

HETIMASIA'S THRONE

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Abstract: The term "Hetimasia" is of Greek origin and its basic meaning is "preparation." Hetimasia's Throne is an iconographic motif of the Christian art arising in the period of the primary church, approximately during the 4th century; it symbolizes the persons of the Holy Trinity and starting with the 11th century, the throne of the Last Judgment (cf. Ps. 9.7-8); as such, it inherits an eschatological connotation. The term **ετοιμασία** is mainly used in the Biblical Greek of the Old Testament - in Septuagint - and in the New Testament, where it is especially employed for the Hebrew verb **kun** כּוּן, whose various meanings it assimilates. Hetimasia's Throne is nothing else than an elongation in history until the end of times, up to the Last Judgment, of Yahweh's Throne amidst the people of Israel, the idea of an empty throne being taken over by the nations surrounding Israel, and extending on a secular line, as a symbol of the divinely-conferred authority of the king. After the Edict of Milan, in 313, this symbol has been assumed by the liturgical art of early Christianity, Christ being the Emperor and the Lord, true man, but also true God, the inheritor of the Davidic throne, together seated with the Father and the Holy Ghost (cf. Apocalypse 3.21). In the same time, the Holy Fathers assert the sacrificial altar of Christ as Divinity's true throne, the Holy Table on which the hierarchs and the priests deliver the Liturgies on Sundays and at holy feasts. Even our Mother of God is named throne of the Divinity, because in her Christ was born, and so she becomes the bridge between the presence of Yahweh in the Holy of Holies, in the Old Covenant and the unseen presence of God on the Holy table in the Holy Altar. This is the reason why the Mother of God is presented on the calotte of the Holy Altar; she is the stair on which the divine glory descends and, at the same time, the burning bush which never deliquesces. The central placement of Hetimasia's Throne in the ample composition of the Last Judgment renders it the keystone by which the entire whole could be translated. The proto-fathers knelt in front of the throne, mediating for the human race, emerge as a second Deisis. As a conclusion, Hetimasia's Throne is the Throne of Christ's sacrifice, the Holy Liturgies that sanctify and prepare the believers for the fearful Last Judgment.

Keywords: *Hetimasia, Last Judgment, The Throne of Judgment, The Holy Table, Mother of God, Judgement's Preparation, Judgement Day;*

Etimasia or Hetoimasia come from the Greek **ετοιμασία, εθ, ηJ**–*hetoimasia*, which means **preparation, diligence, toil, expediency**¹,

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¹ Anatole Bailly, *Le Grand Dictionnaire Grec-Français*, Rédigé avec le concours de E. Egger, Edition revue par L. Sevchan et P. Chantraine, Hachette, 2000, pg. 822.

*availability, finishing, training, preparation, equipment*². The “Hetoimasias’s Throne” (il. 1-6) is a motif from the Byzantine and post-Byzantine age, derived from the pre-Christian motif of “The Empty Throne of the sovereign” (il. 7) named “*divus*”, (or of a god like Zeus³ - il. 8, 9) which was representing the absent emperor, especially placed for his subjects’ veneration, in his absence. On the throne, there was a pillow on which the royal regalia were placed⁴. It is well known the fact that this tradition has been being acknowledged even from Antiquity, brought from an Oriental context, a Syrian-Palestinian one (il. 10).

This iconic motif is composed of an empty throne on which a book is placed, the Book of Life, Christ’s Gospel, the cross and the passions of Christ’s tools. The throne is prepared for the Saviour Who will come to sit as the World’s Judge, at His second Coming, on the Judgment Day; there is also a symbol of the Holy Trinity: God the Father is symbolized by the throne itself, God the Son by the Holy Cross, the tools of the passions and the Holy Gospel, and the Holy Ghost by the Dove; but Hetoimasias’s Throne is closely related to the Pantocrator, because God, the Creator of the world, is also its Judge⁵, with an eschatological connotation: “But the Lord sits enthroned forever; **he has established his throne for justice**, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness” (Ps. 9:7-8); so the Hetoimasias is painted also in the narthex, at the base of the central steeple (il. 5, 11, 12, 13).

Based on the theological-artistic testimonies which have crossed the historical layers to us, the first representations in the Christian art of the empty throne appear in the 4th century. The empty throne on which we could find, under different groupings, the Gospel, the Cross, the Spear, the sponge, the crown of thorns, the lamb as a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice, and the Dove as a symbol of the Holy Ghost, was introduced in the iconographic schemata in the period of the early Christianity and the Byzantine one. The representation could be observed as being part of the icons of the Pentecostal (il. 14, 15) and of the Last Judgment, or the icons that share an eschatological connotation (il. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20).

² Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon With a Revised Supplement*, revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, CLARENDON PRESS, OXFORD, 1996, pg. 703.

³ We can speak about a easy connection between empty throne of a pagan god and the Altar of “Unknown God” ~~agwstw/qew~~ from Areopag St. Paul preaching (cf. Acts 17.23), or cf. Diogenes Laertios, *Despre viețile și doctrinele filosofilor*, X, 110, Polirom Publishing, Iași, 2001, pg. 90-91, with a good analyse by Iustin Moisesescu in *Activitatea Sfântului Apostol Pavel în Atena, Opera integrală vol. IV*, Anastasia Publishing, București, 2002, pg. 189-200.

⁴ Frederick Tristan, *Primele imagini creștine, De la simbol la icoană, secolele II-VI*, „Meridiane” Publishing, Bucharest, 2002, pg. 352.

⁵ Pr. Prof. Ene Braniște, Prof. Ecaterina Braniște, *Dicționar Enciclopedic de Cunoștințe Religioase*, Diocesan Publishing Caransebeș, 2001, pg. 158.

