son Mihail in the great church of the Cozia monastery; his wife is missing probably because she was Catholic. His garments – more precisely his trousers called 'chausses' – are imprinted with the bicephalous eagle, the symbol of the imperial family of the Palaiologos. The way in which he was portrayed had to illustrate and promote the idea of royal authority and heredity.

Prince Neagoe Basarab is shown in the votive image from the cathedral of Curtea de Argeş as a 'Byzantine Caesar' alongside his wife lady Despina Miliţa (the daughter of the Serbian despot Iovan Brancovici) and their children. The entire painting has an imperial aura suggested by the opulent and luxurious apparel and the jewellery worn by the ruling family, all reminders of the splendours of Byzantine imperial court.

Other images of the same family are the icon of Saint Nicholas with the family of Neagoe Basarab, the portrait of Lady Despina and her son Thedosius, and the icon of the Descent from the Cross from the Ostrov-Călimăneşti skete (the last one depicts the suffering of Lady Despina over the loss of her son who had died at a young age; here the painter suggested the pain of the two mothers by a perfect symmetry, but he also went beyond that and showed the transfiguration of human distress and its healing through faith). In another icon of Saints Simon and Sabbas from the Ostrov-Călimăneşti skete, Lady Despina and her daughters are portrayed at the feet of the two saints. The face of Neagoe Basarab was preserved for posterity on the embroidered epitaphios found at the Xenophontos monastery in Mount Athos.

The portrait of Prince Radu Paisie (dressed in a cherry silk vestment) with his wife Ruxanda (dressed in a velvet kaftan) and his son Marcu from the monastery in Curtea de Argeş is singled out by the luxurious costumes. In another image of the same prince, found at Cozia monastery, he is being crowned by an angel, which suggests that his reign was bestowed upon him by God.

Other images that were analysed are those of Mircea Ciobanul and Lady Chiajna from the Snagov monastery and the images showing the same prince with his high steward Nedelcu Bălăceanu from the Tismana monastery. Lady Chiajna is also present here as she was the one who actually managed the state affairs at that time. A suggestive element is the presence of religious themes such as the life of Saint Eustace which corresponds to a certain extent to the life of the ruling family.

Prince Alexander II is portrayed with his steward Pârvu at the Bucovăț monastery; the western wall of the naos is covered in the painted Chronicle of Bucovăț, unique in Wallachia. What is also important is that this monastery was built by the joined efforts of the boyars (such as Stepan) and Prince Alexander II.

Căluu monastery houses the portraits of the Buzești boyars – Radu, Stroe and Preda – and that of Prince Michael the Brave and of his brother, Petru Cercel (both dressed in western clothes). The fact that the prince is portrayed in an edifice commissioned by boyars shows that they had always supported him and shared his ideals. The boyars are depicted with their wives, offering the edifice to God.

Matei Basarab, his wife Elina and their children are portrayed at the Arnota monastery. The face of the prince radiates gentleness and humbleness, qualities the writings of those times attest to him having. He is also illustrated in the illuminated texts of his era, along with his wife, such as the Orthodox Missal of 1654 decorated by Radu Sârbu.

The portraits of Constantin Brâncoveanu and his family at Hurezi are significant documents for both historians and art historians, giving them the opportunity to observe the luxury of their clothes and jewels, the sumptuousness of the Wallachian prince's court. Brâncoveanu appears as both a patron (with an impetuous attitude resembling that of Emperor Justinian in the church of San Vitale) and, in a different painting, as a child with his family, which on his mother's side was related to the Cantacuzino family.

Other boyars' portraits analysed are those of Barbu Craiovescu and his wife Neaga, from the Bistrița monastery, of Diicu Buicescu with his family, at the Clocociav monastery, of logothete Giurea from the church in Stănești, of Stroe Buzescu and his wife Sima from the church of Stănești, and that of logothete Tudor and lady Dimitra of the same church.

Portraits of Princes and Boyars from Moldavia

Alexander the Good was the first Moldavian prince whose portrait has been preserved, namely on the epitachelion of the Bistrița monastery where he is depicted with his consort Marina. Other portraits of him are found at Bistrița, Sucevița, and Voroneț, where he is depicted in a procession welcoming the holy relics of Saint John in Suceava.

Stephen the Great, the foremost figure of 15th century, is depicted with his family in the votive paintings of the monasteries Dobrovăț, Voroneț, Pătrăuți, Saint Nicholas of Rădăuți and Saint Elijah of Suceava wearing Byzantine clothes – this shows he wanted to be seen as a successor of the Byzantine emperors. His features are recorded on the illumination of the Gospel found at the Humor monastery, as well as on various pieces of embroidery (the epitrachelia of Putna, Voroneț, and Dobrovăț, on the veil of Putna). A precious and significant piece of embroidery is the grave veil of Mary of Mangop, preserved in the treasury of Putna.

