

**ANASTASIS**  
Research in Medieval Culture and Art

## **Advisory Board:**

**Jean-Jacques Wunenburger**, Prof. Emeritus, Université « Jean Moulin », Lyon III, France  
**Tereza Sinigalia**, Prof., “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Gaëtan Brulotte**, Prof. Emeritus, Humanities Eminent Scholar Chair, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, USA  
**Zvika Kfir**, Rabin Netanya, Israel  
**Yasmina Foehr-Janssens**, Prof. Ordinaire, Université de Genève, Suisse  
**Antonio Rigo**, Prof. Ordinario, Università Ca'Foscari, Venezia, Italia  
**Jean-Paul Deremble** Prof., Université « Charles de Gaule », Lille III, France  
**Danielle Buschinger**, Prof. Emeritus, Université de Picardie « Jules Verne », Amiens, France  
**Emil Dragnev**, Prof., Université d'État de Chișinău, République de Moldavie  
**Jean-Philippe Pierron**, Prof., Université « Jean Moulin », Lyon III, France  
**Elka Bacalova**, Membre correspondant de l'Académie Bulgare, Institut du folklore de l'Académie Bulgare des Sciences, Bulgarie  
**Jean-Michel Counet**, Prof., Université catholique de Louvain, Belgique  
**Ramona Bordei-Boca**, Prof., UFR Lettre et Philosophie, Université de Bourgogne, France  
**Maria Urmă**, Prof., “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Maud Pérez-Simon**, Assoc. Prof. Université Paris III - Sorbonne Nouvelle, France  
**Blanca Solares**, Prof., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexique  
**Atena Elena Simionescu**, Prof., “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Ionel Bușe**, Prof., University of Craiova, Romania  
**Constantin Necula**, Pr., Assoc. Prof., University “Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, România  
**Marius Tătaru**, Dr. Direktor (i. R) Siebenbürgisches Museum Gundelsheim, Deutschland  
**Athanasios Semoglou**, Prof., Université « Aristote » de Thessalonique, Grece  
**Rosângela Aparecida da Conceição**, Assoc. Prof., Universidade Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil.  
**Luana Stan**, Assoc. Prof., Université de Québec à Montréal, Canada  
**Pilar Pérez Camarero**, Prof., Universidad Autonoma de Madrid,  
**Eleonora Brigalda**, Prof., Pedagogical University « Ion Creanga », Chișinău, République de Moldavie  
**Ana Taís Martins Portanova Barros**, Prof., Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.  
**Cornelia Bordașiu**, Prof., “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Ana-Maria Pascal**, Assoc. Prof., dr., Regent's University, London, U.K.  
**Răzvan Ionescu**, Pr. dr., Centre Orthodoxe d'Etudes et de Recherches "Dimitru Stăniloae", Paris, France

**Anastasis. Research in Medieval Culture and Art** is indexed in the following databases:

European Reference Index for the Humanities (**ERIH PLUS**)

Central and Eastern European Online Library (**CEEOL**)

Directory of Open Access Journals (**DOAJ**)

**EBSCO**

**SCOPUS-ELSEVIER**

Scientific Indexing Services (**SIS**)

Scientific Publishing & Information Online (**SCIPPIO**)

[www.anastasis-review.ro](http://www.anastasis-review.ro)

ISSN 2392 – 862X (print); ISSN-L 2392 – 862X ; ISSN 2392 – 9472 (on-line)

The Research Center of Medieval Art "Vasile Drăguț"

**ANASTASIS**  
**Research in Medieval Culture and Art**

Volume IX, No.2/November 2022

**Editors:**

**Codrina-Laura Ioniță**, Prof., “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași  
**Andreea-Irina Stoleriu**, Assoc. Prof. “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași  
**Adrian Stoleriu**, Assoc. Prof. “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași  
**Daniel-Ion Sofron**, Assoc. Prof. “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași

**Editorial Board:**

**Brîndușa Grigoriu**, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania  
**Diana Gradu**, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania  
**Paula-Andreea Onofrei**, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania  
**Ioana Iulia Olaru**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Adrian Stoleriu**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Bogdan Gavrilean**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Cristina Stratulat**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Andreea-Irina Stoleriu**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Daniel Sofron**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania  
**Raluca Minea**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania

**Editorial Design and Web Design:**

**Adrian Stoleriu**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania,  
**Andreea-Irina Stoleriu**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania,  
**Adriana Neica** “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania,  
**Codrina-Laura Ioniță**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași, Romania,  
**Alexandru Ioniță**, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania

**Proofreading:**

for French: **Brîndușa Grigoriu**, Assoc. Prof., “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi  
**Diana Gradu**, Assoc. Prof., “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi  
for English: **Paula-Andreea Onofrei**, Assoc. Prof., “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi  
**Luisa Țuculeanu**, “George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași  
for Spanish: **Alina Țiței**, Assoc. Prof., “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi

The Research Center of Medieval Art “Vasile Drăguț”, University of Arts „G. Enescu”,  
Faculty of Visual Art and Design, Str. Sărărie, nr. 189, Iași, România, e-mail:  
[centrulvasiledragut@arteiasi.ro](mailto:centrulvasiledragut@arteiasi.ro),

The internet address: [www.anastasis-review.ro](http://www.anastasis-review.ro)

The opinions expressed in published articles are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the editors, or members of the editorial board.

## Table of Contents

**MEDIEVAL ART AND CIVILIZATION**

<b>Ekaterina Yu. Endoltseva, Nikolay I. Bystritskiy</b> <i>Architectural Decoration of Christian Churches in Some Regions of Caucasus between 10th and 11th Centuries: An Attempt to Reconstruct the Decorative System.....</i>	9
<b>Bogdan Guguianu</b> <i>John of Salisbury's Skepticism. A Veritable Exhortation to Prudence (hortamen ad prudentiam).....</i>	22
<b>Babak Behshid, Reza Rezalou, Karim Hajzadeh, Behrooz Afkhami</b> <i>The Impact of Islamic Ideology in the Society Based on Pottery Designs of Islamic Middle Ages .....</i>	39
<b>Lyudmyla M. Sbitnieva, Olena F. Sbitnieva</b> <i>The Development of Ukrainian Singing Culture during the Middle Ages.....</i>	56
<b>Loredana Gaşpar</b> <i>Representations of the Tree of Life in Ancestors' Symbolics.....</i>	70
<b>Mohammad Ismail Khalaji, Araz Najafi, Farzad Mafi</b> <i>A Case Study of Shiite Art and Religious-Ritual Symbols in Safavid Metal Works.....</i>	107
<b>Oleksandr Yakovlev, Olena Ustymenko-Kosorich, Tetiana Gumenyuk, Tetiana Kablova</b> <i>The Phenomenon of Marginality in the Middle Ages .....</i>	125
<b>Svetlana Ivanova</b> <i>The Icon of Resurrection: the Transformations in the Russian Art of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries.....</i>	136

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### **Maria Urmă**

*Perspective in Art. A Practical Approach – Daniel Ion Sofron Book Review*

Sofron Daniel Ion, *Perspectivă artistică. O abordare practică / Perspective in Art. A Practical Approach*, PIM Publishing House, Iași, 2022, 2 volumes, 240 pages.....153

### **Ana-Magdalena Petraru**

*On Graphic Arts of the Early Romanian Books Printed in Brașov in Romanian Art History*

Anca Elisabeta Tatay, Cornel Tatai-Baltă, *Arta grafică a cărților românești vechi tipărite la Brașov/ The Graphic Arts of the Early Romanian Books Printed in Brașov*, Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, 241 pages.....156

### **Mihaela Samoil-Cozma**

*Romanian Symbols Decodings and Interpretations*

Loredana Gașpar, *Simboluri românești decodificări și interpretări / Romanian Symbols Decodings and Interpretations*, Performantica Publishing House, Iași, 2022, 362 pages.....161

# **MEDIEVAL ART AND CIVILIZATION**





# Architectural Decoration of Christian Churches in Some Regions of Caucasus between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries: An Attempt to Reconstruct the Decorative System\*

Ekaterina Yu. Endoltseva\*\*  
Nikolay I. Bystritskiy\*\*\*

**Abstract:** *In course of the long-term research on the architectural decoration of Christian churches in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia, there has been gathered a great number of important materials (that help to correct the date of some groups of artefacts and to identify some new subjects, as well as to put them in the artistic context of the life of the Byzantine Empire and its periphery in the period between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries). However, lapidary collections that originate from these regions have not been studied from the point of view of function and its reliefs. It is necessary to separate the fragments of the altar barriers from the ones of the facades of the Christian churches.*

*Studying of the analogies from the neighboring regions (modern territory of Georgia, Armenia, Asia Minor, other parts of the Byzantine Empire) and using the modern methods of research (3D reconstructions) could permit to visualize many principal monuments (small forms and monumental decoration) that originate from the above-mentioned regions.*

*Such research is important for the studying of the artistic culture of these regions in the period of the genesis of the self-consciousness of their tribes (end of the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. – beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> cent.) and their separation from the political and cultural influence of the hegemon, that is the Byzantine Empire. Reconstruction of some monuments (altar barriers, decorative system of the facades) and drafting of the typological lines could afford us to demonstrate the meaning of the two regions for the Christian culture of the Southern Caucasus in the period concerned. It is also important to show their interrelations with the neighboring territories.*

*Actuality of the problem is proved by the active research led, for example, in Georgia, Russian Federation, France, etc.*

*Originality of research is proved by the fact that small forms and facade decoration of the Christian churches in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia in the period in question have not been systematically studied yet. The previous studies*

---

\* Funding. The research is sponsored by Russian Scientific Fund N. 23 – 28 – 00648.

\*\* Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia; kat345@yandex.ru, orcid: 0000-0003-1558-2819

\*\*\* Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia; nb@rusistin.ru, orcid: 0000-0001-9002-4804

*focused on the paleo Christian period and the dates supposed for some key monuments have been essentially corrected by recent research.*

*Meanwhile, this territory (Western Georgia, passes between Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia and Racha) played a decisive role in the formation of the original type of medieval artistic Christian conscience.*

**Keywords:** *architectural decoration, reliefs, 3D reconstruction, Byzantium, periphery, altar barrier, facade decoration, decorative scheme, Christian Orient, Black Sea region.*

### **Introduction**

As a result of long-term research (as part of numerous international projects of scientific cooperation between Russian – Abkhazian and Russian – Ossetian specialists) of architectural decorations (in Abkhazia – beginning from 2006, in the Southern Ossetia – from 2020), many different witnesses have been brought to date and attribute some monuments of Christian architecture. Main monuments of the 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries in the above-mentioned regions are ruined. Some lapidary collections of architectural decorations and small forms are dispersed (being left in the fresh air or kept in different museum collections).

Considering the opportunities of the modern methods of visualization of the material (virtual 3d reconstruction), it would be suitable for scientific and educational purposes to use them in the work with the ruins of Christian medieval churches and their decoration.

### **Purposes and objectives**

Reconstruction and creation of 3d models of altar barriers and architectural decoration of some churches that can be dated back to the 10<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries from the territories of modern Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia are seminal to this research. The program of the research includes the ruined monuments that will be inscribed in the cultural context of the art of the 10<sup>th</sup> century in the Christian Orient. The abundance of decorative details and several unique iconographic subjects (for example, rear variant of the scene “Prophet Jonas in the womb of the whale”) would permit to reconstruct important typological series.

### **Methods and materials**

In the course of field and desk research, many materials were gathered. As to the bibliography on the subject, it is very vast. Concerning Abkhazian monuments, there are many publications on single monuments and several generalizing works. During recent decades medieval churches of Abkhazia have been intensively studied by Russian and Abkhazian scholars including via numerous projects of scientific cooperation between these two countries.

A detailed review of the bibliography on the subject (up to the 2020) is published in the monography of E. Endoltseva [1, 5 - 24]. For example, single churches were actively studied by S. Sakania [2-5]. As for scientific synthesis, it was partly made by L. Khroushkova (even if sometimes her suppositions concerning the date of some monuments need to be essentially corrected) [6-7].

Architectural decoration of Christian churches in Southern Ossetia is not studied as minutely as in Abkhazia. The most reputed research on the subject was conducted by Georgian scholars more than forty years ago [8]. It contains descriptions and many precious observations on key monuments of Christian architecture on the territory of modern Southern Ossetia in the period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. But actually, there is possibility and even necessity to study the Christian churches of the region dating from the middle Byzantine period in a more detailed manner. Several recent publications on the topic are not enough even if the generalizing work of a group of Georgian specialists is perfect as for quality of polygraphy and richness in rear photo materials [9].

Some interesting observations on zoomorphic images in the decoration of Christian churches of the 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries were made as a result of a project of scientific collaboration between Russian and Ossetian scholars (i.e., “Bestiary of the period of the early Iron age – Middle Ages from the territory of the modern Southern Ossetia (monuments of archaeology, sculpture, mythology)” (2020 – 2022) [11, c. 167-177; 12, c. 9-28; 13, c. 161 - 173]. Research on the architectural decoration of 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries on the territory of the Southern Ossetia should be continued.

Thus, the accumulated information on the topic allows us to make preliminary reconstructions of the architectural decoration of some churches. We should analyze the available information and resulting possibilities one more time.

A lot of necessary information for the hypothetical reconstruction of the architectural decoration is gathered for the Abkhazian monuments (field research, as well as extensive bibliography). Besides, the state of some of them is preferable for such experiments. For example, there are several large lapidary collections in Abkhazia whose reliefs can be assuredly associated to certain church buildings in different states of preservation. The largest collection (more than 90 artefacts) was kept (up to 2016) in the citadel of Anacopia fortress (on top of Anacopia mountain in Novij Afon). These reliefs were analyzed in a very detailed manner (measurements, analysis of figurative and ornamental compositions, etc.) in course of long-term collaboration between Russian and Abkhazian research groups. The results of the research were published in a collective monography dedicated to the complex study of the Christian monuments of Anacopia fortress (epigraphy, archaeology,

iconography) [14]. Some of the results were later corrected and the data was completed [15, c. 103-104, 110-124].

The reliefs from the church of Saint Theodore on Anacopia mountain were measured, their function was studied, their iconographic and stylistic context was defined. But there are still some questions which could only be resolved with the help of the virtual reconstruction of the decorative system of churches from Anacopia fortress. It is particularly important to understand how many churches were decorated by the reliefs gathered in the altar of St. Theodore church in Anacopia and how could they look like. What were their exterior decoration and altar barriers like?

Scholars from the Laboratory of Digital Technologies of Institute of Oriental Studies RAS are planning to suggest solutions for the questions.

A lapidary collection from Anacopia mountain is studied in detail (moreover, the fortress on Anacopia mountain occupies a central place in the history of the Abkhazian kingdom) that is why it is the principal point in the research program concerning the virtual reconstruction of the architectural decoration of medieval churches in the above-mentioned regions. There are also some other lapidary collections in Abkhazia that can be included in this program. Among them, there are the fragments of the reliefs from Dranda church. This collection is divided between several locations. Part of it is kept in the funds of the Abkhazian State Museum. The others two parts – in the collection of the Church Archaeological Museum of the metropole of Abkhazia and in the narthex of the cathedral of Dormition in Dranda village, respectively. Several fragments are lost but they were published more than a hundred years ago by countess P. Uvarova [16, c. 30]. Some other rear fragments of its altar barrier were recently discovered and attributed [17, c. 196-210]. As the preserved fragments are measured, other information is published. So, the virtual reconstruction of the altar barrier is possible. It could enrich the scientific vision of the evolution of small forms in the architectural decoration of Christian churches in Caucasus during the medieval period.

One more interesting and well-studied monument is the church in Veseloje village [18, c. 34-61]. In the course of archaeological excavations of 2010 – 2011 seasons, there were found several carved stone reliefs with figurative and ornamental representations. Available information about it also permits to make a virtual reconstruction of the altar barrier of the church.

As shown above, architectural decorations of Christian churches in the Southern Ossetia of the 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries are less studied than in Abkhazia. But there are also a lot of interesting examples of stone reliefs. On the territory there are several rich lapidary collections (that can be dated back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century) which are accessible to be measured and analyzed in order to produce a virtual reconstruction of the decoration of the churches they originate from.

During a recent study trip (which took place in the autumn of 2020) as part of the Russian – Ossetian scientific program, a series of lapidary

collections were inspected and analyzed. Some of them are situated in Tskhinval region (Dodot village) and in Djav region (Sokhta, Kasadjin, Nadarbaz, Kvaisa regions). Some fragments of carved stone blocks (from the outer decoration or altar barrier) are inserted in the wall of the ruined hospital in Tskhinval city. It is known that they originate from the church in Tbet village of the Tskhinval region (its ruins are also preserved).

The most interesting (presence of rear iconographical subjects) are the fragments from the altar barriers and architectural decoration which were found in the ruins of churches from Sokhta, Kasadjin, Nadarbaz and Kvaisa villages. However, it is necessary to make some additional research work (measurements of the reliefs and of the ruins) before we reconstruct their virtual appearance.

In recent years, thanks to the growing research potential, the number of projects for the virtual reconstruction of monuments of cultural and historical heritage has increased. Virtual reconstruction is a modern digital method of scientific visualization that uses information and communication technologies (ICT) to recreate the historical appearance of individual art objects and architectural monuments (lost or partially destroyed) [19, p. 9]. It allows to visualize the appearance of both individual elements of buildings, and architectural ensembles or quarters as a whole, by developing a three-dimensional model of the object. The creation of a 3D model of an architectural monument is based on the collected historical sources, and the reliability of the reconstructed image depends on the work of the researcher and is based not only on traditional knowledge, but also on computer skills.

The accelerated development of digital technologies over the past decades has significantly enriched the research potential of humanities and has made it possible to use all forms of information modeling. Following the development of methods for mathematical modeling of historical processes in the mid-1990s, an advanced type of modeling appeared – visual modeling of objects [20]. In addition to the traditional approaches to creating graphic models – from drawings to sketches and layouts – digital technologies have provided researchers with the ability to a quicker and much less labor-intensive expansion and modification of models: edit material parameters, change the size and shape of the monument, adjust lighting conditions and environmental parameters, etc. One of the promising areas of visual modeling is considered to be digital volumetric (3D) modeling [21]. According to researchers, the emergence of 3D modeling technologies has become “a real discovery in the field of computer technology” [22, p. 146]. The importance of introducing 3D modeling technologies in art studies was pointed out by Bernard Smith, Head of Unit, Cultural Heritage Applications DG Information Society, European Commission [23]. Existing approaches to 3D modeling can be divided into 4 forms: 1) designing – the creation of new objects, 2) conservation (digitization) – the preservation of the forms and characteristics of existing objects, 3)

industrial renovation – the refinement and modernization of existing objects, and 4) virtual reconstruction – modeling of existing and lost forms and characteristics of the objects.

The virtual reconstruction of historical and cultural heritage objects is a complex research process: search and study of sources and analogues, painstaking analysis of heterogeneous information, creation of a detailed verified reconstruction algorithm that is unique for each object [24, p. 64]. Given the complexity, the activity of creating virtual reconstructions can be considered not only an auxiliary tool for art history and historical research, but also independent scientific research.

The first sporadic attempts to use 3D modeling technologies in art history research have been made since the mid-1990s. Let us mention some projects of historical and architectural reconstruction: Petra Great Temple (late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, Jordan) under the guidance of professor Martha Sharp Joukowsky (Brown University, [https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky\\_Institute/Petra/](https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky_Institute/Petra/)), temples of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. in Rome – under the auspices of Philippe Fleury (Research Center for Antiquity and Myths University of Caen Normandy, <https://rome.unicaen.fr/>), «Rome Reborn», supervised by Bernard Frischer (The Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (IATH), research unit of the University of Virginia, <https://www.romereborn.org/>), Renaissance Vatican Palace, headed by Manfred Koob (Department of Information and Communication Technologies in Architecture, Technical University of Darmstadt, [http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/d\\_projects/vatikan.html](http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/d_projects/vatikan.html)).

By the mid-2000s, software and modeling methodology were being improved, and interest in virtual reconstructions of cultural heritage objects was growing in the scientific community. Thus, interdisciplinary research groups and laboratories are formed in the leading educational and scientific centers. These groups included, in addition to computer specialists, professional art historians, architects, archaeologists, historians, artists and humanitarians from other fields. Large-scale reconstruction projects were launched, characterized by the cooperation of specialists in various fields of knowledge, often from different institutions. This applies to: “Byzantium 1200” (Tayfun Öner, Albrecht Berger, <https://www.byzantium1200.com/>), Khmer temples (Technical University of Darmstadt, National Museum of Cambodia, [http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/d\\_projects/angkor.html](http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/d_projects/angkor.html)), Digital Karnak Project (University of California at Los Angeles Experiential Technologies Center, <http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak/>), Teotihuacan (National Autonomous University of Mexico, National Institute of Anthropology and History), Temple and Sanctuaries of the Ancient Bosphorus (Saint Petersburg State University, Institute of the History of Material Culture RAS, <http://bosportemple.ru/>) [25], “850 years of Moscow Kremlin architecture,

1157-2000 гг.” (Technical University of Darmstadt, Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow Kremlin Museums, [http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/d\\_projects/kreml.html](http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/d_projects/kreml.html)), “Rome Reborn 2.0” (University of Virginia, UCLA, Polytechnic University of Milan, Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3, University of Caen Normandy).

From year to year, visualization tools, complexity and quality of ongoing projects have been improved. For a high-quality reconstruction, it was no longer enough to model only the main architectural elements; the emphasis was shifted to the reproduction of small forms, plastic details, and decorative elements. The same trends can be seen in the transformation of the already mentioned projects: Petra Great Temple, Rome Reborn, Byzantium 1200. In addition, it is worth mentioning other projects where special attention is paid to the virtual reconstruction of plastics and small forms: Imperial mausoleum of Xi’an (Technical University of Darmstadt, Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology, Emperor Qinshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum, [http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/d\\_projects/xian.html](http://www.cad.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/d_projects/xian.html)), Tell Halaf (Syria) and Dresden residential palace 1678 (Technical University of Darmstadt, Architectura Virtualis GmbH, [https://www.dg.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/forschung\\_ddu/digitale\\_rekonstruktion\\_ddu/abenteuer\\_orient\\_\\_tell\\_halaf/index.en.jsp](https://www.dg.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/forschung_ddu/digitale_rekonstruktion_ddu/abenteuer_orient__tell_halaf/index.en.jsp), [https://www.dg.architektur.tudarmstadt.de/forschung\\_ddu/digitale\\_rekonstruktion\\_ddu/dresdner\\_residenzschloss/index.en.jsp](https://www.dg.architektur.tudarmstadt.de/forschung_ddu/digitale_rekonstruktion_ddu/dresdner_residenzschloss/index.en.jsp)), Imperial Cathedral (Kaiserdom) of Königsutter (Hafen City University Hamburg), Gienos Temple (Laboratory of Integrated Digital Technologies IOS RAS, Tkuarchal archaeological expedition IA RAS and Abkhaz Institute for Humanitarian Research AAS, <https://digital.ivran.ru/proekty/gienos>), The Digital Sculpture Project (Virtual World Heritage Laboratory of University of Virginia, <http://www.digitalsculpture.org/>), attractions of Prague Old Town Square, Angkor Wat (Cambodia), Machu Picchu (Peru) (Vizerra SA), “Painted crypts of the Bosphorus” (Saint Petersburg State University, <http://www.bosporuscrypt.ru/>)

Specialist from the Institute of Archeology RAS V.V. Moor believes that virtual reconstruction contains a rich research potential and can serve as a unique tool for the creation and verification of art criticism hypotheses (clarification, verification, development of new ideas) regarding the form, location, manufacturing principles, materials used of historical and cultural heritage objects [26, p. 67]. Along with this, digital methods of virtual reconstruction are often used in the restoration of monuments of painting and monumental art, where they allow restoring images/figures from disparate fragments with great accuracy. The labor-intensive and time-consuming manual checking of the joining of many fragments is now replaced by a computer compatibility analysis of their digital models. High-speed processing of large volumes of data makes it possible to use for fragments joining not only the characteristics of the quality of contour joining, but also the characteristic

of the color gradient on the surface, the direction of the stroke/cutter, etc. It is an ostentatious project for the restoration of the destroyed fresco cycle by Andrea Mantegna in the Ovetari Chapel of the Church of the Eremitani (Padua). Thanks to the method developed by the University of Padua (Department of Physics and Astronomy “Galileo Galilei”), a high efficiency of fragment localization has been achieved [27]. Another project for the restoration of the broken frescoes of the 14th century Church of the Assumption on Volotovo pole, carried out by the “Freska” Research and Restoration Studio, also demonstrated the benefits of digital reconstruction technologies. After extracting the remains of frescoes from the ruins of the temple, more than 1.7 million fragments ranging in size from 1 to 6 cm<sup>2</sup> were collected. The software developed for the restoration of frescoes made it possible to select pairs from many small fragments that are highly likely to join each other, while operations with digital images make it possible to join the fragments without contact, without destroying the edges of the side faces of the fragments [28]. Similar methods can be applied to the restoration of architectural plastics. Consider the project “Reconstruction of the Lost Stone Reliefs of the 13th century St. George’s Cathedral” (Yuryev-Polsky Museum of History, Architecture and Art, Department of Historical Informatics LMSU), in which virtual reconstruction was used to restore the appearance of a number of lost mythical and biblical scenes on stone reliefs that previously adorned the walls of the cathedral [29]. During the collapse and in the course of further rebuilding, the cathedral lost some of the reliefs, and some were embedded in hard-to-reach places. Digital technologies have made it possible to digitize reliefs and work with their models without violating the current integrity of the object itself. During the project, a software tool was used, which made it possible to systematize the fragments and restore some of the stone reliefs. Recent successful examples include projects for obtaining and analyzing virtual images of rock art monuments. (HSE University, RSSDA) [30], making a high-quality copy of the ornate bronze doors for the Baptistery of the Florence Cathedral (Prototek, Ciglia&Carrai) [31], and creation of 3D models of medieval stone crosses (The State Hermitage Museum) [32].

The project presented in this article involves the integrated use of the previous experience of diverse projects for the virtual reconstruction of the cultural and historical heritage of the Eastern Black Sea region, carried out by various research teams. It is worth noting that the proposed scientific virtual reconstruction would be based on the results of many years of archaeological research. The project is carried out according to a single plan and on a proven methodological basis. Activities on the study and reconstruction of each monument include the following main stages:

1. Selection of sources.
2. Digitization, analysis and structuring of information from narrative and graphic sources.



3. The study of archaeological research data.
4. Selection and study of analogues, architectural and aesthetic-utilitarian analyses of the object.
5. Preliminary modeling with the construction of a sketch model.
6. Main modeling.
7. Visualization creation.
8. Verification and preparation of scientific and design documentation.

Thus, at the first stage of the project, a source base is formed using historical, archival, bibliographic and heuristic methods for detecting narrative and graphic sources. Further, the initial data of the sources are digitized, the analysis of the links between their messages and the comparative analysis of the sources are carried out. An important stage will be the study of data from archaeological reports containing information on the monument typology, its properties and the history of study. Here, if necessary, an additional archaeological survey of the object is carried out, along with its photographic fixation, 3D laser scan and photogrammetric measurements and their processing in specialized software (Agisoft Photoscan, Autodesk Remake, Micmac). Based on archaeological and source data, an architectural and aesthetic-utilitarian analysis of the object is carried out, the study of semantic and constructive changes in shaping throughout its history. Furthermore, the selection of analogues according to the constructive and architectural solution and the development of scientific hypotheses on the characteristics of the lost parts of the monument are being carried out. At the stage of preliminary modeling, the necessary design calculations are performed, preliminary conceptual art history and architectural solutions developed, and a simplified draft model of the monument is created. Based on the design solutions of the draft model, the main modeling is performed. Its results are fundamental for architectural, art and constructive solutions, as well as a detailed recreation of monumental art, plastic items and interior decoration. The result of the modeling should be a 3D BIM model – the so-called “digital twin” of the object, developed on the basis of scientific research, taking into account the authenticity of the monument. These two steps use information modeling and computer-aided design (CAD) software tools such as Graphisoft ArchiCAD, Autodesk AutoCAD, Autodesk 3Ds Max. These tools are used to synthesize graphic information (photographs, drawings, excavation plans, orthophoto maps, laser tacheometric survey data and photogrammetric 3D models) and subsequent design work on the reconstruction of the monument. The visualization stage includes the creation of a final illustrative reconstruction report using high-quality photorealistic graphics based on the monument model received, displaying an authentic landscape and site phenomenology. In accordance with the objectives of the project, this stage may include the creation of posters and video materials, virtual and augmented reality

applications (Lumion, Unity3D software). An indispensable milestone of the project will be the stage of verification and scientific criticism of the model. Verifiable reconstruction of the external appearance of monuments should be based on the data of available sources to the maximum extent. It is clear that the models have certain accuracy, a reliable reproduction of plastic and decorative compositions can be combined with reasonable borrowings from analogues. Completion of work on the study and reconstruction of the monument is accompanied by the release of documentation: drawings, diagrams, plans, explanatory notes and web reports. It should be noted that reconstruction work is an iterative process, when the results obtained at one of the stages can serve to correct the data of previous stages, to clarify research hypotheses and design solutions.

We can say with confidence that the implementation of the project carefully prepared by us for the virtual reconstruction of the architectural decorative system of Christian churches will allow us to shed light on traditional issues in a different way and expand research horizons.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the project of virtual reconstruction of architectural decoration of Christian churches of 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries seems to be important for the scientific study of the sculpture of the middle Byzantine period in Caucasus. It fits good to the increasing interest to the subject from some European scholars (for example, significant studies of C. Vanderheyde[33] and N. Iamanidze[34]).

Besides, virtual reconstruction would help a lot in conservation and popularization of cultural heritage. The results of the research would also stimulate writing of informative guides and creation of virtual tours. Virtual reconstructions of architectural decoration of Christian churches of 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia could be actively used in creating modern museum exhibits (in Sukhum, New Afon and Tskhinval).

### **Bibliography:**

**Anisimova, T. I.**, “The Use of New Technologies in the Restoration of Ruined Painting. Church of the Assumption on the Volotovo Field Near Novgorod.” *Novgorod and Novgorod Land. Art and Restoration. Issue 1*. Veliky Novgorod, 2005, pp. 279–291. (In Russ.).

**Armarchuk, E. A.**, “The Carved Stone of the Temple of the 9th–11th Centuries Near the Village Vesylloe.” *Medieval Arts and Crafts. To the 90th Birthday Anniversary of Tatyana Ivanovna Makarova*. Moscow, 2021, pp. 34–61. (In Russ.).

*Art of the Abkhazian Kingdom between 8 and 11 Centuries. Christian Monuments of the Anacopia Fortress*. Ed. by E. Yu. Endoltseva. Saint Petersburg, 2011. ISBN 978-5-88812-469-7 (In Russ.).

**Borisova, S. V., Kartashov, S. A., Zherebyatyev, D. I., Trishin, I. G., Mironenko, M. S., Dryga, D. O.,** “Preservation of Pre-Mongol Rus Cultural Heritage: Reconstruction of the Lost Stone Reliefs of the 13th Century St. Georger’s Cathedral.” *Historical Informatics*. 2018;3(25):51–75. (In Russ.) <http://dx.doi.org/10.7256/2585-7797.2018.3.27576>.

Bringing an Italian 14th century bronze masterpiece back to life with Artec Spider. June 05, 2020. URL: <https://www.artec3d.com/news/3d-scanning-italian-baptistery-doors>.

**Bystritskiy, N. I.,** “Historical visualization in Museum and Exhibition Practice.” *Role of Museums in Information Support of Historical Science*. Moscow, 2015. Pp. 645-653 (in Russ.) [http://silun.ru/sites/default/files/Bystritskiy\\_IstViz%20MVP\\_2015.pdf](http://silun.ru/sites/default/files/Bystritskiy_IstViz%20MVP_2015.pdf).

**Bystritskiy, N. I.,** “Visual communication in History.” *The role of Visual Sources in Information Support of Historical Science*. Moscow, 2019. Pp. 969-984 (in Russ.) <https://www.academia.edu/43087688>.

**Dadiani, T., Khundadze, T., Kvachatadze, E.,** *Medieval Georgian Sculpture*. Tbilisi, 2017. ISBN 978-9941-27-498- 2.

**Dryga, D. O.,** “The Technique of Creating Three-Dimensional Models Cultural Heritage Exhibits of Museum Collections.” *Izvestiavuzov. Geodesy and aerophotosurveying*, 2019;63-5:512-523. (In Russ.).

**Endoltseva, E. Y.,** “Image of Snake-Dragon in the Architectural Decoration of Christian churches in Caucasus in Medieval Period.” *Russia. Georgia. Christian East. Spiritual and Cultural Links. Collection of the Materials of VIII Scientific Readings, Dedicated to the Memory of D. I. Arsenishvili*. Moscow, 2021, pp. 167–177. (In Russ.).

**Endoltseva, E. Y.,** “Motif of Ram’s Head in Architectural Decoration in Caucasus in X – XIV centuries.” *Allon. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Honored Scientist of the Republic of South Ossetia, Professor Yu. A. Dzitsitsoyty*. Moscow, 2021, pp. 161–173. (In Russ.).

**Endoltseva, E. Y.,** *Architectural Decoration in Abkhazia in the Period of the Abkhazian Kingdom (8 – 11 centuries)*. Moscow, 2020. ISBN 978-5-89282-978-6 (In Russ.).

**Endoltseva, E. Y., Skakov A. Y.,** “Zoomorphic images in architectural decoration of Caucasus in 9 – 11 centuries.” *Herald of Orthodox Saint Tikhon Humanitarian University. Questions of History and Theory of Christian Art*. 2020; 37:9–28. (In Russ.) <http://dx.doi.org/10.15382/sturV202037.9-27>.

**Endoltseva, E. Yu., arch. Dorotheus Dbar.,** “Architectural Decoration and Small Forms in Dranda: New Findings.” *Herald of the Volgograd State University. Series 4. History, Regional Studies, International Relations*. 2018;23,5:196–210.(In Russ.) <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2018.5.18>.

**Goroncharovsky, V. A., Vinogradov, Yu. A., Martirov, V.B., Shvemberger, S. V.,** “Experience of Virtual Reconstruction of Architectural Monuments of the Ancient Bosphorus.” *Virtual Reconstruction of Historical and Cultural Heritage in the Formats of Scientific Research and Educational Process*. Krasnoyarsk, 2012, pp. 31–48.(In Russ.).

**Iamanidzé, N.,** *Les installations liturgiques sculptées des églises de Géorgie (VI – XIII siècles)*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2010. ISBN 978-2-503-53408-4 (In French).

**Khrushkova, L. G.,** *Sculpture of early medieval Abkhazia of the 5<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century*. Tbilisi, 1980. (In Russ.).