Up to the 11th century, the representation is not accompanied by the inscription of Hetimasia. Moreover, Hetimasia's Throne does not appear added in a Biblical scene long before the 11th century. This fact indicates that, up to now, it is very possible that it has never been connected to the Judgment Day, initially designating equality between The Persons of The Holy Trinity.⁶ Of course the Throne is here the icon of the Father, the Gospel and the Cross, the icon of the Son, and the haloed Dove, an icon of the Holy Ghost; it is a Trinitarian image, even if in some of the first representations of the empty throne there are no elements which would symbolize all the three persons of the Holy Trinity⁷. The idea of joining the empty throne and the tools of the passions, even in the earliest examples, has probably occurred following the discovery of these relics by Heraclius, in 634⁸. What remains to be mentioned here is the fact that in the early representations of the Judgment Day, Hetimasia's Throne remains unemployed (il. 21, 22, 23, 24) (sometimes even in some of the later representations - il. 25, 26); only much later, it will be introduced, after the recognition of its eschatological symbolism⁹ (il. 27, 28).

Taking into account the fact that Hetimasia's Throne is an iconographic symbol with profound theological valences which self-declines - etymologically but also conceptually - its significance, in numerous occurrences in the pages of the Holy Gospel, some of its basic but also derivative forms which are implicated more or less in collocations that define, one way or another, the concept, such as: *Hetimasia's Throne*, *the Empty Throne*, *the Throne of the Preparation*, and the intercession of the preparation in the divine act, but also in man's act, *the Throne of the Last Judgment*, etc., with terminological instances from the Old Testament, but also from the New one, taken together fill out the whole significance of the basic term: *Hetimasia*.

Thus, the lexical field of the term **ѣѡимасіа**, Hetimasia: **ѣѡимосѣ**, **ѣѡимазу**, **ѣѡимасіа**, **прѡѣѡимазу**, in its clear, basic meaning, means **preparation**, in the active meaning of "preparing, finishing/ending", but also in the passive meaning of "finitude", "ability" or "resolution"¹⁰. So, in the New Testament, **ѣѡимазу** is the most common verb, with the meaning of "**to prepare**", "**to make it ready**", encountered in approximately forty different

⁶ I. D. Ștefănescu, *Iconografia artei bizantine și a picturii feudale românești*, Meridiane Publishing, București, 1973, pg. 59.

⁷ Andreu Grabar, *Christian iconography, A study of Its Origins*, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1961, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., Bollingen Series XXXV-10, Princeton, University Press, 1968, pg. 115 and 122.

⁸ Dalton O. M., *Byzantine Art and Archeology, with 457 illustrations*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1911, pag. 669.

⁹ Cf. footnote 5 in Dalton O. M., *Byzantine Art and Archeology...*, pg. 666.

¹⁰ Walter Grundmann, the term **ѣѡимосѣ**, **ѣѡимазу**, **ѣѡимасіа**, **прѡѣѡимазу**, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. II, Editor Gerhard Kittel, WM. B. EERDMANS Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A., 2006, pg. 704-706.

contexts; the mission of Saint John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming of the messianic king, in the person of Jesus Christ, is described in Mt. 3.3; Mc. 1.3; Lc. 1.76; 3.4, and the sitting on the right and the left side of Christ “*it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared by my Father*” (Mt. 20.23; Mc. 10.40).

The verb **Hetoimazo etoimazw** refers also then to *the preparation undertaken by God Himself*, including even *the preparation of a nation* for Himself (Lc. 1.17); of a kingdom that would have been inherited by His people (Mt. 25.34) and the salvation for His people (Lc. 2.31). The texts of John 14.2; Heb. 11.16 include the pledge that *Christ and God the Father together have been preparing an eternal fortress for the faithful people*¹¹.

This group of words gains a religious significance only in the biblical Greek, in the Septuagint, where it is used especially for the Hebrew word *kun* / WB, whose diverse meanings are assimilated by it¹² (and sometimes for the verb עָשָׂה *asah*, or the verb כָּרַח *karah* and others) and in the New Testament.

The Throne of Hetimasia is nothing else than an extension in history to the end of times, on Judgment Day, of Yahweh’s Throne from the midst of Israel people “God’s first born” (Exod 4.22,23), from the Biblical times of the Old Testament, a throne which is to be found in the Sanctum, above the Ark of the Covenant (אֲרוֹן / aron) in which the golden bowl or the pot (năstrapă, non-translatable – n.t.¹³) with the desert manna, for recollection, Aaron’s stick and the Tables of the Law, and on whose cover (*kapporet* כַּפֹּרֶת)¹⁴ were seated two cherubs carved in locust wood, gilded, with abated wings with which they covered/overshadowed the Holy Ark. These angels with unfolded wings and the cover of the ark (*kapporet* כַּפֹּרֶת which was made of gold, represented the throne of Yahweh’s presence in the midst of the people, the throne of the divine grace, the beheld sign of the alliance between Yahweh and Israel. From the numerous representations that bear witness to the

¹¹ Stephen D. Renn, Editor, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2005.

¹² The meanings of the verb **Kun** /WB are more numerous, such as “to rise”, “to create”, “to find”, “to establish, to install, to invest, to inaugurate, to promote, to propose”, “to prepare”, “to establish”, cf. F. Brown, S. Driver and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Coded with Strong’s Concordance Numbers, With an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, U. S. A., Ninth Printing – September 2005, pg. 465-467.

¹³ Năstrapă – noun, non translatable, meaning a bowl, a vassel, a container, a pot.