Bogdan III is portrayed in the church of Saint George of Suceava. Petru Comarnescu compares his facial traits with those of Theodor Metochites from Karie Djami in Constantinople. Petru Rareș, the illegitimate son of Stephen the Great, is shown with his family – Lady Elena and their children – at the monastery of Moldovița, an edifice he had rebuilt. There are also two votive images of him at Humor and Probota, where his son Iliăș has a blackened face, because he had converted to Islam.

The image of Alexandru Lăpușneanu and his wife is painted at the monastery of Slatina, and on two veils embroidered in 1561 which he had donated to the same monastery.

The Movilă family (Ieremia, Simion, Lady Maria, the children Constantin, Chiajna, Lady Elisabeta, wife of Prince Ieremia and the children Alexie, Ecaterina, Zamfira and Stana) are depicted at Sucevița in sumptuous Byzantine garments worn for the grand court ceremonies and religious celebrations, but only up to the second half of the 16th century, when they were replaced by the kaftan, a piece of clothing the Moldavian princes received on their investiture. Simion and Ieremia Movilă were also portrayed on their embroidered funeral veils which bear the mark of a strong Polish influence.

Vasile Lupu and his family are portrayed in the splendid church of the Holy Three Hierarchs which he had commissioned, in a stance suggestive of his imperial aspirations. Equally impressive by its luxury is the portrait of Lady Tudosca from the same church; another image of her is preserved on the embroidery found in the Gothic room of the church she and her husband had built. The portrait of their early departed son, John is preserved on a piece of embroidery of the same church.

Let us not forget the boyars' portraits: Șendrea and his family, Ioan Tăutu from Bălinești, Luca Arbore from the monastery he built, Teodor Bubuiog and his wife Anastasia

of the Humor monastery, hetman Daniil of the same monastery, and Gavriil Troțușan of the monastery of Părhăuți.

In conclusion, the analysed votive paintings are first and foremost proofs of the strong faith of their commissioners, of their wish to be remembered by their descendents not only as historical figures, but also as people who need the prayers of those who enter the churches and monasteries they had built. Moreover, these images contain messages that promote faith and its continuity, urging beholders to preserve their identity and unity around Jesus Christ. Some princes use portraits or religious images laden with symbolic elements that make up a favourable image strengthening their authority as rulers: for instance, Radu Paisie and Michael the Brave in Wallachia, and Petru Rareș in Moldavia. Actually by the act of offering the church they had commissioned to Christ, as it is shown in votive paintings, sometimes through powerful intercessors such as Saint Constantine the Great and Saint Nicholas, the connection is made between ruling a people and the divine investiture for such a public position. It is just as if the beholder were told that God was the one who had intended both the glory of the commissioner and the preservation of their identity as a people, through faith.

In the case of certain boyars, such as Ban Barbu Craiovescu, logothete Giurea and hetman Luca Arbore, the emphasis is laid on their personal life and destiny (which of course are intertwined with their political life and destiny). Thus, through religious scenes, the personal lives and ideals of the commissioners are clearly highlighted. The painters enjoy a great deal of artistic freedom in these paintings, adopting daring compositional and chromatic solutions.

All these images have a significant value for the history of art as their inscriptions help to date certain historical events with greater precision. Therefore, they have a twofold value: both theological – they promote the faith – and political – they advocate preserving the Orthodox customs and ethos, regardless of the hardships brought about by time.

The Last Judgement

The first artistic representations of the Last Judgement appeared in the catacombs and on sarcophagi, but they are radically different from the later images of Byzantine iconography. Whereas in the catacombs Christ is shown separating the good from the wicked, in the church of San Apollinare Nuovo for instance, He appears between two angels and

surrounded by sheep. Another image of the Saviour, Christ in glory, with an opened book in his left hand and blessing with the right, is found in the scene of the Judgement at Cosmas Indicopleustes: in another register of this scene there is a frieze of eight angels, while underneath there are scenes illustrating the righteous, the sinners and the resurrection of the dead.