- Khrushkova, L. G.**, *The East Coast of the Black Sea in the Byzantine Era. History. Architecture. Archaeology*. Kaliningrad–Moscow, 2018. ISBN 978-5-6040479-8-9 (In Russ.).
- Lemytskaya, D. E.**, *Information Technologies in the Restoration of Architectural Heritage: Textbook*. Krasnoyarsk, 2020. (In Russ.).
- Mepisashvili, R., Tsintsadze, V.**, *Architecture of the Upland Part of the Historical Province of Georgia - Shida Kartli*. Tbilisi, 1975. (In Russ.).
- Moor, V. V.**, “Architectural Computer Modeling in the Study of Architectural Monuments.” *Virtual Reconstruction of Historical and Cultural Heritage in the Formats of Scientific Research and Educational Process*. Krasnoyarsk, 2012, pp. 65–67, 174–194. (In Russ.).
- Panchenko, V., Denisova, A.**, “Three-Dimensional Models of Medieval Stone Crosses Used as a Model for Displaying Artifacts from “Inaccessible” Places.” *Virtual Archaeology. Revealing the Past, Enriching the Present and Shaping the Future. Proceedings of the Forth International Scientific Conference. Krasnoyarsk, 20–22 September 2021*. Krasnoyarsk, 2021, pp. 62–66. (In Russ.) <http://dx.doi.org/10.17516/sibvirarch-007>.
- Restoration of the Frescoes in the Ovetari Chapel. *Museums of Russia*. October 2, 2003. URL: <http://www.museum.ru/N14688>. (In Russ.).
- Rumyantsev, M., Smolin, A., Baryshev, R., Rudov, I., Pikov, N.**, Virtual “Reconstruction of Historical and Cultural Heritage Objects.” *Journal of Applied Informatics*. 2011;6 (36):62–77. (In Russ.).
- Sakania, S. M.**, “Political and Cultural Connection of Abkhazia with Byzantium, Russia and Alania.” *Fourth Kuban Archaeological Conference. Abstracts and reports*. Krasnodar, 2005, pp. 250–252. (In Russ.).
- Sakania, S. M.**, “The Bzyb Church and the Origin of the Cross-Domed Form.” *XLV final scientific session (April 24-26) of the Abkhaz Institute for Humanitarian Research named after. D.I. Gulia Academy of Sciences of Abkhazia. Abstracts*. Sukhumi, 2001, pp. 46–47. (In Russ.).
- Sakania, S. M.**, “Typology of Apses in the Early Medieval Temples of Abkhazia.” *E.I. Krupnov and the Development of the Archeology of the North Caucasus. XXVIII Krupnov Readings. Materials of the International Scientific Conference. (Moscow). April 21-25, 2014*. Moscow, 2014, pp. 274–275. (In Russ.).
- Sakania, S. M., Trebeleva, G. V.**, *Late Antique and Medieval Christian Temples of the North-Eastern Black Sea Region. Catalog. Volume. 1. Western Abkhazia (Gagra, Gudauta, Sukhum regions)*. Magnitogorsk, 2019. (In Russ.).
- Slanov, A. A.**, *Historical Regions of South Ossetia*. Vladikavkaz, 2017. ISBN 978-5-91139-407-3 (In Russ.).
- Smith, B.**, “Activities and Research for Cultural Heritage in the European Union.” *Information for All: Culture and Information Society Technologies: Materials of the International Conference EVA 2003, Moscow, December 1-5, 2003*. Moscow, 2003.
- Svoyski, Y. M., Romanenko, E. V., Khlopachev, G. A., Polkovnikova, M. E.**, “3D Modeling in the Studies of the Portable Art Geometrical Images of the Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic of Eastern Europe.” *Camera Praehistorica*. 2020;2(5):8–24. (In Russ.) <http://dx.doi.org/10.31250/2658-3828-2020-2-8-24>.
- Uvarova, P. S.**, *Christian monuments of the Caucasus. MAC. IV*. Moscow, 1894. (In Russ.).

**Vanderheyde, C.**, *La Sculpture byzantine du IXe au XVe siècle: contexte – mise en oeuvre – décors*. Paris, 2020. ISBN 978-2-7084-1050-3 (In French).

**Vavulin, M. V., Zaytseva, O. V., Pushkaryov, A. A.**, “3D Scanning Techniques and Practices Used for Different Types of Archaeological Artifacts.” *Siberian Historical Research*. 2014;4:21–37. (In Russ.).

**Vinogradov, A. Yu., Beletsky, D. V.**, *Church Architecture of Abkhazia in the Era of the Abkhazian Kingdom 8 – 11 Centuries*. Moscow, 2015. ISBN 978-5-91674-365-4 (In Russ.).

**Zherebyatiev, D. I.**, “System of Electronic Verification (Validation) of Virtual Reconstructions of Objects of Historical and Cultural Heritage on the Example of Moscow Monasteries.” *Information Technologies in the Humanities*. Krasnoyarsk, 2017, p. 79. (In Russ.).

**Zherebyatiev, D. I., Konchakov R. B.**, “Technologies of 3D Modeling in the Perspective of Historical Informatics.” *Circle of Ideas: Models and Technologies of Historical Reconstructions*. Moscow, 2010, pp. 145–174. (In Russ.).

## John of Salisbury's skepticism. A veritable *exhortation to prudence (hortamen ad prudentiam)* \*

Bogdan Guguianu\*\*

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this article is to bring up some of John of Salisbury's skeptical theses (1115/20 – 1180) and their impact on the rest of his works. The introduction will deal with the context of the so-called "medieval skepticism", the first part will tackle John of Salisbury's approaches to skepticism, the second part will attempt to connect some concepts in his work to a few ancient skeptics, while the last part will try to concretely identify elements of skepticism in John of Salisbury's theological discourse. Suffice it to say that, in the end, we will draw some conclusions related to the subject. The article's goal is to take notice, without the pretension of being exhaustive, of the polymorphous way in which the epistemologically skeptical attitude of John of Salisbury influenced different aspects of his doctrine.*

**Keywords:** *academic skepticism, probabilism, medieval skepticism, John of Salisbury, the knowledge of God, Carneades of Cyrene*

### Introduction

Starting from the premise that the skepticism is not solely a philosophical doctrine, but also a spiritual state intrinsic to the reasoning itself, it is impossible for us to accept that a doctrine (be it philosophical or theological) could elude, *de plano*, some allegedly skeptical theses.<sup>1</sup>

---

\* Acknowledgment: This work was supported by a grant of Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS -UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2021-0469, within PNCDI III

\*\* CSdr, Al. I. Cuza University of Iași, e-mail bogdan.guguianu@yahoo.com

<sup>1</sup>In this sense, we can take a look at the surprising conclusion of Jean-Luc Marion regarding the precedence of *doubt* over *existence* in a classic author like Descartes, who cannot be accused of skeptical sympathies. („L'existence provient directement du doute [...] Car le doute offre la forme la plus libre de pensée, puisqu'il n'énonce aucune proposition, n'engage pas la moindre prédication, n'assume aucune signification, ne vise aucun référent" – J.-L. Marion, *Descartes sous le masque du cartésianisme*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2021, p.54). Also, Edouard Mehl argues that *doubt* takes the place and role of *thought* insofar as *dubitatio* can seriously and successfully claim the title of "principle of thought" in the first *Meditation*, before thought becomes *cogitatio* in the second *Meditation*: "Omniprésente, la *dubitatio* tient ici la place et le rôle dévolu ailleurs à la *cogitatio*, à tel point que le doute emporte le titre de principe avant même d'être rapporté à la *cogitatio*" (Édouard Mehl, "La question du premier principe

Regarding the possibility of philosophy to follow a skeptical direction, there is no need to insist any further. The activity of skepticism as a doctrine is more than obvious in antiquity, but also in the period of the formation of modernity<sup>2</sup> or even in the contemporary era<sup>3</sup>. Anthologies dedicated to the history of skepticism do not miss from the world of ideas either<sup>4</sup>.

A much more serious challenge, however, may be *identifying elements of skepticism in the discourse of medieval Christian theology*, which, through its ideological infrastructure, seems to contradict some principles of philosophical skepticism. The idea of discovering skeptical elements in medieval philosophy<sup>5</sup> is relatively new, and precisely for this reason, it possesses a hermeneutical richness that has not yet been fully revealed.

The difficulty of the task of identifying the presence of skepticism in medieval philosophy stems from the fact that *doubt*, a significant doctrinal constant in the structure of skepticism, not only tends to contradict *faith*, one of the elementary Christian theological virtues, but also threatens, at times, the validity of this essential principle of theological discourse. Even in such conditions, however, medieval theology, although it might have been expected to be more reticent about the controversial current of thought in question, did not shy away from employing skeptical practices or arguments, using them without insisting too much on their origins<sup>6</sup>. In one way or another, skepticism

---

dans la *Recherche de la vérité*”, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, 1991/1, p.83). In spite of a certain tradition that often uses hollow sentences, it must always be remembered that “Descartes, au contraire, ne considère pas le doute des sceptiques (ni le sien) *comme une doctrine, mais comme un acte de pensée*” (our emphasis, B.G) - J.-L. Marion, *op.cit.*, p.21. Doubt is not only the expression of a doctrine, but rather the original state of thought, before any kind of *cogitatio* is uttered. The fact that a canonical writer like Descartes, who is often regarded as the founder of modern philosophical thought, gives *doubt* such an important *architectonic* role (not just a *provisional* or *methodological* one, as it has often been said) should make us aware of the importance of doubt for any kind of thought that takes itself seriously (and we are not only referring to ancient philosophy).

<sup>2</sup> Frédéric Brahami, *Le travail du scepticisme. Montaigne, Bayle, Hume*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2001 and M. A. Bernier et S. Charles (dir.), *Scepticisme et modernité*, Saint-Étienne, Presses de l'Université Saint-Étienne, 2005, but also R. H. Popkin, Ezequiel de Olaso and Giorgio Tonelli (dir.), *Scepticism in the Enlightenment*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Keith DeRoseand & Ted A. Warfield (eds.), *Scepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> R. H. Popkinand & J. R. Maia Neto (dirs.) *Scepticism: an Anthology*, Amherst, Prometheus Books, 2007 and Luciano Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus : The Transmission and Recovey of Pyrrhonism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Henrik Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, Brill, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> „Despite this fascination with skeptical arguments, no medieval thinker (with the interesting exception of John of Salisbury, who professed devotion to the Academics in then Prologue to his *Policraticus*) appears to have claimed the mantle of sceptic” - Dallas G. Denery II, Kantik Ghosh, and Nicolette Zeeman (eds.), *Uncertain Knowledge. Scepticism, Relativism, and Doubt in the Middle Ages*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014, p.3.

was omnipresent in the Middle Ages (without being called as such) and always identifiable in the works of *others*, but never in the works of denouncers who branded it dangerous<sup>7</sup>. The distinction between an "internal" and an "external" use of the concept helps us understand why there were no officially recognized "skeptical philosophers" in the Middle ages<sup>8</sup> and why skepticism was only used as a tool within debates: "No one in the Middle Ages was a skeptic in the sense that he claimed that nothing can be known. This was regarded as clearly absurd, and was only used in *reductio* arguments against opponents"<sup>9</sup>.

Christophe Grellard devotes a complex study to the phenomenon of the encounter between ancient skepticism and medieval Christianity, evoking the discourse of John of Salisbury as a significant reference in confirming the presence of the *doctrine of neutrality* in Christian theological discourse<sup>10</sup>. Another medieval author who was long included in the same register of using skeptical elements in theological discourse is Nicolas of Autrecourt<sup>11</sup>, considered for a long time a true "medieval Hume"<sup>12</sup> because of the arguments he used.

---

<sup>7</sup> „Scepticism was, in a sense, everywhere and nowhere, always present in someone else's work, never in one's own. This dynamic, far from producing an unquestioning consensus about the forms and practices of certain philosophical knowledge, actually provided the tools for querying, and in many cases for narrowing, the domain of what could be known with any confidence" – *ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> „An internal use consists in determining what medieval philosophers called skepticism, and to examine who in the Middle Ages accepted such a label. An external use consists in defining a more general notion of skepticism, relevant to what we now call skepticism in modern and contemporary epistemology [...] according to an internal use, nobody was a skeptic" – Christophe Grellard, „Nicholas of Autrecourts skepticism: the ambivalence of medieval epistemology", in Henrik Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed.cit., p.141.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 140

<sup>10</sup>See Christophe Grellard, *Jean de Salisbury et la Renaissance Médiévale du Scepticisme*, Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2013.

<sup>11</sup>See „Nicholas of Autrecourt" in James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture. Evidence and Probability before Pascal*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2015, p. 210 sq.

<sup>12</sup> A characterization that dates back more than a century (H. Rashdall, "Nicholas de Ultricuria, a Medieval Hume", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 7, 1906–1907, 1–27) and which is not entirely false, but neither entirely true, since Nicolas of Autrecourt *openly fought against academic skepticism*, as he himself confessed in a letter to Bernard d'Arezzo: "Et, ut michi apparet, absurdiora sequuntur ad positionem vestram quam ad positionem Academicorum. Et ideo ad evitandum tales absurditates, sustinui in aula Sorbonne in disputationibus quod sum certus evidenter de obiectis quinque sensuum et des actibus meis." – Nicolas of Autrecourt, *First Letter to Bernard*, § 15, in *His Correspondence with Master Giles and Bernard of Arezzo*, A Critical Edition and English Translation by L.M.de Rijk, Brill, 1997, pp. 55–56. The label of "skeptical" given to Nicolas of Autrecourt is at least doubtful (if not undeserved) from the perspective of how the 60 theses extracted from his work *Exigit ordo executionis* were condemned by a tribunal convened in Avignon in 1340 (but whose sentence was formalized by Pope Benedict XII only in 1346). This sentence today appears to reveal more *the limits of ecclesiastical censors* (too attached to Aristotelian doctrine) than the heterodoxy of Autrecourt's doctrine: "His particular crime was to show that the arguments of Aristotelian scholasticism are



In this article, we will focus specifically on John of Salisbury, attempting to highlight how he approached certain aspects of his doctrine through the hermeneutical mobilization of some of the ancient skepticism's theses.

### 1. Means of approaching skepticism in John of Salisbury's work

The general aspects that impose skeptical approaches in medieval theology need to be clearly stated, especially because the type of skepticism present in John of Salisbury's discourse, classified in relation to the most relevant manifestations of this philosophical doctrine (in the ancient period or modernity), proves to be largely reductive. One thing that needs to be understood in this regard is that, if for the ancients skepticism constituted a way of life or skill - δύναντος<sup>13</sup>, for John of Salisbury in particular, and for medieval theologians in general, skepticism seems to acquire slight casuistic nuances, possessing a strictly argumentative and epistemological tint, as recent exegesis interprets it<sup>14</sup>. Even under such circumstances, in *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury considers himself part of the academic class<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, it is not

---

no more justified than any other arguments, and he showed this very quickly. So quickly that he thought it was a scandal that the masters of Paris spent all their lives studying Aristotle such that « they all deserted moral matters and concern for the common good because of the logical discourses of Aristotle and Averroes » - Richard Fitch, "Nicholas of Autrecourt and the mastery of reason", *Divus Thomas*, 116, 3 (2013), p. 166. R. Fitch summarizes the stakes of the two letters to Bernardo d'Arezzo that were preserved after the burning of Nicolas of Autrecourt's books: "In these letters Nicholas uses powerful negative arguments to show that Aristotelian arguments are no more probable, and provide no more certainty, than many other competent philosophical arguments. All these arguments are thus in a state of equipollence, meaning reason has called its own mastery into question" (*ibidem*, p. 167). The work *Exigit ordo executionis*, considered destroyed by censors but found in a copy at the beginning of the 20th century, has been translated into English: Nicholas of Autrecourt, *The Universal Treatise*, tr. Leonard A. Kennedy, Richard E. Arnold, and Arthur E. Millward, with an Introduction by Leonard A. Kennedy, Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1971. For the general context of Autrecourt's condemnation, see J.M.M.H Thijssen's work, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris, 1200–1400*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, pp. 73-89, and for Autrecourt's relationship with ancient skepticism one can consult the article by the same author, "The Quest for Certain Knowledge in the Fourteenth Century: Nicholas of Autrecourt against the Academics" in J. Sihvola (ed.), *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition* in Acta Philosophica Fennica, Volume 66, Helsinki, Societas Philosophica Fennica, pp. 199–223.

<sup>13</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Henrik Lagerlund, *Medieval Scepticism and Divine Deception*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2019, p. 129.

<sup>15</sup> "Academicus vero fluctuat, et quid in singulis verum sit definire non audet. Haec tamen secta trifariam divisa est: habet enim, qui se nihil omnino scire profiteantur, et cautela nimia demeruerunt philosophi nomen. Habet alios, qui se sola necessaria, et per se nota, quae scilicet nesciri non possunt, confiteantur nosse. Tertius gradus, nostrorum est, qui sententiam non praecipitant, in his quae sunt dubitabilia sapienti" (*Metalogicon* IV, 31). For *Metalogicon* we use Ioannes Saresberiensis, *Metalogicon*, ed. J.B.Hall – K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, CCCM, Brepols, Turnhout, 1991, p. 168, 30–36. English translation: "The Academic, however, wavers. He will not presume to state definitely what is true in each case. His sect of the Academics is divided into three camps. The first group claims to know nothing. By excessive caution, the right to be

by chance that H. Lagerlund considers that this type of skepticism assumed by John of Salisbury is not an original one, but rather one strongly influenced by Cicero's opinion on skepticism<sup>16</sup>. For a theologian like John of Salisbury, the assumption of skepticism as a way of life, and even less so its concrete implementation, was out of the question.

Attempting to emphasize the particularization of research regarding the motives that could have triggered the interest of medieval theologians in skepticism, Henrik Lagerlund argues that the *doctrine of neutrality* imposed its presence in theological discourse especially due to the belief of Christian theologians in God's *infinite power*. Such a hypothesis could be logically justified by the following explanations: given that God possesses infinite power, it is very possible that in some situations he might deceive (*decipere*) humans, who are endowed with so many cognitive limitations<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, a person who claimed to have perfect knowledge even about human things could not sustain their position in relation to divine omnipotence, which could invalidate this order of things (*ordoad invicem*)<sup>18</sup>. The solution to this problem

---

called philosophers has been forfeited by some. A second group admits only knowledge of things that are necessary and self-evident, namely, things that one cannot fail to know. A third type of Academics consists in those of us who do not venture to precipitate an opinion concerning questions that are doubtful to a wise man" - John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon* IV, 31, translated with introduction and notes by Daniel McGarry, University of California Press, 1955, p. 251. Christophe Grellard points out that not only for John of Salisbury, but for the Middle Ages in general, scepticism is exclusively neo-academic, since "le pyrrhonisme est quasiment ignoré du moyen âge en général et de Jean de Salisbury en particulier" - Christophe Grellard, *Jean de Salisbury. Un cas médiéval de scepticisme*, p.17. Article disponible online. <https://www.academia.edu/2502112>

<sup>16</sup> „John of Salisbury was influenced by Cicero and he adheres to his own version of Academic skepticism”, Henrik Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism*, ed. cit., p.10.

<sup>17</sup> However, this fear is more common in the late Middle Ages, when theological systems gave greater weight to absolute divine power as a means of imaginatively exploring possible worlds and their alternative (counterfactual) orders: “The ultimate goal is to determine the necessity or contingency of the case at hand, for which the *absoluta* speculation on possibility and impossibility is simply the means” - W.J. Courtenay, “Thee Dialectic of Omnipotence in the High and Late Middle Ages”, in *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by T. Rudavsky, Dordrecht, Reidel 1985, p. 255.

<sup>18</sup> For a summary of the first scholastic controversies regarding the relationship between *potentia Dei absoluta* and *potentia Dei ordinata*, see the fundamental work of A. Funkestein, *Theology and scientific imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, Princeton University Press, 1986, chapter III. B. 2, and also Lawrence Moonan, *Divine Power: The Medieval Power Distinction up to its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure, and Aquinas*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994; William J. Courtenay, “Covenant and Causality in Pierre d’Ailly”, in *Speculum*, nr. 46/1971, pp. 94-119, and *Capacity and Volition. A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordinated Power*, Bergamo, Pierluigi Lubrina, 1990, pp. 189-191. A classic solution regarding the relationship between the two types of *potentia* can be found in Toma d’Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.25 and *De potentia*, q.1. For problematizing the interdependence between metaphysics and theology within this relationship between the two *potentiae*, see Olivier Boulnois’s article, “From divine omnipotenceto operative power”, in *Divus Thomas*, Vol. 115, No. 2 (2012, maggio/agosto), pp. 83-97. We remind *en passant* that

will be offered by the concept of *potentia Dei ordinata*, the only one capable of epistemologically orienting the human being within a true but limited knowledge. Therefore, the Christian theologian considered it much wiser to proceed with caution in matters of knowledge, limiting the ambitions of reason<sup>19</sup>.

We therefore note that this Christian theological "skepticism" of the medieval period was paradoxically imposed through an act of *acceptance of divine authority*, different from the manner in which the ancient skeptic, committing a bold act of ὑβρις, questioned the universally accepted ideas of his time, practically transforming such an attitude into a veritable *modus vivendi*.

The hermeneutical idea that emerges is that the medieval theologian that made use of skeptical arguments could not completely recycle the ideas consecrated by the skepticism of Antiquity. He only wanted to know the positions of the ancient authors and to use them with *caution*. Reading the texts of pagan authors had to be done, according to John of Salisbury, *fidelioribus ingeniis* ("with a spirit more inclined to faith"), a phrase that will return almost in the same form a few pages later as *fidelis lector et prudens* („faithful and prudent reader”)<sup>20</sup>. The same phrase exactly ("lector fidelis et prudens")

---

this distinction is launched by Gregory of Rimini (Ariminensis), who considers that it overlaps with an older one, between *divine justice* and *divine power*: „Huic distinctio satis concordat alia antiqua, qua dictum est quod quaedam deus non potest de iustitia, quae potest de potentia”, Grigore de Rimini, *Lectura super primum et secundum sententiarum*, I, d.42-44, q.1, a2, ed. A. Damasus Trapp OSA and Venicio Marcolino, in *Spätmittelalter und Reformation. Texte und Untersuchungen*, Band 6, Berlin – New York, De Gruyter, 1981. Dominik Perler's article, "Does God deceive us? Skeptical Hypotheses in late Medieval Epistemology" from *Rethinking the History of Skepticism*, ed.cit., pp. 183-185 reviews the fragility of the initial solution offered by Gregory of Rimini and shows how an initial *theological* debate had *epistemological* consequences: "It proved to be the starting point for debates with far-reaching epistemological consequences — debates that centered on the basic concepts of knowledge and evidence" (p.187).

<sup>19</sup>*Metalogicon*, IV, 41 (English translation, ed. Daniel McGarry, p.272) dedicates a chapter to the interpretation of a verse (from *Ecclesiastes*) starting from the opposition between reason and faith (*Hic quoque illorum audaciam reprimit, qui sollicitantur de omnibus, et volunt de universis reddere ratione*, "The holy writer expresses the audacity of those who stick their nose into everything, and want to account for all things") and making an allusion to those who try to examine rationally and without piety the mystery of the Holy Trinity (*Ecce temeritatem eorum cohibet, qui Deificae Trinitatis arcana, et ea quorum visio in vita aeterna promittitur, irreverenti verbositate discutunt*, "Note how here strains the rashness of those who, with irreverent garrulity, discuss the secrets of the Divine Trinity and mysteries whose vision is reserved for eternal life"). The translator suggests that the allusion may refer to Abelard: "Reference maybe made here to attempts to rationalize the Divine Trinity, such as those of Abelard in his *Theologia Christiana*" (*ibid.*, p.272, n.508).

<sup>20</sup>*Policraticus*, VII, 10: "et gentiles [libri] simplicioribus periculosius patent: sed in utriusque fidelioribus ingeniis utilissimum est".

appears in *Metalogicon* III, 1, where John of Salisbury explains the manner in which Porphyry should have been read<sup>21</sup>.

Moreover, this general problem of the relationship with Antiquity is not specific to John of Salisbury and was not limited to issues related to knowledge. Following in the footsteps of Saint Augustine, who urged the appropriation of those elements from Antiquity that can be useful to a Christian (including philosophical arguments<sup>22</sup>) in the way that the Jews took the gold of the Egyptians when leaving the kingdom of captivity, the theologian must also know how to take everything that can be good from pagan culture. In this sense, John of Salisbury evokes in *Policraticus* the biblical episode referred to by Saint Augustine, showing that the Christian must also learn from the enemy: “ licet et ab hoste doceri sapientis animus non detrectet, cum peculiaris populous Dei auro argento uestibus et toto Egipthorum ornatu resplendeat”<sup>23</sup>.

## **2. The skeptical influence model**

A very brief demonstration will allow us to understand what discursive landmarks John of Salisbury borrows from the complexity of ancient philosophical skepticism. Let's see, therefore, what this controversial school of thought represented for an ancient philosopher:

„Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity.”<sup>24</sup>

We can identify from this definition of skepticism three important elements, three identifying marks of the *neutrality doctrine*: the *equipollence*

---

<sup>21</sup> “Quidquid autem litterae facies indicat, lector *fidelis et prudens* interim veneretur ut sacrosanctum, donec ei alio docente, aut Domino revelante, veritas plenius et familiarius innotescat” (English translation: “A trustworthy and prudent lecturer will respect as inviolable the evident literal meaning of what is written, until he obtains a fuller and surer grasp of the truth by further reading or by divine revelation” - John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* III, 1 transl. Daniel McGarry, pp. 148).

<sup>22</sup> “Philosophi autem qui vocantur, si qua forte vera et fidei nostrae accomodata dixerunt, maxime Platonici, non solum formidanda non sunt sed ab eis etiam tamquam ab iniustus possessoribus in usum nostrum vindicanda” – “Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them” - Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 2.40.60, edited and translated by R.P.H. Green Oxford, 1995, pp. 124.

<sup>23</sup> „... although the soul of the wise man does not refuse to learn even from the enemy, since the special people of God glitter in the golden clothing and silver ornaments of all the Egyptians” – *Policraticus*, VII, 1 (transl. Cary J. Nederman, p. 149).

<sup>24</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, edited by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 4.

in the opposed objects and accounts, the *suspension of judgement* and the *tranquillity*. In terms of Greek philosophy, these three elements correspond to the following concepts: ἰσοσθένεια τῶν λόγων, ἐποχή and ἀταραξία. We will not dwell on the method by which philosophical skepticism mobilizes all these concepts doctrinally. The fact that in philosophical skepticism the three identifying marks are determined chronologically (and etiologically) is deducible from the very concise definition previously presented. This conceptual triad theoretically (and practically) strengthens the structure and integrity of skepticism as a philosophical doctrine. If we were to accept that in medieval theological discourse skepticism exclusively targets epistemological issues (as Hagerlund claims), we cannot ignore the fact that this discourse perhaps retains only the first stage of this triad, namely ἰσοσθένεια τῶν λόγων<sup>25</sup>. Even though John of Salisbury ignores the other two essential stages in the doctrinal architecture of philosophical skepticism (ἐποχή and ἀταραξία), it cannot be asserted that he truly supports the first one (ἰσοσθένεια τῶν λόγων) in the ancient sense of the term. In this sense, we must refer to the definition of the first principle given by Sextus Empiricus: “By 'equipollence' we mean equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing: none of the conflicting accounts takes precedence over any other as being more convincing.”<sup>26</sup>

We see from this definition that for an ancient skeptic, the first principle (equipollence) is extremely important, carrying with it an obligation of *neutrality*: the skeptic must be *equidistant* with both *probability* and *improbability*. Moreover, not only in relation to these two limits must he show equidistance, but in any situation where two or more theses are contradictory. In the view of a skeptic, a thesis can receive valid contrary arguments and vice versa. However, it is quite clear that John of Salisbury does not admit such a principle: the one for which two contrary theses are equally probable cannot prove anything, claims the medieval theologian<sup>27</sup>. Equipollence, however, represents according to some modern exegetes, the very foundation of skepticism<sup>28</sup>. John of Salisbury privileges aspects related to *probability* only at a *theoretical* level, thus following a type of skepticism closest to the view of Carneades of Cyrene. The fact that the theologian justifies his skeptical view by appealing to the doctrine of the Academic philosophers, and in particular to aspects related to probabilism, is demonstrable through his own testimonies.: „Being an Academician in matters that are doubtful to a wise man, I cannot

<sup>25</sup> „Obviously, much more can be said about the Pyrrhonian approach to scepticism, but it is clear right from the start that there was nothing like this in the Latin Middle Ages, that is, there was no scepticism with the aim of the *suspension of judgment* and *tranquillity*” - Henrik Lagerlund, *Medieval Scepticism and Divine Deception*, pp. 128-129 (our emphasis, B.G.)

<sup>26</sup> Sextus Empiricus, ed.cit., p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VII, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Leo Groarke, *Greek Scepticism. Anti Realist Trends in Ancient Thought*, McGill Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingsnton/London/Buffalo, 1990, p. 31.

swear to the truth of what I say. Whether such propositions may be true or false, I am satisfied with probable certitude.”<sup>29</sup>

Academics (including Carneades) certainly made concrete use of two of the three principles of philosophical skepticism, namely *ισοσθένεια τῶν λόγων* and especially *ἐποχή*, and this is confirmed by enough bibliographic sources<sup>30</sup>. Given that he studied Cicero, the medieval theologian seems to have known that Carneades' philosophical skepticism did not involve glorifying probabilism. The principle of probabilism was for Carneades a criterion for *practical* guidance, one that would allow him to act when equipollence "blocked" his way<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, John of Salisbury seems to ignore the fact that this academic philosopher valued *ισοσθένεια τῶν λόγων* to its fullest extent, as demanded by the attitude of a true sceptical philosopher. John of Salisbury retains only the *one-sided nuance of probabilism* from the philosophical skepticism of Antiquity, which is indebted to the method of Carneades. It is also noteworthy that this particular nuance is manifested in the text of the medieval theologian primarily at a *theoretical* level and less so at an *applied* level.

John of Salisbury's preference for this type of skepticism, however, is not purely random or accidental. It has already been confirmed by exegetes that serious suspicions of dogmatism, or at least in terms of its anticipation, have been cast upon Carneades' assumed skepticism<sup>32</sup>. Carneades thus consolidated the path towards *belief*<sup>33</sup>, a strikingly similar concept to that of *faith*. Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon, both philosophy professors of Cicero<sup>34</sup>, continued with great dedication this direction, transforming skepticism into a kind of academic dogmatism<sup>35</sup> and coming to be considered by Enesidem not skeptical philosophers, but Stoics quarreling with other Stoics<sup>36</sup>. The levels of probability established by the philosopher Carneades were able to endorse the power of belief to an extremely relevant extent, bringing probability almost to the status of legitimacy. In the philosopher's view, the degrees of probability are three: 1 - a thing may be *plausible*, 2 - *plausible* and empirically *investigable*, 3 – *plausible, empirically investigable*,

---

<sup>29</sup> John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* (transl. Daniel D. McGarry, p. 6, *Prologue*).

<sup>30</sup> See Diogenes Laertius, IV, 28, Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, V, 14, Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Ad Atticum*, XIII, 21, Eusebius de Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 14.8.2, 9–10.

<sup>31</sup> Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism*, Routledge, London & New York, 2009, pp.78-81.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 82.

<sup>33</sup> Harald Thorsrud, „Arcesilaus and Carneade” in Richard Bett, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010. p. 71: „On the first, dialectical interpretation, Carneades merely expands the scope of Arcesilaus' method, but continues to promote universal *epochê*. On the second, fallibilist interpretation, Carneades restricts the scope of *epochê*, allowing for some, *fallible beliefs*.”

<sup>34</sup> See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Brutus*, 306 și *Varro* I, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism*, p. 86.

<sup>36</sup> Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 212, 170a 15-16.

and uncontradicted<sup>37</sup>. John of Salisbury demonstrates that he takes into account cognitive approaches of this kind: „Or, as we put it above, many sensations, or sometimes even only one, result in a memory, many memories in an experimental proof, many experimental proofs in a rule, and many rules in an art, which provides scientific skill.”<sup>38</sup> The mentioned aspect, however, does not prove that the Christian theologian *confirms* this theory in any way, but rather that he expresses his trust in academic philosophy and admits this based on the theorization of probabilities and their ability to lead one to the acquisition of truth: “It is not useless to be in doubt about particular things; and in regard to such matters the Academics had entered into debate about probabilities, until they finally grasped the truth.”<sup>39</sup>

Academic philosophers could thus be worthy models to follow in certain matters related to knowledge. John of Salisbury, in fact, urges caution in several places, recommending that their ideas be followed:

„Since this science both dispels the shadows of ignorance, and illumines its possessor with the privilege of foreknowledge, it has frequently served [as a lamp] to guide from darkness to light the school of the Academicians, with whom we [frankly] profess our agreement on questions that remain doubtful to a wiseman.”<sup>40</sup>

Another example of acknowledging the principles of academic skepticism is the following quote:

„But Academics, evading the precipice of falsehood, are more modest in these sorts of matters because they hardly disavow their defects and, in a position of ignorance about things, they are entirely uncertain about each one. This is by far more secure, of course, than to decide upon uncertainties rashly.”<sup>41</sup>

When it comes to the knowledge of God, John of Salisbury does not appeal to the methods of academic probabilism, clearly rejecting the principles of demonstrative knowledge: „Indeed, there is one principle of all religions

---

<sup>37</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I, 227 (English translation, ed.cit., p. 60: “Further, we say that appearances are equal in convincingness or lack of convincingness (as far as the argument goes), while they say that some are plausible and others implausible. Even among the plausible ones they say there are differences: some, they think, really are just plausible, others plausible and inspected, others plausible and scrutinized and undistractable”).

<sup>38</sup> John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, IV, 12 (transl. Daniel McGarry, p. 222). The aspect can also be noticed in correlation with the Aristotelian view captured in *Posterior Analytics* II, 100 a5, which John of Salisbury might have drawn inspiration from.

<sup>39</sup> John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VII, 7 (transl. Cary J. Nederman, p. 156)

<sup>40</sup> John Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, IV, 7 (transl. Daniel McGarry, p. 213).

<sup>41</sup> John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VII, 1 (transl. Cary J. Nederman, p. 149)

which piety concedes freely and *without any demonstration*, namely, that God is powerful, wise, good, worthy of respect and loving.”<sup>42</sup>

### **3. „Skepticism” and Aristotelism**

The way in which the medieval theologian perceives academic skepticism, as well as the category of skeptical philosophers in which he himself belongs, must be brought back to attention.:

„The Academician, however, wavers. He will not presume to state definitely what is true in each and every case. His sect [of the Academicians] is divided into three camps. By excessive caution, the right to be called philosophers has been forfeited [by some]. A [second] group admit only knowledge of things that are necessary and self-evident, namely, things that one cannot fail to know. A third type [of Academicians] consists in those of us who do not [venture to] precipitate an opinion concerning questions that are doubtful to a wise man.”<sup>43</sup>

The so-called "questions that are doubtful to a wise man" designate a sphere that is quite ambiguous in the discourse in question, since John of Salisbury believes that human reason is ennobled by divine reason, and the cultivation of reason is an obligation that allows for "understanding God's plan related to this world":

“Since our reason is ennobled by its divine origin, and powerful with a divine activity, all philosophy agrees that the cultivation of reason should be our primary concern. For reason curbs unruly impulses, and brings everything into conformity with the norms of goodness. Nothing that agrees with reason is out of harmony with God’s plan. In obedience to the Divine mind, one will move through his allotted span of life making happy progress”<sup>44</sup>.

The cultivation of reason allows not only the avoidance of sensory errors (which are deceiving<sup>45</sup>) and the knowledge of things in this world but

---

<sup>42</sup> John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VII, 7, (transl. Cary J. Nederman, p. 155)

<sup>43</sup> John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, IV, 31 (transl. Daniel McGarry, p. 251)

<sup>44</sup> „Cum ergo ratio origine divina nobilitetur, et divino polleat exercitio, eam super omnia colendam esse, totius philosophiae decreto sancitum est. Haec enim inordinatos motus compescit, et ad normam bonitatis componit universa, ut nihil sit quod ordinationi divinae repugnet, cui si quis obtemperat, felici processu peraget aevum” - John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* IV, 17 (transl. Daniel McGarry, pp. 228-229).

<sup>45</sup> “Et quia sensuum examinatrix est, qui ob fallendi consuetudinem possunt esse suspecti” (“Since reason examines our sensations, which, because they are wont to deceive us, are subject to suspicion” – *ibid.*, p. 229)



also has a crucial role in *understanding eternal truths*: “Thus when love of reason, which concerns earthly things, ascends with prudence to the hidden secrets of eternal and divine truths, it becomes transformed into wisdom, which is in a way exempt from mortal limitations”<sup>46</sup>.

