

SACRED SYMBOLS IN DIMITRIE GAVRILEAN'S PAINTINGS

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Abstract: This year, on the 12th of July, there are four years since the passing away of the painter Dimitrie Gavrilean who, „*through the unique impresion of his originality, early became an emblem of the school of painting of Iasi.*”¹ Born in Voroneț, in 1942, Dimitrie Gavrilean attended „Nicolae Grigorescu” Academy of Arts of Bucharest, being an eminent disciple of the master Corneliu Baba. The work in the creation workshop was combined with the vocation of teacher at the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design within „G. Enescu” University of Arts of Iași, being a rector of this institution in the period 2000-2004. In the contemporary plastic landscape, the artistic work of the painter Dimitrie Gavrilean (1942-2012) from Iași occupies a special place. It mirrors the utmost of the autochthonous rural imaginary, the Romanian fundamental myths, the ancestral myths as well as the recently Christianized ones. His vision is specific to the Romanian Christianity and the Byzantine iconography. The language of Gavrilean's paintings is one of symbols, by excellence. As Emil Staco rightfully observed, the entire work of art of master Gavrilean is „*a work of art of the symbols, of the metaphors rooted in the spirituality of the Romanian village of Bukovina, in the frescoes of Voroneț and Humor Monasteries.*”² On the one hand, the painter did not content himself with illustrating only the ancestral mythical world by means of symbols with universal valences, but he got actively involved in the Christian valorization of mythical symbols. On the other hand, by integrating sacred symbols (the dove, the cock, winged characters, the wise old man, the architecture-church, the sun, Voroneț blue) of the Christian iconography of Byzantine tradition in paintings not necessarily religious, Dimitrie Gavrilean pushed his work of art to the border between sacred and profane, proving an extraordinary capacity of spiritualizing matter as well as of materializing the spirit through art.

Keywords: Symbols, Sacred symbols, Painting, Icon, Iconography, Dimitrie Gavrilean

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¹ Valentin Ciucă, *Dicționarul ilustrat al Artelor Frumoase din Moldova (Illustrated Dictionary of Beautiful Arts from Moldavi)*, Ed. Art XXI, Iași, 2011, p.210.

² Emil Satco, *Artă în Bucovina (The Art in Bucovina)*, Vol. I, Bucharest, 1984, apud, Dimitrie Gavrilean, *Mituri ancestrale românești (Romanian Ancestral Myths)*, Ed. Artes, Iași, 2006, p.100.

On the contemporary artistic scene, Dimitrie Gavrilean defined his artistic personality in a direct relation with national identity. In his paintings, he represented at maximum rates the autochthonous rural fantastic from Bukovina, the Romanian fundamental myths, the ancestral ones, as well as the recently Christianised ones. If as a young man, he manifested an interest for the countryside spirituality with strong, pagan mythological accents, at the age of his senescence, the artist stopped on the inner meanings of the Orthodox spirituality, as they were reflected in the paintings of the famous medieval churches from Voroneț, Humor, Sucevița and Moldovița, where he spent his childhood.

In fact, the entire work of the master Gavrilean reflects his profound attachment towards the principles of the Christian iconography of Byzantine tradition both in terms of expressive-plastic means of representation (spaciousness, composition, shape, line, rhythm, chromatics, light) and in terms of the concept (the fusion sky-earth, the time-myth and the time-history, symbols). In this respect, it is not by chance the fact that Dimitrie Gavrilean was also a famous church painter.