Christian iconography enriches this theme: the throne of *Hetoimasia* with the *arma Christi*, the twelve apostles, the Deesis, heaven and hell. The theme is also found in the 12th century mosaic of Torcello, then in Thessalonica, in the church of Kazandjlar-Djami, Mistra, Gracianica, Basckovo in Bulgaria (the oldest instance of this scene), the Dochiariou and the Great Lavra monasteries of Mount Athos. It is also quite frequent in Russia, especially in the 15th century in the Novgorod and the Moscow School. In 12th century France the scene is also rendered in the sculptures adorning the cathedrals of Beaulieu, Conques, Cohors, and Moissac.

A series of western painters are also inspired by this subject: Fra Angelico, in the church of Sanata Maria degli Angeli, where his work shows clear traditional tendencies, Giotto, at the Scroveni Chapel, Roger van der Weyden in the altarpiece preserved at the Hôtel-Dieu Museum in Beaune, in which the painter dedicated a significant space to Archangel Michael who weighs the sins of men, and last but certainly not least, Michelangelo's unique and original Last Judgement of the Sistine Chapel.

The composition of the Last Judgement is structured on several registers. The top register has two archangels who enfold the veil of time imprinted with the signs of the zodiac. In the middle there is the image of God – the Ancient of Days. The centre of the next register is occupied by the scene of the Deesis, with the Apostles on either side. The third register is dedicated to the *Hetoimasia*: to the right of the empty throne of *Hetoimasia* the martyrs, hierarchs and monks are assembled and led by Saint Paul the Apostle, and to the left Moses leads the unfaithful. From underneath the throne a menacing divine hand appears, holding the scales of righteousness. A giant, threatening river of fire – springing from underneath the throne of Christ in the second register – flows across the scene down to the last register, into the mouth of a dragon. The fourth and fifth registers are connected; left of the river of fire lies hell, right of it, heaven.

The analysis of the way this scene was rendered in Romanian culture was meant to highlight the non-religious elements reflecting historical and political realities of those times.

The themes with a historical-political substratum that does not jeopardise the religious features appear because what was intended was to protect the identity of the Romanian people faced with the threat of occupation: Hungarian dominance, the Catholic Church and later on the Turks were endangering the very being of Romanians. They are trying to defend their identity by the means of religious art, bringing to the forefront theological themes that had not enjoyed a great deal of attention. These are new themes but also old ones that are deliberately amplified precisely so that they could serve an identity ideal.

As a consequence, both in Moldavia and Wallachia the Last Judgement is enriched with historical and social aspects which reflected the state of Romanian society of those times. Numerous themes were employed in a rather propagandistic manner, to motivate and educate the masses. They were orchestrated at the initiative of the rulers and were supposed to keep alive the idea of freedom and national independence in the hearts of the faithful by means of religious and historical imagery. Thus new themes were born, others transformed, and others became more complex.

The first representations of this scene appear in an area controlled by Hungarians: in Transylvania, at the church of Streiu, then in Sântă-Mărie-Orlea and Criscior, but the most relevant scenes are those of Râu de Mori, Leșnic, and Hălmagiu, which reflect the new problems of that era.

In Wallachia, the Last Judgement was generally painted on the eastern wall of the narthex, inside the church or on its western wall. Its first appeared at Cozia and the princely church of Argeș, but it became wide spread only in the 17th century, as it can be seen on the walls of the monasteries of Stănești, Râmnicu Sărat, Hurezi, and Fundenii Doamnei in Bucharest.

The Last Judgement of Hurezi is a good example as to how historical aspects were reflected in iconography. It is worth mentioning that this scene is painted at the monastery funded by Constantin Brâncoveanu in a period of historical and religious turmoil. His entire life Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu supported Orthodoxy both in Wallachia and in the countries that used to belong to the former Byzantine Empire, and this concern was made manifest in his donations to Mount Athos, Sinai, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Transylvania. His concern with defending the true faith may also be deduced from the interest he showed in printing religious books meant to strengthen the faith. He also invited foremost figures of the Orthodox world such as the patriarchs of the Orthodox East, Dositheos of Jerusalem and

Dionysius of Constantinople, who had helped consolidate Orthodoxy by their polemic writings.

At Hurezi, 'the "dogmatic crusade" promoted by the prince receives a visual expression in painting' (Corina Popa). There are many themes meant to mobilise the masses that have been elaborated following the prince's programme; by means of their religious, historical and moralising images they had to kindle the believers' aspiration for freedom. The scene of the Last Judgement painted in the porch of the large church at Hurezi monastery, by a group of painters led by the Greek master Constantinos, elaborated in the Athonite tradition stands out due to its moralising contents, its portrayal of contemporary social, political, and religious aspects. There are obvious intimations of the society's sins. In the hell scene we see the deceiving grocer and the dishonest tailor, portrayed as male prototypes; the sin of cutting wine with water is not embodied by the tavern keeper, but by the alewife; the depraved woman is spanked and the smoking monk is depicted near a narghile. Also burning in the flames of hell there are the heretics, Arius, Antichrist, and the witches.