However, the reader must be attentive to the distinction in the following chapter between *intellectus* and *ratio*, which emphasizes that reaching the highest level of knowledge (*intellectus*) is not a mere effect of exercising reason (*ratio*), but rather an entirely different regime of knowledge, an *intuitive* one (while reason has a *preparatory-operational* regime): “Nam intellectus assequitur, quod ratio investigat: si quidem in labores rationis intrat intellectus, et sibi ad sapientiam thesaurizat quod ratio praeparans acquisivit”<sup>47</sup>. In order to prevent the mistaken idea that the intuitive regime (*intellectus*) of the human mind could confer access to *divine* truths, John of Salisbury points out that it can only reach the “divine reasons of [worldly] things” that are “naturally perceptible”.<sup>48</sup> Beyond this limit, however, intellectual knowledge cannot extend its powers to divine things. Only in exceptional cases, through divine grace, can it reach *some* divine truths: „And there are some divine truths, in like manner, which become either more fully or less fully known to us, according to the decree of the divine dispensation”<sup>49</sup>,

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230. Original Latin text: “Quia cum prudentia, quae de terrenis est, et rationis amor, ad incorruptae veritatis, divinatorumque arcana consurgit, in sapientiam transiens, quodammodo a mortalium conditione eximitur”.

<sup>47</sup> Translation-interpretation into English marks the difficulty of this distinction for a modern person.: “For [intuitive] understanding actually attains what reason investigates. [Intuitive] Understanding enters into the very labors of reason, and treasures up the preparatory gains of reason unto wisdom” (*ibidem*, p.230).

<sup>48</sup> “et divinas penes se causas habet omnium rationum, naturaliter sibi perceptibilium” (English translation: “it also contemplates the divine causes behind all reasons within the natural powers of its perception” – *ibidem*, p.230). We can suspect in this fragment and in the previous ones where the contemplation of the ideas of things is mentioned the Augustinian influence from *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (q. 46, called *Of Ideas*), where Augustine talks about the divine nature of ideas and even quotes Plato: “Quod si hae rerum omnium creandarum creaturarumve rationes divina mente continentur, neque in divina mente quidquam nisi aeternum atque incommutabile potest esse, atque has rationes rerum principales appellat ideas Plato, non solum sunt *ideae*, sed ipsae verae sunt, quia aeternae sunt et eiusdem modi atque incommutabiles manent” (CCSL 44A, XLVI.72-73.57-62, our emphasis, B.G).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 231. Latin text: „Et nonnullae aliis plus aut minus, pro divina dispensationis decreto, innotescunt” (VI, 18). What draws attention in this fragment is the use of the phrase *divinae dispensationis*, which is the Latin equivalent of the Greek term οἰκονομία (divine economy or the attitude of God who performs various actions in favor of humans). The Greek term οἰκονομία had already been translated as *dispensatione* by Tertullian: “unicum quidem deum credimus, sub hac tamen dispensatione, quam οἰκονομία dicimus” - Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 2. 1-4; CCL 2, pp. 1160-1161. The most probable source of the term in John of Salisbury is St. Augustine, who already used the tradition of equating the Greek term “οἰκονομία” with the term *dispensationis* (see *inter alia*, *De vera religione* 7, 13 and 34, 128). The fact that it is not a random phrase in John of Salisbury is proven by the presence of two more identical occurrences in *Policraticus* (“multis et variis pro dispensatione diuina afflictis temporibus, saepeque sunt clamantes ad Dominum liberati” - It is about the chosen people who

but the general rule is that divine reasons ("divinas rationes") *exceed the human and even angelic capacity to intuit them*: "For there are some divine reasons which utterly exceed, not merely human, but even angelic comprehension"<sup>50</sup>.

It might be better to understand things as follows: in matters related to the knowledge of what exceeds the material world, the philosopher must appeal to faith or revealed truths, and *probabilism must be exclusively confined to human affairs*. Thus, it becomes easier to understand the passages in which John of Salisbury acknowledges his own *inadequacy in adopting skepticism*.

What concretizes perhaps the most relevant aspect that John of Salisbury doesn't always follow the natural impulse of the medieval theologian to appeal to faith or revelation can be observed in the way he uses epistemic models of other ancient philosophers in matters of knowledge (where Augustine's theory of illumination was used in the early Middle Ages), departing from skepticism. In general, it's about the anchoring in Aristotelianism (as it was known then through Boethius). We can take as a suggestive example in this sense the passage in which John of Salisbury argues that genera and species are "mental representations of actual, natural things, intellectual images of the mutual likenesses of real things, reflected, as it were, in the mirror of the soul's native purity"<sup>51</sup>. In order to be able to delimit them conceptually, John of Salisbury even uses the transliterated Greek term ("These concepts the Greek call *ennoyas* or *yconoyfanas*"), considering them clearly discernible by the human mind ("that is to say images of things clearly discernible by the mind"<sup>52</sup>). Mental images or exemplars (models of things) exist in the mind<sup>53</sup>, but they do not have an ontological reality of their own, such as the Platonic ideas:

"According to Aristotle, these exemplars are conceptual, and are, as it were, images and shadows of things that really exist. But if one attempts to lay hold of them, supposing them to have an existence of their own, apart from particular things, they vanish [into thin air] as do dreams. For they are representations apparent only to the intellect"<sup>54</sup>.

---

are often punished by God "by divine economy", VIII, 20; „quia diuinae dispensationi reluctari non audet" - it is about a man of the Church who did not dare to oppose "God's plan", VIII, 23) and in *Metalogicon* (besides the previously cited occurrence, there is another one in I, 41: "Homo enim ad exsequendum *divinae dispensationis* effectum").

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 231. Latin text: „Sunt enim quae exsuperant omnem sensum, tam hominum, quam angelorum, divinae rationes”.

<sup>51</sup> *Metalogicon*, II, 20 (transl. Daniel McGarry, p. 121). See also *Metalogicon* IV, 20: "Reason's activity, whereby it seeks and finds in its processes the ideas of things, which the Greeks call *ennoias* ... (transl. Daniel McGarry, p. 232).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*: "The exemplar of what is defined exists in the mind, while the example exists among actual things”.

<sup>54</sup> The translator notes that John of Salisbury fully adopts Aristotle's criticism of Platonic ideas ("Here John follows the translation of Aristotle's *An. Post.*, i, 22, 83 a, 33, concerning Platonic

John of Salisbury's appropriation of Aristotle's criticism of Plato can be explained by the fact that, like all his contemporaries<sup>55</sup>, he had an extremely limited knowledge of Plato, only having access to Calcidius' partial translation of *Timaeus*<sup>56</sup>, quotes from *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Laws* found in Cicero<sup>57</sup> and general elements of Platonism found in Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*<sup>58</sup>.

Here is what the Christian theologian says regarding the problem of the *real existence* of universals:

„Nothing can be universal unless it is found in particular things. Despite this, many have sought to find the universal, in itself, apart from individual things. But at the end of their search, they have all come out empty-handed. For the universal, apart from particular things, is not an entity, unless perhaps in the sense that truths and like meanings of combined words are entities.”<sup>59</sup>

Even if we were to accept some slight notes of skeptical attitude in the sights of John of Salisbury, we must admit that this is ultimately a dogmatic perspective, one that a genuine skeptic would never accept, preferring rather to suspend judgment in theorizing about such matters.

There will still remain and other problematic issues, at least in relation to the possible acceptance of the Academic philosophers theses by the medieval theologian. We can ask ourselves, for example, whether John of Salisbury knew that Carneades, the representative par excellence of probabilistic skepticism, had made extremely significant contributions precisely in *contesting* the possibility of human beings knowing divinity and understanding its role in the order of the world<sup>60</sup>? For even if we have observed that John of Salisbury can tangentially accept certain skeptical views correlated with the ideas of Carneades, it is still unlikely that he would accept such things. Truths of this kind should not even be questioned from John of Salisbury's point of view: „And he who places in question whether God exists, and whether

---

ideas, which is attributed to Boethius, *Post. Anal. Interpr.*, chap. 18 (in Migne, P.L., LXIV, 733). – *ibid.*, p. 121, n.349)

<sup>55</sup> Michel Lemoine, “La tradition indirecte du Platon latin” in Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Medieval Translator. Proceedings of the International Conference Held at Conques*, Turnhout, 1993, pp. 337–346.

<sup>56</sup> Which is quoted in *Entheticus*, II, 937–1088 and in *Policraticus* VII, 5,

<sup>57</sup> Cicero, *De officiis* I, 15; *De finibus* 2, 52.

<sup>58</sup> See Christophe Grellard's indications, *Jean de Salisbury et la Renaissance Médiévale du Scepticisme*, ed.cit., p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> *Metalogicon*, II, 20 (transl. Daniel McGarry, p. 123).

<sup>60</sup> Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism*, Routledge, London & New York, pp. 62-65.

this same power is wise or good, is not only irreligious but treacherous, and is deservedly instructed by the lesson of punishment.”<sup>61</sup>

### Conclusions

It is clear that the idea of *prudence* appealed to the Christian theologian, as he himself confirms and praises the qualities of such an attitude necessary in discovering the *truth*<sup>62</sup>. The fact that John of Salisbury assumed a *strange* type of skepticism, whose doctrinal characteristics are lax, contradictory, and difficult to classify, is attested to in other very recent studies<sup>63</sup>. Thus, John of Salisbury's skepticism is fragmentary (as we have seen, he only takes certain concepts from ancient skepticism and practically limits their area of use), but even in these conditions, we can still consider it, following David Bloch's suggestion<sup>64</sup>, a type of *optimistic skepticism*.

This idea of prudence, or more accurately, the exhortation to prudence (*hortamen ad prudentiam*), we believe is the thesis that can characterize, at least intentionally, the skepticism of an author who is still insufficiently popularized.

### Bibliography:

**Aristotle**, *Posterior Analytics – Topica*, by Hugh Tredennick & E. S. Forster (eds.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960.

**Bernier M. A. et S. Charles** (dir.), *Scepticisme et modernité*, Saint-Étienne, Presses de l'Université Saint-Étienne, 2005.

**Bett, Richard**, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010.

**Bloch, David**, „John of Salisbury's Skepticism” in Diego E. Machuca & Reeds Baron (eds.), *Skepticism. From Antiquity to Present*, Bloomsbury, London/New York, 2018. Brahami, Frédéric, *Le travail du scepticisme. Montaigne, Bayle, Hume*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2001.

**Boulnois, Olivier**, “From divine omnipotenceto operative power”, in *Divus Thomas*, Vol. 115, No. 2 (2012, maggio/agosto), pp. 83-97.

**Denery II, Dallas G., Kantik Ghosh, and Nicolette Zeeman** (eds.), *Uncertain Knowledge. Scepticism, Relativism, and Doubt in the Middle Ages*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014.

---

<sup>61</sup>John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VII, 7 (transl. Cary J. Nederman, pp. 153-154).

<sup>62</sup>“Since the subject matter of prudence is truth (for prudence is concerned with comprehending the truth), the ancients conceived of Prudence and Truth as sisters, related by a divine consanguinity. Thus perfect prudence needs must contemplate the truth, from which nothing can separate it” (*Metalogicon*, IV, 14, transl. Daniel McGarry, p.224)

<sup>63</sup>David Bloch, „John of Salisbury's Skepticism”, in Diego E. Machuca, Baron Reeds (eds.), *Skepticism. From Antiquity to Present*, Bloomsbury, London/New York, 2018, p. 186.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 193.

**Cicero, Marcus Tullius**, *On Academic Scepticism*, translated, with Introduction and Notes by Charles Brittain, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2006.

-----, *Brutus*, ed. J. Martha, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1923.

**Courtenay, William.J.**, “Thee Dialectic of Omnipotence in the High and Late Middle Ages”, in *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by T. Rudavsky, Dordrecht, Reidel 1985, pp. 243-269.

-----, “Covenant and Causality in Pierre d’Ailly”, in *Speculum*, nr. 46/1971, pp. 94-119.

-----, *Capacity and Volition. A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordinated Power*, Bergamo, Pierluigi Lubrina, 1990, pp. 189-191.

**Eusebius of Caesarea**, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, Tr. E. H. Gifford, 1903.

**Fitch, Richard**, “Nicholas of Autrecourt and the mastery of reason”, *Divus Thomas*, 116, 3 (2013), pp. 166-189.

**Floridi, Luciano**, *Sextus Empiricus : The Transmission and Recovey of Pyrrhonism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

**Franklin, James**, *The Science of Conjecture. Evidence and Probability before Pascal*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2015.

**Funkestein, Amos**, *Theology and scientific imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, Princeton University Press, 1986.

**Grellard, Christophe**, „Nicholas of Autrecourt’s skepticism: the ambivalence of medieval epistemology”, in Henrik Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, Brill, 2010, pp. 119-143.

-----, *Jean de Salisbury et la renaissance médiévale du scepticisme*, Société d’édition Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2013.

-----, *Jean de Salisbury. Un cas médiéval de scepticisme*, p.17. Articol disponibile online. <https://www.academia.edu/2502112>, consulted on February 25, 2023.

**Grigory of Rimini**, *Lectura super primum et secundum sententiarum*, I, d.42-44, q.1, a2, ed. A. Damasus Trapp OSA and Venicio Marcolino, in *Spätmittelalter und Reformation. Texte und Untersuchungen*, Band 6, Berlin – New York, De Gruyter, 1981.

**Groarke, Leo**, *Greek Scepticism. Anti Realist Trends in Ancient Thought*, McGill Queen’s University Press, Montreal & Kinsgton/London/Buffalo, 1990.

Ioannes Saresberiensis, *Metalogicon*, ed. J.B. Hall – K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, CCCM, Brepols, Turnhout, 1991.

**John of Salisbury**, *The Metalogicon : A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, translated with introduction and notes by Daniel McGarry, University of California Press, 1955.

**John of Salisbury**, *Policraticus: Of Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers: Being a Translation of the First, Second, and Third Books and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books of the “Policraticus” of John of Salisbury*, by Joseph B. Pike, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1938.

**Keith DeRoseand & Ted A. Warfield** (eds.), *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

**Lactantius**, *Divine Institutes*, translated with an introduction and notes by Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey, Liverpool University Press, 2003.

**Lagerlund, Henrik** (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, Brill, 2010.

- , *Medieval Scepticism and Divine Deception*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2019.
- Lemoine, Michel, “La tradition indirecte du Platon latin” in Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Medieval Translator. Proceedings of the International Conference Held at Conques*, Turnhout, 1993, pp. 337–346.
- Marion, J.-L.**, *Descartes sous le masque du cartésianisme*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2021.
- Mehl, Édouard**, “La question du premier principe dans la *Recherche de la vérité*”, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, 1991/1, pp. 77-97.
- Moonan, Lawrence**, *Divine Power: The Medieval Power Distinction up to its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure, and Aquinas*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Nicholas of Autrecourt**, *His Correspondence with Master Giles and Bernard of Arezzo*, A Critical Edition and English Translation by L.M. de Rijk, Brill, 1997.
- , *The Universal Treatise*, tr. Leonard A. Kennedy, Richard E. Arnold, and Arthur E. Millward, with an Introduction by Leonard A. Kennedy, Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1971.
- Perler, Dominik**, “Does God deceive us? Skeptical Hypotheses in late Medieval Epistemology”, in Henrik Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, Brill, 2010, pp. 171-192.
- Photius**, *Bibliothèque*, Tome III (« codices » 186-222), texte établi et traduit par René Henri, Société d'édition «LesBellesLettres», Paris, 1962.
- Popkin, R. H., Ezequiel de Olasoand Giorgio Tonelli** (dir.), *Scepticism in the Enlightenment*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1997.
- Popkin R. H., and J. R. Maia Neto** (dirs.) *Skepticism: an Anthology*, Amherst, Prometheus Books, 2007.
- Rashdall, H.**, “Nicholas de Ultricuria, a Medieval Hume”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 7, 1906–1907, pp. 1–27.
- Saint Augustine**, *De doctrina christiana* 2.40.60, edited and translated by R.P.H. Green Oxford, 1995.
- , *Against the Academicians*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 1957.
- Sextus Empiricus**, *Outlines of Scepticism*, edited by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Thijssen, J.M.M.H.**, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris, 1200–1400*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.
- , “The Quest for Certain Knowledge in the Fourteenth Century: Nicholas of Autrecourt against the Academics” in J. Sihvola (ed.), *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition* in Acta Philosophica Fennica, Volume 66, Helsinki, Societas Philosophica Fennica, pp. 199–223.
- Thorsrud, Harald**, *Ancient Scepticism*, Routledge, London & New York, 2009.
- , „Arcesilaus and Carneade” in Richard Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010, pp. 58-80; available online [https://www.academia.edu/46514832/Arcesilaus\\_and\\_Carneades](https://www.academia.edu/46514832/Arcesilaus_and_Carneades); accessed on February 20, 2023.

## The Impact of Islamic Ideology in the Society Based on Pottery Designs of Islamic Middle Ages

Babak Behshid\*, Reza Rezalou\*\*,  
Karim Hajizadeh\*\*\*, Behrouz Afkhami\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:** *The art of pottery in the Islamic Middle Ages along with other arts is one of the most beautiful and important manifestations of Islamic teachings that has affected all aspects of human life; theology, attention to the universe, goodness and humanity are constantly commanded. In this research, an attempt is made to determine the extent of the effect and type of those teachings by studying and classifying the motifs and decorations of pottery of the Islamic era based on the concepts of Quranic verses. The type of analytical-descriptive research and the method are field work and library research. After classifying the verses of the Islam, the designs and decorations of the art of the Islamic period and matching them with each other, a logical analysis of the findings is conducted. The aims of the research include: separating the types of motifs and decorations of works of art related to the Islamic period influenced by the themes of Islamic ideology and finding the extent of these effects. Questions such as the effect of the Islamic ideology on the pottery decorations of the Islamic era and their types will be addressed. The purpose of addressing the Islamic teachings on pottery was answered assuming religious beliefs, philanthropy and the taste of pottery artists.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic ideology, motifs and designs, Islamic Middle Ages pottery*

### Introduction

The art of pottery has always been considered because of its wide application in daily life and its relationship with different sections of society. Among lasting works, there are the works of different ethnic groups and nations, which contain valuable information of the creators, intentions, beliefs, tastes, and many literary and religious points. There is a deep connection between pottery in the Islamic era and Islamic teachings derived

---

\* PhD student of Archaeology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. E-mail: babakbehshid@gmail.com

\*\* Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. E-mail: reza\_rezaloo@yahoo.com

\*\*\* Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. E-mail: k\_hajizadeh@uma.ac.ir

\*\*\*\* Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. E-mail: Bafkhami@uma.ac.ir

from Quranic verses. The deepest connection between Islamic art and the Qur'an is of another kind, and it is not in the appearance of the Qur'anic word, but in fact it is a gem free from forms and appearances that benefits from the source of divine existence and its oneness.

### **Problem statement**

The art of pottery in the Islamic Middle Ages rose due to the increasingly advanced approach of Islamic teachings to promote science, followed by those works of order and balance and the use of astronomy. Using constellations and their symbols merging with mythological stories referring to historical events, while employing Quranic-Islamic teachings in regard to the nature, environment and its manifestations, good deeds and people-friendly attitudes with good prayers and advice by using various decorations is important. During this period, with the creation of seminal centers for the production of pottery and mass requests, artists from different regions paid attention to the subjects of literary books such as *Shahnameh* and *Khamseh Nezami* stories; historical and religious subjects such as the Ascension of Prophet Muhammad and the story of kings and correlated events were also engraved on many beautifully glazed and colorful pottery of this period. Each of the centers of pottery production had its own style, but at the same time, due to the special beauty and genius of artists, they have sometimes influenced each other.

### **Research background**

Research projects related to the effect of different teachings on Middle Ages pottery include: Akram Najafipour and Forough Matiei's 2010 examination of the effect of literature on pottery and Simorgh's role in it<sup>1</sup>, Majid Tarikhani's 2013 research on the effects of verses of God on Iranian-Islamic works of art; and Seyyed Rasoul Mousavi Haji, Morteza Ataei and Maryam Asgari's 2015 study on the poetic inscriptions of Timurid and Safavid pottery.

### **Objectives and necessity of conducting research**

The present study aims to identify the concepts of Islamic pottery designs in the Middle Ages, the degree of influence of the verses and teachings of the Holy Quran, common themes between the two topics and the classification of Quranic-Islamic teachings used in pottery as motifs and designs. Attention is given to Islamic teachings and the mystery, variety and beauty of the decorations on medieval Islamic pottery, incoherence, diversity and commonalities between Quranic-Islamic concepts with pottery designs of

---

<sup>1</sup> Akram Najafipour, Forough Matiei, *The Effect of Literature on Pottery Motifs of the Islamic period with Emphasis on the Role of Simorgh*, 2010, pp. 110-114.



this period which are very dense and diverse. Moreover, we aim at removing the ambiguity in between, hence the need for this research.

### **Questions and Hypothesis**

1- What are the commonalities of designs (motifs and inscriptions) of pottery with Islamic teachings and what are their types?

2- What was the purpose of the potters' treatment of Islamic teachings and their recommendations on pottery?

Hypotheses: Decorations include subjects such as historical events and stories, nature and its beauties, the world of divinity and the purpose of using these motifs; religious beliefs, philanthropy, understanding the law of nature and the creativity of pottery artists.

### **Research method**

This article is research-based of the analytical-descriptive type and the method consists in field research and data collection and then the next stage is library research and implementation and analysis of Islamic teachings from Islamic verses to pottery designs. Thus, in the beginning, the generalities of pottery designs from the Middle Ages are determined and the Islamic teachings related to them are selected, and finally, the designs are classified in accordance with Islamic teachings and the information obtained from them is analyzed.

### **Theoretical foundations**

To find the effects and connections between several subjects, one must first pay attention to their nature of existence.

Religion as a belief and way of life and art as a physical and material manifestation of beliefs and convictions, have long played a role in giving meaning to human life. Religions have guided and expressed human beliefs about the beginning and end of life, they determined the right path and how to reach the ultimate goal of human life. Religious values, as nurturers of art, have incentivized man to create space, form and body, which has helped him to better understand his beliefs and led him to spirituality and perfection. Thus, there has been a connection between religion and various levels of art. Ever since man knew his Creator, worshipped Him to feel close to Him, he has used the form of movements to express his desires and to meet his needs to change the form of matter and prepare it for use in order to reach perfection. Man was given the truth inside the world, which is beyond his senses, and to introduce himself to this truth, he creates works of art. He spoke of these times as creating the first signs of religious art<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Naghizadeh, *Fundamentals of Religious Art in Islamic Culture, Fundamentals and Intellectual System*, 2008, pp. 55-56.

Pottery is one of the most important and oldest human handicrafts that has remained stable since its beginning. Pottery products have a special value. Art, religion, and finally the history and relationship of nations with each other<sup>3</sup>; Pottery as an element that is inextricably linked with art and everyday human life, in the best possible way, can express the relationships and commonalities of different lands and reveal how these connections or similarities brought them together<sup>4</sup>. The potter artist pays attention to nature and the life of the work, in addition to the essentialist aesthetics; he is also interested in existence and, according to Wright, for the artist there is no aesthetic source as far as understanding the law is concerned. Nature is not productive, inspiring or useful<sup>5</sup>.

### **Medieval Islamic pottery**

The pottery of this period is divided into two groups in terms of style with the period of 5-7 AH and 7-9 AH and later, and its types include: unglazed, plain glazed, glazed, carved and glazed. The engraved and painted pattern, painted under the glaze, is painted on the glaze<sup>6</sup>; glazed pottery is in the form of hand-held jars, small jars, drinking troughs, and small straps.

### **Analysis of Islamic pottery designs from the Middle Ages based on Islamic ideology taken from Quranic verses**

The potters of the Islamic era used different ideas and creations for their patterns, motifs and designs of pottery.

To better analyze and understand the effect of Islamic teachings (taken from verses of the Qur'an) based on pottery designs, several perspectives can be used:

#### **Verses related to walking in nature, paying attention to beauty and envisaging it as a manifestation of Gods existence**

More than 750 verses of the Qur'an command to walk in nature and pay attention to its beauty as a manifestation of God.

1- Testifying to the manifestations of nature such as: (وَالَّتَيْنِ وَالزَّيْتُونَ) Oath to figs, witnessing by the olive. (وَطُورِ سَيْنِينَ) "Sinin" is the name of a mountain. I Oath to the mountain.

2- "Verses" for knowing nature as a sign: in verse 164 of Surah Al-Baqarah, it is stated: and the water that God sent down from the sky and

<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Yousef Kiani, *Iranian Pottery Study of Iranian Pottery in the Prime Minister's Collection*, 1978, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Seyed Rasoul Mousavi Haji, Morteza Ataei, *Study of Collections of Samples of Sistan Pottery*, 2010, p. 335.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, *For the Advancement of Architecture*, 1992, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Mohammad Yousef Kiani, *op. cit.*, p. 3.; Faeq Tohidi, *The Art of Pottery*, 2003, p. 258.

revived the earth after death and spread all kinds of creatures in it, are signs of God's pure nature and His Unity

3- Using the elements of nature in the naming of Surah Al-Quran such as: Surah Al-Baqarah, Ra'd, Nahl, Ankabut, Fajr, Hadid, Tin, Ma'idah, An'am, Anfal, which includes desert, forest, sea and lake. In Surah Al-Wasif and in Surah Al-Jumu'ah, there is mention of the glorification of heaven and earth for God.<sup>7</sup> Verses related to taming nature for man by God: verses 32 and 33 of Surah Ibrahim, verses 12. He mentioned 14 surahs of Nahl, verses 20 and 29 of surah Luqman, verse 65 of surah Hajj and verse 12 of surah Jathiya. Journey in nature and attitude to it: (Surah Ankabut, verse: 20) Creation of beings from water (Surah Anbiya, verse: 30, Surah Noor, verse 45, Surah An'am, verse: 99 and Surah A'raf, verse: 57), Creation of the world (Surah Supreme, verses: 1-5) and Surah Hood, verse: 7)<sup>8</sup> and resurrection: (Surah A'raf, verse: 57, Surah Romans, verses: 19 and 50, Surah Reward, verse: 95, Surah Fatir, verse: 9 and Surah Jathiya, verse: 5) This issue has been mentioned<sup>9</sup>. The manifestation of thought in nature, for example, with animal motifs created from the oldest motifs used by humans on pottery, which refers not only to the aspect of design, but also sometimes expresses hope, fear or recourse to a force to combat the dangers of nature and life. Expressing religious beliefs and myths, these specific values and beliefs turned the designs into conventional and symbolic signs<sup>10</sup>. Plant motifs in the form of Arabesque motifs and scroll flowers and foliage were generally painted in yellow, green and brown on pottery<sup>11</sup>. The faces of animals or humans are beautifully embossed among the plant designs. The gardens and orchards depict the surrounding nature and even the world of divinity as beautifully as possible (Table 1, Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).

Table 1- The first group of pottery designs of Islamic Middle Ages taken from walking in nature.

---







<sup>7</sup> Seyedeh Zahra Etesami, Susan Al-Rasoul, *Surahology of Mustahabt*, 2009, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Seyedeh Zahra Etesami, Susan Al-Rasoul, *op. cit.*, pp. 44 and 49.

<sup>9</sup> Seyyed Mohammad Hussein Tabatabai, *Tafsir Al-Mizan*, 1995, p. 120.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Mortezaei, Neda Sedaghatizadeh, *Study of Animal Motifs of Ancient Pottery in Gorgan (Jorjan) in the Islamic era*, 2012, p. 48.; Mohammad Khazaei, Sheila Samavaki, *Study of the Role of Birds on Iranian pottery*, 2001, p. 8.; Obeydollah Sorkh Abi, Maryam Mastalizadeh, Samad Parvin, *Development and Evolution of Bird Motifs on Iranian's Crockery of the Middle Ages of Islam (5-9 centuries A.H.)*, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Faeq Tohidi, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

		
<p>Fig 1 - Seljuk plate of 5th century AH</p>	<p>Fig 2- Radial plan and garden<sup>12</sup></p>	<p>Fig 3 - Seljuk pottery 5 AH, with the role of fish</p>
		
<p>Fig 4 - Seljuk period Northwestern Iran</p>	<p>Fig 5 - Spring Flowers Design, Medieval Islamic Pottery<sup>13</sup></p>	<p>Fig 6 - Ilkhani pottery<sup>14</sup></p>

### Light, wheel as manifestations of nature and resurrection in nature

There are mentions of the manifestations of nature as “verses” and the signs that guide and prove the existence of God. Verse 164 of Surah Al-Baqarah, also refers to verses such as "And Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth" (Surah Noor/ verse: 35)<sup>15</sup>. The names of the surahs of the Qur'an are derived from the manifestations of nature: light, sun, moon, star, ghashiyah, dawn and night indicate its importance. Designs related to the

<sup>12</sup> Nafiseh Mousavi, Mohammad Ali Rajabi, *Study of the Method of Design and Placement of Decorative Patterns in Painted Pottery of the Patriarchal Period*, 2008, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Jenkins, *Islamic Pottery: A Brief History*, 1983, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Marilyn Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Seyedeh Zahra Etesami, Susan Al-Rasoul, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

manifestations of nature on medieval Islamic pottery are engraved in two forms, the former is the shape itself and the latter are the symbols related to these elements of nature, including motifs of animals or mythical creatures. On Islamic art arrays, some consider the sphinx to be a symbol of the sun and (probably) the Sagittarius constellation (Table 2, Fig 1). On the golden pottery of Kashan, sphinxes and harps are located on both sides of the abstract tree with a light ring around the head (Table 2, Fig 3)<sup>16</sup>. About astronomy: constellations, the carved owl is in the shape of two fish (Table 2, Fig 5), which are connected to each other from the tail<sup>17</sup>. The container inside the circles (Table 2, Fig 4) and the other enamel bowl of the Seljuk period of the Metropolitan Museum (related to the center or north of Iran) with the role of the Twelve Eclipses<sup>18</sup>.

Table 2 - The second group of pottery designs of Islamic Middle Ages taken from the manifestations of nature

		
<p>Fig 1-. Aqkand type earthenware bowl with a possible motif of the Sagittarius constellation<sup>19</sup></p>	<p>Fig 2 - Seljuk Garous bowl with cow motif, Cincinnati Museum<sup>20</sup></p>	<p>Fig 3- Golden bowl<sup>21</sup></p>

<sup>16</sup> Hossein Abed Doust, Mehdi Kazempour, *Riziba, the Continuation of the Life of Ancient Sphinxes and Harps in the Art of the Islamic Era*, 2009, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> Parviz Varjavand, *Exploring the Maragheh Observatory and a Look at the Background of Astronomical Knowledge in Iran*, 1987, pp. 442-443.

<sup>18</sup> Nasrin Beyk Mohammadi, Sepideh Moradi Mohtasham, *Comparative Study Pottery Motifs of Islamic Middle Centuries with Constellations*, 2018, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> Hossein Abed Doust, Mehdi Kazempour, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>20</sup> Nasrin Beyk Mohammadi, Sepideh Moradi Mohtasham, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> Hossein Abed Doust, Mehdi Kazempour, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

		
<p>Fig 4- Seljuk golden pottery, Kashan with the design of the twelve constellations<sup>22</sup></p>	<p>Fig 5 - Saveh Seljuk enamel bowl, fish and star motif<sup>23</sup></p>	<p>Fig 6 - Seljuk Enamel Bowl of the Metropolitan Museum<sup>24</sup></p>

### **Literary advice and prayers of goodness and benevolence for human beings towards each other: adapted from Islamic teachings**

In several chapters of the Qur'an, such as: Surah Hadid, charity and piety are commanded, which causes the forgiveness of sins and the doubling of God's mercy and attention. It is also recommended to entrust matters to God in the verses on trust (Surah Al-Imran, verse: 173 and Surah Al-Ma'ida, verse: 10). Surah alhadid, verse: 28,<sup>25</sup> and again in Surah Taghabun also calls for charity for the pleasure of God. Another feature of the Qur'an is the educational and spiritual goals that God has provided for people to enjoy the light of the verses of the Qur'an<sup>26</sup>. Both inscription decorations and human and animal designs are drawn on the pottery. In the fourth century AH, the hadiths and sayings of the elders were proverbs, a wish for happiness and blessings of wealth and prosperity for the owner of the vessel, "Al-Barakah, Wal-iman, Saadah, and the joy of companionship" and sentences with the theme of trust in God (Tables 4, Fig. 1, 2 and 4)<sup>27</sup> or poems on health for the owner of the vessel (Fig 5) and sometimes refer to a verse (Fig 3). Verses 257 (Surah Al-Baqarah verse of Al-Kursi), verses 27 and 28 of Surah Sajdah and verse 48 of Surah Al-Rum are engraved on the shoulder of the vessel<sup>28</sup> (Table 3, Fig. 3).

<sup>22</sup> Nasrin Beyk mohammadi, Sepideh Moradi Mohtasham, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Salehi Kakhki, Mitra Shateri, Solmaz Mansouri, *Study of Saveh Enamel Pottery Motifs in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries AH Based on Samples from the Metropolitan Museum*, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Nasrin Beyk Mohammadi, Sepideh Moradi Mohtasham, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>25</sup> Seyyed Mohammad Hussein Tabatabai, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

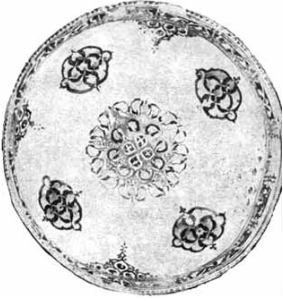





<sup>26</sup> Toshi Hiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, translated by Ahmad Aram, Tehran: Islamic Culture Publishing House, 1989, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Wilkinson, *Color and Design in Iranian Pottery*, 2000, p. 137.

<sup>28</sup> Majid Sarikhani, *Research in the Effects of Divine Verses on Iranian-Islamic Works of Art*, 2013, p. 74.



Table 3: The third group of literary designs: benevolence and prayer on pottery of Islamic Middle Ages

		
<p>Fig 1- Enamel bowl with the inscription of Al-Dawlah and health and blessings, Rey 6th century AH, National Museum of Iran</p>	<p>Fig 2 - Seljuk lapis lazuli with the prayer inscription of honor and happiness, Gorgan, Minialis Art Institute</p>	<p>Fig 3- Seljuk pottery of the National Museum with the inscription of Al-Kursi verse<sup>29</sup></p>
		
<p>Fig 4 - Bowl with Thuluth Script prayer for health and blessings, patriarchal museum of "Dar al-Athar Islamic Kuwait"<sup>30</sup></p>	<p>Fig 5 - Tang with the inscription of the poem of health and blessings for the owner of the dish, Gorgan, 5th century AH, National Museum of Iran</p>	<p>Fig 6 - A thermos with a molded pattern and the text of the water that makes me happy, Saveh, 6th century AH, National Museum of Iran</p>

<sup>29</sup> Majid Sarikhani, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> Nafiseh Mousavi, Mohammad Ali Rajabi, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

### Attention to beauty and order in the designs and decorations of medieval Islamic pottery taken from order and balance in nature

The categories of Qur'anic verses pay attention to the order and balance of nature and the universe, as well as to the purposefulness of creation and to realize the existence of the essence of the systematic and purposeful Creator. “*إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَخِتْلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ*”: Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day, are signs for those of understanding (surah Al-Imran, verse: 190).

أَلَمْ تَرَ وَآلَهُمُ الْكَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا: Do you not see how He created the seven heavens in an orderly and harmonious manner? (Surah nouh, verse:15)

الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدَرَهُ تَقْدِيرًا: He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and who has not taken a son and has not had a partner in dominion and has created each thing and determined it with (precise) determination (Surah Furqan, verse: 2).

“إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ”: Everything in the creation of the world is based on order and justice, and everything has been created in the necessary way (sureh Qamar, verse: 49), Symbolic, cosmic, and philosophical concepts are intertwined. Geometric patterns include several groups of geometric shapes or designs, framings, and frames, combined with other motifs such as plants, animals, and inscriptions to create balance and symmetry. Designs and proportions are beauty and order in pottery<sup>31</sup>. The numbers are distinct from each other, their environment is marked by their side lines, and they are shaped and colored. The artists of this period have created works based on the human aesthetic sense with the interest for the ideal geometry that lies in this proportion. They look beautiful and pleasant. In addition, more than two colors were used to paint, usually green, brown, indigo and especially yellow gold. Yi and brown were employed to emphasize patterns and gave them a raised state.

Some Seljuks sgraffito pottery was designed with motifs or nested frames (Table 4, Figures 1, 2, 3, etc.) and some potteries were designed in the style of Kashan and Sultanabad glazing and radial design (Table 4, Figures 4, 5, and 6).