¹⁴ The term כַּפֹּרֶת *kapporet* is a noun deriving from the verb כָּפַר *kaphar*, meaning “to cover”, “to ransom”; a ritualistic term describing the meaning by which the sins of Yahweh’s people have been forgiven under the old pledge. This forgiveness was obtained by offering a bloody sacrifice, which “covered” the sins of the person bringing the sacrifice. So the term *kapporet* כַּפֹּרֶת is translated as “*the throne of mercy*” or “the covering of the ransom”. F. Brown, S. Driver and C. Briggs, op. cit..

appearance of the Ark of Law, (today, lost) we specify the representation of the ark from the Capernaum synagogue (around IV-III century B.C.) (il. 29).

So, on a scriptural level, the idea of “God’s throne” crosses like a red thread the entire history of humanity, up to *Hetimasia’s throne*, in which the world will be judged. But from a representational point of view, as a consequence of the Ark of Covenant being lost, the idea of “royal throne” or “empty throne” registers some synopes. But this idea of a divinity’s throne is assumed, of course in a veiled way, by Israel’s neighbouring peoples, as testified by irrefutable evidences on the co-existence of this idea of *a throne of a divinity which cannot be seen*, the idea of an empty throne, joined by uncountable *representations of local gods seated on this throne*, specific to different peoples. We restrain ourselves to presenting a single example in this direction: a representation of Assyrian origin (around 1243 B.C.) which is hosted by a museum in Berlin and which shows King Tukulti-Ninurta I knelt in front of an empty throne on which a flame would be represented, as a symbol of the god of fire Nusku (il. 10).

In the Christian areal, after the Edict from Milan in 313, when Christianity is given freedom of expression, liturgical art begins to develop itself in the same rhythm as the writings of the Holy Fathers of the Church, which demonstrate Christ’s Messianity, but also the fact that He is the inheritor of the Davidic throne, a throne which, even in the Old Testament period, has had profound Messianic connotations. So Christ is King and Lord, true man, but also true God, the dogmas discussed and established starting with the first eccumenical Synod, hold in Nicaea, in 325, modeled by the wordings of the Cappadocian Fathers, but also by the succeeding fathers¹⁵ who assert the sameness in being and, at the same time, the homotrony and the syntrony of the Son with The Father and the Holy Ghost (this means that Christ is together with the Father and the Holy Ghost on a seating chair, being of the same being with the Father and the Holy Ghost)¹⁶.

So in this theological climate, it was only natural the rising of “artistic formulations or expressions” for the laying out of the theological ideas in question. But the non-theological artistic climate was already emphasized, fact that has facilitated the attempts of theological visual expression.

In the non-theological climate of the age, it was known that the **Empty Throne** - bearer of the royal paraphernalia seated on a cushion – was

¹⁵ We are referring to the Cappadocian Fathers: Saint Basil the Great in the treatise “*On the Holy Ghost*” Ch. VI, and Saint Gregory the Theologian, in the sixth Homily “*On peace*”; about the hymnographer fathers: Saint Andrew of Crete in “*The Great Canon*” Song IV, Saint John of Damascus, in his 8th song from the second canon of Matins, in the Pentecostal Sunday, Mitrophan of Smyrna in some of the troparia he composed, etc.

¹⁶ Nicolae Ozolin, *Iconografia Ortodoxă a Cincizecimii, izvoarele sale și evoluția schemei iconografice bizantine*, Translated by Vasile Manea, Patmos Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, pg. 112-118.

presenting in the armchair the absent emperor who was worshipped as if he would have been there. He was considered present as if he were there. A speaking example in this context, taken from the life of the Church itself, could be considered the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, at which the emperor Constantine the Great took part, but not to all the sessions, as Eusebius of Caesarea underlines. The council has lasted for more than three months, from 20th May 325, when the opening took place, and lasting until 25th August of same year¹⁷. While missing, Emperor Constantine has been leaving behind the scepter, gesture by which the emperor was expressing his will of participating in the council, assuring the participants of his presence even in absence, but an absence conditioned by the affairs of the empire which were absorbing him, but not totally, because his heart and soul were there, in the middle of the synodic debates, fact effected by the presence of the imperial insignias: the empty throne in which the emperor's scepter is seated¹⁸.

A more eloquent example, which shows this time the passing made from the recognition of the imperial insignias of the earthly emperor to the worshipping of the heavenly emperor, took place at the third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, in 431, when there was once again an empty throne, but this time, instead of the empirical scepter, the Holy Gospel has been seated on the cushion. This fact has been recorded in the letter send by Saint Cyril of Alexandria (who was presiding the council) to Emperor Theodosius the Second.: "The Holy Council has reunited in the Holy Church of Mary having as a member or, better said, as a leader Christ Himself. In this effect, in the throne the venerable Holy Gospel was being seated"¹⁹ (il 30 – with specification that image refers to the second council, Constantinople 381). By these examples we are able to practically observe the adoption of the lay symbols and their metamorphosis in the blossom of the Christian Church. Christ is considered true God and the Lord of everyone, who governs each of our actions when being invoked and his divinity is asserted.

It deserves mentioning the fact that before the appearance of the empty throne in the Christian art, a representation of the empty throne also appears at the renowned Synagogue of Dura Europos, which is dated from 3th century AD, respectively 244 AD, based on an Aramaic inscription, its frescoes being re-placed in the National Museum of Damascus, Syria. The reference is to the space above the niche where the Torah was kept. Taking into account the fact that the image is quite dull, but also the fact that the picture was intervened

¹⁷ Pr. prof. dr. Ioan Rămureanu, Pr. Prof. dr. Milan Šesan, Pr. Prof. dr. Teodor Bodogae, *Istoria Bisericească Universală, vol. I (1-1054)*, I.B.M.B.O.R. Publishing, Bucharest, 1987, pg. 316;

¹⁸ Cf. Frederick Tristan, *Primele imagini Creștine*, Meridiane Publishing, Bucharest, 2002, pg. 352-353;

¹⁹ Idem;

upon, with great pains could we distinguish the initial subject of the composition.