The vision that Gavrilean impresses to the Romanian plastics is an iconic one, of Byzantine nature, definitely being a pathfinder in this sense. From everlasting, the art evolved between the two opposite poles: between matter and dematerialization, between incarnation and disappearance. Or, the uniqueness of Dimitrie Gavrilean's paintings comes from the fact that they represent the world under its double aspect, material and spiritual at the same time. Matter is represented by the artist in the spirit of the Orthodox iconography – "transparent" for God's grace, full of energy, and the sky harmoniously fuses with the earth through a central axis which is either a tree („*Nuntă la Voroneț*" / "*Wedding at Voroneț*"), either the tower of a church on the top of the hill („*Soarele și vârcolacii*" / "*The sun and the werewolves*"), either a character you never know if he's ascending or descending in his flight („*Legenda Meșterului Manole*" / "*The Legend of Master Manole*"). What is interesting is the fact that the artist from Iași impresses not only an iconographic vision on its paintings, many with an autochthonous ancestral thematic, but on the contrary, but he also implements a plastic approach in some iconographic representations („*Tronul Hetimasiei*" / "*The Throne of Hetoimasia*", „*Cel Vechi de Zile*" / "*The Ageless One*", „*Iisus Pantocrator*" / "*Jesus Pantocrator*", „*Buna Vestire*" / "*The Annunciation*"). This proves that the master understood, even if only at a conceptual level, the "key" of the iconographic language – the transfiguration of the being, in which the symbol plays a fundamental role.

In the context of information presented above, we can speak of a real dimension of the sacred Christian in Dimitrie Gavrilean's paintings, paintings whose language is by excellence one of symbols.

The painter did not content himself only with illustrating the ancestral mythical world by means of some symbols with universal valences (the sun, the moon, the celestial water and the earthly water, the egg, the column, the mount, the cave), but he got actively involved in the Christian improvement of some mythical symbols, by integrating them in a Christian conceptual context, through which was intended the identification of the sacred in the profane, indicating the matter as having a spiritual foundation and the possibility of spiritualizing it.

For example, in the painting „*Clovnul Pantocrator*”/”*The Pantocrator Clown*”, by association with the iconographic type of Jesus Pantocrator (The All-Keeper), the clown, as a symbol of the assassinated king, in a hand keeps an egg and with the other, he blesses. The egg, as a universal symbol of the birth of the world, acquires Christian valences, signifying resurrection, rebirth, and immortality.

In „*Soarele și vârcolacii*”/”*The sun and the werewolves*” [Fig.1], Dimitrie Gavrilean integrates two mythological symbols – the sun and the werewolves, in a Christian context (God’s descent among people), wishing to illustrate the connection between good and evil and the final victory of the good, symbolized by the inexpressibly large sun, whose light cannot be “eaten” by the “starveling” werewolves. If in the universal mythology, generally the good is on an “equal footing” with the evil, coexisting for so long, in this work the message the artist offers is a Christian one: “*the light lights in the darkness and the darkness has not overwhelmed it*”.³

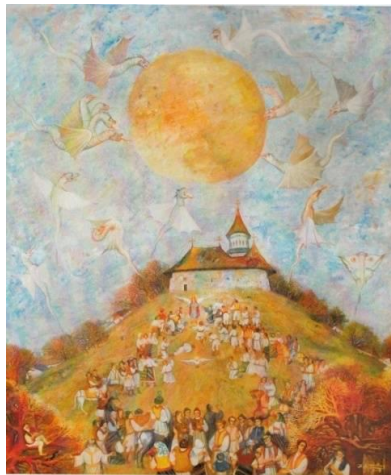


Fig. 1. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Soarele și vârcolacii*”/”*The sun and the werewolves*”

But the painter Gavrilean has not offered only Christian valences to some mythological symbols, but even integrated in several of his works, not

³ Ioan 1, 5, biblehub.com/john/1-5.htm

necessarily with religious subject, a series of Christian sacred symbols, such as: **the angel, the wise old man, the church, the pigeon, the cock, the sailing ship, the fish**, which he took from the Christian iconography of Byzantine tradition. This actually represents the object of our intercession. But in order to exemplify each of the listed symbols, we consider that it is useful to make first of all some technical mentions on the notion of sacred symbol.

We call sacred symbols those symbols whose signified does refer neither to the sphere of physical reality, nor to the one of psychical reality, but to the one of metaphysical reality in whose centre resides the Supreme Reality – God. Unlike mythical or artistic symbols whose functioning mechanism reduces only to the relation between signified and signifier, Jean Borella considers that the sacred symbols are built on the:

“similar relation that unifies the signifier, the meaning and the particular referent (the signified) under the jurisdiction of a fourth element – the metaphysical or transcendent referent. [...] The signifier or the symboliser is usually of sensitive nature, the meaning is of mental nature, identifies with the idea that the signifier evokes in our thought, either naturally or culturally; the particular referent is the non-visible object that the symbol, depending on its meaning, can denote. As the metaphysical referent is concerned, Borella says, always forgotten and yet fundamental, in as far as it is the one which transforms the sign in a real symbol, it is the archetype – or the metacosmic principle – in relation to which the signifier, the meaning and the particular referent are only its distinct manifestations.”⁴