<sup>31</sup> Mehdi Makinejad, *Centralism, Symmetry and Repetition in Traditional Iranian Arts*, 2013, p. 104.



Table 4 - The fourth group of designs related to order and balance on Islamic pottery of the Middle Ages

		
<p>Fig 1- Aq Kand style pottery<sup>33</sup></p>	<p>Fig 2 – Garous style with the design of circles and flames, 5-6th century AH, Reza Abbasi Museum</p>	<p>Fig 3 - Siloto technique bowl, Islamic Middle Ages, Metropolitan Museum<sup>32</sup></p>
		
<p>Fig 4- Radial plan, probably of Kashan<sup>36</sup></p>	<p>Fig 5- Cross design of the patriarchal plate of the Victoria Albert Museum<sup>35</sup></p>	<p>Fig 6- Sultanabad pottery, 8th century AH<sup>34</sup></p>

### Some verses refer to historical events and praise them:

The Qur'an does not explicitly name the word history, but it does make references to it, including the word "story" in verse 76 of Surah An-Naml. "إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَفْصُّ عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَكْثَرَ الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ". Indeed, this verse of the Qur'an fully expresses most of the teachings and rulings in disagreement with the "bani Israel".

In verse 26 of Surah A'raf, verse 25 of Surah Qasas, verse 5 of Surah Yusuf and in general, the word Qasas is mentioned a total of 26 times and the word myth is mentioned 9 times<sup>37</sup>. This event can be seen in medieval pottery (Seljuk to Ilkhanid period). A plate in the Freer Gallery depicts the battle of

<sup>32</sup> Marilyn Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Ernst Grubeh, *Islamic pottery from the collection of Nasser Khalili*, 2005, p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> Mohammad Yousef Kiani, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Nafiseh Mousavi, Mohammad Ali Rajabi, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> Hamidreza Rouhani, *Typology of Sultanabad Pottery Bowls in the Patriarchal Era through Analysis and Adaptation of Body Shape and Decorations*, 2014, p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> Ezzatollah Radmanesh, *Racial Styles and Theories of History*, 1991, p. 15.

armies and princes to conquer a castle (Table 5, Fig. 3), as well as the battle of Jalaluddin Kharazmshah on an enamel bowl. The Seljuk period is depicted in the National Museum of Iran (Table 5, Fig. 4). An Sgraffito bowl related to 5th century AH from Sheikh Tappeh of Urmia with the subject of the story of Zahak Shahnameh has been found<sup>38</sup> or ordinary rider motifs with an aureole around the head on a sample bowl from Saveh related to the 7th century Is H.Q. (Fig. 1). In the Baghdad school, due to helping to understand the different concepts, more designs in scientific, philosophical, medical, astronomical and historical fields were considered and were common; this was also the case in Syria, Egypt, Iran and different parts of the Islamic world. For this reason, the Baghdad school has been called by some historians, the Mesopotamian school, the Abbasid school and the Seljuk school<sup>39</sup>. Seljuk artists mostly used works of Sassanid origin<sup>40</sup>. The story of Azadeh's death in the presence of Bahram on pottery is mainly for his astronomical interpretation; sunrise and the beginning of the day and life again are engraved on the pottery. Bahram is the symbol of the rich and the sun god, whereas Azadeh is the symbol of Venus, the morning star, its expulsion and the beginning of the day (Table 5, Fig. 5 and 6)<sup>41</sup>.

Table 5 - The fifth group of designs related to historical events on Islamic pottery from the Middle Ages

		
<p>Fig 1- Enamel bowl of a horse rider, Saveh, 7th century AH<sup>44</sup></p>	<p>Fig 2- Sgraffito bowl, Urmia, 5th century AH. The story of Zahak<sup>43</sup></p>	<p>Fig 3- Enamel plate of the 6th century AH battle scene<sup>42</sup></p>

<sup>38</sup> Faeq Tohidi, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

<sup>39</sup> Soheila Namaz Alizadeh, Ashraf al-Sadat Mousaviller, *Analysis of the Visual and Conceptual Pattern of Free Death in Ancient Iran, Sassanid and Seljuk with Panofsky's Iconic Approach*, 2018, p. 80.; Yaghoub Azhand, *Iran's Miniature (Research in the History of Iran's Miniature and Painting)*, 2010, pp. 97- 98.

<sup>40</sup> Mohammad Hassan Zaki, *History of Iranian Industries after Islam*, 1984, p. 287.

<sup>41</sup> Soheila Namaz Alizadeh, Ashraf al-Sadat Mousaviller, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>42</sup> R. W. Freya, *Iranian Arts*, 1995, p. 254.

<sup>43</sup> Faeq Tohidi, *op. cit.*, p. 317.



Fig 4: Freer Gallery, Jalaluddin Kharazmshah War Scene



Fig 5- The story of Bahram and Azadeh, the Seljuk plate<sup>46</sup>



Fig 6- The story of Bahram and Azadeh, the Seljuk plate of the Berlin Museum of Islamic Art<sup>45</sup>

### Analysis

According to the adaptation of the decorations and pottery motifs of Islamic Middle Ages with Islamic teachings and the themes of Quranic verses, five groups were distinguished. In order to find out the effectiveness of the art of pottery from Islamic teachings and analyze these divisions in detail, the following table summarizes them (Table 7).

Table 7- Matching the meanings of Quranic verses with pottery designs of Islamic Middle Ages

	Islamic ideology	Islamic pottery designs and motifs
Group 1	Examples of nature: verse 1 of Surah Tain, verses 22 and 23 of Surah Ibrahim, verses 12 and 14 of Surah An-Nahl, verses 20 and 29 of Surah An-Naml, verse 65 of Surah Al-Hajj, verse 12 of Surah Jathiya; about traveling and nature: verse 20 of Surah Ankabut; creation from water: verse 30 of Surah Anbiya, verse 45 of Surah Noor, verse 99 of Surah An'am, verse 57 of Surah A'raf, verse 15 of Surah Noah; creation of	Mostly include plant and animal designs such as: various types of pottery in Jorjan, Kashan, Saveh, Soltanabad

<sup>44</sup> Ahmad Salehi Kakhki, Mitra Shateri, Solmaz Mansouri, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Soheila Namaz Alizadeh, Ashraf al-Sadat Mousaviller, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80.

	the world: verse 7 of Surah Hood; resurrection belief: verse 57 of Surah A'raf, verse 19 of Surah Rome; resurrection of nature and creatures: verse 50 of Surah Romans, verse 95 of Surah An'am, verse 9 of Surah Fatir, verse 5 of Surah Jathiya	
Group 2	Manifestations of nature: verse 164 of Surah Al-Baqarah, attention to the celestial bodies: verse 59 of Surah An'am and verse 6 of Surah AH; the names of the chapters of the Qur'an called the manifestations of nature: light, sun, moon, star, ghashiyah, dawn.	It includes the manifestations of nature such as: sphinxes and the sun symbol, the type of pottery of Jorjan and the like. <sup>47</sup>
Group 3	Literary advice, helping others, good prayers and philanthropy: verse of trust in Surah Al-Imran (verse 173), verse 10 of Surah Ma'idah and verse of Sunnah of Surah Al-Baqarah.	It includes more inscriptions and human ornaments on the pottery of Kashan, Jorjan and Sultanabad.
Group 4	Purposeful order and beauty of creation: verse 49 of Surah Qamar, verse 2 of Surah Al-Furqan, verse 190 of Surah Al-Imran, verse 15 of Surah Nooh.	It includes various rhythmic framings such as: Sgraffito pottery, Kashan pottery, Soltanabad, Jorjan, Metropolitan Museum, Reza Abbasi Museum Ministerial Complex.
Group 5	Ascension of the Prophet: Verse 1 of Surah Asra', referring to the journey on earth and paying attention to the history of the tribes Verse 18 of Surah An-Najm.	Historical events: topics such as the Ascension of the Prophet, the story of Bahram and Azadeh, the interpretation of the beginning of the day on Seljuk pottery, the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Berlin Museum of Islamic Art, the Battle of Jalal-ud-Din

Most of the plant, animal and compositional decorations are in accordance with the teachings of groups 1 and 2, i.e., paying attention to

<sup>47</sup> Hossein Abed Doust, Mehdi Kazempour, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

nature and the manifestations of nature; geometric patterns also serve to create works of natural manifestations in showing the resurrection and divine creations. The verse of light, of return and the like are evoked in the mind and soul of man as can be seen from the pottery of the Seljuks to the Ilkhanids of Jorjan, Kashan, Saveh and Sultanabad styles. Concepts of groups 3 and 5 show on medieval Islamic pottery as human motifs and inscriptions on subjects in the form of literary advice and good prayers of the owner of the vessel, sentences with the theme of trust in God, in fact the advice and manifestation of the verses of trust (Al-Imran, verse 173), verse 10 of Surah Ma'idah and the like.

### **Conclusion**

In the Middle Ages of Islam, pottery was decorated by mixing literary poems, advice and prayers for the owners of the dishes in the form of beautiful and rhythmic Thuluth and Naskh script on the inside and outside of the dishes to the best of the potters' ability. It has also embodied a direct or cryptic role and design among the green, turquoise and indigo motifs and colors, the transcendent Ferdows, the sky and the world of divinity giving a new spirit to its effect; this is derived from religious beliefs and recommendations. In their works on Islamic concepts and the Qur'an, pottery artists dealt with natural phenomena such as proving the Almighty Creator, monotheism and absolute lordship of God in the universe, showing greatness, power, wisdom, knowledge and divine mercy; they have also attempted to prove resurrection and the revival of life by encouraging the use of nature and its productivity, expressing the origin of beings and phenomena, the order, coherence and full purpose of nature. Moreover, they encouraged people to have faith, piety and charity for God's sake and help others in their works; last but not least, based on their creativity and ability, they have engraved motifs, poetic calligraphy or beautiful verses on pottery.

Answers to research questions include: the commonalities of the designs are in agreement with Quranic verses and Islamic teachings in the form of five natural groups: natural manifestations, literary-prayer inscriptions, attention to the balance and system of existence and historical events. According to the obtained results, the hypotheses were completely confirmed.

**PS:** \*Part of this research is taken from the author's doctoral dissertation entitled: "Analysis of the pattern of medieval Islamic settlements in Namin".

AH: Hijri lunar

**Bibliography:**

- Abed Doust, Hossein; Kazempour, Ziba**, “Riziba, the Continuation of the Life of Ancient Sphinxes and Harps in the Art of the Islamic Era”, *Negareh Quarterly*, no. 13, 2009, pp. 81-92.
- Azhand, Yaghoob**, *Iran's Miniature (Research in the History of Iran's Miniature and Painting)*, Volume 1, Tehran: Samat Publications, 2010.
- Beyk Mohammadi, Nasrin; Moradi Mohtasham, Sepideh**, “Comparative Study Pottery Motifs of Islamic Middle Centuries with Constellations”, *Archaeological Studies of Parseh*, no. 6, second year, 2018, pp. 123-141.
- Etesami, Seyede Zahra; Al-Rasoul, Susan**, “Surahology of Mustahab”, *Fadak Quarterly*, First Year, No. 1, 2009, pp. 29-54.
- Freya, R. W**, *Iranian Arts*, translated by Parviz Marzban, Tehran: Forouzan Roost Publishing and Research, First Edition, 1995.
- Grubeh, Ernst**, *Islamic Pottery from the Collection of Nasser Khalili*, translated by Farnaz Haeri, Tehran: Karang Publishing, 2005.
- Izutsu, Toshi Hiko**, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, translated by Ahmad Aram, Tehran: Islamic Culture Publishing House, 1989.
- Jenkins, Marilyn**, “Islamic Pottery: A Brief History”, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, Islamic Art, New Series*, Vol. 1, 1983, pp. 1-53.
- Kiani, Mohammad Yousef**, *Iranian Pottery Study of Iranian Pottery in the Prime Minister's Collection*, Tehran: Prime Minister's Private Publications, 1978.
- Khazaei, Mohammad; Samavaki, Sheila**, “Study of the Role of Birds on Iranian Pottery”, *Quarterly of Visual Arts*, no. 18, 2001, pp. 6-11.
- Lloyd Wright, Frank**, *For the Advancement of Architecture*, translated by Farzaneh Taheri, (Abadi Magazine), Tehran, Deputy Minister of Urban Planning and Architecture, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Second Year, Fifth Issue, 1992, pp. 17-30.
- Makinejad, Mehdi**, “Centralism, Symmetry and Repetition in Traditional Iranian Arts”, *Art Chemistry Quarterly*, Volume 3, Number 10, 2015, pp. 99-108.
- Mortezaei, Mohammad; Neda Sedaghatizadeh**, “Study of Animal Motifs of Ancient Pottery in Gorgan (Jorjan) in the Islamic Era”, *Journal of Archeology*, no. 2, Volume 2, 2012, pp. 47-62.
- Mousavi, Haji; Seyed, Rasoul; Morteza, Ataei**, *Study of Collections of Samples of Sistan Pottery, Zahedan*: Publications of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, 2010.
- Mousavi, Nafiseh; Rajabi, Mohammad Ali**, “Study of the Method of Design and Placement of Decorative Patterns in Painted Pottery of the Patriarchal Period”, *Negareh Quarterly*, no. 8 and 9, 2008, pp. 67-81.
- Naghizadeh, Mohammad**, *Fundamentals of Religious Art in Islamic Culture, Fundamentals and Intellectual System*, Tehran: Islamic Culture Publishing House, Volume One, 2008.
- Najafipour, Akram and Matiei, Forough**, “The Effect of Literature on Pottery Motifs of the Islamic Period with Emphasis on the Role of Simorgh”, *Book of the Month of Art*, no. 147, 2010, pp. 110-114.
- Namaz Alizadeh, Soheila; Mousaviller, Ashraf al-Sadat**, “Analysis of the Visual and Conceptual Pattern of Free Death in Ancient Iran, Sassanid and Seljuk with Panofsky's Iconic Approach”, *Negareh Quarterly*, no. 48, 2018, pp. 73-87.

- Radmanesh, Ezzatolah**, *Racial Styles and Theories of History*, Tehran: Kavir Publishing, 1991.
- Rouhani, Hamidreza**, "Typology of Sultanabad Pottery Bowls in the Patriarchal Era through Analysis and Adaptation of Body Shape and Decorations", *Negareh Quarterly*, no. 31, 2014, pp. 61-75.
- Salehi Kakhki, Ahmad; Shateri, Mitra; Mansouri, Solmaz**, "Study of Saveh Enamel Pottery Motifs in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries AH Based on Samples from the Metropolitan Museum", *Scientific Quarterly of Islamic Art Painting*, Year 6, 2015, pp. 4-421.
- Sorkh Abi, Obeydollah; Mastalizadeh, Maryam; Parvin, Samad.**, "Development and Evolution of Bird Motifs on Iranian's Crockery of the Middle Ages of Islam (5–9 centuries A.H)", *Int. J. Arts and Technology*, Vol. 12, no. 3, 2020, pp. 28-253.
- Tabatabai, Seyyed Mohammad Hussein**, *Tafsir Al-Mizan*, translated by Seyyed Mohammad Baqir Mousavi Hamedani, Qom: Islamic Publications Office Publishing, 1995.
- Tohidi, Faeq**, *The Art of Pottery*, Tehran: Organization for the Study and Compilation of University Humanities Books (Samat), Second Edition, 2003.
- Th holy Quran
- Varjavand, Parviz**, *Exploring the Maragheh Observatory and a Look at the Background of Astronomical Knowledge in Iran*, Tehran: Amirkabir Publications, 1987.
- Zaki, Mohammad Hassan**, *History of Iranian Industries after Islam*, translated by Mohammad Hassan Khalili, Tehran: Iqbal Publishing, 1984, p. 444.
- Wilkinson, Charles. K.** *Color and Design in Iranian Pottery*. Editors: Richard Ettinghausen and Ehsan Yarshater, (Brilliant Peaks of Iranian Art), Translation: Hormoz Abdollahi and Rouin Pakbaz, Tehran: Agah Publishing, 2000.

## The Development of Ukrainian Singing Culture During the Middle Ages

Lyudmyla M. Sbitnieva\*  
Olena F. Sbitnieva\*\*

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this article is to study the development of Ukrainian singing culture during the Middle Ages. Ukraine has always been famous for its songs and singers. Ukrainian singing culture dates back to ancient times. Ancient cultural monuments confirm that folk songs and folk art have played a significant role in the life of the Ukrainian people. Starting from the 10th century, church music began to develop, and thus great importance was attached to musical education. Song creativity is the most popular form of folk art, which influenced the development of many genres of Ukrainian music during the Middle Ages.*

**Keywords:** *Ukrainian singing culture, the Middle Ages, folk songs, church singing, Kyivan Rus, fraternal schools, Kyiv chant, part song*

Ukrainian musical culture originates in the distant historical past and is closely connected with the culture and lifestyle of the Ukrainian people. The earliest information about East Slavic tribes dates back to the beginning of our era (Anno Domini). Hence, as early as the 4th-6th centuries it was already known as the “Antes”, and later in the 7th-8th centuries as the “Rosses”. It was from this name that later the name “Rus” appeared. Archaeological findings (sculptural images, various bronze and silver ornaments) confirm that in those times there was a fairly developed art, which reflected veritable fragments of everyday life and pagan religious ideas of ancient Ukrainians. The worldview of ancient Ukrainians was largely mythological, and the entire surrounding world was perceived by them in images, which were endowed with human qualities. An important place in mythology belonged to the solar deity, who was represented as “Dazhbog”, “Hors”, “Kupala”, “Yarylo”. All the

---

\* Doctor of Pedagogic Sciences, Professor of Musical Art and Choregraphy Department, Educational and Research Institute of Culture and Arts at the State Institution “Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University”, Ukraine, E-mail: sbitnieva.l@gmail.com.

\*\* PhD of Pedagogic Sciences, Associate Professor of Academic and Variety Vocal Department, Musical Art and Choregraphy Faculty at the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine, e-mail sbitnieva.elena@gmail.com.



surrounding nature was, according to the ideas of the ancient Slavs, illustrated by spirits that helped people in their work. Ancient Ukrainians worshiped Mother Earth, fire, forests, fields, cornfields, rivers, stones, etc. In Ukrainian families, children were encouraged to sing and dance from an early age. The origins of lullabies, in which qualities like honesty and kindness, hard work and attitude towards one's parents were formed, reach us from the depths of centuries. All of man's beliefs were directed towards the world around him with the practical goal of 'forcing' nature to help humanity.

Kyivan Rus with its center in Kyiv as a state was formed in the 9th century, but it reached a particularly high political and cultural flowering in the 11th century under princes Vladimir the Great and Yaroslav the Wise. The significance of this period in the cultural history of the Ukrainian people is extremely important, because it was during this time that the foundations of literature, architecture and musical art development were laid. Professional musical art developed in Kyivan Rus, which, in addition to examples of folk art, included church music and the music of princely courts ('guslists and singers') and fair music-making by buffoons. It should be mentioned that the artistic traditions of Kyivan Rus, both changing and enriching, continued to develop for several centuries<sup>1</sup>.

It is well known that arts and education began to develop in Kievan Rus from that time. At the table of the Kyiv princes, the guests were entertained with music. The surviving remains of buildings of the 11th and 12th centuries in the ancient cities of Kievan Rus, on the frescoes and mosaics in the churches, are still inspiring admiration.

In 988, the Baptism of Rus took place, which had important consequences for the political and cultural development of the state. This event contributed to the strengthening of ties with the centres of world culture, the community's perception of Byzantine education. In the ancient *Hustin Chronicle*, it was reported that Prince Volodymyr the Great had brought a metropolitan, a bishop, a priest and Bulgarian singers from Korsun to Kyiv. At that time, schools were created in the churches built all over the country. A considerable attention was paid to singing in those schools, because this very fact was seen as a form of the children's preparation for their participation in church ceremonies. Furthermore, church singing, creating an emotional situation, significantly influenced the consciousness of believers.

Since the 10th century, cult music has been emerging. A special Kondacarien and Kryuki ("hooks") musical notation system was introduced, and singing schools were organized at the monasteries. But it should be mentioned that the adopted new traditions of European church culture, the stylistic principles and forms of Byzantine church singing began to be combined with the original traditions of national culture. Cult music under the

---

<sup>1</sup> Olga Levashova, *Istoriya russkoy muzyki. Tom 1 [History of Russian music. Volume 1]*, Muzyka, Moscow, 1972, p. 13, p. 9.

influence of folk song culture began to acquire peculiar national features (the so-called Kyiv chant, close to the Ukrainian folk song).

A key factor in the development of cult music in Ukraine was the activity of the brotherhoods (religious and national organizations), which contributed to the intensive development of school education. In church parish schools, where children received their primary education, Church Slavonic writing and liturgical singing were taught by the deacons. Mykola Arkas assures that the activities of the fraternal schools were multifaceted: they organized the work of printing houses, translated Latin and Polish sacred books, produced primers and alphabets for Ukrainian schoolchildren, and more<sup>2</sup>.

On the frescoes of St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv, you can see a musician with a bowed string musical instrument (the predecessor of the viola) and several performers playing wind and plucked instruments. There are opinions indicating that the guests themselves were often the performers at the holidays, but probably professional musicians had already begun to appear in Kyivan Rus by that time. The images of the 11th century musical instruments (harps, pipes, horns, cymbals, trumpets, tambourines, etc.) have been preserved on the frescoes of St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv. The names of the court singers (Boyan, Mitusa, Or) have been preserved in the annals<sup>3</sup>.

The traditions of heroic songwriting, which were filled with patriotic feelings and the struggle for independence pathos, were significantly developed in Kyivan Rus. These traditions were reflected in a vivid poem of the end of the 12th century, referring to the campaign against the Polovtsy people in 1185. Boyan (second half of the 11th century), who is mentioned in the "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" and Mitus in the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia, had a legendary fame. It is known from historical monuments that music was also used during the reception of foreign ambassadors. The annals mention "merry people", buffoons, folk singers and performers on simple musical instruments, without which various holidays did not take place.

The artistic heritage of Kievan Rus is highly appreciated. Landmarks of Kyiv architecture, painting and literature became models for followers in other regions.

After the adoption of Christianity, when the construction of St. Sophia's Cathedral was completed (1051), Prince Yaroslav the Wise invited teachers of church singing, as well as Greek and Bulgarian singers from Greece. It is known that in the Church of the Tithes in Kyiv there were a large choir and a school for church singing teaching<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Mykola Arkas, *Istoriya Ukrayiny-Rusi [History of Ukraine-Rus]*, Mayak, Odesa, 1994, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> *Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya. Tom 44 [Great Soviet Encyclopedia. Volume 44]*, Poligrafkombinat im. V. M. Molotova, Moscow, 1956, p. 155.

<sup>4</sup> Nikolay Uspensky, *Drevnerusskoye pevcheskoye iskusstvo [Old Russian singing art]*, Sovetskiy kompozitor, Moscow, 1971, p.31.

Professional musical art has been developing since the days of Kyivan Rus. During the reign of Vladimir the Great and Yaroslav the Wise, the concept of “singing princes and princesses” appeared and the first singing books were made. More and more attention was paid to musical education in the state, and church singing had already been taught in schools and monasteries. The Cathedral of St. Sophia was built in Kyiv, where, as it is known, the first Palace School, parish schools and libraries were opened. Kyiv Pechersk Lavra had a significant influence on the development of Ukrainian choral culture and the formation of the Ukrainian vocal school, where Ukrainian singing culture began to arise<sup>5</sup>.

The church singing of Kievan Rus was based on the traditions of Byzantine culture, but over time, its own spiritual singing began to take shape, which came to be called Kyiv chant. The psalms were created in accordance with stories from the Bible, Psalter and other church books, which quickly spread in the church practice of monasteries and temples.

Over time, Kyiv Pechersk Lavra became a creative environment for the church singing development and the talent discovery of many singers and composers. With reference to this aspect, it is well known from the annals the activity of the songwriter monk Stefan, the leader of the choir in the Pechersk Monastery. The research of scientists on monuments of musical notation in the 11th - 12th centuries provides an opportunity to consider that church singing in those days was unanimous and had a declamatory performance nature. Musical signs for notation were called “znamen”, which were divided into Kondacarien (small) and “stolp” (big signs). Later, musical signs were called “hooks”<sup>67</sup>.

It can be assumed that the Byzantine samples of sacred music became the basis for the Kyiv chane development, the main form of church singing in the 12th century, the times of the greatest prosperity of Kyivan Rus. Each week had its own “glas” (melody). When the row of eight singing weeks was completed, they were reiterated, and that is why this system of singing in the church was called “octoechos”. Thus, it can be assumed that musical life in Kyivan Rus was rich and developed gradually.

The Mongol invasion of Kievan Rus for a certain time generally stopped social development in the country. Only in the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia culture evolved.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lyubov Kiyanovska, *Ukrayins'ka muzychna kul'tura [Ukrainian musical culture]*, Triada plus, Lviv, 2009, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Oleg Mykhailichenko, *Muzychno-estetychne vykhovannya ditey ta molodi v Ukrayini (retrospektyvno-teoretychnyy aspekt) [Musical and aesthetic education of children and youth in Ukraine (retrospective and theoretical aspect)]*, Kozats'kyi val, Sumy, 2007, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Lidiya Korniy, *Istoriya ukrayins'koyi muzyky. Chastyna I (vid naydavnishykh chasiv do seredyny XVIII st.) [History of Ukrainian music. Part 1 (from the earliest times to the middle of the 18th century)]*, M. K. Kots', Kyiv, Kharkiv, New York, 1996, p. 62.

In the Middle Ages, when the Orthodox church was a dominant cultural power, singing played a significant role in church activities. It should be remembered that all arts began to develop in the church. As a matter of fact, the emotional richness of church choral singing consists of an organic combination of text and melody with an artistic environment and a cult rite. The creation of a rather complex religious artistic and cult image, which is unique, affects all sides of a personality's sensory sphere.

A significant role in the formation of Ukrainian singing art and the development of national musical culture in the Middle Ages was played by church choirs that performed works written only on religious texts.

From historical evidences, it is known about the artistic talent of Ukrainians, the treasures of folk art and church music, which influenced the formation of the aesthetic ideas of Ukrainians. Ancient monuments of culture testify to the importance of song creativity in the people's life. It was an integral part of life itself, accompanying all events, both happy and sad. Even the developed form of household rituals included singing necessarily.

A folk song has become the greatest treasure of Ukrainian musical culture; it reflects the thorny path of the Ukrainian people. Since ancient times, Ukraine has been famous for its songs, which were distinguished by exceptional expressiveness and melodiousness, a wealth of genres: household labor, which were related to the calendar (Vesnianka, Kupala and Shedrivka songs, carols), and household ceremonial (lullaby, lyrical and wedding songs, funeral cries). Calendar and ritual holidays, closely related to the labor activity of Ukrainians, created, especially for young people, a sense of respect for work, surrounding nature and people in general. Young people visited their neighbors and sang New Year's Shedrivka songs, Christmas carols with wishes for health, happiness, wealth, etc. In Vesnianka (choral spring) songs words, movements and melody interacted organically. On the summer holiday of Ivan Kupala (John the Baptist day) there were performed special songs, in which motives of love were present. In autumn, agricultural work was completed, and in winter, young men and women met at evening parties, where feasts with songs and dances were arranged. Wedding lyrical songs with bright artistic images were performed at weddings<sup>8</sup>.

Particular importance in the Ukrainian people's choral art evolution is attached to the folk-poetic song material, which has a unique visual element. It comprehensively affects the development of the aesthetic feelings, the understanding of the images of artistic works in music, singing voice and musical abilities development. Ukrainian songs were distinguished by their exceptional expressiveness, the beauty of melodies, and the richness of genres. The poetic content of vocal and choral works comprehensively reveals the picture of national life, the beauty of nature, the experiences and hopes of every

---

<sup>8</sup> Roman Kirchiv, *"Tsinna pam'yatka ukrayins'koyi etnografiyi ta fol'klorystyky"* [*"A valuable monument of Ukrainian ethnography and folkloristics"*], Naukova dumka, Kyiv, 1992, p. 23.

person, the original way of life and centuries-old traditions, culture of the Ukrainian people, attracted by the images of the starry sky, the sun, the change of seasons, etc. The idea of the heavenly family of bright gods of ancient Ukrainians is reflected in the artistic images of the songs: “clear moon, clear sun, light rain, small stars, etc.”. Another important element which is illustrated in these songs is represented by the struggle of the Ukrainian people for freedom.

Folk songs arouse interest in decorative and applied arts, Ukrainian vyshyvanka and create a lyrical picture of the Ukrainian landscape. In the bright, poetic language of the choral folk songs’ artistic images, the organic closeness of man and the surrounding nature is reflected. Additionally, the history of the people, life, character, subtle shades of feelings are clearly and majestically reflected.

The Ukrainian folk song with its bright content and charming melody is one of the best and richest manifestations of the Ukrainian people’s spiritual traits. Various interests, character, experiences, feelings and everyday life are exemplified in its images. The musical images of children’s Ukrainian songs with their magical whimsy of fairy-tale songs create in the children’s imagination a unique world of imaginative elements. Similarly, motifs and plots depict penetrating humanity, undisguised lyricism, sometimes sly humor.

A considerable attention was paid to the musical education of children in Kievan Rus. Ivan Ohienko emphasizes in his research that an original pedagogical system was developed in Ukraine in the 14th century, in which music education played an important role. Singing and elementary musical literacy were taught not only to the princes’ and boyars’ children, but also to students in fraternal and parish schools that were in almost all villages<sup>9</sup>. In the fraternal schools, students studied so-called “seven liberal sciences”, including music. Children were brought up there in the spirit of the “Orthodox faith and nationality”. It can be argued that Ukrainian children were positively influenced by the respect and love for folk music, song, dance, and folk music creativity that existed at that time in the society. It also contributed to the formation of the aesthetic tastes, and thus the natural giftedness of many Ukrainian children encouraged further musical advance<sup>10</sup>.

Historical songs, Kobzar’s dumas (epic poems) and other songs appear later. Most ancient folk songs are characterized by a melodic songful composition and a couplet form. Funeral lamentations in Kobzar’s dumas are more typical of a recitative-declamatory composition. Humorous songs were

---

<sup>9</sup> Ivan Ohienko, *Ukrayins'ka kul'tura. Korotka istoriya kul'turnoho zhyttya ukrayins'koho narodu [Ukrainian culture. A brief History of Ukrainian people’s cultural life]*, Dovira, Kyiv, 1992, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup> Oleg Mykhailichenko, *Muzychno-estetychne vykhovannya ditey ta molodi v Ukrayini (retrospektyvno-teoretychny aspekt) [Musical and aesthetic education of children and youth in Ukraine (retrospective and theoretical aspect)]*, Kozats'ky val, Sumy, 2007, p. 24.

close in rhythm to dance songs. The melodic volume of ancient chants is a fourth, a fifth, and later, an eighth and higher. A characteristic feature of choral songs is a subvocal polyphony developed form with the improvisation presence in the part of the upper voice.

Musicians-singers traveling around the country, kobzars and lirnyks, who accompanied their singing by playing the kobza (bandura) and lyre, were the transmitters of professional folk music. During the peasant wars and the period of the People's Liberation War (1648-1654), kobzars selflessly served the people with their art, raising them to fight. The repertoire of kobzars included dumas, historical, satirical, humorous and everyday songs. The lirnyks performed spiritual songs and chants. In the 19th century, the kobzar Ostap Veresai was already famous, who had performed such examples of folk art as dumy "Pro Khvedora Bezridnoho" ("About Theodore Bezrodnyi"), "Vtecha tr'okh brativ z Azova" ("The escape of the three brothers from Azov"), "Pro vdovu i tr'okh syniv" ("About the poor widow and three sons") and others<sup>11</sup>.

Instrumental dance music has long been widespread in Ukrainian culture. A typical instrumental folk ensemble "Troyisti muzyky" ("Triple Musicians") included a violin, a basolia (folk instrument of the bowed string family similar to the cello), a tambourine or the tymbaly (hammer dulcimer). Instruments like folk wind instruments of Ukrainians as trembita (an alpine horn made of wood), sopilka (flute), dentsivka (instrument with a fipple), telenka (an overtone flute, a primitive form of dentsivka without fingerholes), floyara (open ended notched flute), duda or koza (bagpipe) and many others were also known.

The developed form of household rituals included various types of arts: singing, dancing, playing a simple musical instrument or implying elements of theatrical actions. Ancient monuments of fine art testify about the role of music and choreography. For example, between the treasures of the 6th century, found in the Kyiv region, there were several cast silver images of dancing men. A similar type of pattern on the shirt is still found in modern Ukrainian clothing.

Ukrainian culture began to rise significantly from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Church creativity at that time remained the most important part of professional musical art. Kyiv chant began to be called a 'Znamenny Chant'. From the 16th century, it became known as a consequence of the introduction of the so-called "Kyiv znamya", i.e. recording notes on five lines. It should be mentioned that such a form of musical notation, known as "octoechos" (the eight-voice system), was widespread in the practice of church services for a long time. It is also known that churches and monasteries kept

---

<sup>11</sup> *Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya. Tom 44 [Great Soviet Encyclopedia. Volume 44], Poligrafkombinat im. V. M. Molotova, Moscow, 1956, p. 155.*

handwritten books of Irmoloi, in which, through the efforts of educated monks, the melodies of the divine services were collected.

Later, under the influence of Christianity, psalms began to appear in folk art, in which events taken from the Bible, the Psalter and other books became artistic images<sup>12</sup>.

Secular music-making developed in Ukrainian society starting from the 15th century. The emergence of polyphonic singing in the 16th century in Ukraine contributed to the beginning of systematization, arrangement of the singing art basics and intensive creative activity. These processes contributed to the further development of choral professional art. The main genres in the 17th century were part song concerts, chants, psalms, unison songs with instrumental accompaniment.

Professional music of the 15th century was concentrated in fraternal schools of that time in some important cultural cities: Lviv, Kyiv and Lutsk, Ostroh (founded in 1576 by the prince Vasyl-Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi) and the Kyiv-Mohyla academies. Over time, the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, founded by metropolitan Peter Mohyla, acquired more and more important artistic importance. Music was one of the compulsory sciences studied at fraternal schools. In the academies, students also studied, in addition to singing church works, secular ones that were written for various festive events.

In the 16th century, the number of fraternal schools grew rapidly in the cities of the Lviv, Przemysl and Kholm eparchies. Later, in the 17th century, they began to be organized in other cities of Ukraine. "Musica" (as it was called then) or vocal singing was one of the important disciplines of that time at schools in Lviv, Kyiv and Lutsk. The singing books of Irmologion were the teaching aids. It is known that the appearance of the first printed music book "Irmologion" in 1707 in Lviv became an important event in Ukrainian church music<sup>13</sup>.

Due to the activity of the Orthodox brotherhoods, in the second half of the 16th century, part polyphonic church singing was born, which replaced the monophonic one, and, therefore, five-line notation was introduced. There is an opinion that the first manuals for a singing teaching appeared in the first half of the 17th century. Their authors remained unknown. In the work "Chto yest' musikiya" ("What music is"), an anonymous author introduces readers to the basic rules of relative notation. In another work, appertaining to an unknown author, the basics of musical literacy, harmony, the basics of the initial polyphonic composition, advice on the practical mastering of the solmization

---

<sup>12</sup> Lyubov Kiyanovska, *Ukrayins'ka muzychna kul'tura [Ukrainian musical culture]*, Triada plus, Lviv, 2009, p. 10, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ivan Krypiakevych, *Istoriya ukrayins'koyi kul'tury [History of Ukrainian Culture]*, Lybid, Kyiv, 2002, p. 631.

technique are provided. The author's compositions were built on the intonations of Ukrainian dumas and historical songs<sup>14</sup>.

The development of part singing took place simultaneously with the spread of the five-line musical notation, the "Kyiv znamya". It consisted of several voices or "parts". In the 16th century, polyphonic part singing spread among church parish schools, where children studied not only Church Slavonic writing, but also a liturgical singing. There are historical sources from which it becomes clear that the music-theoretical works of Western European authors were used at the schools of that time: for example, the manual by Johann Spangenberg "The question of music for the use in the Nordhausen school or how to teach singing to young people easily and correctly" (Wittenberg, 1542) and the works of other authors. Gradually, polyphonic choirs began to sing in Ukrainian Orthodox churches under the leadership of experienced choir conductors<sup>15</sup>.