So researchers like Goodenough resorted to the reconstruction of the image and to its detailed description. As a consequence, on the right side of the fruitless vineyard, an empty throne is painted, without a backrest, with a cushion on the seat, and under the throne there is a trestle in such way that the empty throne to represent the sky, and the trestle – the cosmic orbit²⁰.

This aspect exhibits an eschatological connotation because of the place of the location (above the niche for storing the Torah), but also because of the symbols with which it's corroborated (the vineyard – central, the altar – on the left side, and the empty throne – on the right side; under the throne, in the centre, the scene “Abraham’s sacrifice” – all of them arranged in such a way that form a symbolic program, a well-outlined one, which comes to enforce the idea that the Jews were still expecting Messiah here, on earth, and of the future things of the world that will come, idea that emerges in reality from the entire program of Dura Europos’s representations²¹.



(il. 30) *Dura Europos Synagogue, west wall: central panel; first reconstruction after Goodenough*²²

Taking into account the fact that both in the synagogue of the first centuries of the Christian eve, and in the early Christian church the image of the empty throne is used as a Messianic symbol, we could take a glimpse to a direct link between the synagogue and the early Christian church.

So starting with 4th century, we find the first examples of “empty throne” from the Paleo Christian art:

- The sarcophagus of Tusculum, with the monogram of Christ and His robe seated on the empty throne, 4th century (il. 31);

²⁰ Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of The Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection XXVIII, Washington D. C., 1990, pg. 161;

²¹ Idem, pg 163-164;

²² Cf. Figure 195 from *The Frescoes of The Dura Synagogue ...*;

■ Bas-relief of marble, at the present in Bode Museum – Berlin (cca. 400), with two lambs represented under the throne (il. 32);

■ The coffin for holy relics of Samagher, near Pola (Istria), which exhibits Hetimasia's throne in its center, 440 AD; now it is to be found in Venice, the Archaeological Museum (il. 33);

■ The mosaic with the empty throne from Saint Matrona's Chapel, today Santa Maria di Capua Vetere (Saint Mary of Capua Vetere), 5th century; it is an eschatological throne, placed on clouds, surrounded by two of the four apocalyptic beings, bearing the Book of Life, with seven seals, and the Holy Ghost disguised in a dove seated on the backrest (il. 34);

■ Clypeus with an empty throne on the Arch of Triumph in Santa Maria Maggiore, 5th century, with the four apocalyptic beings (il. 35);

■ The lamb and the opened Gospel, on the empty chair from the apsidal arch of Santa Maria Maggiore Church; it is a throne which governs the entire universe represented here by the blue sky with the sun, the moon and the stars surrounding it (il. 36);

■ Ravenna, the orthodox baptistery, belonging to Neon, cca 451-473. The dome includes four eschatological thrones (il. 37);

■ Ravenna, the Baptistery of the Arians, the Mosaic of the Dome, 5th century (il. 38);

■ Marble capitellum with the representation of the empty throne, 5th - 6th century, Louvre, Paris (il. 39);

■ The Church of Saint Cosmas and Damian, Rome, 527 AD; - mosaic detail, the Throne with the Lamb – Christ bringing Himself as a sacrifice (il. 40);

■ Detail of the triumphal arch with Hetimasia's throne, with Christ the Lamb, Santa Prassede of Rome, years: 817-823; during the governing of Pope Paschalis I; it's a copy after the representation from "Saints Cosmas and Damian" Church, Rome, 6th century²³ (il. 41);

■ Santa Prassede, The Chapel of Saint Zenon, 9th century, Rome (il. 42);

²³ cf. Frederick van der Meer, *Apocalypse, Vision from the Book of Revelation in Western Art*, Alpine Fine Arts Collection, Ltd., Publishers of fine art books, New York, 1978, pg. 57;

■ The Arch of Triumph: Hetimasia's Throne with the Gospel, crown and cross, between two angles; Santa Maria, foris portas, Castelseprio, Varese, probably the first half of the 9th century, Italy (il. 43);

■ The empty throne of Hetimasia in the midst of the participants in the second Ecumenical Council in 381, under the presidency of Emperor Theodosius the Great²⁴ (il. 30);

■ The empty throne surrounded by the four apocalyptic beings, by "the lion of Judaea and the lamb of God"; in the bottom, it is represented Moses on the throne, the unveiling of Moses's face by Evangelical symbols; frontispiece by Apocalypse from Moutiers-Grandval, Tours, cca. 840; London, British Library²⁵ (il. 44);

In the Orthodox churches, on the eastern side of the altar's apse, there is the chair reserved for the bishop, which symbolizes the heavenly chair of Our Christ the Savior²⁶. In this way, **the sinthron or the upper chair** is a high chair, with many chairs surrounding it, in which there are seated the vicar and the co-liturgical priests during the reading of the Apostle²⁷, imaging the Savior surrounded by the Holy Apostles. But this is not the throne of the Last Judgment.

In his work **Mustikhvqewriḗ kai; eḗklhsiastikhviḗstoraiḗ** the patriarch **Germanus the Second of Constantinople** says:

"The Church is the sky on earth, in which lives and walks God Who is in Heavens;... she is glorified more than the Tent of Testimony, of Moses's, it was prefigured through the patriarchs, founded on the Holy Apostles..., heralded by prophets and adorned by hierarchs, perfected by martyrs and seated on their holy relics, as on a throne."²⁸

Saint Maximus the Confessor says about the church: "**The Holy Church of God is an icon of the sensible world. She has as a gift the godly altar, and**

²⁴ Manuscript including the Homilies of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, 879-992, Paris, BNF; The Greek Manuscript, foil 355v.