In stark contrast to this scene, the heavens have such scenes as the Dormition of the righteous, where the dying man is surrounded by prophets of the Old Testament: David who in a gesture of infinite kindness and understanding plays the harp for him, Solomon, who reads to him for the relief of his soul, angels ready to welcome the spirit of the deceased. The soul is depicted here as a small winged white man, ready to take flight. These striking contrasts between heaven and hell were probably meant to underline and clarify what is happening to the souls of those who lose or keep their faith.

The Ship of Christianity, an important and relevant theme for the historical and political context is painted in the parecclesion – the work of Preda, Nicolae and Ephrem. Ioana Iancovescu believes this is both an allegorical scene depicting the dangers threatening the Orthodox Church and the Christian faith, and a composition which combines scenes of the Last Judgement and the Apocalypse. It represents a ship with Jesus Christ at its helm and Apostles Peter and Paul standing watch at the bow. A multitude of saints and hierarchs stand on the deck around an altar table, all dressed for the service of the Divine Liturgy. On the altar there is just one object: the tabernacle, a metal box containing the Holy Communion. The city of Jerusalem appears in the distance.

Underneath it we see the two most formidable enemies of the Wallachians of those times: Calvin and Mahomet, who is placed directly onto the mouth of the Leviathan and is

trying to shoot the Holy Eucharist (in Valeriu Anania's view), whereas the former is placed on the monster's jaws. Arius and Nestorius stand on the shore, along with the emperors who had persecuted the Church: Maximilian, Nero, Trajan, Julian and Diocletian, embodying the horsemen of the Revelation, accompanied by the Woman of Babylon (Rev. 17,4-5).

The place reserved to Mahomet in this scene reflects the mindset of that period regarding the leader of the Islamic faith. If we were to attempt to fathom the way the people of that particular historical period thought, to identify the mental *habitus* that dominated their era – the one Sorin Dumitrescu talks about when mentioning Panofsky's method – Mahomet is perceived by the painter and by his fellow countrymen as an impostor, a false prophet and Islam as a Christian heresy. The false prophet is sometimes depicted in the west as Antichrist, a strong negative image, especially in mediaeval times (when the Ottoman reign expanded), but later on he will be regarded less suspiciously by the Europeans.

Valeriu Anania believes that the Hurezi frescoes – both those in the church and the parecclesion – were ahead of their time, a surprisingly modern work: the scenes of the damned convey their complete lack of identity and communication with one another. The colours are warm and harmonious, especially those used by Constantinos in the paintings of the larger church, and the drawing is noble, translating the 'eclectic vision' of its author.

The Last Judgement of the church Fundenii Doamnei, painted on the eastern wall of the porch is also worth mentioning. Mihail Cantacuzino funded this building and the scene was painted in 1699, by the famous Pârvu Mutu. Albeit it largely complies with contemporary *hermeneias*, this painting brings a new element depicting social and religious aspects of those times: issues of immorality. The scene is a representation of 'the World' as a woman with horns sitting on a beast (Rev. 17,1-18) raising 'the old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan' (Rev. 12,9) above her head. Daniel Barbu gives an interesting interpretation to this scene: its message is that the people who forgot the faith and destroyed their life by identifying it with money and turning the latter into an idol will be punished; by the power of their worldly possessions the rulers of the world, such as Nebuchadnezzar, demanded that their people bow before them and see to their every whim. Another representation of 'the World' as a horned woman sitting on a beast is also found in the church of Stănești, which proves that the scene in the church Fundenii Doamnei was not the first.

The style of the painting of this church is that of the famous painter Pârvu Mutu easily recognisable in other churches he painted such as those in Filipeștii de Pădure, Sinaia,

Râmnicul Sărat, Doicești etc. He has an excellent realistic manner for painting portraits, but his genius is shown here by the colours and the technique he uses, as well as by the ingenious ideas he has in creating suggestive themes and images.

In Wallachia the Last Judgement appears symptomatically more often, in the churches of Filipeștii de Pădure, Sinaia, Râmnicul Sărat, Stănești, in the parecclesion of Doicești etc.

The most famous representation of this scene in Moldavia is clearly the one from the monastery of Voroneț. It is placed on the western wall and it presents obvious similarities to the 16th century scenes of Mount Athos, especially the one in the refectory of the Great Lavra.