The theoretical foundations of part singing and counterpoint were stated in the treatise "Grammatika musikiyskago peniya" ("A Grammar of Music [al Singing]"), published in 1677 by the Ukrainian composer and theorist Nikolay Diletsky (born in 1630 approximately). The works of Diletsky, which summarized the practice of a part singing and justified the need to replace the old "hook" musical notational system with a new linear one, were the most valuable achievements of a music-theoretical thought in the 17th century. Later, the theoretical positions of part singing were developed in the works of Gavalevich, Zavadskyi, Pikulytskyi, Kolyadchyn, Byshevskyi and others.

The first publications of Ukrainian folk songs melodies appeared in the second half of the 18th century, in the song collections of Vasyl Trutovskiy (1776-1795), Johann Gottfried Pratsch (1790), and the first publications of folk instrumental music appeared in the collection "Muzykal'nyye uveseleniya" ("Musical entertainments", 1774), dance melody "Dergunets".

At first, there was Znamenny Chant, but later the singing part began to be introduced. Also, musical literacy was studied in fraternal schools. Another significant aspect is that the teacher who taught singing at the fraternal schools was also the leader of the choir. Students who had been selected to sing in the choir were not only paid, but also provided with food and clothing.

In the 16th century, schools of a new type began to spread in Ukraine, where primary education was combined with secondary education. One of the first schools was founded, the Ostroh Ruthenian-Greek-Latin school (1576), from which graduated many famous political figures and educationalists of that

---

<sup>14</sup> *Sofiyivs'ka zbirka: arkhivni materialy 127-381 [Sofia collection: archival materials # 127-381]*, Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv.

<sup>15</sup> Oleg Mykhailechenko, *Muzychno-estetychne vykhovannya ditey ta molodi v Ukraini (retrospektyvno-teoretychnyy aspekt) [Musical and aesthetic education of children and youth in Ukraine (retrospective and theoretical aspect)]*, Kozats'kyy val, Sumy, 2007, p. 26, p. 30.



time. Hence, Hetman Petro Sahaidachny, who played a significant role in the development of Ukrainian society, had studied at the Ostroh school (officially styled Academy). There was operated a printing house, thanks to which we have important historical monuments of Ukrainian writing. Ostrog was a well-known centre of traditional musical culture, where the “Ostrog chant” originated. The school curriculum necessarily included music.

Kyiv Pechersk Lavra monastery played a significant role in the spread of the part singing, that’s why this kind of singing later came to be called “Lavra” singing. Choral multi-part works on religious themes became the main genre of part singing. Students of fraternal schools studied not only church music, but also secular works to welcome guests who visited the schools, for theatrical recitations in “school dramas”, which were an important parts of the musical and aesthetic education of the students. The music, which consisted of chants, carols, psalms and included the elements of folk songs as well, was an important part of “school dramas”. This testified to the interaction of folk and church music. In the 17th century, the process of a wide chants and psalms spreading began.

It is believed that the artistic arrangement of Ukrainian folk songs began at the same time. Chants were performed not only in churches, but were also parts of Nativity scenes, school celebrations, etc. Chants were polyphonic hymns of philosophical, love and humorous content, which were written most often by students of academies and fraternal schools, students of seminaries and universities on religious texts (from Latin “cantare” – singing).

But at first, chants had no right to be performed in church. Over time, they became more and more popular and began to be performed not only in Nativity scenes (folk Christmas dramas), celebrations, but also in churches. Famous chant “Oy, pid vyshneyu, pid chershneyu” (“Oh, under the cherry, under the cherry”), used by Ivan Kotlyarevsky in his work “Natalka Poltavka”, has an instructive character and preaches important human values. We believe that the artistic value of chants influenced the work of Ukrainian composers of later eras. Chants, as a partially professional genre, played a significant role in the development of Ukrainian music in the 17th century.

There is no doubt that the creative activity of talented Ukrainian artists, often unknown authors of psalms and chants from the 15th to the first half of the 18th centuries, influenced the development of Ukrainian music in the second half of the 18th century, which is called the “golden age of Ukrainian music”, and its most prominent representatives, Maxim Berezovsky, Dmitry Bortniansky and Artemy Vedel<sup>16</sup>.

The first “Singing School” in Ukraine was founded in 1738 in Hlukhiv, where many famous Ukrainian musicians, composers, and singers received their education, who influenced the further development of Ukrainian

---

<sup>16</sup> Lyubov Kiyanovska, *Ukrayins'ka muzychna kul'tura [Ukrainian musical culture]*, Triada plus, Lviv, 2009, p. 17.

musical culture over time. Music was also studied at the Kyiv Academy and collegiums. Brass bands worked at the magistrates and town halls; there were also choirs and theaters in the landowners' estates.

Nikolay Diletsky was the most famous Ukrainian musician of the 17th century. The works of this prominent Ukrainian composer became well-known examples of the part concerts. His work "A Grammar of Musical Singing", in which the scientist theoretically studied the significance of musical art in the spiritual development of people, shades of human characters in a musical workcreating possibility, was considered one of the best works in the field of philosophical and aesthetic thought of that time. The works of Dyletskyi "A Grammar of Musical Singing" and "The Way to Train Children" became the first singing manuals for Musicteachers.

In the 17th century, after the Ostroh Academy, the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, music classes at colleges and universities began to play a significant role in the development of Ukrainian musical art. In 1631, metropolitan Peter Mohyla founded the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, which played an important role in the development of not only spiritual, scientific, but also artistic culture of Ukraine.

Graduates of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy were the famous Ukrainian philosopher Gregory Skovoroda (1722-1794), who created the first examples of secular lyrical songs, the famous composer in the genre of spiritual music Artemy Vedel (1767-1808) and others. Historical sources indicate that the Academy had a choir and an orchestra. Even in Zaporizhzhya Sich, a harsh military community, there was a tradition of music classes with talented boys who were taught to sing and play musical instruments. Zaporizhia Cossacks marched with musicians playing trumpets and tambourines, and celebrated their holidays and victories in Zaporizhia Sich with music and dances.

In Kyiv, Kamianets-Podilskyi, Lviv and other cities, guild associations of city musicians were founded, due to which secular music began to develop widely. The composers Maxim Berezovsky (1745-1777), Dmitry Bortniansky (1751-1825) had a significant influence on the development of Ukrainian musical culture with their works. Famous musicians-performers of that time were guslist Vasyl Trutovskyi (1740-1810), lutenist, composer and kobzar-bandurist Timofiy Bilohradsky, singer E. Bilohradska and others.

It is known that in the 18th century in the estates of the landed gentry there were created opera troupes, choirs, symphony and horn orchestras, whose activities were of great importance for the development of Ukrainian musical culture. Since that time, there was an interest in collecting and studying Ukrainian folk songs, foundations of Ukrainian national classical music forming process began.

Composers Maxim Berezovsky, Dmitry Bortniansky and Artemy Vedel created world-famous spiritual choral works, in which a departure from church canons can be traced. But these works could already be performed not

only in divine services, but also at secular concerts. Composers Berezovsky and Bortniansky got professional musical education abroad from the leading European musicians of that time.

Maxim Berezovsky, whose choral works have become real pearls in the treasury of Ukrainian musical art, studied at the Glukhiv School of Music, then at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. He continued his studies later at the St. Petersburg Court Capella, for which during several years he created wonderful church concerts, for example, the concert “Do not reject me in old age”. In 1769, the composer and singer received a special scholarship to study in Italy, at the Bologna Philharmonic Academy, which was one of the most famous centres of musical education of the 18th century. He studied under renowned teacher padre Giovanni Battista Martini, the best music theorist and teacher of that time in Europe. During his life in Italy, Berezovsky wrote both church choral music and created works in secular genres of music. For instance, he wrote “Demofonte”, the opera on the mythological plot.

Dmitry Bortniansky is one of the most famous composers of the Ukrainian musical culture of the “golden age of Ukrainian music” (18th century). Firstly, he studied at Gluhiv school. After receiving the scholarship when he turned 17, he started his education in Italy at the Venice Opera House. There, the period of composer’s creativity began. Bortnyansky created numerous works: three operas on mythological subjects “Creonte” (1776), “Alcide” (1778) in Venice, and “Quinto Fabio” (1779) at Modena, sonatas, cantatas and church works. After his return, the composer was appointed a director of the Saint Petersburg Court Capella, where he worked for many years. Most of the spiritual choral concerts written by the composer are based on texts from the Psalter. In the musical language of these works, which are examples of the composer’s skill, we can trace both the centuries-old traditions of Western European church music, the traditions of Ukrainian Orthodox music, and the presence of Ukrainian folk art elements, which is a key feature of Bortniansky’s creativity.

Another famous composer of the brilliant “golden age of Ukrainian musical culture” of the second half of the 18th century is Artemy Vedel. First, he studied at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, which in the first half of the 18th century was known for its perfect musical education and was one of the most thorough educational institutions in Eastern Europe. After receiving his education, Vedel worked as a conductor of choral bands and, at the same time, engaged in choral composition work. Among the numerous genres of choral music, Vedel chose the spiritual choral genre and in this genre the composer created masterpieces of a national art: “Dokole, Gospodi” (“How long, Lord”), “Voskresni, Bozhe” (“Rise, God”). Many prominent musicians and composers, as well as researchers of world choral music, claim that Vedel succeeded in bringing the professional spiritual choral concert closer to the Ukrainian folk song heritage and enriched the genre of the spiritual choral

concert with the lyrics of everyday urban sentimental romance, calendar-ritual songs and epic folk art.

The creative heritage of the composers of the “golden age of Ukrainian musical art” is significant and diverse in terms of artistic images, and over time it spread throughout the world and gained wide popularity among fans of musical art.

### **Conclusions**

Music has always occupied a significant place in the life and everyday life of the Ukrainian people. It can be considered that both the Ukrainian people history and Ukrainian music history begin with Ukrainian music folk art and folk songs.

An overview of the Ukrainian singing culture development history defines the folk song as one of the most important links that originates from ancient times. Ukrainian folk song is one of the best and richest manifestations of the spiritual characteristics of the Ukrainian people. The images of folk music and folk songs reflect a wide range of various interests of a person’s daily life, character traits, experiences and feelings; the history of the people unfolds clearly and majestically. However, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Ukrainian folk song in the aesthetic ideas formation of ancient Ukrainians about beauty and moral values.

The Ukrainian choral performance has its own ancient traditions, the creative possibilities of which have always reflected the thorny path of history, hopes and expectations of the Ukrainian people. A lyrical song is of particular importance in Ukrainian choral culture. On the one hand, it attracts the attention of the most talented and famous composers and singers in the modern musical culture and, on the other hand, encourages them to create.

The historical development of Ukrainian singing culture during the Middle Ages ends with a brilliant period in the 18th century. As a consequence, the musical culture development history is known as “the golden age of Ukrainian music”.

Maxim Berezovsky, Dmitry Bortniansky, Artemy Vedel, Nikolay Diletsky have contributed with their creativity not only to the development of Ukrainian choral art, but also to the world choral art. The works of the composers Bortniansky, Berezovsky and Vedel are performed during church services and various concert stages all over the world. Some works of the composer Berezovsky are stored in the libraries of France and England, and his spiritual works (concerts, communion songs, “Cherubs”) are particularly popular among contemporary fans of musical art. Thus, the creative heritage of composers occupies an important place in the treasury of world choral music. It arouses considerable interest among world choral art researchers and influences the development of modern choral music culture.

**Bibliography:**

**Arkas, Mykola,** *Istoriya Ukrayiny-Rusi [History of Ukraine-Rus]*, Mayak, Odesa, 1994.

*Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya. Tom 44 [Great Soviet Encyclopedia. Volume 44]*, Poligrafkombinat im. V. M. Molotova, Moscow, 1956.

**Kirchiv, Roman,** “*Tsinna pam'yatka ukrayins'koyi etnografii ta fol'klorystyky*” [“*A valuable monument of Ukrainian ethnography and folkloristics*”], Naukova dumka, Kyiv, 1992.

**Kiyanovska, Lyubov,** *Ukrayins'ka muzychna kul'tura [Ukrainian musical culture]*, Triada plus, Lviv, 2009.

**Korniy, Lidiya,** *Istoriya ukrayins'koyi muzyky. Chastyna 1 (vid naydavnishykh chasiv do seredyny XVIII st.) [History of Ukrainian music. Part 1 (from the earliest times to the middle of the 18th century)]*, M. K. Kots', Kyiv, Kharkiv, New York, 1996.

**Krypiakevych, Ivan,** *Istoriya ukrayins'koyi kul'tury [History of Ukrainian Culture]*, Lybid, Kyiv, 2002.

**Levashova, Olga,** *Istoriya russkoy muzyki. Tom 1 [History of Russian music. Volume 1]*, Muzyka, Moscow, 1972.

**Mykhailichenko, Oleg,** *Muzychno-estetychne vykhovannya ditey ta molodi v Ukrayini (retrospektyvno-teoretychnyy aspekt) [Musical and aesthetic education of children and youth in Ukraine (retrospective and theoretical aspect)]*, Kozats'kyy val, Sumy, 2007.

*Softyivs'ka zbirka: arkhivni materialy 127-381 [Sofia collection: archival materials # 127-381]*, Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv.

**Ohienko, Ivan,** *Ukrayins'ka kul'tura. Korotka istoriya kul'turnoho zhyttya ukrayins'koho narodu [Ukrainian culture. A brief History of Ukrainian people's cultural life]*, Dovira, Kyiv, 1992.

**Uspensky, Nikolay,** *Drevnerusskoye pevcheskoye iskusstvo [Old Russian singing art]*, Sovetskiy kompozitor, Moscow, 1971.

## Representations of the Tree of Life in Ancestors' Symbolics

Loredana Gașpar\*

**Abstract:** *From time immemorial, our predecessors have projected an entire series of symbols on trees, so that through them, man can become part of what is sacred, thus being able to absorb a speck of the sacred. Therefore, elements of the sacred are identified in a series of established trees. The tree's roots travel in the hypogeal world, the trunk takes part at the terrestrial life, while the branches raise towards the sky, thus forming a ladder which can be climbed by the man who escapes the mundane present and enters the other world. The three fundamental phases from human existence: birth, marriage and funeral are similar to the three component parts of the tree, but in the same time, they are also marked by the presence of the Tree during the three ceremonies: at birth, wedding and funeral.*

*The cosmic tree is always situated in a sacred space, we may either refer to the sky tree or the life tree with its substitutes – the tree of birth, of wedding, fertility, of judgement, funeral, or we may have in view the place where the column of the sky is erected with its substitutes – the buttresses of life, the columns of judgement, preventive pales, but also the simulacra of the sky column – the countryside troiță<sup>1</sup>, road columns, grave columns.*

*Even nowadays, there are various sacred connections established by human beings for different trees: the apple tree is of life and wisdom, dominating the landscape from Paradise, the sycamore maple is the one used for making the semantron and the maple is the tree with a divine valence, the fir is the double of human life, the grapevine is a symbol of immortality, the May Tree or the maypole watches over and protects the household from evil forces, the pine cone is an expression of the world renewal.*

*Our ancestors connected their faith to trees that were their church and body and they also hoped that, when they would die, the tree would be the bridge that would make the transition towards the Other World.*

*There are many and varied ways of expression of this symbol and there are numberless its codes. The artist from ancient times and even the nowadays*

---

\* Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, *George Enescu* National University of Arts from Iași, Romania, Specialization Design, office@atipico.ro.

<sup>1</sup> *Troiță* = the Romanian term for the Orthodox cross made of wood or stone, usually placed at crossroads, in the neighborhood of wheels and in special placed, where events took place (sometimes, the cross is embellished with paintings, sculptures, engravings and it is accompanied by a small construction).

*peasant differently represent the Tree of Life, depending on the context, but there are also multiple ways of exhibiting; still, its essence has remained sacred and not altered.*

**Keywords:** *the cosmic tree, the heavenly tree, the tree of life, the column of the sky, the grapevine, the fir tree, the apple, the sycamore tree.*

### **The Tree of Life**

Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov makes a very clear distinction between two types of trees that existed before man's fall from Paradise, they do not represent two vegetal types, but two conscience states. **The Tree of Life** is the central unit where there is no good and evil, while **The Tree of Knowledge of the Good and the Evil** represents the polarity where the good and the bad are alternative, the days and the nights, happiness and sorrow. The forbiddenness to eat from The Tree of Knowledge was, in fact, a protection that assured the transition of the human being from one's fluid matter to an opaque matter. Once the apple eaten, Adam and Eve felt they were no longer wrapped in light clothes and they flushed. They continued to live, but they were dead regarding a superior state of conscience. Kabbalah presents us the seven forms of the Earth – from a dense matter to a subtle form, the last one also being the area where Adam and Eve were expelled from. In this ethereal plan is the Tree of Life and now, it represents an energy coming from the Sun and feeding people.

The Tree of Knowledge of the Good and the Evil is the symbol for an astringent current which passes through Paradise, but which is connected to the root of things, the plan of material creation and even of the underground world of metals, crystals and fire. By eating the fruit of this Tree, human beings have changed their consistency and they started to become opaque, dense, thick and dark.

The snake which interceded this transfer is a dual element which is positive in its superior part, if it is impregnated with light and is negative in its inferior part if it is impregnated with negative thoughts. It impregnates the entire universe and transmits good and bad exhalations. Being seduced by Lilith and Samael, two of the entities that lived inside the snake, Adam and Eve chose to explore matter, leaving behind light, beauty, warmth, liberty. This is the source of the endless desire of the soul to return to the lost Paradise and the permanent quest to recompose even a fragment of it, in a dense matter. When the human being raises towards a high goal, one connects with The Tree of Life which is a centre of energy situated above the notion of good and evil.

The roots of the tree go deep into the underground world, the trunk is part of the terrestrial life, while the branches go up towards the sky, thus forming a ladder which can be climbed by the human being which leaves the terrestrial present and enters the other world.

The cosmic tree becomes the axis around which the entire universe is built. Its protraction from the Primordial Waters and its appearance from chaos

also brings to light the elements which will be used for the entire construction of the Cosmos. This essential role will offer to the Tree a polyvalency of functions and attributes that will be transferred to the *pir* and to all its substitutes

The cross does not annihilate this symbolics, the tree on the grave is also connected with the sacred tree associated to the passions and the Christian Resurrection. The cross replaces the Cosmic Tree that grows from the centre of the Earth towards the sky, being part of the Universe, having a strong bond with everything that exists in this world. The Redemption of Christ on the cross was made from the Tree of Good and Evil and it does not annihilate the pre-Christian value of the Tree of the World, but it reinterprets it and expands it.

**The Cosmic Tree** includes the entire cosmos with the principles of life, existence, immortality. It is a representation of life and of the cosmos in a vegetal form. The Cosmic Tree was the basis of ancient universal mythologies symbolizing the creation in movement, meaning the condition of continuous transformation. It is visually represented having the roots in the ground and the tree crown surrounded by stars and celestial bodies. As we have already mentioned, the Cross superposed on this mythical concept as a symbol of the centre of the world. Christianity considers that the entire universe was redeemed through the cross – regenerated, renewed.

*„Sus în vârful muntelui/ crește bradul brazilor,/ de mare și înfoiat/ tot ceru l-a îmbrădat,/ soarele în cetini,/ luna între ramuri,/ mii și mii de stele/ între rămurele” [“Up there, on top of the mountain/ the fir of all firs grows./ It’s so big and puffed/ that the entire sky is covered by it,/ the sky in its branches,/ the moon between the savins,/ thousands and thousands of stars/ between its twigs”].<sup>2</sup>*

**The Celestial Tree** is the element of connection between the Cosmic Tree and the Tree of Life and it represents the terrestrial power, a simulacrum of the column which supports the celestial arch. It can be considered a reduced form of the Cosmic Tree. One of its functions is to hold the celestial arch. It acts ascendently and descendently on three plans: the celestial plan in the world of divinity, the earthly plan in the world of humans and the subterranean plan in the world of demons.

*„Sus la munte ce-mi vedere?/ Leru-i Doamne,/ îmi vedere-ncetinat/ brad cu stele încărcat,/ brad cu neguri îmbrăcat;/ și în vârful-i ce-mi vedere?/ Cerul leagăn de mătase,/ dar în leagăn cine-mi șade?/ Șade Luna sfântă/ și cu bradul precuvântă” [“Up, in the mountains, what do I see?/ God, oh, God/ I can see a fir/ a fir filled with stars/ a fir all dressed in fog;/ and what do I see on top of it?/ The sky is a silk cradle,/ but who is sitting in the cradle?/ It is the holy Moon/ and it talks to the fir”]<sup>3</sup>*

---

<sup>2</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română [Romanian Mythology]*, The Publishing House of the Academy of RSR, Bucharest, 1987, p. 485.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem.*



**The Tree of Life** closes this circle and it represents the connection between divinity and the terrestrial plan of the human being as a bridge. It embodies continuity, immortality, the idea of youth without old age and life without death, the symbol of terrestrial fertility. Since Neolithic times, it has been represented through an undefined plant, ageless and genderless or by a miraculous plant which cures all illnesses. The fruits of this plant are made of gold, silver, they make people look younger, they illuminate, they make people return from the dead (the golden apples, the garden of the Hesperides, the garden of the Biblical Paradise).

*„Junelui bun,/ cică-n dalb de răsărit/ răsare un soare strălucit./ Da nu-i soare strălucit,/ Ci-i un pom mândru-nflorit”. [“To the young good man,/ at the beginning of sunrise/ appears a shiny sun./ But it is not a shiny sun,/ But a beautiful blossomed tree.”]<sup>4</sup>*

*„Mircea Eliade, în Tratatul de istorie a religiilor, arată că simbolul arborelui sacru este polimorf: arbore-imagie a cosmosului, arbore-teofanie cosmică, arbore-simbol al vieții, arbore-centru al lumii și susținător al Universului”. [“Mircea Eliade, in his Patterns of Comparative Religions, shows that the symbol of the sacred tree is polymorphic: the tree-image of the cosmos, the tree-cosmic theophany, the tree-symbol of life, the tree -centre of the world and the one which supports the Universe.”]<sup>5</sup>*

There is an association between the Tree of Life and the Mother-Goddess (woman-soil-plant) on some fibulae found in Romania and in its proximity. Regarding Altaic people, there is the belief that the Mother-Goddess is at the basis of the Tree of Life which has seven branches, interpreted as a metaphor of the seven known skies from Romanian mythology, skies that need to be pervaded by the dead, an allusion to the seven planets known in that period and to the seven temples from Sarmisegetuza and to the seven bodies of the Earth that are mentioned by Kabbalah.

Our ancestors believed in fairies, young girls that did not know old age, maidens born from flowers, deities of fertility and fecundity that were represented in their art as half woman, half plant, a migration of the Great Goddess from the Neolithic to the plant-woman of the Thracian world.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Petringenaru, *Imagine și simbol la Brâncuși [Image and Symbol regarding Brâncuși]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, p. 102.



**Fig. 1** The Tree of Life and the Mother Goddess on a bronze fibula, Middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century- middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.C., Ungheni, Argeş, The Museum of Argeş County, Piteşti

Mircea Eliade in *Patterns of Comparative Religions* tells us that the universe with its entire creation has vegetal roots, thus: the cosmos is symbolized through a tree; the divinity manifests His presence dendromorphously. The divinity reveals Himself in the cosmos under the shape of a tree, being in the same time the spring of regeneration and of «life without death», a spring towards which the human being goes and puts one trust concerning one's immortality; fecundity, abundance, luck, health – or, at a higher level, immortality or eternal youth – they are concentrated in herbage or trees; humanity or race derive from a vegetal species; human life seeks refuge in vegetal forms when it is interrupted, by wickedness, before the proper time; in a word, everything that is, everything that is alive and creator, continuously regenerating oneself, is expressed through vegetal symbols.

Restarting the processes that made possible the appearance of the first signs of life (reawakening, revival, rebirth) is possible by *the hero's receding into the tree* (as a principle of light, reason, vital energies), according to C. Prut in *Calea rătăcită [The Lost Path]*. The hero's regression into a tree is kept up to the end of the medieval period. We find practices in the area of Moldavia where, if a young man dies and his body is not found, in his place a tree is buried, dressed in that young man's clothes. In other areas, a tree is planted on the grave or, at the burial process, it is brought a tree that is the substance of life and it makes possible the transfer between worlds.

The way towards redemption is difficult towards the Tree of Life which is in an inaccessible place and it is guarded by two monsters – *griffins*. Immortality is very hard to obtain, after an entire series of hardships and after the man confronts and kills the two monsters which are a quintessence of the three elements: air, fire and earth. The gold of Apollo from Scythia and the crater of Dionysos were guarded by snakes, they are present in all cultures when it is about a "centre" only to be accessed by the initiated. All trees represent the universe in its perpetual regeneration, but in its centre, the centre of the World, it is situated the Tree of Eternal Life or of Knowledge. The Great Goddess is the personification of the spring of creation which is always full of water, it is the "centre of the world" where the spring of Life is, of youth and immortality.

The griffins are symbolic representations frequent during ancient times. The fight between the griffins and the herbivore is a very much used theme, the griffins are the terrifying guardians of the treasures that are guarded with great ferocity. On the bronze matrix found in Sarmisegetuza, there are griffins with heads of lion, wolf and vulture, on the golden coin from Băiceni-Iași there are two griffins having wings and horse bodies, guarding the Tree of Life or griffins which appear on burial stones. Near the Tree of Life which also has solar elements, the griffins suggest the hope of renaissance in a better world, governed by solar forces. When the king wore the helmet with the Tree of Life guarded by griffins, he became a correspondent of universal order here, on earth, having the tree included, it could bring the divine order into the perfect man. He could become a messenger between the terrestrial and the divine plan for his followers, thus offering them access to the soul's immortality when they died.

In old legends, griffins had their homeland in the country of the hyperboreans, they guarded the gold of the Arimaspi. According to N. Densușianu, from Hyperborea, gifts of gold were sent to the sanctuaries from Greece where celebrations were held, honouring Apollo the Hyperborean. He travels to sanctuaries dedicated to him being on the back of a griffin.

Griffins are also present in the Christian church, in many representations inside the church and, what is more, they have become the symbol of Jesus, having a double human and divine genesis.

Griffins become symbols also present on the heraldry of many noble families.



**Fig. 2** Griffins on the blazon of Moldavia (detail), the tower of the bell tower, The Church Three Hierarchs, Iași

The representation of the Great Goddess as half goddess half the Tree of Life having a palmette shape had a large spreading in the Danube area for more than 1000 years. Other representations of the pair the Great Goddess - The Tree of Life are cosmological symbols and heraldic animals: the bucranium-uterus, swastica, fir, palmette, birds' heads, vultures, the petal rosetta.

Another representation of the *Tree of Life* can be seen in the pair of the **V of the Great Goddess** centrally placed and the **bucranium-uterus** present in pair on each side, symbols that can also be found on a series of Neolithic statues, votive sanctuaries and Geto-Dacian objects. Since Neolithic times, a very suggestive representation of the Tree of Life has reached our times, it has suffered very few changes in time, being alto taken over by the Geto-Dacian and later on, by the Romanian traditional repertoire.

Cristian Pintilie makes a demonstration of the evolution of the Tree of Life from Neolithic up to nowadays, he remarked the presence of some elements that have been perpetuated, their essence was not changed and their form was slightly modified. The association between the symbols of regeneration, the **V** of the Bird Goddess and the **bucranium-uterus** already formed the Tree of Life in the Neolithic period. In parallel, it was used the group formed out of the three symbols – the **V** of the Great Goddess, the **comb** -a running water and the **Column** – the connection of the Sky with the Earth.

The **V** of the *Great Goddess* is a sign derived from the pubian triangle, an initiation symbol, a symbol of Divinity; the **axis**-the mast of the world is Axis Mundi, the centre that unites the sky with the earth and makes a connection with Divinity; the **bucranium-uterus**, represented as two opposing banderoles, refers to the uterus, the branched curled yarns represent the vegetal expression of immortality; the **comb**-brush is a symbol of vulva, of running

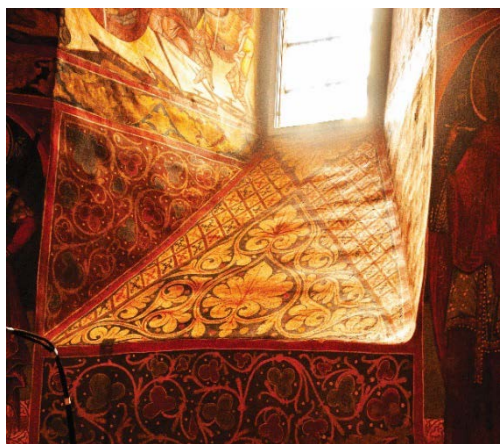
water, being a symbol of abundance; water is non-manifestation, sprouts, latency, the elixir of deathlessness, the creative force.

At the beginning of the Bronze Age, they were superposed, thus obtaining a Tree of Life specific to the Danube area. The Tree of Life evolved in the bronze Age up to the form of a palmette – a palm leaf. Serpent-like spirals receive the form of some S-shaped volutes which sometimes multiply, and the comb becomes a triangle or a realistic representation of the root or even a plant, a rhizome.

**The Palmette** is the Dacian, Getic and Thracian Tree of Life which appears on very many weapons, helmets, spiral-shaped bracelets made of gold and silver, fibulae, phalerae, fittings, pots, spikes.

The palmette from the Carpathian space is frequently met placed between two rolls. Sometimes, the palmettes are represented as being the extension of a ribbon which goes up and down, forming double S-es which cross each other. This type of representation is the symbol of the passing of time, the process of regeneration and obtaining immortality or of continuing one's existence from beyond death. The body sinuously travels on the ribbon of life, among the regenerating-palmette centres which permanently give their fertilizing energy.

Being taken over by the Greeks from the Thracians, Dionysos had ivy and grapevine as his sacred plants, two symbols which were also present on his thyrs -the mace of the god, but also on the maces of the followers who took part in celebrations dedicated to him. The etymology of the name "agatârși" could be suggested by V. Flaccus as *thyrsgetae* – the Gets with thyrs. The bishop crook is a long rod which is part of the hood and the clothes of the Christian high-ranked hierarchs, being a symbol (depending on the ornamental elements, the vegetal motifs and/or snakes) of the authority and wisdom of these people who can shepherd the people.



**Fig. 3** Palmette on the inner window of Humor Monastery built in 1530

**The grapevine** is a symbol of immortality, to the same extent that it is the symbol of youth and eternal life, and the Mother Goddess is called at the beginning *Grapevine-Mother* or *Grapevine-Goddess*. Under this representation, we always find, in fact, the prototype of the Tree of Life, situated in the centre or in an out-of-reach world where only the initiated have access.

The Tree-Goddess, the Grapevine-Goddess, surrounded by heraldic animals or cosmological insignias, reveals us the existence of "*the centre of the world*" where the Spring of Life is, of immortality. In the centre of the universe, there is a tree of Eternal Life or of knowledge. The presence of the Goddess is an expression of the existence of life, immortality and sacredness in that "centre".

Ancient and medieval weapons have hefty representations of the Three of Life, because this assures the revivification of the warrior in another body, preserving a permanent connection between the fighter and the Sky and the Earth and the supreme deity Zalmoxis during the battle. According to the Dacians, the more violent one's death during the battle, the more assured one's resurrection was in the Afterlife, also as a warrior. By destroying weapons – the benting ritual – it was envisaged the death of the weapon's spirit, together with his fighter, so that weapons could more easily follow him in the Afterlife.

On the golden helmets from Băiceni and Coțofenești, worn during magical-religious ceremonies, there are representations of ritualic scenes of immortality – the scene of sacrificing a ram, the scene of offering sacrifices and their receiving by winged griffons which guard the Tree of Life, these practices are regarded as sygnifying immortality. The confrontation of the two griffons does not have a physical dimension and it should be regarded as an initiation act. Receiving immortality is represented on the helmet from Băiceni, by representing the two winged griffons which guard the Tree of Life, suggesting the opening of the ways toward immortality and the free access to the spring of youth without old age and life without death. This image reminds us of the fairytale of Harap-Alb who was in search of immortality and he was helped by his winged horse which ate embers. The two helmets which imitate the lambskin transmitted to their subordinates that the people who wore them were initiated king-priests that had the ability to perform the magical-religious rituals for obtaining soul's immortality. The fur of the animal sacrificed for this purpose offers the king-priest an overflow of energetic flux which are necessary for performing this ritual. The cap with golden fur facilitated the dialogue with divinity and offered immortality to royal subordinates even from beyond death. This image of the golden cap infkames our imagination and makes us think about the Argonauts and the golden fleece, but also about the way the Dacians extracted gold from river, by using lambskins that were put perpendicular to the waterflow and gold filaments were kept in the twirls.

Ever since Neolithic times, the Tree of Life is represented having the shape of **columns**, as it is the case of the sanctuary from Căscioarele made of two clay columns that were empty inside and they were over two metres height. The higher column is decorated with the motif of the continuous fugitive spiral. According to archeologists, they were built around a tree trunk that was later removed. Around them, there were more columns that formed something similar to a canopy, which proves that it was a sanctuary destined to the cult of columns. The two painted columns represented the Sun and the Moon, and the seven columns that framed them represented the seven stars that were known at that time.

**The Column of the Sky** is a more evolved form of the columns, they have been shrines or sanctuaries for a long time and they have reached our present times, but having a lost meaning, a complocation of architecture and a decoration which gives up on magical symbolism and takes over traditional symbolism.

The column which is Y-shaped is the oldest type of Tree of Life. At the beginning, it was a living tree, having its roots deeply fast in the ground, having its crown cut, only two branches that were Y-shaped were left uncut, it is possible that they were the support of a solar symbol. Having the shape of tree columns, we see them at Naviodunum or as Dacian columns on Trajan's Column. The Sky Column has had several shapes in time: *the Y-shaped columns*, discreetly decorated with points, circles, spirals; *the T-shaped columns* (commisural shape) marked by the sun, the moon, the stars; *hominoid columns*, the predecessors of Atlas that was holding up the Earth in his back, decorated with the sun, the moon and the stars; more recently, under the form of *troițe* and of the *disk-shaped columns* having the symbolism of the sun and the moon, later on it was the Christian symbolism. Other mythical symbols scrawled on the columns of the sky, coming from the the Uranian period were *the pole axe and hatchet* symbolizing light, thunder and lightening, these were mythical signs of solar deities. These elements were in most cases associated to consecration horns – representing the bull – a divine animal having a solar order. All these symbols that decorated the column of the sky had the mission to make the place sacred.

„Stâlpurile pe cărare/ Stau cu fața către soare...” [“The columns on the path/ Are facing the sun...”]<sup>6</sup>

„După troița-n picioare/ Cunoști luna când răsare/ Și noaptea cât e de mare” [According to the standing cross/ You know when the moon rises/ And how big the night is”]<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1972, p. 186, inf. teren, Mureș, 1936.

<sup>7</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1972, p. 186, inf. teren, Muntenia, Vlașca, 1934.

While the column was replaced by the *troița* which is a religious element, the columns were the astronomical primitive stakes older than the raising of stone calendars from Sarmisegetuza, which involves that their origin is from an archaic population that lived on this territory long before the Indo-European migration.

The megalithic columns of the sky are also those monuments that are in the mountains and are called *Babele*<sup>8</sup>. They are columns of the sky and earth and they sky leans against them.

While the sky column was erected, there was an entire ritual that took place, and we mention here only the fact that the masterpiece was brought to its place being carried by two pairs of oxen and placed in a carriage, a white cock was sacrificed, the work was placed towards the east, its founders gave away white clothes and towels, there was a feast on the occasion of placing the masterpiece at its place, followed by *hore*<sup>9</sup> around the column of the sky, and during the evening, these dances ended with *hore of light*. The sky column usually placed at a crossroads paralyzed the power and the effervescence of bad spirits and it became a sacred place which was once called *the lighted column* or *the sky column*. They were placed depending on the cardinal points and the zodiac's trajectory on the sky and, depending on the shadow, they became solar sundials. The columns which were Y-shaped were similar to some antennae that guided celestial forces towards the earth, cures for hard to cure diseases were prepared near these columns.