The fact that the painter Dimitrie Gavrilean uses in his works sacred symbols taken from the Byzantine iconography proves once more the vision he impresses to the Romanian plastics – the extraordinary capacity of matter spiritualization and spirit materialization by art. Let's analyze one by one the most important sacred symbols encountered in Gavrilean's paintings.

Angels. In sacred art, angels have an important role, as they are intermediary beings between God and the world. Symbols by excellence in anthropomorphic hypostasis, angels are represented along with an entire series of symbols, among which the most important is the one of wings. Wings represent transcendence and immateriality, the spiritual nature, as well as the supernatural speed of displacing.

The iconography of angels contains a rich poliformism, being represented depending on the ranks and names they bear in the interval

⁴ Jean Borella, *Criza simbolismului religios (The crisis of the religious symbolism)*, translated by Diana Morărașu, Ed. Institutul European, Iași, 1995, p.6-7.

between humans and God. Those who are closer to the earthly space are anthropomorphically represented and those who are very close to the Chair of the Holy Trinity are represented much more stylized, but only under the form of some symbolic elements, such as wings, eyes and circles.

The same iconographic manner of representation of angels is also approached by the painter Gavrilean through a series of works, both with religious and mythological thematic. Therefore, in the paintings „*Cel Vechi de zile*”/”*The Ageless One*” [Fig.2], „*Tronul Etimasiei*”/”*The Throne of Etimasia*” [Fig.3] and „*Iisus Pantocrator*”/”*Jesus Pantocrator*” [Fig.4], the painter gets inspired by the inside and outside frescoes of the ancient voivodal churches from the North of Moldavia, more precisely by those significant iconographic types presented in the central tower of the nave (“*Christ Pantocrator*” – Fig.5), in the tower of the threshold („*Cel Vechi de Zile*” – Probota) or in the famous scene of the Final Judgement („*Cel Vechi de Zile*”/”*The Ageless One*”, „*Tronul Etimasiei*”/”*The Throne of Etimasia*”) which we find represented either on the eastern wall of the threshold as in Sucevița [Fig.6] and Moldovița, or on the Northern wall of the outside architecture, at Voroneț [Fig.7], respecting the hermeneutic rules established in the representation of those scenes.



Fig. 2. Dimitrie Gavrilean,
„*Cel Vechi de zile*”/”*The Ageless One*”



Fig. 3. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Tronul Etimasiei*”/”*The Throne of Etimasia*”

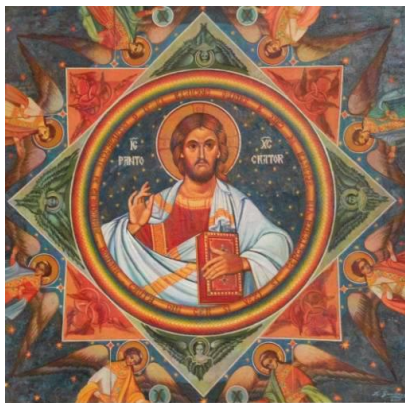


Fig. 4. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Iisus Pantocrator*”/”*Jesus Pantocrator*”



Fig. 5. *Hristos Pantocrator/Christ Pantocrator*, the Moldovita Monastery tower



Fig. 6. *Hetimasia's Throne*, the Sucevița Monastery



Fig. 7. *Cel Vechi de Zile/The Ageless One*, detail from „*Last Judgment*” Voronet Monastery

The canons of the Byzantine paintings envisage that the Persons of the Holy Trinity be represented accompanied by celestial groups who in the hierarchical order are closer to God: Thrones, Cherubs and Seraphs. In the three mentioned paintings, Dimitrie Gavrilean, on a dark blue background, specific to frescoes, but vibrated in its unique style, brings to the foreground the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father („*Cel Vechi de Zile*”/”*The Ageless One*”), the Son („*Isus Pantocrator*”) and the Holy Spirit („*Tronul Etimasiei*”/”*The Throne of Etimasia*”) on a structure of superposed circles and squares, accompanied by the specific angelic groups.