²⁵ cf. Frederick van der Meer, *Apocalypse, Vision from the Book of Revelation in Western Art*, Alpine Fine Arts Collection, Ltd., Publishers of fine art books, New York, 1978 (first publishing), pg.74.

²⁶ *** *Învățătura de Credință Ortodoxă*, în „Mitropolia Moldovei și Bucovinei”, Doxologia Publishing, 2009, pg. 236.

²⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, *Liturgica Generală, vol. II Noțiuni de artă bisericească, arhitectură și pictură creștină*, 3rd edition, revue par pr. Eugen Drăgoi, Episcopia Dunării de Jos Publishing, Galați, 2002, pg. 98.

²⁸ Germanus the Second of Constantinople, **Mustikhvqewriḗ kai; eḗklhsiastikhviḗstoraiḗ**, Greek Patristics, tome 98, columns 383-453, Romanian translation Pr. Nicolae Petrescu, *Descriere a bisericii și tâlcuire mistică*, in „Mitropolia Olteniei”, No. 5-6, 1964, pg. 357-360.

as a ground, the beauty of the nave.”²⁹ And **Saint Simeon of Thessaloniki** underlines: “The Church is the house of God... made for God and God is its inhabitant and in it it’s the glory, the power and His Gift... *The holy altar fancies the above-heaven things, where it is said that the chair of God resides, symbolized by the Holy Table.*”³⁰ And again, the Patriarch Germanus the Second of Constantinople, in his work “*About the things of the Church*”³¹, says about **the Holy Table** that symbolizes, among others, “... **God’s chair over the cherubs...**”, as does the Shrine of the Law from the Holy of Holies from the period of the Old Testament, the place of the divine presence, the holiest locus of the Tent of Covenant and, later, of the Temple of Jerusalem. But with God being invisible for the physical eyes, this throne of glory and divine presence appeared as being empty and still a throne of the Divinity. In a prayer that the priest was privately saying during the Holy Liturgy, right after the prayer “Pater Noster”, it is said: “*Beware, our God from your holy place and from the chair of your Kingdom’s glory, and come to sanctify us, the One that above together with the Father sits and here, in invisible way, together with us you are...*”³² That the Church is the House of God the priest confesses every time when he enters the church by the prayer delivered at that moment: “*But I, by your great love, can come into your house in reverence I bow down toward your holy temple, in my fear of You, my God...*” (cf. Ps. 5.7-8)

The Holy Table is at the same time the place of sacrifice for “the slain Lamb” (Apocalypse 5.6). This is the reason why in numerous early representations of the throne of the divine glory, Christ was represented in the likeness of a lamb, following the words of the prophet Isaiah who prophesized about Christ (Is. Ch. 53.7): “like a lamb to the slaughter He would be brought, and like a ewe that is mute before her shearers, and He would not open His mouth.” These words are said by the priest during the Prothesis office at the preparation of the Holy Eucharist, at the delivery of the Holy Agnus, respectively (the term “**agnus**” comes from the Latin **agnus**, meaning lamb).³³ And when Saint John the Baptist says in reference to Jesus Christ: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1.29), he is alluding exactly to the words of the prophet Isaiah. Likewise, during the Holy Liturgy, at the moment of sharing, when the priest

²⁹ Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Mistagogia*, trans. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, I.B.M.B.O.R. Publishing, Bucharest, 1999, pg. 27.

³⁰ Simeon of Thessaloniki, *Despre sfințirea bisericii*, ch. 132, Greek Patristics, tome 155, Romanian transl. Toma Teodorescu in the paper “*Tractat asupra tuturor dogmelor credinței noastre ortodoxe*”, Bucharest, 1865, pg. 110-129.

³¹ Germanus the Second of Constantinople, *Despre lucrurile bisericii*, Greek Patristics, tome 155, Romanian translation Toma Teodorescu in his work *Tractat asupra tuturor dogmelor credinței noastre ortodoxe*, Bucharest, 1865, pg. 110-129.

³² ****Liturghierul*, printed with the blessing of His Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Vadu, Feleac and Cluj, third edition, Renașterea Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, pg. 79.

³³ Gheorghe Guțu, *Dicționar Latin – Român*, Humanitas Publishing, Bucharest, 2007.

crushes the Holy Body and puts Him on the holy disk, says: “It is crushed and it is shared the Lamb of God...”³⁴

Over the first covering of the Holy Table, the white shirt – **katasarka**, which prefigures the shrouds in which Christ was wrapped at His putting in the grave, there is another covering named “endotion”, made of silk, a golden or reddish shiny material fancying the glory of God. It worths mentioning that even Hetimasia’s Throne is represented as covered with this silky shiny white, red or blue *endotion*, sometimes accompanied by a white cloth symbolizing Our Savior’s shrine, as the last garment of Christ before Resurrection³⁵, as we could find it represented on the horizontal arm of the cross from above the empty throne in the Baptistry of the Arians (il. 38).

On the Holy Table there is permanently located the Holy Cross, the symbol of the supreme sacrifice for human’s redemption from the sin, and the Holy Gospel, the Book of Life, in which there are the very words of Christ the Savior, of His teachings, the New Law, Law under which all the peoples are to be judged, as under a “judicial code” of Christian living.³⁶ The same holy objects are evidenced on Hetimasia’s throne, with the specification that on the Holy Gospel it’s painted the Holy Ghost in the likeness of a dove, this meaning that, after the Ascension of the Savior to heavens, He send us the Ghost of truth and the Giver of Life as a Caresser, Who confesses and discovers Christ to us; and the fact that the Caresser is painted on the Holy Gospel signifies that the teachings of the Savior, the words of Christ’s Gospel are made comprehensible, they are translated by the Ghost, and the authors of the Holy Gospel have drafted Christ’s words inspired by the Holy Ghost.