*"The theme of the myth of the sky column seems to refer to a monument of light: scattered in its cosmic dimension (the sacred light of the sun) or focused on the three terrestrial hypostases (the solar ray, the lightning and the fire) considered specific to a deux tonans: Saint Elijah in the Christian belief, Gebeleizis in the Geto-Dacian mythology. Therefore, we can say that the theme which is basis of the myth of the sky column was first of all the representation of the totem of light and second of all, of the trinity hypostasis of this deified totem".*<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> *Babele* is the name given to the rocks from Bucegi Mountains, the translation would be "The Old Ladies" and they can be seen here: [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babele,\\_Mun%C8%9Bii\\_Bucegi](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babele,_Mun%C8%9Bii_Bucegi)

<sup>9</sup> *Hora* (pl.*hore*) is a traditional Romanian dance which supposes that people hold their hands and form a circle, symbolizing their union and understanding.

<sup>10</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1972, p. 190.





**Fig. 4** Troiță, Costești, Hunedoara



**Fig. 5** Cross that was usually placed at a crossroads, The Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, Cluj

Sometimes, the *Sky Column* was made by cutting down a fir that was left with only three leafed branches, graphically forming the image of three arrows or spears. This image was interpreted as being the spears that the Dacians used to throw towards the clouds representing the god of weather and death. Among the twelve categories of columns which formed the succedaneums and the simulacra of the sky columns, the funerary ones are used more frequently, they describe sex, age, marital status, family, profession.

The tree was charged with divine forces because of its vertical position, it renews its canopy year after year, thus being revived, because it dies and it is reborn for countless times. Man has found a brother in the tree, for both of them are born from the ground, they take their sap from the fertile land, they have a connection with the sky, that offers them food having the form of rain and high energies, both of them left their seeds for perpetuation and they ended up rotting in the ground. This union has led to the creation of the archetype the *Tree of Life*.

The tree appears in many situations in a symbolic landscape: guarding fruits is often done by birds like the dove, the peacock, at its shadow, there are terrestrial animals – like the lion, or fantastic ones – like the griffin, and sometimes people – the Tracian chevaliers appear near the trees around whose trunks there are serpents coming from the underground, following the way of the roots, an eruption of the chthonic during daylight. This image is to be met

when a man dies and a serpent-like wax candle is placed on a wooden rod, having the length of a human being, the rod is a funerary column having the motif of the snake and of the spindle. The psychopompe character is also met regarding its role as bridge between the worlds when the tree bends in order to make the man cross the sea towards *The Afterlife*, on condition that the man knows some magical words. At the bottom of the tree's trunk, lives a serpent, and on its treetop – a cuckoo.

The Tree of Life is an archetype, a spiritual entity that hides itself under the form of a tree that is distinct depending on its geographical area (fir, oak, persimmon). It is sacred because of its divine essence, it has power due to its presence and it revives because of its own evolution law. If man can detach himself from his visible form and if he can overcome specific mental barriers, the symbol becomes detached from its concrete form and it is abstract.

It is possible that the sky column is a concrete image of a metaphysical state in which man transcends towards the sky, he releases a ray of light in the heaven, representing the column (the obelisk), he has a beatitude experience (the disk-shaped columns), he brings information into the terrestrial world (the lightning, the thunder – symbolizing the pole axe) and matter is recast (by the usage of fire). The sky column is possibly a physical representation of a prayer addressed to divinity, a spiritual travel that invites man to make steps in the chosen direction. Another interpretation could be the representation of the road that man has to go on, after death, without deviating from his route, straight to the source, to God. „*Junelui bun/ Cică-n d-alb de răsărit/ Răsare un soare strălucit / Da nu-i soare strălucit/Ci-i un pom mândru-n florit*”. [“*To the good young man/ It is said that in the east/ A golden sun rises/ But it is not a shiny sun/ But a beautiful blossoming tree*”].<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1972, pag. 48, apud S. Drăgoi, 1939, p.163.



**Fig. 6** Fire columns, wall painting, Voroneț monastery

### **The fir**

The Romanian people have always considered that the connection between man and plants is a mythical hetairism present in all the important phases of one's life: birth, wedding, death and also after death. Thus, we see how the man who died hard was put on the ground or on straws, in order to diminish his suffering, the child was offered to a fir when he was born and the child had to take care of that fir all his life, and if the child got sick, the parents went to the fir to ask for its help; when the child was a grown up and he/she was supposed to get married, he/she went to the fir to announce the news, the fir took part in the wedding, it was carried at the wedding by a fir-taker, it was put on the house, in order to protect the couple's home, and at the wedding, the funerary fir was used.

The fir is used in the Carpathian space as the double of man's life. It replaces in the tomb the young man whose body was not found, being dressed in good clothes and having an Orthodox icon on his chest. The destiny of the child is written on the top of the fir, and the life of the tree and of the human being are closely connected. When the young man asked a young lady to be his wife, he took a fir as his witness and, up to the wedding, it was decorated with tinsel, it hold the place of the groom for the girl. At death, it was carried to the house of the deceased, then it was included in the funerary convoy and "planted" on the tomb. When it was cut from the forest, people asked the fir for forgiveness and they told the tree the reason why they cut it. The simulacrum of the fir was the wedding column which had the elements of the

wedding on top of it, they had to be taken down during a ritual of climbing on the column: the scarf, the bota bag with wine and the basil, in order to be offered to the bride.

The fir is the cosmic tree that always appears in rituals connected to periodic agriculture activities, fixed and mobile celebrations and the cycle of life, in general. If his branches are oriented towards the ground, it is a sign of terrestrial life, a *life ax* that is also rendered through an ascending powerful column. When the tree has a horizontal column accompanied by birds and flowers and leaves, then it is a *perpetuation ax*. If the branches are oriented towards the sky on a falling column, then it is a *thanatic ax*. When it appears represented in the same register, both ascending and descending, it keeps the space between the sky and the earth not altered, thus maintaining *cosmic order*.

We have already seen that, once the cosmos appeared after striking Sky Waters with a rod, a tree full of light appears (the fir), having its roots deeply placed in the ground and its branches in the cosmos. Regarding the Romanian universe, the myth of forests and secular saint trees that dominate them is very much present, there are also cult relics with spiritual reminiscence. A special place is held by the fir, which is the tree model that concentrates inside it most of the spiritual activities that are connected to Romanian mythology, it is a cosmic tree *per se* and also a divine tree, a tree of life.

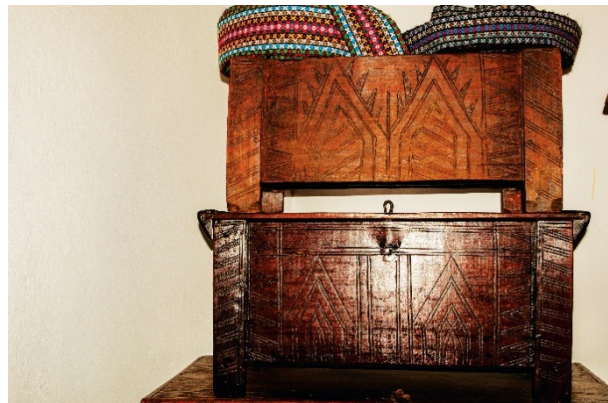
According to Romanian beliefs and customs, the *Cosmic Tree* is multiplied in its derived elements and substitutes, depending on the cycle of calendaristic activities and fixed and mobile religious celebrations over the year. As we have already mentioned, the fir is present at all major events in human life, like birth, as *the birth tree* (by connecting the baby with the fir that will be his/her brother for a lifetime), at wedding, as a *wedding tree* (it replaces the groom up to the moment when they get married), or at the death of a virgin or a young man (it replaces the bride or the groom and that is the moment when it becomes the simulacrum of the fir), *the wedding column* that is decorated on top of it with the signs of the wedding, like the scarf, the basil and the bota bag with wine. As a *funerary tree* placed near the head of the deceased, it had the role of helping the deceased person's soul to cross the Water of Saturday, as a *give-away tree* substituted by a fruit tree, as a *fertilizing tree* placed among fruit trees, as *armindeni*<sup>12</sup> *columns* decorated with icons and they had a protective role, also being *columns of the sky*.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Armindeni* = a celebration that is held every year on May 1<sup>st</sup>, it dates back to the Dacians and it is also known by people as "The Tree of May" or "The Day of Absynth", it is considered a celebration dedicated to the fertility of the soil.



**Fig. 7** Wooden keeves that have the scrawled symbol of the fir, Museum of Folk Customs, Humor



**Fig. 8** The tree of life on hope chests, Museum of Folk Customs, Humor

On top of the tree, it was written the destiny of the child or of the marriage. If the top of the tree grew beautifully and straight, so was the development of the child or marriage. Rendering the child to a sacred tree in order to protect him/her is a belief which comes from time immemorial when people believed that trees are beings with superior powers which can defeat demons.

„După mersul pomului  
Va fi mersul fătului;  
Dacă pomu mere bine  
Fătu crește și se ține,  
Dacă pomu nu mere,  
Fătu scade tăt și piere... ”<sup>13</sup>  
dies...”]

[”According to the life of the tree  
So the child will live;  
If the tree is good  
Then the child is good as well;  
If the tree is small  
Then the child becomes smaller and

Through its grandeur, the fir imposed respect and this is the reason why we see it as a tree of divine judgement:

„Brad în munte  
Brad în vânt  
Lângă bradu mare sfânt,  
Șade Petrea la pământ  
În funii de trei legat  
Gătat pentru giudecat.  
Și-n giuru-I șade gloată  
crowd  
Păcurari de giudecată... ”<sup>14</sup>

[”A fir in the mountains  
A fir in the wind  
Near the big saint tree  
Sits Petrea on the ground  
Being all tied up with ropes  
Ready to be taken to be judged.  
And around him, there is the  
Ready for the judgement...”]

On carpets, the tree of the deceased is carried in front of the funerary cortege, it is represented as a tree whose canopy is formed of *ginger bread* having in its vicinity *clouds* and *chairs* – solar thrones, as a symbol of fertility and *birds* – as a messenger of one’s soul in the cosmic zone.

*Ginger bread* actually represents the offerings – *prescuri*<sup>15</sup> or patties – offered in order to worship the memory of the deceased or ritually given under the first furrow from the beginning of the agricultural year. These patties had different forms on carpets: they looked like crenelles, restangles that were gathered on head and they sometimes had crosses, which show people’s belief in their existence as the centre of the Universe or having the shape of *prescură* which looks like a eight-petal flower.

---

<sup>13</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest , 1972, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> *Prescură* (pl.*prescuri*) = a rounded small piece of bread used by the Christian Orthodox church for the Holy Eucharist. It is usually prepared by a woman having a clean life, with good deeds and praying.





**Fig. 9** The tree with ginger bread, carpet, Mimi Castle, The Republic of Moldavia

*The wheel of fire* are often accompanied by ginger bread, they can also be found together with hooked rhombuses, the tree with sweet patties is actually a symbol of fertility.

The column of the sky offers support to the celestial vault, it is an *axis mundi* which appears in all ancient cultures and it has complex symbolism: the spindle supports the sky and also assures communication between sky and earth. *Axis mundi* is situated in the centre of the World, around it, man can talk to divine powers. Megalithic cultures have given birth to some megalithic columns which, in our country, can be seen in more Carpathian areas.

The image of the Tree of the World is presented during winter holidays, when Santa Claus comes and offers gifts near the beautifully decorated fir. According to N. Densușianu, Santa Claus is Old Saturn, regent of the Golden Age when the Tree of Life gave miraculous fruit to people. The image of Santa Claus coming in a sleigh pulled by reindeers, filled with gifts that he puts near the fir full of light and tinsel has its origin in the long-forgotten Golden Age when people were bright, they lived very many years and they did not have to work in order to obtain their food.

According to Densușianu, we find Saturn (the most important deity of Pelasgi) in Bucegi under the form of an old man with tresses and a bushy beard, carved in stone on the road which leads to Omu Peak. From the right temple, a woman springs and she reminds us of the myth of Athena's birth (also known as Minerva) from the head of Zeus. She is the goddess of wisdom and war.

After Uranus set the basis of the great Pelasgi Empire, he was followed in reign by his son Saturn, he was the one to instaurate the *Golden Age* on Earth.

According to some ancient sources, the Gets called Saturn "Zalmoxis", but the Greeks and the Romans called him Homo (The Man). In Romania, it is known even today as *Old Man*, *The Big Man*, *Santa Claus*.

The fir also has magical-religious valencies, just like there is the *church of firs* in the mountains, whose purpose is the marriage between a shepherd and a girl who marry against their parents' will. The church is in fact a small forest of firs planted in circle. Dan Oltean in *Religia dacilor [The Religion of the Dacians]* states that fir churches were formed of three concentric circles that were identical with the shape of the great rounded sanctuary (S7) from Sarmisegetuza Regia. „...căsătoria tinerilor daci avea loc tot la munte, în interiorul sanctuarului, căci numai așa se explica de ce majoritatea nedeilor din secolul trecut includeau momentul logodnei fără preot a tinerilor”. [“...The marriage between young Dacians also took place in the mountains, inside the sanctuary, this is how it can be explained that most nedei from the past century included the moment of the engagement between the young man and woman without the presence of the priest.”] <sup>16</sup>

Shepherds confessed to the fir and they used savin buds as their eucharist. "A long time ago, shepherds confessed their sins to trees (especially firs). They made a cross on the tree's crust (with an axe or a knife) and they confessed their sins in front of the cross, as if they had a priest in front of them, while they were making genuflections. Afterwards, they cut some slivers from the tree with an axe, and then they threw them away. According to the vow they made, if after a year, the tree would still be green or not, they considered that they had been forgiven or not for their sins. Shepherds claimed that this confession was even better than the one in front of a priest. Better, because they believed, probably, that they confessed directly to God, in the His representation on the fir". <sup>17</sup>

Iconography presents the fir under three aspects: as a *metaphor* of the youth of the mountains covered in their green ornaments, as a *sacred symbol* of the Carpathian ecosystem and as an *allegory* of the force of the Romanian territory in one's ascension towards the sky, of the immanent that goes up. He is also represented partially, as a fir small *twig* and the fir cone.

There are very many places and objects that the Romanian man marks with these symbols: he engraves the beams, the walls, he carves flutes, rods, tools, hope chests, he paints clay pots, their shape can be found on ring-shaped bread that is given as alms, known as *colaci*.

### **The Apple**

A substitute of the fir is *the Apple*, *the tree of life and of wisdom*, which dominates the heavenly landscape. It is the tree from which, according to the

---

<sup>16</sup> Dan Oltean, *Religia dacilor [The Religion of the Dacians]*, Saeculum Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 424.

<sup>17</sup> Traian Herseni, *Forme stravechi de cultura poporană românească [Ancient Forms of Romanian Folk Culture]*, Dacia Publishing House, 1977, p. 184.



Christian belief, Adam ate, this is the reason why the entire humanity is punished, but it is also the fruit tree that promises the divine reward of Heaven. Under it, there is a table with good food and God sits with the saints at the table, according to the righteous people that claim to have seen God during the nights when the sky opens.

The human body has two areas placed at its extremities that pulse in order to make energy enter these areas both ways (from top to bottom and the other way round). The first centre is placed on top of the head, while the second is in the area of perineum, where there is a set of eight cells which stay unchanged from birth until death. They are the only cells of this type, because the rest of the cells change at intervals between 5 and 7 years. Between these two poles, an energetic tube is created and it supplies the human being during every moment of life. From these eight cells, bodies develop themselves, no matter the evolution phase (plant, animal, human being), in a radial way, in all directions, starting from this cellular bow, this model being kept up to 32 cells. Starting from here, cells become asymmetrical and a sphere is formed up to the moment when it becomes a tor (a shape that gathers in itself towards the centre and it opens up towards the exterior and also towards the interior).

This tor looks very much like an apple which is hollowed in the middle and it has the name of morula. From this phase, through which all living creatures pass, the members of different species start to differentiate themselves. Maybe this is the reason why iconography remarks the fact that the tree of knowledge of good and bad was an apple tree, because in a specific moment of our lives, we all are similar to an apple. It is the shape that appears in the model of the Genesis, a unique shape that was called by Arthur Young *the chart of the seven colours from mathematics* (there are seven regions that have all the same size and that perfectly cover the surface of the tor). The tor shape can be found in various life aspects – man's heart has 7 muscles that compose a tor and that pumps up in 7 directions. This structure is at the basis of all forms of life, of celestial bodies – planets, stars, galaxies.

The apple has, it seems, an extraordinary importance in the architecture of the living and it has created an archetype that only science can now demystify. In our fairy tales, the apple appears as a primordial centre out of which everything was born, having the Sun as the father and the Earth as the Saint Mother, the Polar Star is our Emperor, the Earth is a silver island with a gold axle, Fire is the emperor and Water is the empress, in the middle there is a mountain on which God sits, in the centre there is a fountain, the sky is supported by 7 pylons, guarded by 7 angels. The Earth is surrounded by the Water of Saturday, which is the river bed of all waters, there where it is the Fortress of God and the Red Apple. All the waters of the world get out of the Red Apple, they spread in the world and they return to it. The sea in which the Red Apple can be found is the Black Sea.

*“Under the earth, there is an apple, the red apple. Under it, there is the fish which holds the Earth. If the fish moved a little bit and the apple fell down in the water, peace, there would be no earth! That apple tree says that it has apples, but who can reach them! Nobody on earth can travel up to that point! It says that all the waters that are on this planet and they run, they all move from sunset to sunrise, all of them have their origin under that apple tree, they spread all over the world and they also return there. That sea where the apple tree is found is actually called the Black Sea“.*<sup>18</sup>

The apple tree is the axle of the Earth, it is there where the Navel of the World is. The tree is Axis Mundi. It goes along the pole on the vertical until it meets the horizontal line determined by waters; it is known that in Heaven, from the Tree of the World, the four rivers that fertilize the entire world spring: The Tigris, the Euphrates, Gihon and Fison. On the right and on the left of the Tree of Life, there are Adam and Eve. In many cases, in carols, the Sun is considered the fruit of the Tree of the World.

In fairy tales, Făt-Frumos set free Ileana Sânziana from the **Other Realm** after he killed the 7-head dragon and, in wonder regarding what he had seen, wished to bring back something from the novelties of that world. After smitting thrice with his whip, palaces were transformed in a golden apple, brought by him into our human world. It is made of gold because it becomes materialized in all its beauty during the Golden Age, positioned in the northern, polar area, that the Romanian pre-Christian belief considers to be Primordial. Planting a tree when a child is born or when the bride is brought home makes a temple out of the man's house, a temple subordinate to the tree (there are no better deeds than sowing and growing a tree).

By using his whip, Făt-Frumos transforms the palaces of dragons into apples; once he reached home again by using the whip again, he brought them back to their initial form and he set free his sisters that lived in those palaces.

In another story, because he wanted to get married, Făt-Frumos disguised himself as a gardener, but, despite all these, the Emperor's daughter chose him among all the suitors of high rank, throwing an apple in his head. After he saw his daughter's choice, the Emperor chased him away from the palace and they went to live in a hut that was dirty outside, but it was full of gold inside, that was the place that made the connection with a subteranian palace. The kingdom was attacked by a neighbour thrice, Făt-Frumos set it free each time, and the emperor discovered its true identity and gave him the throne.

The choice that the Emperor's daughter made by throwing the apple represents the recognition of its essence, the awakening of the hero and the setting of all future events, her gesture started a spiritual endeavour. The

---

<sup>18</sup> El. Niculiță-Voronca, *Datinile și credințele poporului român adunate și așezate în ordine mitologică [The Customs and beliefs of the Romanian People Gathered and Ordered Mythologically]*, Saeculum Publishing House I.O., Bucharest, 2008, vol. II, p. 306.

Emperor contributed to Făt-Frumos's initiation by trotting away from paternal care. Neither the gesture of the Emperor, nor the hut are what they might seem at first sight.

Spân represents an identification of Harap-Alb with *The Apple of the World*, what represents its recognition as a *Pole*. The daughter of The Red Emperor put three twigs of apple in her hair and Alive Water and Dead Water and she managed to remake his sanguineous flux by vegetal flux, thus reviving him. This fact would be translated by creating an allegiance of a secondary tradition (the daughter of the Red Emperor represents the Atlantis tradition) to a *Primordial* tradition represented by Harap-Alb (the Hyperborean tradition).

In the fairy tale Harap-Alb, the hero must bring twigs of apple and Alive Water and Dead water from the world beyond this human existence, meaning the place where mountains smash their peaks.

These twigs of apple have magical powers and, as we know, the daughter of the Red Emperor will revive Făt-Frumos by using them. They hold the secret of knowledge, of health and of life. In the rituals of dendrological magic all over the world, there is the custom of hitting people, animals, land, trees with a branch, stick in order to transfer them health, fertility, life from the plant towards the hit one. In the games of winter celebrations, "the old men" and "the ugly ones", they struck things by using their twisted rods, the purpose being the transfer of magic power, life and fertility from the vegetal world.

The apple tree has a major importance regarding the Romanians, because it is the tree of life from the real of paradise (the cosmic mountain) situated in the vicinity of the river with the eater of life, this is why the apple twigs brought by Harap-Alb have magical powers.

*"Then, he showed me the river and the Water of Life, clear as crystal is (...) And on the two shores of the river, the tree of life grows..."* (Apocalypse of John, according to the vision of the prophet Ezechiel).

*"The frequent meeting of the water of life, the tree of life and the cosmic mountain is normal, because they are elements having a similar mythical-symbolic essence, they are part of the same sacred, surreal area, which can be the Afterlife, the Kingdom of Death, Paradise or the Centre of the World".<sup>19</sup>*

The Golden Apple is destined to be contemplated, self-sufficient through its beauty, just like the fir, the oak. When its destiny in the Golden Age was fulfilled, the apple was substituted with a fruit that was good to be eaten, it is obvious its residual character towards the golden apple, which also has it as an archetype. The spreading of the seeds from the tree is a propagation of the seeds of knowledge from the Biblical Tree.

---

<sup>19</sup> A. Oişteanu, *Grădina de dincolo. Zoosophia. Comentarii mitologice [The Garden from Beyond. Zoosophia. Mythological Commentaries]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iaşi, 2012, p.141.

In the fairy tale "The Golden Hen", God transformed the Golden Tree which invites to deep meditation only through observation and contemplation, into a fruit apple tree whose seed should be spread in the entire world by both good and bad people, because all, through their own effort, should reach higher phases of consciousness. The Golden Bird with golden chicken, on the top of this Tree, was transformed by God in the constellation the Hen (Pleiades), in order to be eternally contemplated by people. This fact show us once again that the autochthonous pre-Christian context was Primordial.

The *moji*<sup>20</sup> from the Apuseni Mountains also have a legend that connects the Mountain Găina with the golden hen that had its nest with golden eggs on its top. It was, in fact, *Vălva băilor*<sup>21</sup> which, being hunted by the locals, left the area of Roşia Montana, taking all the gold from the area.



**Fig. 10** The Tree of Life represented on the houses from Bukovina Under the form of grape vine, the eye of God, vesica piscis

<sup>20</sup> Moţ (pl.moţi) = autochthonous inhabitant of the central part of the Apuseni Mountains in Romania.

<sup>21</sup> Vălva bailor = according to folk beliefs, it was a spirit that guided people towards finding gold, it showed them the place where they could find it and it also warned them regarding a future event.



**Fig. 11** The Tree of Life represented on the houses from Bukovina

According to Traian Herseni, the Romanians have always had a cult of the apple established on other principles than the ones of the fir and the oak. The people that were poor and shepherds frequently ate wild apples, and their tameability has led to the formation of the tree-totem that was later transformed into a sacred tree. The apple often appears in Romanian *colinde* where there is also the central idea of the ceremonial fable creation, but also as choruses which are nothing else than ritualic formulae of incantation:

*Sub cel roșu răsărit,/ Mândri-s pomii de-nfloriți,/ Mărule cu flori dalbe.  
Under that red sunrise,/ The blossomed trees stand in beauty/ Apple tree with white flowers.*

**Sorcova**, a Romanian folk custom from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, whose object of mythical-magical translation is a branch that is in bud or a *sorcovă* made of a branch decorated with paper flowers, an allusion to the green of the tree in bud. Inclined towards the person who is *sorcovită*, it plays the role of a magical branch that translates good wishes of youth and health, just like a spell.

**The pine cone** is an expression of the renewal of the world, representing the main symbolism of the tree of life. Furthermore, we also find the **grapevine branch** which, together with the snake, is one of the most frequently met representations on the rod of shepherds, on funerary stones and on crosses. Another presence is the **flower** which keeps the promise of endless life, permanent youth, saving wisdom, miraculous healing, of saving physical power, it sends our thoughts towards the initial paradise. Together with the fir, the grapevine and the flower, we also find *the apple*, as an expression of the nostalgia of paradise-like spring.

**The root of life** appears in a variety of stylistic forms on a large scale on the carpets from Moldavia. Simple or associated with the motif of the fir,

of the spike, of the birds – the *beet* or the *root of life* is a hymn to the vitality of nature and of creative forces.

**The full pot** is always connected to the plant of Life or with fertility, the Tree of Life being sometimes replaced with the grapevine which gets out of the pot.

*”The beginning and the end of the road are in the tree of life. It is also there, day and night, the deep and the high, the past and the future. The gate of falling into history, just like the one of getting out of history. It is, maybe, more than just an allegory of transcendence: between the zenith and the nadir, one can go both ways, and on this path, the ages of the world are different”.*<sup>22</sup>

### **The Maple Tree**

A.Oișteanu has an extended study regarding the maple tree (1989). This tree is also called field maple or simply maple. The author tells us that when a church is built, an arch (Noah), a construction, this is usually done in a place where a man died, as we will see in the legend of the Oak from Borzești according to which Ștefan cel Mare built a church where a friend of his from childhood died in an accident near an oak. According to the Moldavian legend of the flood, God told Noah that, in order to finish the ark which fell down because of the antichrist, Noah must strike the first tree with his axe, make a maple *semantron* and to use it at the root of the maple. Around the maple, the devil has no power, this is the reason why the maple is called *Kill it with the Semantron*.

The great sacred religious constructions are based on legends having the same mythic background: a hermit, a priest, a monk, in order to establish the place of the church to be built by a ruler, uses a bow and an arrow and from the wood of the tree where the arrow gets stuck, usually a maple, the altar is done.

When the ruler or Noah has a cut on his finger when the hermit (the magus) realizes the made mistake – it is either the place which is not proper, or the building is done from the wood of another tree -this is the reason why the hermit puts his ear on the chosen maple and he hears the *semantron* at it root. The ruler destroys the construction and makes a new one on the chosen place and using the wood of the preferred maple.

*”Just like in the Romanian legend of the flood and in the legends involving Ștefan the Great building churches, the role of the maple and the role of the *semantron* is transposed, even if this time, we are talking about its divine prototype: the *semantron* from the sky or the *semantron* of God is similar to the one on earth, just like the one from the church and having the same purpose (everything that is evil disappears and the devil can not show its face anymore). Of course, it is a big *semantron* heard only by the good people that believe in God, without sins or extraordinary people. The magic gesture*

---

<sup>22</sup> C. Prut, *Calea răătăcită [The Lost Path]*, Fundația INTERART Triade, Timișoara, 2012, p. 88.

*of the man and of the god are complementary and they take place in the same time and in the same place. The maple – on its place and from its wood, the church will be built – is a symbol of the cosmic tree that marks the Axis and the Centre of the World. The arrow or the sematron of man, on the one hand, and thunder or the sematron of the deity, on the other hand, meet in the same point, the only place where creation can start, the building of the monastery (imago mundi). Any other place, not established and not chosen in this manner proves to be not suitable, not a single construction can pass the test of time in this way”.*<sup>23</sup>

According to Romanian traditions, when a house is built, it is an evil sign for the owners, if the stonemason gets hurt when building the house, the future inhabitants will get sick and die. Noah got hurt before building the ark, it is a warning sign regarding a made mistake having a magical-ritual nature, and the one that commits it is a dendro-daimon or a forest daimon, a Mother of the forest.

A belief from Banat says that: *”...in the forest, there is a supernatural being that supervises the trees, it makes sure they grow, it defends them of the wrongdoers. It is beneficial for the ones who cut down trees that respect the laws of the forest, but the ones that are bad spirits and enter the woods and they try to destroy it, the being attacks them, by throwing branches on them and breaks their hands, it makes them cut their own legs with their axes...”*<sup>24</sup>

R. Vulcănescu considers that the basis of rising a sacred construction, monastery complexes is represented by paleoChristian confraternities of monks that were masons/stonebreakers that had the labyrinth as a ritual sign or a heraldic symbol.

The Dacian ascetic priests were called *pleistoi* in antiquity, what would be translated as the founders or the ones that founded cities. These priest, in order to create a sacred building, sent arrows to the clouds in order to chase atmospheric demons, but also to the ground to make earthly and subteranian demons disappear. In order to set the basis of a new centre, a ritualic hunt took place and it was done by throwing an arrow, a spear, a rod.

*”In some areas (in Bihor County for example), a simulated hunt took place by using a bow and arrows or by throwing a bat or a stick. The place where one of these objects fell was considered the one where the future village*

---

<sup>23</sup> Ion Muşlea, Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Tipologia folclorului. Din răspunsurile la chestionarele lui B. P. Haşdeu [The Typology of Folklore. From the Answers to the Questionnaires of B.P.Haşdeu]*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1970, pp. 138-142.

<sup>24</sup> Emilian Novacoviciu, Ecătărina Novacoviciu, *Din comoara Banatului [From Banat's Treasure]*, Ed. Folclor, Oraviţa, 1926, p. 59.

would be founded, thus an oracle animal was symbolically killed in that area".<sup>25</sup>

Establishing the centre from where creation spreads was done by digging a gun into the trunk, the root of a tree or in the ground, by listening to the established tree, by hitting the wood of the tree with an axe or a hammer (semantron), by organizing a ritualic hunt, by throwing the hatchet.

The establishment of a village or a house was done by digging the ground and putting a picket there, it became the centre around which the house or the village was built. This gesture immitates the founding of a world by the Bosom Friend, he hit the primordial waters with a rod, thus the earth appeared. Man (Noah, Manole the Master) did not do anything else but to immitate him.

*"He was a great man/ and he took a big axe/ and he went into the big forest/ and he cut down a big tree (or a big maple)/ and he made a large monastery/ [...]with nine doors, with nine are".<sup>26</sup>*

Noah made a semantron out of a maple's wood that is also used for building the ark that is periodically destroyed by the antichrist. *"Then Noah (...) made a maple semantron (...) and he started to use it; and the more he used the semantron, the faster the wooden parts put themselves back, they had been spread all around by the devil".<sup>27</sup>*

The fact that the semantron is used in churches had its origin in this legend which is documented in a paper from 1647. And the tree which was hit with an arrow by Daniil Sihastru, in order to build Putna Monastery, the tree is also a maple. Putna, according to George Coşbuc, is raised on the place of a former old temple of another saint maple. And Alexandru-Vodă Lăpuşneanu built Slatina Monastery on the place where a maple grew and where the hermit had seen several lights on Sunday and on the occasion of important religious celebrations.

*"On Christmas morning/ A young man was born for me,/ A young man like God,/ Young and pure/ And he has clothes,/ Clothes made of cotton,/ He's dressed in white silk,/ His cradle is made of maple/ The wind bows and swings Him.../ God grew and grew,/ He did a great thing for me:/ He made the sky and the earth/ he made the sky in two days,/ And the earth in nine days".<sup>28</sup>*

---

<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Trebnici, Ion Ghinoiu, *Demografie și etnografie [Demography and Ethnography]*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1986, p. 304.

<sup>26</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițional românească [Order and Chaos. Myth and Magic in Romanian Traditional Culture]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p. 128 apud Cristea Sandu Timoc, *Cântece bătrânești și doine [Old Songs and Doine]*, Ed. pentru Literatură, Bucharest, 1967)

<sup>27</sup> Tudor Pamfile, *Cerul și podoabele lui după credințele poporului român [The Sky and Its Ornaments According to the Beliefs of the Romanian People]*, The Romanian Academy, 1915, p.130.

<sup>28</sup> Alexiu Viciu, *Colinde din Ardeal. Datini de Crăciun și credințe populare [Carols from Ardeal. Customs for Christmas and Folk Beliefs]*, Bucharest, 1914, pag. 26.



Even if they are Christianized, some carols reflect the cosmogonical features of the maple. The reviving of the used cosmos was done together with the birth of Jesus that recreates the world around an axis which is central, the maple, in which He is swung and, later on, the cradle is made of maple.

*“The huge sea is coming,/ but it has no shores,/ what does it bring on its waters?/ It brings pines/ with their trucks;/ Among pines and firs,/ A small cradle/ made of maple.”*

*“From the sand of the sea,/ At the border of the country,/ Born, growing,/ Three maple trees are showing/ Tall and yellowish”.*<sup>29</sup>

The maple seems to be a saint tree under which young men were trained and initiated, leaders received their ointment under these trees, after killing their predecessors, the old men of the village judged people under the maple, brotherhoods were formed under this tree, people confessed under it etc. The maple is the residency of the Demiurge, of Baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

In fairy tales and carols, the maple is the residency of the Demiurge, of a God, or of the main Christian characters: Mary and Baby Jesus are sitting near two golden maples, in their shadow. The hawk that steals *“The cloth of the Son,/ the belt of God”* and makes its nest in the maple is cursed or killed, and the nest is destroyed and the maples are cut down.

If a sick person die under a consecrated tree, one easily finds the ladder-tree to limb towards heavens.

In Romanian legends, the maple is blessed by Saint Sisoës to stand in front of the church and, through the sound made by the semanstron made of maple wood, people gather at church. *“Since then -says a legend -the maple is considered a blessed tree, saint and honest, without it, no Liturgy can be held inside the church”.*<sup>30</sup>

The maple is frequently represented as a funerary tree in mythical Romanian folklore. The maple appears with: *the top towards the sky,/ the feet on the seas,/ its shadow is round,/ its leaves are small*. Here, according to some formalities from the book of the living, the sky on which the traveler goes to the sky is descended.

The maple as a funerary tree has a double hypostasis: the relationship deceased-maple (either a maple tree grows out of the dead person’s body, or one is placed in a maple tree or in a cradle made of maple) and the postume resurrection of the deceased.

<sup>29</sup> Alexiu Viciu, *La luncile soarelui. Antologie a colindele laice [On the Meadows of the Sun. A Collection of Secular Carols]*, Ed. pentru Literatură, Bucharest, 1964, p. 167, 275

<sup>30</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițional românească [Order and Chaos. Myth and magic in Romanian Traditional Culture]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p. 140.

Apollonios from Rhodos wrote in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. regarding the funerary rituals practiced by the people from Caucasus on the eastern shore of the Black Sea: “[...] *They lived there in strings/ Many trees with graceful branches and also huge willows/ Where all dead people were hung from the top branches/ With ropes. And today in Colchida, there is a huge iniquity/ To burn the deceased on stakes; it is not appropriate to put them in the ground/ To bury men and to put a funerary stone above them./ In exchange, corpses are put in oxen skins that have just been stripped off,/ [...] This is the tradition back there*”.<sup>31</sup>

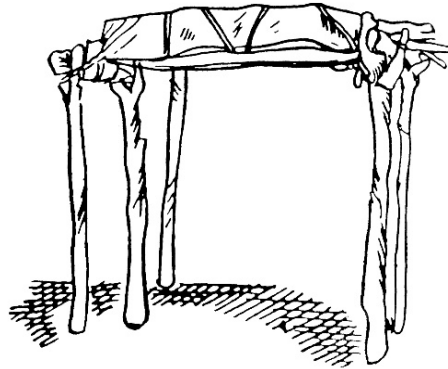


Fig. 12 Corpse exhibited on a platform by the Northern-American Indians, according to A. Oișteanu

This funeral practice of people connected to trees gave people the hope that they would come back to life just like the trees that revive every year.