Beside its religious aspects (based on the contemporary *hermeneias*) this scene also has a powerful political and social message that can be easily identified in the third register: the painters portrayed various figures who were considered enemies of their nation and of their religious confession. Thus, among the sinners there are the enemies of the true faith, from ancient times – Herod, Maximilian, Julian – to those days – Turks, Tatars, Armenians and Latins.

The older adversaries of the faith are depicted differently from the new ones. For the former the painters reserved a smaller area, whereas the latter were painted more carefully: they have extraordinary sizes and are strategically placed so as to be seen by the beholders. The Latins are also among the damned souls because they were considered heretics, just as the Armenians, and were therefore a danger to national unity. In stark contrast to the figures tormented by hell fire, those inhabiting the heavens have serene faces and are surrounded by a festive calmness. Here we have the Mother of God, three patriarchs of the Old Testament and even the repentant thief that had been crucified with Christ.

The fact that the Turks and the Tatars were represented in this scene is not an artistic novelty, but the Armenians being counted with the damned is a foreshadowing of the persecution which was to befall them during the reign of Ștefan Rareș, who persecuted them because their heresy seemed to threaten his attempts to centralize his state.

The Catholics are also painted amid the damned souls because just like the Armenians they are considered to be heretics and consequently an undermining factor of national unity and strength. During this time Rareș occupied Pokkutya and this caused the relations with the Polish, and subsequently those with the Roman-Catholics, to deteriorate.

Sorin Dumitrescu has a brilliant opinion about this scene at Voroneț: it may have been inspired by the Vision of the Tremendous Judgement of Saint Niphon, a ‘mystical and ecclesial document’.

With regard to its style, the painting of Voroneț impresses its beholders by the grace and the vitality of its figures, the almost painful realism of their faces, the striking contrast between the serene countenances of the righteous who were welcomed into paradise and those of the sinners with hideous, pagan, almost vulgar faces. The colours are bright, dominated by golden yellow, the famous Voroneț blue, dark green, olive green, ochre and grey.

The scene of the Last Judgement was painted on the walls of other churches in Moldavia as well, such as those of Humor, Moldovița, Sucevița, but one of the most significant is that of Probota.

At the monastery of Probota, built with the stipends of Petru Rareș, the Judgement scene is painted in the porch alongside another theme, generously depicted, new to the iconography of that period, namely the Revelation of Saint John the Evangelist. The two scenes are integrated in one another, a compositional choice which creates a wonderful dynamic. The painting of Probota is individualised through the suggested communion and dialogue between the figures, the fine draping of their clothes, the ample, fan-like wings of angels all elements endemic to the painter’s style.

To conclude, the connections between history and iconography are quite obvious, as are the intentions of the painter and of the political figure who commissioned his work: the enemies of the nation must be depicted as sinners filling the ranks of those damned to suffer eternal torment; finally, although the scene of the Last Judgement preserves its intact theological value, it also gains a historical and political relevance worthy attention.

Conclusions

The analyses of all these iconographical themes led me to the conclusion that the Romanian iconography of Byzantine tradition of the 14th to the 17th centuries had a theological and historical-political role to play. First of all, the theological significance of

these representations cannot be disputed: they were meant to preserve the true faith and the Orthodox dogmas from the dangers of those times. These dangers caused the cult of the Theotokos, Saint Nicholas, the Holy Emperors Constantine and Helena, and the Military Saints to grow as well as themes like the victory of the Holy Cross, the Ecumenical Councils, the Orthodox capitals and the Last Judgement to be depicted more often. Secondly, the Romanian rulers made use of the arts – especially religious painting – in their efforts to preserve political and religious unity and identity, and as a consequence the iconography of those times has clear militant aspects. Thirdly, beside the religious themes historical and social themes also appear either alone or associated with religious ones, forming ensembles that convey unambiguous historical and moral messages. Finally, the votive paintings reflect the various intentions the people who commissioned them had had in mind: some of them chose subjects and characters whose lives had a certain connection to their personal suffering or to events of their own lives; others wished to emphasise the divine and human legitimacy of their reign or social position; however, all of them wanted to stress the authority of the prince by the means of a hieratic attitude and luxurious attire mimicking that of the Byzantines.

To conclude, all these analyses have highlighted the connections between the historical-political context and the religious imagery of Romanian iconography of Byzantine tradition from the 14th to the 17th centuries in Wallachia and Moldavia.

Key words: Romanian iconography, mediaeval history, the Cavalcade of the Holy Cross, votive images, Last Judgement, Christian capitals, Wallachia, Moldavia, Romanian princes, Romanian boyars.

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