So this is the artistic visual means of underlying the fundamental hermeneutical role played by the Holy Ghost in understanding the godly Word, the authentic interpretation of the Holy Gospel being achieved, beyond the powers of human reason, into the Holy Ghost, the Ghost of the truth: “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.” (John 16,13).

So the **Holy Table** from the Holy Altar on which every Sunday the Gospel is read and on which Christ sacrifices Himself in an unseen way for the redemption of humankind’s sins, **is in fact the Throne** which is being prepared for the Last Judgment, **the Sacrifice of the Savior and of His Saints being the measure by which the world will be judged** (il. 45 - Here Hetoimasia appear like a Holy Table with a chalice,³⁷). This is the reason why sometimes the Throne appears with a lamb, (il. 36, 40, 41) named in the Apocalypse “the Throne of the Lamb”, this being Christ brought as a

³⁴ ****Liturghierul*, pg. 80.

³⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, *Liturgica Generală, vol. II...*, pag. 97.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Cf. Andreu Grabar, *The great centuries of painting, Byzantine Painting*, Historical and critical study by Andreu Grabar, Collection planned and directed by Albert Skira – Lausanne and Geneva, 1953, pg. 188.

sacrifice. And the idea that Hetimasia's Throne – of the Preparation – will be in fact the Throne of Judgment also is plastically suggested in the iconography by the fact that sometimes under the throne, the hand of God protecting His Saints, keeps also the scale of measuring the deeds, the scale of the judgment (il. 2, 3, 4).

Then, the scene of Lord's Ascension to heavens is painted in the Orthodox churches in the upper side of the dome of the Holy Altar because through His Ascension, Christ left the throne of His sacrifice deserted – the Holy Table – in order to go to the Father on the throne of glory, of adoration (il. 18, 19) and, based on the words given to us by the angel in (Acts 1.11): "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go to heaven."; from here it follows that at the Parousia Christ will come on the throne of the aggrandizement surrounded by His angels and by much glory. But this throne of glory is not also the throne of judgment, but the throne of judgment is the one of preparation, the one prepared by Christ through His sacrifice, but also the one which prepares all people for the judgment: it is the Holy Table on which priests and hierarchs present the Liturgy till the end of times, preparing for God a chosen nation – the saints, "members of God's household" (Eph. 2.19). At the feet of this Throne of the Last Judgment there are the bones of the martyrs: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (I Cor. 6.2). This is the reason why in most representations of the scene of the Last Judgment, under Hetimasia's Throne, a hand is painted in which the souls of the saints are sheltered: it is the very hand of God that harbors the saints, those martyrs who sacrificed themselves for faith and whose holy relics are disposed at the food of the Holy Table, but also in a corner of Saint Antimis, in a little bag specially prepared for this purpose (cf. Book of Revelation 6.9,11): "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne... Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been."

Another truth that must be carefully highlighted is the fact that on the calotte of the altar, above the Holy Table, Mother of Our Lord is painted, the one who encompassed in Her womb the sky, the wholly saintly ark, the bright cloud, the staircase on which the divinity descended, making possible "**The mystery hidden from eternity and unknown to the angels**": The incarnation of Christ the Savior. In such way, Virgin Mary is named **the Throne of the Divinity**, because she has been deemed worthy of receiving and bearing the One Born for Eternity from the Father, the Son of God; Mary is as such being Theotokos, namely The Bearer of God, the Empress of the Angels, "Fairer than the cherubs and seamlessly more honored than the seraphs" – the ardent ones who await in the proximity of divinity's fire. So

through the Mother of God, who is named “The wholly saintly Ark”, etc., the connection is made, like a red thread, between the Old and the New Testament, between the presence of Jahweh in the midst of the Jewish people above the Holy Ark and the Incarnation of the Savior and, by this means, with the Holy Table which is the Sacrificial Altar of the Savior and the throne of divinity, and between the Holy table and Hetimasia’s Throne, of the future Judgment (il. 46, 47).

An important fact that must be specified is that the entire compositional ensemble of the Last Judgment scene must be mandatory read from up to bottom, as an impressive reversed perspective, (il. 48, 49) as a consequence in descending order, fact determined by the very subject of the composition. So in the register following right after the register depicting Parousia, downwards, in the center, Hetimasia’s Throne is represented, the Throne of Judgment Preparation, which is an element of powerful theological symbolism, through the symbolic elements contained, but also in itself, because it is a symbol. It is worth mentioning the position of Hetimasia’s Throne in the compositional ensemble. The very central layout of the Throne, the entire composition gravitating around this element, seems to imply the idea that Hetimasia’s Throne would be the keystone of the entire composition, the element by which the whole could be deciphered.

Notable is the fact that in some depictions of the Judgment day, as the one from Probota, the throne is framed by a rainbow, the symbol of the covenant between God and the human race of not wasting the human being, because of the disobedience sin, through the means of the flood (Gen. 9.9-17). Framed in the same rainbow is the Ancient of Days as the One Who made the covenant with the humankind after the flood, through Noah, but also Christ in glory is sitting on rainbow like on a throne, as the One by whom this covenant has come to fulfillment: the redemption of humankind from the shadow of the sin, by His redeeming Sacrifice (il. 50). But this throne is represented as surpassing the rainbow, in other words, the moment of the judgment transcends the promise of the redemption made in the perimeter of time, to the springs of time and which has otherwise been fulfilled from the perspective of time, in Christ, through Incarnation-Death-Resurrection, humankind being objectively redeemed, but which will take possession of the fruits of redemption, in a subjective way, in this interval: Resurrection-Parousia. And so, the moment of Parousia will take place in the future, beyond time, at the end of all ages, after the scroll of times would have been rolled in, and all the people standing alive shall change in a glimpse and “shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4.17).