Mircea Eliade, Petre Culianu remarked the fact that moving in the air *”in flesh and bones”* or only with the spirit and some shaman features of the Greek ecstatics would be due to the contact that the Greeks had with the Thracian and Scythian civilisations, once Greek colonies appeared near the Black Sea. The Greek priests served the northern god Apollo hyperborean, Orpheus is thracian, Abaris comes flying from Hyperborea, Leonin from Athens was sent in order to cure people in Leuce Island from the Mouthes of Istru, Medeea was a missionary priestess that introduced the cult of the goddess Artemis hyperborean (Bendis) in Greece.

The symbolic features of the maple tree are: it is the place where the god has its residence, Axis Mundi, a well-known tree, considered for judgement, the maple tree makes evil spirits disappear, it gathers people to get

---

<sup>31</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițional românească [Order and Chaos. Myth and magic in Romanian Traditional Culture]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p.153 apud Argonauticele, III.

o church (the semantron) or when people are in a good mood (the flute), it charms fairies, it gathers the three saint virgins around the maple fire, on Saint George's Day -the branches of field maple protect the household, people and animals of bad spirits, women who disenchant using them as magical wand, they use the maple stick to make spirits of love come or go.

Maple flowers are used for the onest hat suffer from love, in the decoction from field maple shell, children bathe, no matter the illness they suffer from, the maple leaves which decorate houses, churches, tombs are used against thunder, they are picked in the day of Jesus's Rising in order to have a purifying role, when the maple becomes ladder for the souls of the deceased. The celebration of Jesus's Rising takes place 40 days after Easter, it is a dy with a great religious and also funerary significance.

In laments, but also in funerary songs for the deceased, we find the description of the path that the dead person has to go on -one should not got o the left, where there are thieves, but towards the right where, at the fountain under the maple tree, the Virgin Mary crosses out one's name from the notebook of the living and writes one's name down among the deceased. From heaven, two angels descend a maple ladder that is meant for the deceased toc limb towards Christ where one is watered with white wine in order for one to forget about the white world. During this travel, one is neither alive, nor dead, neither in the white world or the black one, wondering around in a labyrinth and one can get out of it only if one deserves it.

What is important is the world created around the maple, it appears: "Having the peaks oriented towards the sky/ The feet on seas/ Having a rounded shadow/ And a small leaf..."<sup>32</sup>

And also in some fairy tales, the heroes go up to the heavens on a miraculous tree. In the fairy tale written by Petre Ispirescu, *Piciul, Ciobănașul și pomul cel fără căpătâi* [*The Kid, the Shepherd and the tree without a Purpose*], the hero, in order to reach for the sky, asks to be given nine corners of *prescură*, nine glasses of wine and nine axes, a typical request in order to travel to the World from beyond. The hero places the nine axes on the truck of the tree, as he goes up on it, thus forming a ladder with nine steps (levels).

We can see the motif of the ladder in the burial tree under the form of some cookies made of dough together with other funerary symbols: the cross, the angel, the bird symbolizing the soul, the woman, the man. In other funeral songs or ballads, according to A. Oișteanu, from the corpse of the decesead (young men, children, Ana – the wife of *Meșterul Manole*), two maple trees grow, miraculously rising towards the sky, the child of Ana does not die, but it is perpetually swinging on top of the maple tree. In *Miorița* as well, the

---

<sup>32</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițional românească* [*Order and Chaos. Myth and Magic in the Romanian Traditional Culture*], Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p. 143.

shepherd does not want to be buried “*Pe mine pământ nu puneți/ numai dalbă (sfântă) gluga mea,/ fluierul după curea*” [“Don’t put soil on top of me/ only my white (saint) hood, / the fistula after the belt].<sup>33</sup>

This presentation at the surface, in branches of maple tree or in the cradle made of maple wood, exhibited higher than the ground is an archaic funerary rite which supposes being buried at height, on wooden platforms, in trees of the deceased that were placed in thick wool fabric. The shepherd from *Miorița* also wants his fistula and his hood (*sarica*) to be hung in the maple tree, but “*Brazi și pălinași/ I-am avut nuntași.*” [“Firs and maple trees/ Were my marriage guests”]; in the case of the versions in which the shepherd is not buried, the two trees accompany him, and in another version, if he was buried in the ground, he had a maple cross near his head.

“... in many cases, beliefs and customs which are still alive in specific conservative regions of Europe (among them, we must always mention the Balkans and Romania) reveal layers of culture which are more archaic than the represented ones, to be more specific, by the “classical” Greek and Roman mythology. This fact is particularly obvious for everything that is connected to the magical-religious customs and behaviour of hunters and shepherds. ... Systematic research in the field of Romanian or Balkanic paleoethnology is still to be conducted; it has been proven that a specific number of cultural pre-Indo-European and paleo-Indo-European elements have been preserved better than anywhere else in Europe...”<sup>34</sup>

### Short conclusions!

Man invested the Tree of Life with mythical functions, but especially with divine ones, choosing it as a transfer bridge between the human world and the celestial one. The tree was the element that created balance and gave the hope of regeneration and immortality, it maintained cosmic order or it was the representative of creative forces and an expression of the renewal of the world. The archetype of the Tree of Life is present even today in all the forms of social, cultural and religious manifestation, which gives us a key for decoding its symbolism which seems to deeply live in the human DNA.

### List of illustrations:

**Fig. 1** The Tree of Life and a Mother Goddess on a bronze fibula, middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century – middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Ungheni, Argeș, The Museum of Argeș County, Pitești  
**Fig. 2** Griffons on the blazon of Moldavia (detail), the tower of the belfry, Three Hierarchs Church, Iași

<sup>33</sup> Adrian Fochi, *Miorița. Tipologie, circulație, geneză, texte*, Ed. Acad. R.P.R., București, 1964, p. 565.

<sup>34</sup> Mircea Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis la Genghis Han*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1995, p. 141,

**Fig. 3** Palmette on the interior window of Humor Monastery built in 1530

**Fig. 4** Troiță, Costești, Hunedoara

**Fig. 5** Cross placed at crossroads, The Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, Cluj

**Fig. 6** Fire column, wall painting, Voroneț Monastery

**Fig. 7** Wooden keeves that have the scrawled symbol of the fir, Museum of Folk Customs, Humor

**Fig. 8** The tree of life on hope chests, Museum of Folk Customs, Humor

**Fig. 9** The tree with ginger bread, carpet, Mimi Castle, The Republic of Moldavia

**Fig. 10** The Tree of Life represented on the houses from Bukovina, under the form of grape vine, the eye of God, vesica piscis

**Fig. 11** The Tree of Life represented on the houses from Bukovina

**Fig. 12** Corpse exhibited on a platform by the Northern-American Indians, according to A. Oișteanu

All permission granted

### Bibliography:

**Andrić, Stanko**, *Vinkovci u srednjem vijeku*. Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za Povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2007.

**Barral I Altet, Xavier**, *Protiv romanike? Esej o pronađenoj prošlosti*, Zagreb: IPU, 2009.

**Basić, Ivan**, "O pokušaju ujedinjenja zagrebačke i splitske crkve u 13. stoljeću." *Pro tempore* 3 (2006): 25–43.

Bedenko, Vladimir, "Mons Gradyz iuxta Zagrabiam", *Historijski zbornik* 44 (1991): 3–17.

**Brunšmid, Josip**, "Kameni spomenici Hrvatskog narodnog muzeja u Zagrebu, part II", *VHAD N. S.* 12 (1912): 127–197.

**Budak, Neven**, "Zagrebački biskup Stjepan II, suvremenik Tome Arhiđakona" In *Toma Arhiđakon i njegovo doba*, edited by Mirjana Matijević-Sokol and Olga Perić, 153 – 158, Split: Književni krug, 2004.

**Cepetić, Maja**, *Biskupski posjedi Dubrava, Ivanić i Čazma u 12. i 13. stoljeću: teritorijalna organizacija, naselja i spomenici*, PhD Thesis, Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 2015.

**Cepetić, Maja; Goss, Vladimir P.**, "A Note on the Rose Window in Čazma and on the Presence of the Royal Workshops in Medieval Slavonia", *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* III/37 (2010): 179–187.

**Deanović, Ana et al.**, *Zagrebačka katedrala*, Zagreb: Globus and Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1988.

**Dobronić, Lelja**, *Biskupski i kaptolski Zagreb*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1991.

**Dujmović Danko; Jukić, Vjekoslav**, "The "Koloman Renaissance" in North Western Croatia – An Unfinished Project", *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* III/37 (2010): 171-182.

**Engel, Pal**, *Realm of St. Stephen: a History of Medieval Hungary*, London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001.

**Evans, Edward Payson**, *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Architecture*. London: W. Heinemann, 1896.

- Ghisleberti, Carla**, "I legami culturali e stilistici tra la scultura architettonica federiciana dell'Italia meridionale e il mondo cistercense." In *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen*, edited by William Tronzo, 41-62, Washington: NGW-Stud Hist Art, 1994.
- Goss, Vladimir P.**, "Bishop Stjepan II and Herceg Koloman and the Beginnings of the Gothic in Croatia" *Hortus artium medievalium* 13/1 (2007): 211-223.
- Goss, Vladimir P.** (ed.), *Stotinu kamenčića izgubljenog raja*. Zagreb: Arheološki muzej u Zagrebu, 2007.
- Goss, Vladimir P.**, "The Battle of Cathedrals: or how Zagreb almost Became an Archbishopric in the 13<sup>th</sup> century" In *Medioevo : l'Europa delle cattedrali: atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Parma, 19-23 settembre 2006*, edited by Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, 146-154, Milano: Electa, 2007.
- Goss, Vladimir P.**, "Renesansa 12. stoljeća i Hrvatska" in *Renesansa i renesanse u umjetnosti Hrvatske, Zbornik Dana Cvita Fiskovića 2*, edited by Predrag Marković, Jasenka Gudelj, 417-426, Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2008.
- Goss, Vladimir P.**, *Četiri stoljeća europske umjetnosti 800 – 1200, pogled s jugoistoka*, Zagreb: Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, 2010.
- Goss, Vladimir P. and Jukić, Vjekoslav**, "Medvedgrad – Ócsa – Spiš, Some Stylistic Consideration." *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* III/34 (2007): 295-308.
- Goss, Vladimir P.; Vichelja Matijašić, Marina**, "Some Observations on the Chapel at Medvedgrad." *Starohrvatska prosvijeta* III/33 (2006): 165-185.
- Kahn, Deborah**, "The Engoulant: Development, Symbolic Meaning and Wit." In *Ex quadris lapidibus. La pierre et sa mise en oeuvre dans l'art medieval*, edited by Yves Gallet, 313-322. Turnhout: Brepols, cop. 2011.
- Klaić, Nada**, *Medvedgrad i njegovi gospodari*. Zagreb: Globus, 1987.
- Klaić, Nada**, *Povijest hrvata u srednjem vijeku*. Globus, Zagreb, 1990.
- Kocijanić, Juraj**, *Zagrebačka katedrala (handwriting)*. Zagreb, 1946.
- Kontler, László**, *Povijest Mađarske*, Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2007.
- Krčelić, Baltazar Adam**, *Historiarum cathedralis ecclesiae Zagradiensis*. Zagreb: Institut za suvremenu povijest, 1994.
- Kukuljević-Sakcinski, Ivan**, *Događaji Medvedgrada*. Zagreb, 1854.
- Kukuljević-Sakcinski, Ivan**, *Nadpisi sredovječni i novovjeki*. Zagreb, 1891.
- Lukšić, Tugomir and Reberski, Ivanka (ed.). *Sveti trag: devetsto godina umjetnosti zagrebačke nadbiskupije*. Zagreb: Muzejsko-galerijski centar : Institut za povijest umjetnosti : Zagrebačka nadbiskupija, 1994.
- Mariani, Maria Stella Caló**, *L'arte del duecento in Puglia*. Torino: Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino, 1984.
- Marosi, Ernő**, *Die Anfänge der Gotik in Ungarn*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó; 1984.
- Miletić, Drago; Valjato-Fabris, Marina**. *Kapela Sv. Filipa i Jakova na Medvedgradu*. Zagreb: [s. n.], 1987.
- Porter, Artur K.**, *Lombard Architecture, vol. 4*. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1967.
- Rački, Franjo** (ed.); **Toma Arhidakon**, *Historia Salonitana*. Zagreb: in taberna Libraria eiusdem societatis typographicae 1894.
- Raffay, Endre**: *Esztergom, Vértesszentkereszt*. Újvidék, 2006.
- Ragusa, Isa**, "Porta patet vitae sponsus vocat intro venite and the Inscriptions of the Lost Portal of the Cathedral of Esztergom." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 43 Bd., H. 4 (1980): 345-351.

**Smičiklas, Tadija** (ed). *Codex Diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae Vol. III*. Zagreb: HAZU, 1905.

**Smičiklas, Tadija** (ed). *Codex Diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae Vol. IV*. Zagreb: HAZU, 1906.

**Smičiklas, Tadija** (ed). *Codex Diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae Vol. VI*. Zagreb: HAZU, 1908.

**Stanojev, Jermina** (ed). *Monatur [MOHATYP]*. Novi Sad: Muzej Vojvodine, 2013.

**Stanojev, Nebojša**, *Arača – crkve, nekropola, manastir*, Novi Sad: Muzej Vojvodine, 2004.

**Stošić, Josip** "Crkva sv. Marije Magdalene u Čazmi." In *Čazma u prošlom mileniju*, edited by Josip Pandurić and Nino Škrabe, 69-72. Zagreb: Disput, 2001.

**Štrk, Vjekoslav**, "O novim nalazima sakralne arhitektonske plastike u Čazmi." *Muzejski vjesnik 13* (1990): 24-29.

**Štrk, Vjekoslav**, "Arheološka istraživanja povijesne urbane cjeline Čazme u 1993. godini." *Muzejski vjesnik 16* (1993): 25-40.

**Štrk, Vjekoslav**, "Povijesna kronologija Čazme (1094–1606)." In *Čazma u prošlom mileniju*, edited by Josip Pandurić and Nino Škrabe, 21-50. Zagreb: Disput, 2001.

**Štrk, Vjekoslav**, "O problemu vremena i mjesta ukopa slavonskog Hercega Kolomana u Čazmi." *Rusan, časopis za književnost, kulturu i druga društvena zbivanja Matice hrvatske Bjelovarsko – bilogorske županije 1-2* (2006): 101-106.

**Takács, Imre** (ed). *Pannonia Regia*. Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 1994.

**Takács, Imre** (ed). *Paradisum plantavit: Bencés monostorok a középkori Magyarországon/ Benedictine monasteries in medieval Hungary/*. Pannonhalma: Pannonhalmi Bencés Főapátság, 2001.

**Takács, Imre**, "The French Connection – On the Courtenay Family and Villard de Honnecourt a propos of the 13th century Incised Slab from Pilis Abbey." In *Künstlerische Wechselwirkungen in Mitteleuropa*, edited by Jiří Fajt and Markus Hörsch, 11-26. Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2006.

**Tkalčić, Ivan Krstitelj**, *Prvostolna crkva zagrebačka: nekoč i sada*. Zagreb: Knjigotiskara Karla Albrechta, 1885.

**Tkalčić, Ivan Krstitelj**, *Povijesni spomenici slob. kralj. grada Zagreba prijestolnice kraljevine Dalmatinsko-Hrvatsko-Slavonske, vol I*. Zagreb: Knjigotiskara Karla Albrechta, 1889.

**Tóth, Sándor**, *Román kori kőfaragványok a Magyar Nemzeti Galéria Régi Magyar Gyűjteményében*. Budapest, 2010.

**Valentić, Mirko**, *Kameni spomenici Hrvatske 13. – 19. stoljeća*. Zagreb: Povijesni muzej Hrvatske, 1969.

**Valentić, Mirko; Prister, Lada**, *Zbirka kamenih spomenika*. Zagreb: Hrvatski povijesni muzej, 2002.

**Wood Rendell, Alan**, *Physiologus a Metrical Bestiary of Twelve Chapters by Bishop Theobald* (translation), London: John and Edward Bumpus, 1928.

**Bernea, Ernest**, *Timpul la țăranul român*, Ed. „Bucovina” I.E. Torouțiu, București, 1940

**Blaa, Lucian**, *Spațiul mioritic*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1994

**Bugajewski Diana**, *Sub semnul lui Zalmoxis*, Ed. Artemis, București, 2010

**Buhociu, Octavian**, *Folclorul de iarnă, ziorile și poezia păstorească*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1979

- Busuioceanu, Alexandru**, *Zalmoxis sau mitul dacic în istoria și legendele spaniole*, Ed. Dacica, București, 2009
- Camilar, Mihai**, *Calendarul popular bucovinean*, Biblioteca „Miorița” Câmpulung Moldovenesc, 2001
- Coman, Mihai**, *Studii de mitologie*, Ed. Nemira, București, 2009
- Culianu, Ioan P.**, *Arborele gnozei. Mitologia gnostică de la creștinismul timpuriu la nihilismul modern*, Ed. Nemira, Trad. Popescu Corina, București, 1998
- Daba, Dumitru**, *Brâncuși*, Ed. de Vest, Timișoara, 1995
- Densușianu, Nicolae**, *Dacia preistorică*, Ed. Arhetip, București, 2002
- Dunăre, Nicolae**, *Ornamentică Tradițională Comparată*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1979
- Eliade, Mircea**, *Sacrul și profanul*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2013
- Eliade, Mircea**, *Comentarii la Legenda Meșterului Manole*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2004
- Eliade, Mircea**, *De la Zalmoxis la Genghis Han*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1995
- Eliade, Mircea**, Culianu Ioan P., *Dicționar al religiilor*, Ed. Humanitas, Trad. Baltag Cezar, București, 1993
- Fochi, Adrian**, Miorița. *Tipologie, circulație, geneză, texte*, Ed. Acad. R.P.R., București, 1964
- Ghinoiu, Ion**, *Mică enciclopedie de tradiții românești*, Ed. Agora, București, 2008
- Ghinoiu, Ion**, *Sărbători și obiceiuri românești*, Ed. Elion, București, 2006
- Gimbutas, Marija**, *Civilizația Marii Zeițe și sosirea cavalerilor războinici*, Ed. Lucrețius, București, 1997
- Grovei, Artur; Ciușanu Gh. F.**, Ediție de Nicolau Irina, Mihalache Carmen, *Credeințe și superstiții românești*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2013
- Graur, Doina**, *Avatarurile unui mit*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1983
- Guénon, René**, *Simboluri ale științei sacre*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1997
- Herseni, Traian**, *Forme stravechi de cultura poporană românească*, Ed. Dacia, 1977
- Istrățescu-Târgoviște, Cristian**, *Simbolistică, Ornament, Ritual în spațiul carpatic românesc (curs de antropologie aplicată)*, Ed. Brumar, Timișoara, 2003
- Kernbach, Victor**, *Miturile esențiale*, Ed. Științifică și enciclopedică, București, 1978
- Lavric, Dumitru**, *Hybernia Magica. Simbolistica sărbătorilor de iarnă*, Ed. Agata, Botoșani, 2007
- Lovinescu, Vasile**, *Creangă și Creanga de Aur*, Ed. Cartea Românească, București, 1969
- Lovinescu, Vasile**, *Interpretarea ezoterică a unor basme și balade populare românești*, Ed. Cartea Românească, București, 1993
- Lutic, Marcel**, *Timpul sacru. Sărbătorile de altă dată*, Ed. Kolos, Iași, 2009
- Lutic, Marcel**, *Mărțișorul. Mărturie arhaice*, Ed. Kolos, Iași, 2012
- Malearov, Simona; Ștefan, Camelia**, *Mobilier pictat Transilvănean*, Editura „Astra Museum”, Sibiu, 2012
- Marchiș, Ioan**, *Nodul dacic*, Ed. Eikon, Cluj Napoca, 2014
- Mardare, Ghe**, *Arta covoarelor vechi românești basarabene. Magia mesajului simbolic*, Ed. Cartier, Chișinău, 2016
- Simeon, Florea Marian**, *Sărbătorile la Români. 1. Cârniligile*, Ed. Saeculum, București, 2007
- Simeon, Florea Marian**, *Sărbătorile la Români. 2. Păresimile*, Ed. Saeculum, București, 2007



- Simeon, Florea Marian**, *Sărbătorile la Români. 3.Cincizecimea*, Ed. Saeculum, București, 2007
- Simeon, Florea Marian**, *Botanica poporană română, vol. I*, Ed. Mușatinii, Suceava, 2008
- Simeon, Florea Marian**, *Botanica poporană română, vol. II*, Ed. Academiei Române, Suceava, 2010
- Simeon, Florea Marian**, *Botanica poporană română, vol. III*, Ed. Academiei Române, Suceava, 2010
- Marinescu, Atanasie Marian**, *Cultul păgân și creștin. Sărbătorile și datinile romane vechi*, Ed. Saeculum, București, 2008
- Miller-Verghy, Margărita**, *Vechi motive decorative românești*, Ed. Vestala, București, 2007
- Muşlea, Ion**, Bîrlea Ovidiu, *Tipologia folclorului. Din răspunsurile la chestionarele lui B. P. Haşdeu*, Ed. Minerva, Buc, 1970
- Niculiță-Voronca, Elena**, *Datinile și credințele poporului român adunate și așezate în ordine mitologică*, Ed. Saeculum I.O., București, 2008, vol. I și II
- Novacovicu, Emilian; Novacovicu, Ecătărina**, *Din comoara Banatului*, Ed. Folclor, Oravița, 1926
- Oișteanu, Andrei**, *Motive și semnificații mito-simbolice în cultura tradițională românească*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1989
- Oișteanu, Andrei**, *Mythos & Logos. Studii și eseuri de antropologie culturală*, Editura Nemira, Colecția „Totem”, București, 1997
- Oișteanu, Andrei**, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițională românească*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2004
- Oișteanu, Andrei**, *Narcoticele în cultura română. Istorie, religie și literatură*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2010
- Oișteanu, Andrei**, *Grădina de dincolo. Zoosophia. Comentarii mitologice*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2012
- Olinescu, Marcel**, *Mitologie românească*, Ed. Gramar, București, 2008
- Oprisan, I.**, *Troițele românești. O tipologie*, Ed. Vestala, București, 2003
- Oprisan, I.**, *La hotarul dintre lumi. Studii de etnologie românească*, Ed. Saeculum, București, 2007
- Pamfile, Tudor**, *Cerul și podoabele lui după credințele poporului român*, Academia Română, 1915
- Pamfile, Tudor**, *Mitologia poporului român, vol. 1, 2*, Ed. Vestala, 2008
- Papadima, Ovidiu**, *O viziune românească a lumii*, Ed. Saeculum, București, 2009
- Petringenaru, Adrian**, *Imagine și simbol la Brâncuși*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1983, pg. 102
- Pрут, Constantin**, *Calea răătăcită*, Fundația INTERART Triade, Timișoara, 2012
- Gorovei, Artur; Ciușanu Gh. F.**, Ediție de Nicolau Irina, Mihalache Carmen, *Credințe și superstiții românești*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2013
- Stahl, Paul H.**, *Folclorul și arta populară românească*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1968
- Trebnici, Vladimir; Ghinoiu, Ion**, *Demografice și etnografice*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1986
- Ursache, Petru**, *Emoestetica*, Ed. EIKON, Cluj-Napoca, 2014
- Ursache, Petru**, *Etnofrumosul sau Cazul Mărie*, Ed. EIKON, Cluj-Napoca, 2014
- Vasilescu, Virgil**, *Semnele cerului*, Ed. Arhetip, Chișinău, 1993

- Vasilescu, Virgil**, *Simboluri patrimoniale*, Ed. Europa Nova, București, 1997
- Vasilescu, Virgil**, *Semiotica*, Ed. Iulian, Chișinău, 2011
- Viciu, Alexiu**, *Colinde din Ardeal. Datini de Crăciun și credințe populare*, București, 1914
- Viciu, Alexiu**, *La luncile soarelui. Antologie a colindele laice*, Ed. pentru Literatură, București, 1964
- Vulcănescu, Romulus**, *Măștile populare*, Ed. Științifică, București, 1970
- Vulcănescu, Romulus**, *Mitologie română*, Ed. Academiei RSR, București, 1987
- Vulcănescu, Romulus**, *Coloana cerului*, Ed. Academiei RSR, București, 1972

## **A Case Study of Shiite Art and Religious-Ritual Symbols in Safavid Metal Works**

**Mohammad Ismail Khalaji \***

**Araz Najafi\*\***

**Farzad Mafi\*\*\***

**Abstract:** *Traditional artworks in different periods, especially after the advent of Islam in Iran, have benefited a lot from text adornment, due to the emphasis of this religion on science, literacy, and its positive approach to the use of calligraphy. Needless to say, the use of calligraphy was not merely decorative; it was used more to convey a message and show the status of an issue. Metal working in the Safavid period has many artistic and religious values in material and spiritual aspects. Safavid artists have used religious themes, mystical, and Quranic concepts in decorating their works. In their works, they have revealed the mysterious manifestations of mysticism, Islamic religion, and Shiite religion. Samples of metal objects with calligraphy with Quranic content and religious devotions have been investigated. The findings indicate that, in addition to having a decorative aspect, Safavid metalworking has taken its motifs from the common religious thought of that period, namely the Shiite religion. Inside their forms and motifs, these objects are created symbolically as an illustration of the beliefs, rituals, and faith of the Safavid period. Those metal objects that have Quranic verses have a special use, and they are generally used for religious purposes. The content of the verses used, above all, has determined the volume and practical importance of the verse; the artist, therefore, has mostly used the small chapters of the 30th part of the Quran, Ayat al-Korsi, and short verses that have a message in them. The contents of the present article have been collected by library methods; it has been prepared based on documents and in a descriptive-analytical and comparative way. In*

---

\* PhD Student in Islamic Archaeology, Faculty of Archaeology, Islamic Azad University of Abhar, Abhar, Iran, m.ismail.khalaji@gmail.com

\*\* Assistant Professor, Faculty of Archaeology, Islamic Azad University of Abhar, Abhar, Iran, arazznajafi@gmail.com

\*\*\* Assistant Professor, Faculty of Archaeology, Islamic Azad University of Abhar, Abhar, Iran, mafifarzad@vatanmail.ir

*this article, only a limited number of objects have been examined, which have received more attention than the decorative aspect.*

**Keywords:** *Metalworking, Safavid, Form and Motif, Symbology*

### **Introduction**

The Safavid period has been one of the best and most brilliant artistic and historical periods of post-Islamic Iran. Innovations and various techniques in engraving on metal objects have reached a point that the objects of this period have placed to be the most unique in the history of Iran. Artists in this era, using their inherent genius, artistic taste, and inspiration from the elements of their time, with beautiful and delicate engravings, carving metal surfaces, turned them into a painting full of motifs and drawings. In such a way that the presence of beautiful arabesque and angelica motifs, bergamot and beautiful inscriptions of Nastaliq, etc., both symbolically used and in symbolic language, kept pace with the social conditions of the time so that they could express the characteristics of art, society, and religious beliefs. The art of metalworking in the Safavid period is one of the most important factors for identifying the culture and art that can be examined.

For the beautiful and symbolic art of the Safavid period, considering the religious beliefs of that era (Shiite) and the common beliefs in society also we cannot give a purely decorative identity<sup>1</sup>. Given the use of motifs with the function and symbol of the Shiite religion, also esoteric meanings can be considered for this art. Techniques in the art of metalworking of this period have peaked, and designs have changed. The motifs have become more subtle and dynamic at this time, and simultaneously with this change, there is a change in the concepts. In the Safavid period, Islamic mysticism has had a great impact on the art of metalworking, and especially on the use and concepts of motifs, so that they were full of symbolic meanings. Given their philosophical roots and the origin of common intellectual foundations in that period, these concepts can be profoundly studied. Not to mention, the history of metalworking art in this period, which has a very high value, was not a new phenomenon related to the emergence of this dynasty, but in terms of form and executive items, it was a continuation of the same traditions before, namely the metalworking of the Mongols and the Timurids. Safavid artists abandoned part of the Mongol metalworking tradition and presented the rest in a new form.

“During his study, to date, Assadollah Soren Malekian Shirvani has reached three main conclusions about Safavid metal working: First, Safavid metalworking is a continuation of the heritage of the Timurid era, especially Khorasani. Second, during the reign of Shah Abbas I, there were two distinct

---

<sup>1</sup> Samad Parvin, Behrouz Afkhami, Elham Hendiani, *Investigating and analyzing the motifs of the Tombstones of the Ounar Cemetery*, 2020, p. 399.

schools of metalworking in Iran, one in Khorasan and the other in Azerbaijan. Third, one can find both Sufi and Shiite tendencies in the works of the Safavid period, and without revealing it, the Khorasan School had a great influence on the classical school of western Iran<sup>2</sup>". The art of metalworking in this period, with symbological approaches, has entered a new stage; in fact, the form and motif have a special relationship with each other, which are specific to this period. Another special feature of the period is the use of yellow copper metal, which has a higher luminosity than previous periods and is closer to golden color, and they have been used in many religious works<sup>3</sup>. Steelwork was also perfected during the Safavid period, and Jean Chardin, a French globetrotter of that period, admires metalworking artists and states: "They do engraving very well; particularly do cameo well"<sup>4</sup>.

Given the recognition of the Shiite and the manifestation of new beliefs in the Safavid period, the artists of this era began to innovate in metalworking, which has been used in both material and spiritual aspects. From a material point of view, the efforts of these artists can be related to production for daily life; from a spiritual point of view, to the provision of spiritual and doctrinal needs respectively. This work with a symbolic approach has been achieved in the Safavid period through decoration and the use of abstract motifs, as well as various types of calligraphy, including Nastaliq, traditional and religious motifs. This artistic endeavor is nurtured in the common culture and religion (Shiite), is formed under the influence of thoughts and ideas that govern society, and is known as the art of the Safavid period. An art that, in addition to manifesting artistic effects and using motifs, has also expressed a manifestation of Shiite religion and cultural-religious beliefs, as by exploring these topics, one can reach the concepts and meanings of motifs. The present research, accordingly, intends to study the relationship between motifs and concepts while examining motifs and their concepts. It intends to examine the concepts and meanings associated with them and to answer the following questions. Questions such as, what are the meanings of religious motifs in the Safavid period? Did religious motifs increase during the Safavid period? Has the Shiite religion influenced these motifs?

Regarding the research background of metalworking in the Safavid period, it can be said that Malekian Shirvani has stated in his research that "Inscriptions on metal objects are one of the main pillars of ornaments, and inscriptions are one of the most important components of historical records

---

<sup>2</sup> Assadollah Soren, Malekian Shirvani, *Devotions & poems on Safavid bronzes in: Safavid art & architecture*, 1982, p. 25. ; Roger Sivari, *Safavid Iran*, 2020, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Alireza Varvazitalab, Mohammad Afrogh, *Examining the form, decorating the content in the metalworking art of the Seljuk and Safavid eras*, 2010, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Upham Pope, Phyllis Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art*, 1938, p. 2909.

along with metal objects such as coins, candlesticks, ware, etc.” With the advent of Safavid power, inscriptions with the theme of Shiite militancy appeared on metal objects. These inscriptions have been expressed with themes such as prayer and appeal to God through the names of the Twelve Imams or often the Fourteen Infallibles, mentioning Nad-e Ali with the name of Imam Ali and sometimes poems in praise of Imam Ali with a lot of extremism<sup>5</sup>. The research “Interaction of form and content in metal Kashkuls of the Safavid and Qajar eras,” which was conducted on 34 Kashkuls of these periods, have been answered the questions on the appearance form, decorative elements, calligraphic inscriptions used on these Kashkuls, dervish customs, and religious beliefs. In another study that examined the form and decoration of metal bowls of the Safavid period, 23 samples of images on Safavid metal bowls in domestic and foreign museums and personal collections have been examined in the form of library research. The results of the research showed that Safavid metalworkers, in creating their works, apart from being functional, have always considered decoration, Shiite culture, and religion. “Art-loving, the artistry of the kings, the self-awareness, and the deep artistic understanding of the artists, have made changes in terms of the beauty and elegance of form and motif in the metal objects of this era; this has led to the prosperity of metalworking art in that period”<sup>6</sup>.

In the research “Art of Islamic Studies”, which has studied the form, decoration, and content in the metalworking art of the Seljuk and Safavid eras to recognize the type of influence of religious elements on metal objects of the Seljuk and Safavid eras, it is stated that Iranian works of art, including the art of metalworking, there has been a reflection of rituals and religious ideas as well as views throughout the various centuries of history<sup>7</sup>. In the meantime, due to the different types of Sunni and Shiite religious tendencies, the metal objects of the Seljuk and Safavid dynasties, the golden age dynasties of Iranian art that established independent and unified governments in this land, are very important. In addition to common cultural and artistic features, there are many differences, including the use of geometric, plant, and animal decorations. Techniques used to apply materials, the content of the objects, and the use of calligraphy in Arabic script in the Seljuk period, Persian script in the Safavid period, and the type of use of the objects are shown<sup>8</sup>. Research has shown that with the coming to power of the Safavid government, the religion, and ideology of ruling Iran changed. Along with this religious change, the forgotten identity of the Iranians was revived after

---

<sup>5</sup> Assadollah Soren, Malekian Shirvani, *op. cit.*, p.30.

<sup>6</sup> Kobra Azarmdel, Ali Vand Shoari, *A study of the form and decorations of metal bowls of the Safavid period*, 2016, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Samad Parvin, Habib Shahbazi Shiran, Maryam Mastalizadeh, *The themes of metalworking in the Saljuqid period vis-à-vis Khorasan and Mosul schools*, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Alireza Varvazitalab, Mohammad Afrogh, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

about nine centuries, from the fall of the Sassanids to the coming to power of the Safavids, with an Islamic color and smell. At this time, the traditional artists of the Safavid society, especially the metalworkers, also showed the signs and symbols of the Shiite religion and national and Iranian identity in their works and handicrafts.

In research with the aim of “adjusting, explaining and interpreting the themes of Quranic inscriptions by the use of Safavid and Qajar metal objects and the relationship between Quranic inscriptions in terms of content with metal objects of Safavid and Qajar period eras, Islamic art is seen in various forms and contents in the art of metalworking in Iran. One of them is the Quranic inscriptions various scripts of Kufic, Thuluth, Naskh, etc., whose visual beauty along with its spiritual and mystical atmosphere contains valuable messages for the owner of the object and its visitors in different eras<sup>9</sup>.

“Inscriptions on metals in the Safavid period, in fact, are the creation of an understanding between art and the Shiite religion, which can be traced to the artistic and spiritual genius of the Iranians and can be seen in the remnants of historical periods. With the spread of Persian script and language, the strengthening of Shiism and Iranian nationality, metalworkers engraved all kinds of inscriptions on most metal objects with Persian poems, in Naskh and most of all in Nastaliq”<sup>10</sup>.

### **Research Methods**

The research method in the present article is descriptive-analytical, and information is collected in a library, in accordance with a documentary manner. Given the low quality of some images, there have also been used the virtual databases of museums, some sites, articles published on scientific sites, and books related to the identification of motifs. The statistical community of interest in the article is represented by the significant and authoritative objects that were made in the Safavid period and are currently kept in museums and private collections around the world.

### **Safavid Metalworking**

The Safavid reign was a religious one, and the lineage of Shah Ismail and his successors went back to Imam Ali ibnAbiTalib; they claimed the guardianship of the Shiite Imams. The Shiite religion, which in previous periods had scattered bases in Iran, became the official religion of the Safavid reign; then, by separating itself from its Sunni neighbors, Iran had a kind of

---

<sup>9</sup> Majid Sarikhani, *An analytical study on the effects of Quranic verses on the metalworking of Iran in the Safavid & Qajar eras with reference to the metal works of the National Museum of Iran*, 2014, p. 160.

<sup>10</sup> Asghar Javani, Mehdi Motie, Habibollah Kazemnexhad, *A Study of Safavid Religious Metal Decorations*, 2012, p.26.

national identity that has continued to this day. Safavid kings encouraged artists and craftsmen; during the reign of these kings all the arts reached their peak of prosperity, and metalworking, which is one of the most important branches of art in the Safavid era, progressed like other industries. The skill and genius of the artists in this art, which is based on the old traditions and skills of metalworkers of this period, can be seen well<sup>11</sup>.