In the representation of Seraphs “*with six wings*”, of Cherubs “*with multiple eyes*” and of Thrones (winged circles), the painter inspired from the entire Byzantine iconography⁵ [Fig.8], but exploring in a creative manner the compositional and chromatic representation. Through the orientation of hands, of wings, and through the chromatic combination of shades warm-cool, he highlights the role of these beings as intermediaries of the space between sky and earth, between the spiritual and the material world. They are truly represented as beings who fill “*the interval between humans and God*”⁶, as Andrei Pleșu says.



Fig. 8. *Heruvimi și Tronuri*/Cherubs and Thrones, detail from Sucevita Monastery, Romania

Through the chromatic of the dark blue background, vibrated with many other greyed shades of these paintings as of many others, we can glimpse the entire mythological philosophy of the master Gavrilean, according to whom the celestial and the earthly space, with the celestial and earthly water and the elements or winged beings that populate these spaces are in an entire process of miraculous fusions („*Pescarul Amin*”/”*The fisherman Amin*”, „*Semănătorii cerești*”/”*Celestial Seeders*”, „*Ultima*

⁵ See Dionisie from Furna, *Erminia picturii bizantine (Interpretation of the Byzantine paintings)*, Ed. Sophia, Bucharest, 2000; Vasile Grecu, *Cărți de pictură bisericească bizantină (Books of Byzantine Church Paintings)*, Ed. Glasul Bucovinei, Cernăuți, 1936.

⁶ Andrei Pleșu, *Despre îngeri (About Angels)*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 2003, p.35.

licornă”/”The Last Unicorn”, „Autoportret cu Arca Văzduhului”/”Self-portrait with the Arch of the Air”).

It is still in some paintings with religious subject „*Buna Vestire*”/”*The Annunciation*” [Fig.9] and „*Lupta lui Iacob cu Îngerul*”/”*Jacob’s Fight with the Angel*”, Dimitrie Gavrillean represents the celestial beings either following the iconographic canon („*Buna-Vestire*”/”*The Annunciation*”), or making a personal interpretation and bringing a certain message („*Lupta lui Iacob cu Îngerul*”/”*Jacob’s Fight with the Angel*”).



Fig. 9. Dimitrie Gavrillean, „*Buna Vestire*”/”*The Annunciation*”

In the work with mythological subject „*Soarele și vârcolacii*”/”*The sun and the werewolves*”, the painter represented the Archangel Michael in the central area of the composition, with open hands, encouraging people to fight against disinterest. Although the subject of the work is a mythological one, the message is a profoundly Christian one, the angel being one of the sacred symbols that Dimitrie Gavrillean successfully integrated in the painting [Fig.1a].

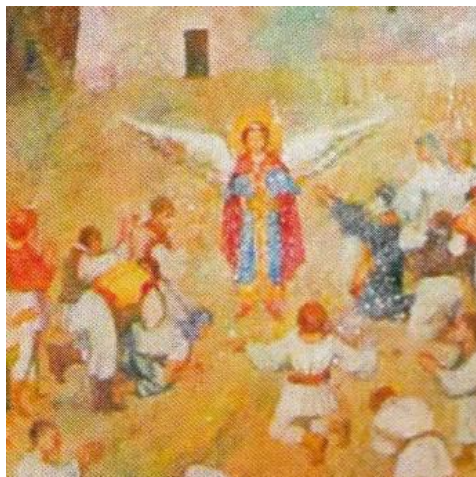


Fig. 1a. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Soarele și vârcolacii”/”The sun and the werewolves”, detail, angel

The wise old man is a symbol that Gavrilean associated in painting with the Ageless One, and in his representation he got inspired both from the Romanian medieval fresco, as in the paintings „*Cel Vechi de Zile*”/”*The Ageless One*”, and „*Soarele și vârcolacii*”/”*The sun and the werewolves*” and from the daily life, from the childhood years spent near upon some wise old men around Voroneț, such as in „*Cimpoier*”/”*Bagpiper*”, „*Cântarea Cântărilor*”/”*The Song of Songs*”, „*Floare albastră*”/”*Blue Flower*”, „*Legenda Meșterului Manole*”/”*The Legend of Master Manole*” [Fig.10], „*Înțelepții*”/”*The Wise*”.