On another side of Hetimasia’s Throne are presented the proto-fathers of the humankind, Adam and Eve, with auras, meaning they are absolved, redeemed, because in the Redeeming Sacrifice of Christ, the entire human

race was reviewed, including the first humans, the ones by whom the sin entered the world. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15.2). The iconography suggestively represents this universal redemption in “The Harrowing of Hell” scene, in which Christ delivers from the bounds of hell first the proto-fathers of humankind. For this reason, Adam and Eve are being represented with auras, albeit knelt and begging the divine forgiveness for the entire humankind, through them spoiled by sin. We could say by extrapolating the facts, that this prolonged wailing cry of the first people at the gates of Heaven from where they have been banished, a cry which, in corroboration with their reviewing in Christ’s sacrifice, brought the redemption to them. We could say, with the mandatory quotes, that it is another Deisis, a second Deisis, having as mediators, intercessors the very fathers of the human race.

As a conclusion, we would like to underline the fact that even if the term of “Hetimasia”, “Hetimasia’s Throne,” in other words “The Throne of the Preparation” entered the artistic language quite late (around 11th century), the symbolic elements accompanying the representation of the Empty Throne were reinforcing, starting with the very first representations, the idea of Christ’s sacrifice, which prepares the redemption of the humankind, and only based on this redeeming sacrifice, the idea of a Throne for Preparing the Last Judgment, Hetimasia’s Throne, has been accomplished. Because of the redeeming Sacrifice of Christ, humankind in general and every man in particular can appropriate for himself the fruits of an objective redemption, each of us working for individual redemption, *preparing* as such the soul for the Judgment. This throne of Preparation of the Judgment (of Hetimasia), which we have specified it’s the Holy Table, at the Judgment time will be transformed in the Throne of the Last Judgment; in other words, the **Holy Liturgies** which consecrate the believers, preparing them for judgment, **will be the measure of the judgment of humankind.**



* Left, (il. 1.) Hetimasia’s Throne, detail from “Last Judgment” fresco, first half of 15th century, Probota Monastery;

* Right, (il. 2.) Hetimasia’s Throne, detail from “Last Judgment” fresco, the western façade of Voronet Monastery, first half of 15th century;



*Left, (il. 3.) Hetimasia's Throne, detail from "Last Judgment" fresco, the Eastern wall of the open exonartex, Moldovita Monastery, first half of 15th century ;

* Right, (il. 4.) Hetimasia's Throne, detail from "Last Judgment" fresco, the Eastern wall of the open exonartex, Humor Monastery, first half of 15th century ;



* Left, (il. 5.) Hetimasia's Throne, New Saint John of Suceava Monastery, first half of 15th century;

* Right, (il. 6.) Hetimasia's Throne, detail from "Last Judgment" fresco, the Southern façade, Arbore Monastery;



* Left, (il. 7.) Roman Empty Throne, 1st century CE, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California;

*Right (il. 8.) Coin, Empty throne of Zeus Olbius facing slightly right / Thunderbolt; Cilicia, Olba, Circa 1st Century AD.



*Left (il. 9.) Tetradrachm, from Siria Seleucia Pieria 98-97 B.C., Turreted and veiled bust of Tyche wearing necklace; Rev. ΣΕΛΕΥΚΕΩΝ / ΤΗΣ ΙΕΡΑΣ - ΚΑΙ / ΑΥΤΟΝΟΜΟΥ; On stool, thunderbolt placed on filleted cushion, between legs, date BI (= year 12 of the local era);

*Right (il. 10.) Assyrian Basrelief. King Tukulti-Ninurta kneeling in front of the empty throne of the god of fire Nusku – 1243 BC; Museum of History– Berlin;



*Left (il. 11) Monreale, Sicilia, Duomo - vault with empty throne, Hetoimasia;

*Middle (il. 12) Bethlehem, St. Helena's Chapel - Hetoimasia above Pantocrator, 12th century;

*Right (il. 13) Palermo, Cappella Palatina - Apsis with Hetoimasia, Sicilia, Italy, 1140-1170;



**(il 14) The empty throne or hetoimasia, surrounded by the twelve Apostles, Basilica San Marco, Venice 11th century;*



**(il. 15) The Triumphal arch with Hetoimasia, Santa Maria di Grotta Ferrata Monastery, Italy, 12th century;*



*Left (il. 16) Russian Reliquary of the true cross with Hetoimasia, Constantinople (1075-1125 CE) St. Petersburg Hermitage;

*Right (il. 17) Pala d'Oro with Empty throne or Hetoimasia, Basilica di San Marco, Venice, Italy;



*Left (il. 18) Andreas Ritzos (1421 Iraklio - 1492), Ascension of Christ with the Hetoimasia, 15th century, Tokyo, National Museum of Western Art;

*Right (il. 19) The All Saints Icon with Hetoimasia, Leimonos Monastery, Is. Lesbos, Greece, ? century;



*(il. 20) Byzantine ivory plaque, detail Hetoimasia, Inscription above the throne (middle top): HETOIMASIA, with The Angels Mihail and Gavriil, and four saints: St. Dimitrie, St. Teodor, St. Gheorghe, St. Procopie, Constantinople 1000 CE - Louvre Paris;



*Left (il. 21) Last Judgement, Muestair Monastery, western wall, Swiss, around 800 C.E; - without Hetoimasia

* Right (il. 22) Last Judgement, St. George Church, western façade, Reichenau-Oberzell, Germania, 11th century;



*Left (il. 23) Last Judgement, Sant Angelo in Formis Church, Capua, 1072-1078; - without Hetoimasia