Fig. 10. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Legenda Meșterului Manole*”/”*The Legend of Master Manole*”

Represented in white coats, with long hair and white beard, the Wise Old Man or „*Cel Vechi de Zile*”/”*The Ageless One*” identifies in iconography with the Person of God the Father, “*the creator of sky and earth*”⁷, the Lord of ages [Fig.11]. In his plastics, Gavrilean offers the Old Man the same message, but enriched in meanings. Therefore, the old man can be “the wise man of the village” („*Înțelepții*”/”*The Wise*”), a constructor and builder of holy houses of God („*Legenda Meșterului Manole*”/”*The Legend of Master Manole*”) or an instrumental performer who “*accompanies*” the pure love („*Cimpoieș*”/”*Bagpiper*”, „*Cântarea Cântărilor*”/”*The Song of Songs*”, „*Floare Abastră*”/”*Blue Flower*” – Fig.12a). In Gavrilean’s mythological universe, “*music is the measure of time*”⁸ and the singers evoke through sounds the “time-myth” or the “time-history.”

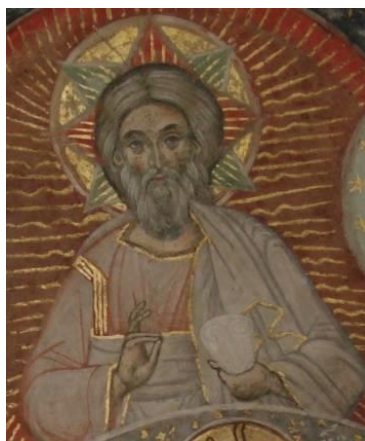


Fig. 11. „*Cel Vechi de Zile*”/”*The Ageless One*”, detail from Sucevita Monastery



Fig. 12a. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Floare Albastră*”/”*Blue Flower*”, detail, instrumental performer

⁷ *Ceaslov (Religious Book)*, second edition, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1993, p.5.

⁸ Dimitrie E. Gavrilean, *op. cit.*, p.159.

In the work „*Soarele și vârcolacii*”/“*The sun and the werewolves*” [Fig.1b], the representation of the Old Man into the fore is an iconographic one (with halo and garbs) and the message is a Christian one. Through it, the painter addresses the viewer, encouraging him to fight against disinterest and to enter a space of the sacred which leads him to the light. Those who are disinterested to the “call of the sky” transform themselves, without realizing it, in werewolves which want to “eat”, to “destroy” the light in the world.



Fig. 1b. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Soarele și vârcolacii*”/“*The sun and the werewolves*”, detail, the Old Man

The Church as architecture is a sacred symbol often represented in the Byzantine iconography, either as architectural landscape element or as main element (tabernacle) as in the votive paintings with the builders of sacred houses of God. Within the landscape, this symbol describes a sacred space, an axis which unifies the sky with the earth, a “center of light”. According to Mircea Eliade, the idea of “*centre of the world*” is encountered in all traditions, this being marked on the highest areas (“the sacred mountain”) through a sacred tree, a stone, a prop or through a sacred edifice.

In this respect, in many of his works („*Cimpoier*”/“*Bagpiper*”, „*Căruța proștilor*”/“*The cart with stupid people*”, „*Nuntă la Voroneț*”/“*Wedding at Voroneț*”, „*Alai de nuntă*”/“*Wedding cortege*”, „*Soarele și vârcolacii*”/“*The sun and the werewolves*”, „*Autoportret cu lupă*”/“*Self-portrait with loupe*”, „*Visul unei nopți de vară*”/“*A Midsummer Night's Dream*”, „*Ritual de primăvară*”/“*Spring Ritual*”, „*Marele spiriduș*”/“*The Great Leprechaun*”, „*Căruța orbilor*”/“*The Cart with blind people*”, „*Alai*”/“*Cortege*”, „*Floare Albastră*”/“*Blue Flower*” – Fig.12), Dimitrie Gavrilean expresses his will of spiritualization of space and time, introducing in rural landscapes the image of the church on the top of a hill or mountain. His artistic creed has permanently been animated by Blaga's belief according to which “*eternity was born in the village*”⁹, where the “*church,*

⁹ www.poezie.ro/index.php/potry/22275/Sufletul_satului

through its high tower, enters the sky and the sky descends on the earth”, as the artist confessed on the occasion of his personal exhibition from Gura Humorului, in 2007.



Fig. 12. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Floare Albastră”/”Blue Flower”

In three of the paintings („*Legenda Meșterului Manole*”/”*The Legend of Master Manole*” [Fig.10a], „*Nuntă la Voroneț*”/”*Wedding at Voroneț*” [Fig.13a], and „*Soarele și vârcolacii*”/”*The sun and the werewolves*” – Fig.1c), the church is represented in the centre of interest that increase the Christian message of the work. In „*Legenda Meșterului Manole*”/”*The Legend of Master Manole*”, the painter was inspired by the iconographic type of the votive painting which was present in most of the voivodal Romanian churches, indicating the church as a sacrificing expression not only of the patron, but also of the one who builds it. Manole sacrifices for his creation and the sacrifice “ascends” him.

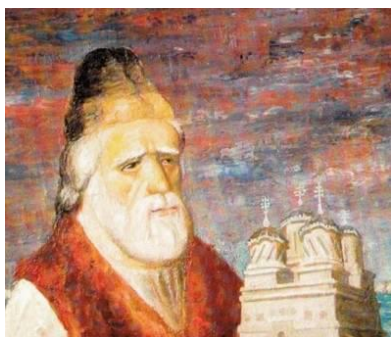


Fig. 10a. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Legenda Meșterului Manole*”/”*The Legend of Master Manole*”, detail, the church

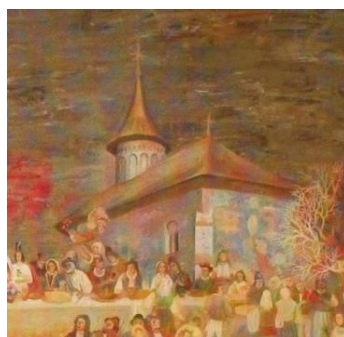


Fig. 13a. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Nuntă la Voroneț*”/”*Wedding at Voroneț*”, detail, the church

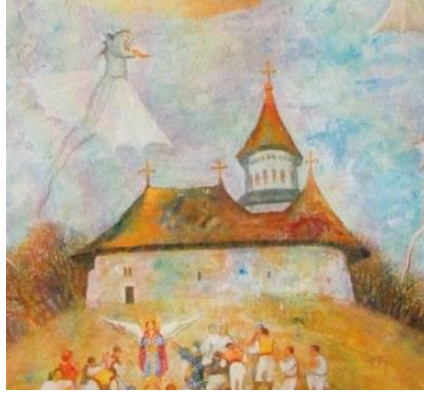


Fig. 1c. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Soarele și vârcolacii”/”The sun and the werewolves”, detail, the church

„Nuntă la Voroneț”/”Wedding at Voroneț” [Fig.13], and „Soarele și vârcolacii”/”The sun and the werewolves” [Fig.1] alongside „Legenda Muntelui Găina”/”The Legend of the Hen Mountain” [Fig.14] are works of reference in Gavrilean’s paintings. They represent an ideogram of the entire artistic creation, mirroring the effort of the “missionary painter” along years in the plastic understanding and transformation, through a Christian vision, of an important mythological symbol from the Romanian culture – the Column of the Sky in one full of sacred – the Church. Look how:



Fig. 13. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Nuntă la Voroneț”/”Wedding at Voroneț”

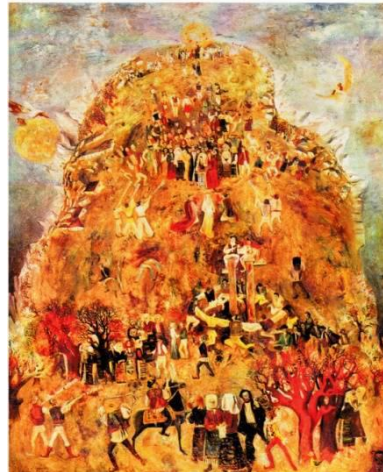


Fig. 14. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Legenda Muntelui Găina”/”The Legend of the Hen Mountain”