* Right (il. 24) Christ in Glory surrounded by evangelist's symbols and angels, St. Peter and Paul Church, Reichenau-Niederzell, Germany, 11th century; - without Hetoimasia



*Left (il. 25) Last Judgement –al fresco, Notre-Dame de l'Assomption Church, Alsacia, Bas-Rhin, Rosenwiller 14-15centuries; - without Hetoimasia

*Right (il. 26) Last Judgement, St. Trinity Church, Makariev Monastery, Rusia, 17 Century;



*(il. 27) Last Judgement, detail Hetoimasia, Constantinopol, ivory plaque, London Victoria & Albert Museum, 1000-1100 CE;³⁸



*(il. 28) Last Judgement - inlaid, Hetoimasias detail, St. Maria Assunta Cathedral, Torcello, 11th - 12th Century;

³⁸ Cf. Kurt Weitzmann, Gaiane Alibegashvili, Aneli Volskaja, Manolis Chatzidakis, Gordana Babic, Mihail Alpatov, Teodora Voinescu, *The Icon*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1982, pag. 39.



**Left (il 29) The Ark of Covenant Representation from Capernaum synagogue, Bas-Relief, (around IV-III century B.C.);*



**Left (il. 30) Council of Constantinople 381 CE with empty throne or Hetoimasia, Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus, 879-882, 9th century Byzantine manuscript, Paris BNF MS Gr 510 fol-355v;*

**Middle and right (il. 30 a and 30 b) Empty Throne in Dura Europos Synagogue, Damascus, Syria, 3rd century – 244 C.E;*



**Left (il. 31) The sarcophagus of Tusculum, with the monogram of Christ and His robe seated on the empty throne, IV century;*

*Middle (il. 32) *The empty throne of the Lord, Bas-relief of marble, Constantinopolis about 400 CE, now in Bode Museum – Berlin;*

*Right (il. 33) *The Empty Throne on a ivory casket for holy relics, Samagher, near Pola (Istria), about 440, now in Archaeological Museum of Venice;*



*(il. 34) *The mosaic with the empty throne from Saint Matrona's Chapel, today Santa Maria di Capua Vetere (Saint Mary of Capua Vetere), 5th century;*



*Left (il. 35) *Clypeus with an empty throne with the four apocalyptic beings on the Triumphal Arch in Santa Maria Maggiore, 5th century;*

*Right (il. 36) *Clypeus with The Lamb and the opened Gospel, on the throne from the apsidal arch of Santa Maria Maggiore Church;*



* (il. 37) *The Ravenna dome - includes four eschatological thrones, the orthodox baptistery, belonging to Neon, cca 451-473;*



*Left (il. 38) Hetoimasia, the Baptistry of the arians, the mosaic of the Ravenna Dome, 5th century;

*Right (il. 39) Marble capitellum with empty throne, 5-6th century, Louvre, Paris;



*Left (il. 40) The Throne with the Lamb – Christ bringing Himself as a sacrifice, St. Cosmas and Damian Church, Rome, 6th century;

*Right (il. 41) The Throne with the Lamb, Santa Prassede of Rome, 817-823;



*Left (il. 42) The Empty Throne, Santa Prassede, The Chapel of Saint Zenon, 9th century, Rome;

*Right (il. 43) The Throne with the Gospel, crown and cross, between two angles, the arch of triumph; Santa Maria, foris portas, Castelseprio, Varese, probably the first half of the 9th century Italy;



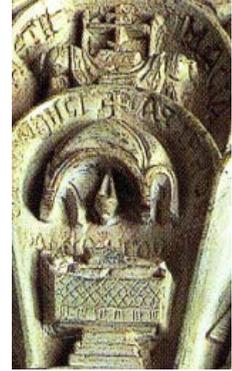
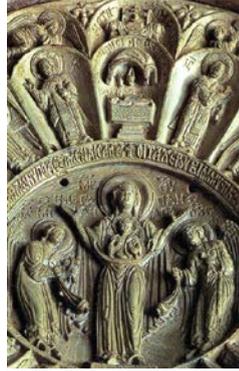
**Left (il. 44) The empty throne surrounded by the four apocalyptic beings, by “the lion of Judaea and the Lamb of God”, frontispiece by Apocalypse from Moutiers-Grandval, Tours, cca. 840; London, British Library;*

**Middle and right (il. 45) Hetoimasia like a HolyTable, detail from a reliquary cross, double faces, Cosenza Cathedral, Calabria, South Italy, 12th century;*



**(il. 46) St. Ana with Virgin Maria, and upstairs in the middle is Empty Throne, like a simbol of Virgin Maria, and two angels, a portable mosaic icon, 11th-12th century, Vatopedi Monastery, Athos;³⁹*

³⁹ O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1911, pag. 433;



**(il. 47 a, b, c) The "Pulcheria" Paten; in Center of paten: Virgin Platyttera between two angels, middle line: Christ distributing The Eucharist, angels and archangels; upstairs in the margins line The Hetoimasia; 14th century, steatite, silver gilt mount, diameter 16 cm, Mount Athos, Xeropotamou Monastery;⁴⁰*



**Left (il. 48) Last Judgement with Hetoimasia in the middle of composition, panoramic photo, Voroneț Monastery, Bucovina, Romania;*

**Right (il. 49) Last Judgement with Hetoimasia, Exonartex, Probota, Romania;*

⁴⁰ Jannic Durand, *Byzantine Art*, FINEST SA/Edition PIERRE TERRAIL, Paris, 1999, English Edition with the assistance of the French Ministry responsible for Culture Centre National du Livre, Printed in Italy, 1999, pag. 194;



*(il. 50, a, b, c) The same rainbow surround God and Hetoimasia, but Jesus Christ is sitting on the rainbow, Exonartex, Probota Monastery, Romania, 16th century;

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