In „*Legenda Muntelui Găina*”/”*The Legend of the Hen Mountain*” [Fig.14a], a work from his youth, the artist recalls the world of the Romanian village in times of holiday, with peasants dancing, in their traditional folk costumes, with trumpeters and instrumental performers climbed on stone props, with the moon and the sun having descended close to the mountain which compressed on the vertical, becoming a sort of centre of the world. Everything happens in a timeless, dynamic, chaotic, and almost not related to the cosmos, ancestral, non-Christianized space.

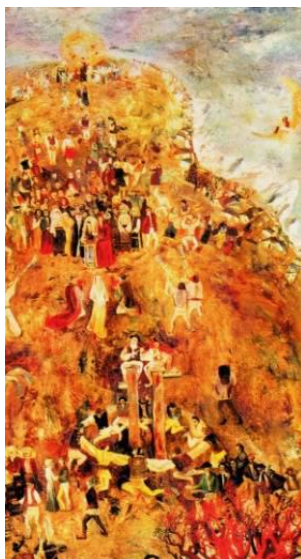


Fig. 14a. Dimitrie Gavrillean, „*Legenda Muntelui Găina*”/”*The Legend of the Hen Mountain*”, detail, mountain – centre of the world

„*Nuntă la Voroneț*”/”*Wedding at Voroneț*” [Fig.13b] is the work where Dimitrie Gavrillean takes the decisive step in the “Christianization” of ancestral symbols, situating them in the yard of the church, more precisely under the eaves of Voroneț, which he indicates as axis of the world. What impresses in the work is not only the church passing through the sky with its tower, but the ideogram of juxtaposed mythical symbols: the tree – the prop – the cock, ideogram which indicates the three substrata of the Romanian spiritual becoming: the sacred tree of prehistory which became a column of the sky to Geto-Dacians and indicators of Christianity through the cock that announces the end of the mythical night and the arrival of the light of Christianity in the world. The prop-cock, alongside the tower of the church makes a gate in whose center is the bloody sun and the two spouses of the wedding from Voroneț. „*Nuntă la Voroneț*”/”*Wedding at Voroneț*” is a “Christian translation” of Miorița, where Christ, ”The Sun of Justice”,

through His sacrifice, became the „Groom of the World” in a wedding of cosmic proportions.



Fig. 13b. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Nuntă la Voroneț”/”Wedding at Voroneț”, detail, the mythical’s symbols: the tree – the prop – the cock

„Soarele și vârcolacii”/”The sun and the werewolves”, a work of his artistic maturity, represents the maximum expression of “Christianization” of the Column of the Sky, which master Gavrilean makes in the Romanian plastics. Here, the Column of the Sky in neither the sacred mountain, nor the cosmic tree, nor the prop of the sky, nor the column-cock, but the architectonic structure of the Church itself which, on the crest of the hill supports on its tower the light in the world. In this work, with apocalyptic accents, the author alerts that the real column of the sky, the saving axis of the world cannot be another than the Church, through which God descends in the middle of people, keeping them away from the disinterest that might annihilate the light in the world.

The pigeon is another sacred symbol that Dimitrie Gavrilean represented in the religious paintings „Buna Vestire”/”The Annunciation” and „Tronul Etimasei”/”The Throne of Etimasia” and integrated it with the same Christian significance of plastic image of the Holy Spirit in the work „Soarele și vârcolacii”/”The sun and the werewolves” [Fig.1d]. Unlike iconography, where this holy bird is represented in a stylized manner, Gavrilean used all plastic means of the oil technique to outline either the arrow-fastness of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Virgin Mary („Buna Vestire”/”The Annunciation”) – [Fig.9a] or the

mildness which slowly descends, almost indistinguishable in the middle of people („Soarele și vârcolacii”/”The sun and the werewolves”).



Fig. 1d. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Soarele și vârcolacii”/”The sun and the werewolves”, detail, the pigeon



Fig. 9a. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Buna Vestire”/”The Annunciation”, detail, pigeon

As in iconography, it is represented with a halo, inclusively in the scene „Soarele și vârcolacii”/”The sun and the werewolves”, outlining the fact that it symbolizes the third Person of the Holy Trinity – the Holy Spirit.

The cock is a universal solar symbol, as through its crow announces the sunrise. In Christian terms it is an emblem of Jesus Christ. As Messiah, it announces the day which follows the night. This is why it is present on the towers of churches and cathedrals.

This position on the top of the houses of God can evoke the supremacy of the spirit in the human life, the divine origin of savior illumination, the wakefulness of the soul wishing to perceive in the darkness of the ending night the first twinkle of the spirit waking up.¹⁰

In the Romanian medieval iconography, the cock is represented most often in the Cycle of Passions, more precisely in the scene of Peter's Renunciation, on the northern walls of the nave (Voroneț, Moldovița and Sucevița) – [Fig.15], and its significance is that through its crow to remind Apostle Peter the prophetic words Jesus Christ uttered before Passions: ”Before the cock crows, you will give up on Me three times.”¹¹

¹⁰ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dicționar de simboluri* (Dictionary of Symbols), Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2009, p.263.

¹¹ Matei, 26,75, biblehub.com/matei/26-75.htm



Fig. 15. *Peter's Renunciation*, Voronet Monastery, Romania

In the painting „*Nuntă la Voroneț*”/”*Wedding at Voroneț*”, the cock is represented by Gavrilean both in its Christian dimension, climbed on a prop, dominating the work, oriented in its crow towards the tower of the church, and in the “pagan”, ceremonial dimension, of “dance of the cock” from the end of the wedding party, represented much more natural and oriented with the beak adown [Fig.13c]. In the more stylized representation of the cock on the column, the painter inspired from the interior fresco of Voroneț and not only, proving once more the effort in the improvement of some monumental iconographic elements in the easel painting.



Fig. 13c. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „*Nuntă la Voroneț*”/”*Wedding at Voroneț*”, detail, the cock

The list of Christian sacred symbols represented in painting by master Gavrilean might continue with symbols such as **the sailing ship** („*Autoportret cu Arca Văzduhului*”/”*Self-portrait with the Arch of the Air*” – Fig.16, „*Arca Văzduhului*”/”*The Arch of the Air*”) and

the fish („Pescarul Amin”/”The fisherman Amin” – Fig.17), through them the artist intending to make an update of a world of “beginnings” long before bygone.



Fig. 16. Gavrilean, *Autoportret cu Arca Văzduhului*”/”Self-portrait with the Arch of the Air”



Fig. 17. Dimitrie Gavrilean, „Pescarul Amin”/”The fisherman Amin”

To conclude the above-mentioned information, we can consider that Dimitrie Gavrilean’s paintings, through the universe of sacred symbols explored, are situated at the border between sacred and profane, representing the cultural and we would dare to say “missionary” effort of a painter whose Christian rural fiber determined him to start from ample compositions inspired from the world of the Romanian village and of ancestral myths to reach the representation of several themes full of sacred and profoundly Christian message.

From the rural spirituality often full of pagan signs, the artist took the step to the religious, Christian one. But here comes the esthetic canon of the Byzantine painting, compelling for the inconsiderable ones, challenging for the authentic artists. He did not allow himself excessive freedom in these terms, which proves that wisdom guided him. It is not appropriate to compete with a solid tradition, but only to complete it. That is why he behaved as any authentic artist from the Orthodox space, with humbleness towards such a rich tradition. Transposing the spirit in sensitive images is a challenge that any great painter feels the need to assume. In icons, but in the mural painting too, from the couple of churches he painted, D. Gavrilean remains the same refined colorist, the same tireless seeker of meanings and significances that we know. The mathematical rigor of the drawing fully combines with a generous chromatic made of blue of Voroneț, red of Sucevița or green of Moldovița. In a

happy manner, the circle of creation closed wherefrom it started, the religious painting in the last period confessing the profound call of his beloved Bukovina.¹²

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¹² Mihai Dorin, *In memoriam Dimitrie Gavrilean*, in *Ziarul de Iași (The Newspaper of Iasi)* from 13, 08. 2012, p.5.

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