The important point of this period is that the use of calligraphy reached its peak in all arts, especially in metalworking, and one of the innovations of the Safavid in metalworking was the use of Persian calligraphy and inscriptions as well as the relative disappearance of Arabic writings. The Safavid period (907-1148 AH) is one of the glorious periods of Iranian art, whose decorations became more free and simple. Also the arts of weaving, pottery, gilding, painting, metalworking flourished in this period, which The Safavid period can be called the golden age of Iranian art<sup>12</sup>.

The making of brass wine containers with spherical bodies and cylindrical tubes of silver and gold plating, which was one of the conventional works of the Timurid period, continued in the early Safavid period. Safavid metal objects are decorated with inscriptions in Naskh, Nastaliq, Thuluth, and flower, as well as plant volutes. Sculptural and animal motifs, additionally, have been used in this period. Engraving of animal motifs also continued on metalware in western Iran during the reign of Shah Abbas I, with an extreme variety of styles<sup>13</sup>.

The expression of mystical and religious themes in the Safavid period using calligraphy on metals became more widely used, so that the subjects of the writings of wine goblets and other metalware were reflected in the mystical poems of great classical poets such as Hafez and Saadi. These mystical poems are abundantly seen in the inscriptions of metalware.

The choice of mystical poems for candlesticks and the like was also natural, because the metaphor of the butterfly circling the candle to achieve unity, to perish in its flame, had long been part of the stereotyped and repetitive allegories of mystical poems<sup>14</sup>.

The text of the inscriptions and their bodies were decorated with plant motifs and devotions, since Iranian art, especially Safavid art, was based on Shiite ornaments and religion. It seems that the reason was to provide a softer context for the epigraphs. In metalworking, these inscriptions, in combination with arabesque and angelica, were used more than ever and were engraved in the form of serrated bass strips around the ware. The art of calligraphy, which has been used in combination with plant

---

<sup>11</sup> Eric Schroeder, Arthur Upham Pope, Phyllis Ackerman, *Masterpieces of Iranian Art*, 2002, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> Sheila Kanbi, *Safavid Art and Architecture*, 2009, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Assadollah Soren, Malekian Shirvani, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Sivari, *op. cit.*, p. 133.



motifs in the form of inscriptions on the metals of this period, in addition to the decorative role, has manifested the Islamic spirit in works of art. In this regard, it is stated: "since calligraphy is a manifestation of the human heart and soul, so the rules that govern the soul also apply to calligraphy, and thus calligraphy has played an important role in expressing an artist's religious feelings and beliefs"<sup>15</sup>. In the Safavid period, Muslim artists used fewer human and animal elements; in their works, more plant motifs and inscriptions (in Naskh and Nastaliq) inspired by Shiite and mystical themes can be seen. This has made art more prominent in this period than in other ones. Generally, there is a proportion and harmony between the poems and the inscriptions of the ware, and the type of consumption of the objects. The artists of the period also considered the current spiritual values in the period by decorating the surface of the ware; in addition to material value, they have also given spiritual value to ware.

### **Religious Themes and Symbols in Samples of Safavid Metalworking**

#### **Bowl**

The design form of bowls, in the Safavid period, was according to the type of their use. The general form of these bowls follows the type of their function, which is based on two categories: stemware and flatware, which have different forms. These forms have surfaces that, like paper pages, have become an arena for expressing words and images. In other words, while preserving the features as their function, they have become an arena for expression. The motifs and decorations on the surface of the ware have become eligible according to the common and religious beliefs of the Shiites in the Safavid period, and the motifs have a symbolic reading.

The beautiful motifs of the body of these ware are not only united by the composition, but also their semantic sharing is conveyed to the viewer through the motifs and visually. Shiite religious thoughts and common Sufi thoughts of the Safavid period are somehow manifested in the motifs of each of this ware, and their decorations, largely, are derived from the thoughts and beliefs of the time of the production. Regarding the inward meanings of Iranian miniatures, Titus Burckhardt believes that its special mystical quality [miniatures] is influenced by the atmosphere of Shiite Iran<sup>16</sup>. (Fig. 1 - 5)

The form and body of some Safavid bowls are not two-part and are skew. Continuous lines divide the surface into regions, each of which contains a single form. The narrow strip between the inscription and its body better shows the height of the inscription. From the repetition of single forms

---

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad Madadpour, *Manifestations of spiritual wisdom in Islamic art*, 1996, p. 178.

<sup>16</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufism*, 1996, p.100.

with a common central point, radial motifs are created that can be seen around the foot of all bowls.



**Fig. 1.** Copper Bowl, 1078 – 1678, Height: 10.95-11, Width: 26.65-27.75



**Fig. 2.** Food Bowl, West of Iran, Isfahan(?) 17th C. AD

The intersection of all radial lines is the point around which all the structural lines of the design revolve. The inscription, which is about one-third the height of the container, emphasizes the height of the edge of the container. On the body of this container, arabesque motifs that have been executed by the symmetry method, from the arabesque joint and in combination with angelica design, emphasize the symmetry of the container's body. Seeing each part, the viewer's gaze is transferred to another part, and this transfer from one part to another creates a kind of movement.

The bowls are combined with Fourteen Infallible inscriptions and their edges have delicate arabesque motifs. The horizontal line in the middle of the container is exactly where the height of the container divides into two equal parts.



**Fig. 3.** Part of the Inscription on the Edge of the Bowl



**Fig. 4.** Copper Bowl, 16th C. AD



**Fig. 5.** Bowl, 16th & Early 17th C., Copper Casting with Carvings, Height: 9.5 cm, Width: 24 cm, British Museum

### The Text of the Inscriptions

The text of this type of inscriptions is as follows:

«اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى الْمَصْطَفَى مُحَمَّدَ ، وَ الْمُرْتَضَى عَلِيَّ ، وَ النَّبُوْلَ فَاطِمَةَ ، وَ السَّبْطَيْنِ الْحَسَنَ وَ الْحُسَيْنَ ، وَ صَلِّ عَلَى زَيْنِ الْعَبَادِ عَلِيِّ ، وَ الْبَاقِرِ مُحَمَّدَ ، وَ الصَّادِقِ جَعْفَرَ ، وَ الْكَاطِمِ مُوسَى ، وَ الرِّضَا عَلِيَّ ، وَ النَّوْفِيِّ مُحَمَّدَ ، وَ النَّوْفِيِّ عَلِيَّ ، وَ الرَّكْبِيِّ الْعَسْكَرِيِّ الْحَسَنَ ، وَ صَلِّ عَلَى الْمَهْدِيِّ الْهَادِي صَاحِبِ الْعَصْرِ وَ الزَّمَانِ صَلَوَاتِ اللَّهِ وَ سَلَامُهُ عَلَيْهِ وَ عَلَيْهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الْمَعْصُومِينَ  
سنه»

“Peace be upon the Imams and the Fourteen Infallibles”

The edge of this ware is completely smooth and the inscription starts exactly from the edge, and its height is one-third of the height of the body. The theme of the inscription is a salute to the Fourteen Infallibles in the Nastaliq, and the content of this section is covered with very delicate helix arabesque and tiny angelica. The signature of the owner of the bowl can be seen in the motif, in the shape of a bergamot head on the edge of the bowl. An inscribed strip is separated from the body by a slightly raised horizontal line. There is a strip with arabesque and angelica motifs between the inscription and the body.

### Goblets

“In different religions and sects, the goblet has had a ritual use, and the motifs on ancient goblets that reflect the beliefs of different ethnic groups make this use even more apparent.



**Fig 6.** Inside the Goblet

A goblet, dating to the fourth millennium BC, made in Susa and discovered there, with images of mountains, water, and an antelope (moon,

water, symbols of productivity and fertility, respectively) is one of them. In the Safavid period, goblets were usually made of brass, were used for special purposes, and were available to augurs, diviners for augury, and astrology. (Figs 6 - 9)



**Fig. 7- a-1.** The Outer Surface of the Goblet



**Fig. 7- a – 2.** Metal Patch (Keys)



**Fig. 8.** Forty-key Goblet, with A Short Edge Folded Outwards, with A Circular Foot, 1040 AH

In the decorations of the edge of the goblet of the Safavid period, there is a wide horizontal inscription with the theme of “salute to the Fourteen Infallibles” in the beautiful calligraphy of Nastaliq, which is located in the content of delicate arabesque motifs.



**Fig. 9.** Bismillah Forty - Keys Goblet or Augury and Divination Goblet (Moghaddam Museum)

From under the inscription to the foot part, the body of this goblet is decorated with fine and tangled inscriptions with Naskh script and it seems to be a devotion. On the edge of the ware, there are verses and salute to the Infallible Imams; behind them one can see verses of poetry, such as:

نَادِ عَلِيًّا مَظْهَرَ الْعَجَائِبِ      تَجِدُهُ عَوْنًا لَكَ فِي النَّوَائِبِ

Call out to Ali, that he is the embodiment of strange traits

كُلُّ هَمٍّ وَعَمٍّ سَيَنْجَلِي      بَوْلَايَتِكَ يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَلِيُّ

Until the problems are solved, I swear by your greatness and I swear by your leadership, understand me with your hidden kindness  
On the edge of the goblet, this prayer and support from Imam Ali was engraved, which was considered very useful and valuable.

From the bottom of the folded edge to the foot, the motifs on some goblets are decorated with five horizontal stripes and different motifs. The lower part of the folded edge of the dish has inscriptions and devotions in Naskh and fine form. In the inscription section, stretched bergamots are repeated one after the other and inside each of them, the name of one of the Imams is engraved in Naskh. On the side, these bergamots have small circular motifs that form a chain-shaped by curling in a row. On the wide strip of the ware, which occupies the most part, the twelve months of the year

(the twelve constellations) are placed inside the simple bergamot motifs. Among these motifs, devotions are engraved in Naskh and tangled lines as well. Geometric patterns are placed on the foot, horizontally and in a straight direction. The names of the Imams are engraved inside the stretched bergamots in the narrow strip at the bottom of the body. Inside the ware, the surah of Al-Fātihah, Al-Kāfirūn, Al-Ikhlās, Al-Falaq, and An-Nās are engraved.

The outer surface of some of the other goblets of this period is decorated with an inscribed strip at the edge. Each part of this strip, which has the theme of salute the Fourteen Infallibles, is placed inside a simple bergamot. Among them, the heads of the bergamots are circular with a decorative role. At the body, the devotions are placed inside circles of equal size, at regular intervals, and connected by short horizontal lines. In the upper part, motifs similar to half-bergamot can be seen. The use of the names of religious leaders for the blessing of their names, and to show the interest of Muslims has been common and has found a special place in applied arts, such as metalworking.

### **Candlestick**

The general form of columnar and tall candlesticks of the Safavid period is divided into three parts: base, body, and edge by two horizontal lines. These three parts are located around the central axis of the candlestick, which is perpendicular to the base reference line (base circle line), which is also a horizontal line. In contact with the center point of the base circle, this vertical line forms two perpendicular angles on either side of the candlestick, which causes the two parts to be symmetrical. The base consists of a large circle a few centimeters above the ground. There is a beautiful curvature from the part where the container is placed on the ground to the part that is attached to the body. This part consists of parallel and circular lines that are located around an axis, and towards the body, its diameter decreases. Necessary proportions have been observed in all parts of the candlesticks; if the form of each section is considered separately, they are compatible with each other, and this compatibility ultimately leads to coordination between them. The cylindrical and tall shape of the candlesticks of the Safavid period was a function of their function. The decorative motifs used on the candlesticks of this period, as well as their beautiful inscriptions, show the deep influence of Sufism, the common mystical thoughts, and teachings of that period. The influence of these thoughts has made the decorative motifs contain many esoteric meanings, as we discover their secrets with a symbolic reading<sup>17</sup>.

The three parts, the base, the body, and the edge of the candlesticks are composed of concentric circles. Concentric spheres are known as the

---

<sup>17</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, p.110.



strongest and most effective symbol in the stages of the universe, which one must go beyond to achieve absolute existence<sup>18</sup>. Given the fact that the circle is a symbol of human individual evolution and is considered the origin of existence and the symbol of the essence of God (according to the doctrines of the Sufis who believe in the Sufi stages of attaining the essence of God), perhaps these circles can be considered as a symbol of the Sufi world, the path and behavior of the Sufis on the way to the origin of God. Inscriptions, a symbol of Islamic calligraphy and Nastaliq calligraphy that became popular during this period, are a symbol of Shiism and Shiite mysticism. Poetic inscriptions on candlesticks also originate from the same thoughts and express the mystical aspects of Sufism. These Persian poems, which are mostly about candles and butterflies and the mystic's love for God, are the metaphor of the butterfly circling the candle, the suffering of the mystic, and a symbol of achieving unity and perishing in the essence of God<sup>19</sup>.



**Fig. 10.** Brass Candlestick, 16th C., **Fig. 11.** Brass Candlestick, 17th C.  
Height: 31.4, St. Louis Museum of Art

Man lives in the Islamic society according to the canon rules. The relationship between Truth, Doctrine, and Canon can be shown in the best way possible by the symbol of the circle. The circumference is likened to the

<sup>18</sup> Sayed Hussain Nasr, *The Doctrines of the Sufis*, 2014, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Ayatollahi, Habib, *Theoretical Foundations of Visual Arts*, 1998, p. 176.



doctrine, the radii that connect to the center are the canon, and the centre of the circle represents the truth. This study begins with the radii. Although, it must be borne in mind that these radii are located between the canon and the truth, so without the circumference, there will be no canon, and without the centre, there will be no truth<sup>20</sup>.



**Fig. 12.** Inscription & Arabesque Motifs on the Edge of the Candlestick

### **Conclusion**

The results showed that there is a close relationship between the form and the motif of containers; thus, in a way, the motif is a function of the form and the location of each motif on the body of the container changes according to its form. The location of the inscriptions, for example, is usually on the edges of the wares, which has a special effect in a composition with plant motifs (arabesque and angelica). The Nastaliq, for this purpose, was most used in the Safavid period, and this was involved in the division of the surface of the wares. Therefore, one of the factors that have led to the success of the design of these objects is the fit of the edge margin, body text, text, and components within it. Bowl-shaped wares are usually inside-centre, and in all of them the height and width of the inscriptions correspond to the height, as

---

<sup>20</sup> Ardalan Nader, Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sense of Unity, Mystical Tradition in Iranian Architecture*, Translated by Hamid Shahrokh, 2001, p. 5.

well as width of the wares. In some works of art of this period, shapes and motifs have also influenced the main structure of objects, consequently, the decorations conform to the form. For example, round and scroll shapes are more in line with the circular shape of objects.

In bowls, the “line” connects the various parts of the forms and motifs. Since the straight line is uniform, it creates a sense of parity. Various types of tangible lines in these compositions that are created through the form of placing patterns together visually induce a sense of parity and the symmetry of the motifs are very effective in creating this sense. Generally, it can be said about these objects that their motifs are in perfect harmony with the form. In the case of these objects, generally, it can be said that their motifs are perfectly in harmony with the form; in a sense, that the designs have the same visual impact that the forms have on the audience.

Studies show that in the Safavid period the Shiite religion did not annihilate the previous mystical thoughts by entering Iran, but coexisted with them. There has been a close connection between art and spiritual customs derived from religion in this period, and the Shiite religion is one of the most influential factors in the art of this period, especially metalworking, just as metalworking has been a language for expressing religious, mystical thoughts and the manifestation of God. The spread of the Shiite religion and its path to all the dignity of people's lives has been revealed in the form and decoration of this art. The form and the content in the bowls and candlesticks of this period are perfectly proportional, as the symmetrical forms have complied with the function of the design and follow the content. In the works of this period, the content is conveyed by the motifs, so that the artist has expressed the mystical content derived from the visual elements of the motif through visual language. The containers studied in this period are subject to the traditional rules and regulations governing metalworking and, at the same time, reveal the needs and inner thoughts of the artist. Since the Safavid metalwork artist was under the doctrines of Islam, especially Shiism, Shiite themes in the form of decorative motifs has expressed spiritual concepts by the principles of aesthetics. In these works, the relationship between form and motif is reciprocal, as the motif has been a function of the form, and, at the same time, the motif is effective in emphasizing the form. Generally, there is a dynamic unity and diversity in these wares and each part of their form and motif can complement another. The motifs, which have given a deep spirituality to the art of metalworking by using Shiite themes (Shiite symbols), are in a common sense. They are united in terms of semantic commonality and by means of combination. This common concept is the same as achieving unity from plurality. This transcendental truth is manifested in “harmony,” “parity” and “unity” and is visible in the motifs.

The prevalence of Shiism and motifs in this period had a reciprocal effect. The motifs with their deep mystical concepts have both been

influenced by Shiism and helped to spread Shiism by influencing people's lives. Artists used motifs that were rich in spiritual concepts in order to express and convey spiritual values so that these motifs, which were in line with people's beliefs, could communicate with the viewer. This led the artists who followed soul purification to introduce spiritual etiquette into metalworking. Despite the use of inexpensive materials by the artists of this period, such as copper and bronze, and due to the spirituality which lies in itself (that originates from the esoteric truth of Islam), this art gained special value and became the manifestation of the presence of God. Generally, motifs and forms have one thing in common, and that is to achieve unity and manifestation of divinity. Although there are differences in form between candlesticks and bowls, as well as among the bowls themselves, on a more abstract level, they all seem to follow a single pattern that is a function of the Shiite and Sufi way of thinking of the time. For example, the use of writing is sacred, because it refers to the divine word. The most original Symbology factors of wares have been expressed in this research and the reason for distinguishing wares has been the difference in their form. However, all of them follow a common worldview or thinking in their principles.

#### **Bibliography:**

**Ardalan Nader; Bakhtiar, Laleh**, *Sense of Unity, Mystical Tradition in Iranian Architecture*, Translated by Hamid Shahrokh, Tehran: Khak Publications, 2001.

**Ayatollahi, Habib**, *Theoretical Foundations of Visual Arts*, Tehran: Samt Publications, 1998.

**Azarmdel, Kobra. V; Shoari, Ali**, *A study of the form and decorations of metal bowls of the Safavid period*, National Conference on Art Studies & Humanities Research, 2016, pp. 1-13.

**Burckhardt, Titus**, *An Introduction to Sufism*, Translated by Yaghoub Azhand, Tehran: Molly Publications, 1996.

**Javani, Asghar; Motie, Mehdi; Kazemnexhad, Habibollah**, *A Study of Safavid Religious Metal Decorations*, Journal of Visual Arts, 2nd Year, No. 3, 2012, pp. 23-41.

**Kanbi, Sheila**, *Safavid Art and Architecture*, Translated by Mazda Movahed, Academy of Arts, Tehran, 2009.

**Madadpour, Mohammad**, *Manifestations of spiritual wisdom in Islamic art*, Amirkabir Publications, Tehran, 1996.

**Malekian, Shirvani; Assadollah, Soren**, *Devotions & poems on Safavid bronzes in: Safavid art & architecture*, Tehran: Publication of the Academy of Arts, 1982.

**Nasr, Sayed Hussain**, *The Doctrines of the Sufis*, Translated by Hossein Heidari and Mohammad Hadi Amini, Tehran: Ghasidesara Publications, 2014.

**Parvin, Samad; Afkhami, Behrouz; Hendifani, Elham**, *Investigating and analyzing the motifs of the Tombstones of the Ounar Cemetery*, Kratkije Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii, NO. 259, 2020, pp. 398-409.

**Parvin, Samad; Shahbazi Shiran, Habib; Maryam Mastalizadeh,** *The themes of metalworking in the Saljuqid period vis-à-vis Khorasan and Mosul schools*, Int. J. Arts and Technology, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2019, pp. 127-138.

**Pope, Arthur Upham; Ackerman, Phyllis,** *A Survey of Persian Art*, London, Vol XII, 1938.

**Sarikhani, Majid,** *An analytical study on the effects of Quranic verses on the metalworking of Iran in the Safavid & Qajar eras with reference to the metal works of the National Museum of Iran*, Iranian Journal of Archaeological Research, 5(3), 2014, pp. 158-168.

**Schroeder, Eric; Pope, Arthur Upham; Ackerman, Phyllis,** *Masterpieces of Iranian Art*, Translated by Parviz Natel Khanlari, Scientific and Cultural Publications, Tehran, 2002.

**Sivari, Roger,** *Safavid Iran*, Translated by Kambiz Azizi, 4th ed, Tehran: Center Publications, 2020.

**Varvazitalab, Alireza; Afrogh, Mohammad,** *Examining the form, decorating the content in the metalworking art of the Seljuk and Safavid eras*, Journal of Islamic Art Studies, No. 12. 2010, pp. 113-128.

## The Phenomenon of Marginality in the Middle Ages

Oleksandr Yakovlev\*  
Olena Ustymenko-Kosorich\*\*  
Tetiana Gumenyuk\*\*\*  
Tetiana Kablova\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:** *The article considers the phenomenon of marginalization as the ability of the subject to activate the internal processes of worldview in the process of overcoming the fear of contemplation of alternative coordinate systems, inconsistent worlds of values and various cultural programs. It is stated that being in a marginal state is a conscious choice, which is dictated by the need of the subject to take an active position in life. It is determined that the main feature of the medieval world is social statics, which ensured the stability of the world. In conditions of non-reflexive self-perception, the processes of self-identification are not activated. At the same time, marginality is positioned as a difference in relation to the inviolability of the universe of social hierarchy in a conformal and comfortable social structure, as a deviation from the stable state of the system.*

*The study used such methods: analytical - to determine the conceptual approaches to the study of the idea of marginality in cultural studies, systemic - to determine the integrity of the phenomenon of marginality in Western European culture; historical - in the reconstruction of the process of formation of the core of culture in each historical period of Western European culture.*

*It is determined that the marginal groups that opposed their way of life and system of values to the medieval society are the early Christian community, the monastic order, the heretical sect, and so on. Their common features are: the equality of group members, anonymity, external equality, the absence of clearly defined private property, the maximization of a virtuous lifestyle both in spiritual programs and in their implementation. Physical or spiritual searches as the basis of self-organization, being chosen by God, distancing from secular institutions*

---

\* Habilitated Doctor of Cultural Studies, Professor, Rector, Kyiv Municipal Academy of Circus and Performing Arts, Ukraine. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5881-0861>

\*\* Habilitated Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Director of Educational and Scientific Institute of Culture and Arts of Sumy, Makarenko State Pedagogical University, Ukraine. ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9686-7626>

\*\*\* Habilitated Doctor of in Philosophy, Professor, Vice-Rector, Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Ukraine. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9210-6424>

\*\*\*\* PhD in Art, Associate Professor, Kyiv Municipal Academy of Circus and Performing Arts, Ukraine. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0954-8422>

*have become one of the determining factors of the cultural marginality of modernity in the Middle Ages.*

**Keywords:** *marginality, marginal person, marginal groups Christian community, Monasticism, sect, ecclesia.*

### **Introduction**

For almost a century, sociology has studied marginal subjects and processes just like social psychology has studied the marginal state. In recent decades, the trend of scientific interest of cultural theorists to study marginality in the cultural field has been determined. However, this issue in culturology has not yet been substantively approved.

The first explicit studies of marginality in the perspective of the conflict of values were the subject of study of the Chicago School of Sociology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (R. Park, E. Stonequist). The structural approach in sociology has shed light on the phenomenon of marginality in the context of socio-political and economic transformations (A. Farge, A. Touraine). Phenomenological sociology (A. Schutz) and social psychology (T. Shibutani) expanded the problematic field of research of marginality and outlined the way out in culturological issues in the 60's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The importance of Christian communities in defining the first marginal groups of the Middle Ages**

The Middle Ages occupy a special position in the Western European cultural space. On the one hand, it clearly fits into traditional culture, demonstrating the classic invariants of the pre-modern world. On the other hand, we can say in the words of modern Italian scientist U. Eco, "all the problems of modern Europe are formed, in its current form, all the experience of the Middle Ages: democratic society, banking, national monarchies, independent cities, technological renewal, the uprising of the poor"<sup>1</sup>.

"Conformism" and "inclusion" were one of the most significant invariants of Western European spiritual culture in the Middle Ages. Conformism is a complete agreement with the generally accepted norms of culture, inclusion, and solubility in those forms of culture that are dominant in a certain sociocultural space. The millennia of Western European civilization have shown the "convenience" of such a position. In the Middle Ages, each individual tried to live within the walls of a city, castle, monastery, town, etc., but not outside them. Life outside the team was death, not only physical, but also spiritual. The man was dissolved in his lineage, in his family, and eventually in the universe. Therefore, the person did not feel the need for self-identification. "I" was perceived not in itself, but only in the context of involvement, and coverage by society (surrounding people as certain forms of

---

<sup>1</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, Vintage, London, UK, 2004, p. 464.

the team). In traditional culture, change has come very slowly. From birth, the position of the individual was clearly defined, and the program of his behavior was determined accordingly – a system of connections with relatives, neighbors, rulers, and spiritual authorities, inherited along with property from parents. "The alpha and omega of every individual was the social and religious community to which he belonged. From the super personal, authoritarian and absolute instance, any separation from the crowd was derived - and returned to it"<sup>2</sup>.

The self-perception of the individual was based on the recognition by the collectives of the statuses he received in accordance with his social status. Even when an individual had several statuses at the same time (father, blacksmith, subject, parishioner), the transitions in them were clearly oriented by initiation procedures, so that the individual's life career consisted of discrete biographical particles, each of which the individual was completely identical. The comfort of existence, the inviolable guarantee of the stability of the world, and man's place in it were the basis of human existence. It is not characterized by reflectivity - the objects of this world, as well as the actual self, were self-evident and not problematic. Individual identity was inseparable from group identity.

Marginality in the Middle Ages should be considered in both individual (individual) and group incarnations. And if the invariant was the social life of the individual, expressed in the absorption of his group, the more important is the study of modes of existence of marginal groups in the public space of Europe, those groups that opposed themselves and their value systems to the dominant social integrity.

One of the historically first marginal groups of the Middle Ages was the early Christian communities that formed on the border of antiquity and the Middle Ages.

The phenomenon of the early Christian community becomes an example of a group culture of marginality. The spiritual unity of the Christian community, which opposes itself to the world, is immersed in vice and sin, and demonstrates the integrity of worldviews, moral principles, practices different from the official Roman world of spiritual values, presents itself as a group.

Nowhere in Svetsytska's work is it directly stated that the early Christian community in the Roman Empire of the I-II centuries was marginal. But the whole description of the organization of her life is imbued with the spirit of cultural marginality. This triggers, firstly, the fixation of the social component in the formation of the Christian community, secondly - the self-perception of its members, and thirdly - the content of the spiritual

---

<sup>2</sup> Leonid Batkin, *Yevropeyskiy chelovek na yedine s soboy. Ocherki o kul'turno-istoricheskikh osnovaniyakh i predelakh lichnogo samosoznaniya*, [European man alone with himself. Essays on the cultural and historical foundations and limits of personal self-consciousness], Moscow, 2000, p. 11.

program that the community actively practiced in relation to itself (outlining the circle of "their") and to the surrounding infidels (delimiting the circle of "strangers").

The first Christian communities formed in the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, mostly in the eastern provinces, consisted of people who did not have the status of citizens. These were the poor, foreigners from other lands, very often private or public slaves, prostitutes, the sick, the crippled - all those who were rejected by official society. In addition, "a number of scholars believe it is possible to say that Christian communities from the beginning included more or less rich people who for one reason or another fell out of society and felt deep spiritual dissatisfaction"<sup>3</sup>

Christian preaching was addressed to all who felt suffering, physically and / or spiritually in imperial society, who felt uncontrollable mental anxiety from the official system of values, which left a person helpless in the spiritual search. Christianity directed this kind of topic: all the dissatisfied and suffering in a sinful and unstable world were promised the Kingdom of Heaven, and the equality of all, rich and poor, before God. The sermon emphasized that such a world immersed in sin and debauchery would soon come to an end, so the early Christians waited for the end of the world (such expectations are reflected in the Apocalypse). The life of the community was closed to itself, but it did not cease to be rich, both socially and spiritually. On the basis of a sermon that promised salvation and God's grace, the self-perception of the members of the Christian community was appropriate.

The spiritual world of the Christian community is filled with the fulfillment of moral requirements, which are based on something objective, only the law and the example of Christ. Based on the preaching and example of Christ, on the subjective achievements of the apostles, their exemplary life lived in poverty, religious individualism preached by the Gospel is combined with religious society.

### **Ecclesia as a form of Christian communities**

The early Christian community was called "ecclesia", i.e. assembly. "The word" ecclesia "in Greek cities meant" people's assembly "... Christians seemed to oppose their assembly - the ecclesia of the faithful, the true assembly - the earthly ecclesia, which has lost all meaning"<sup>4</sup>. The main function of the ecclesia was to give spiritual consolation to the "brothers and sisters," as Christians called each other, to listen to the apostles together, and to discuss what they heard.

From the beginning, the spirit of the Christian mystical religion was cultivated in the ecclesia, striving in the language of mystery, a symbol to

---

<sup>3</sup> Iryna Svetsitskaya, *Ranneye khristianstvo: stranitsy istorii. [Early Christianity: pages of history]*, Politizdat, Moscow, 1987, p.86.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.



express the relationship between the eternal and the changing, almighty God and the finiteness of an unworthy man.

At the beginning of its existence, the ecclesia (this Greek term is often translated into Russian and Ukrainian as "church") did not have a vertical hierarchy, the horizontal equality of brothers and sisters and their worship of the apostles who personally listened to Christ's sermons were the only form of self- ) organizations. But this was possible only in the early stages of Christianity when each ecclesia lived quite isolated from the outside world.

In this aspect of the spiritual life of the early Christian church, it is appropriate to rely on the study of F. Tönnies, who introduced a transliteration of the Latin word "community" - "communitas" (communitas) to denote a spontaneously formed group in which there is horizontal equality: spontaneity, arbitrariness, and unpredictability of the organization is a fundamental attribute of the community, and the duration of its existence - "phase, moment", and "not a permanent condition"<sup>5</sup>.

Describing communitas as spontaneity and borderline, «In spontaneous communitas there is something magical. Subjectively, she has a sense of infinite power and authority". He further adds: "However, if this force is not transformed, it cannot be used immediately in relation to the organizational facts of social life"<sup>6</sup>.

In addition to the introduction of spiritual assistance, the ecclesia performed the social function of providing "bread" to its members. As the poor people came to the community first of all, material assistance to the needy was very acute on the agenda. Helping one's neighbor was one of the important missions of the early community. But it is noteworthy that many Christians understood their neighbors primarily as their fellow believers or those who sympathized with them.

The rejection of non-believers, people from other religious groups or the civilian population of the cities was uncompromising. On the one hand, this may be explained by the fact that the revelation revealed to Christians by the good news of Christ was unattainable to others, and the very realization of this fact placed them in an exceptional position in relation to imperial society. On the other hand, from the beginning, Christians were so spiritually distant from the world, continuing to live in it, that the official Roman authorities perceived them as the most dangerous criminals. This may explain the mystery of the first Christian congregation, first, to prevent contact with the pagan outside world and, second, to prevent persecution by the Roman authorities.

The inexpediency of using the spiritual energy of community, or ecclesia (as a more common term), is manifested in the fact that community

---

<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Profil-Verlag, München, Wien 2017, p. 209.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Macmillan, New York, 1931, p. 208.

accumulates the energy of such force that it is sufficient for the existence of this form. The hierarchical organization that will take the place of community (ecclesia) retains its name - the Church of the Faithful.

The German scholar E. Troeltsch highlights the differences between two types of organizations, the church and the sect. It is worthwhile to dwell on the individual provisions of this study, as it allows us to trace the differences between them and the shift of emphasis in the transformation of the sect (ecclesia, community) into the church as a permanent, hierarchical organization. Among the essential characteristics of the church as an organization, Troeltsch includes the following: conservatism. Based on a stable and recognized tradition; worldliness and immersion in secular affairs; universality. The desire to guide the whole life of the believer<sup>7</sup>.

Unlike the church as a stable structural organization of a sect in general, the early Christian community as its variety, in particular, can be characterized by the following features: the presence of innovative value orientation; the spiritual connection between its members; distancing from the world and secular institutions (such as law, property, war, power). Considering the historical perspective of the socio-cultural dynamics of the sect and the church, it is necessary to indicate that in the first centuries of its existence, Christianity fluctuated between these two types of organization and only with the development of the doctrine of the priesthood and sacraments, it, in the process of institutionalization, established in the church.

That is, sects behaved towards the world, the state and society either indifferently, tolerantly, or hostilely because they did not seek to join them. It is noteworthy that the so-stated idea of the group did not interfere with the cultivation of individual parameters of a virtuous life, ideally - ascetically oriented. At the same time, it is important, that the asceticism of the (early Christian) sect differed significantly from the asceticism represented by later forms of medieval culture.

It is clear that Christianity took a dominant position in the spiritual world of medieval Europe. It formulated the church organization and was the spiritual content of the doctrine, its transcendence. "The reformist spirit of the XI century, substantiating and implementing the world-simplifying ideal in its extreme manifestations, called and led the masses to the time of the Apostolic Church" <sup>8</sup>.

### **Monasticism as a self-realization of a marginal person of the medieval world**

In the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, monastic orders appeared that preached evangelical values and appealed to the ideals of the early Christian

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.227-229.

<sup>8</sup> Lev Karsavin, *Kul'tura srednikh vekov [Culture of the Middle Ages]*, Simbol&AirLand, Kyiv, 1995, p.143.

communities. The emphasis on the preferences of the poor in the kingdom of heaven resulted in an ideological justification - an apology for poverty. This phenomenon was evident in the XI century in an effort to return to evangelical simplicity, which led to "the reform of the clergy and the renewal of the canonical institution", and the movement flourished in the late 11<sup>th</sup>- early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries"<sup>9</sup>.

New monastic orders are emerging, which have argued the need to leave the world in order to acquire in solitude the true values that the Western world seemed to be losing more and more.

The monastery gathered under its shadow desperate poor, helpless bystanders, fugitives from the battlefield of life, who sometimes did not have a pronounced religious motivation and vocation to moral self-improvement. And yet, the profile of medieval monasticism clearly shows the features of restless ascetics who tried to embody the ideal of holiness and lead others, to capture them with the romance of holiness and moral purity.

Poverty as a "spiritual value" in the 12<sup>th</sup> century was a religious concept. "As the number of the hungry, the poor, the outcasts increase markedly, poverty becomes a social concept, an awareness of injustice comes, and the complaints of the poor become political demands. Demands are expressed in the language of religious reforms, in a quasi-religious way and are accompanied by extraordinary religious exaltation and the pursuit of piety, simple and honest life.

Thus, a socio-cultural space is formed, in which the marginality of the subject is built, as an active life position in overcoming external circumstances. The main thing in the life of this subject is focus on maximizing the spiritual and value component in the intentions of life implementation.

### **The role of marginal groups in the culture of the Middle Ages**

Marginal groups were formed mainly on the sidelines of the dominant socio-cultural system, on the socio-cultural periphery, despite the unparalleled spiritual orientation that they set for the further development of Western European culture. Marginal groups, represented mainly by religious communities that opposed the social order of the European Middle Ages, have common features: equality of community members ("all equal before God"), anonymity, abolition of all external differences, lack of private property. The condition for joining the community was the introduction of their own property in joint ownership and use to eliminate external differences between members), partially identical clothing, sometimes even without distinction by gender, emphasizing the similarities / similarities between them, sexual abstinence, which in extreme manifestations reaches the elimination of the institution of

---

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*, Arthaud, Paris, 1964, p. 81.

family and marriage, the termination of family and kinship rights and responsibilities (all are brothers and sisters or comrades), the maximization of a virtuous lifestyle, expressed in pious behavior.

However, the socially charged socio-cultural dominants of the Middle Ages do not rule out the presence of people at that time who stood out for their extraordinary qualities. Personal dimensions of marginality are also available at that time. It should be noted that in the traditional (pre-modern) Western European culture, the marginality of the person almost never acted as its autonomy and independence, ie in a purely modern perception of the meanings embedded in these symbols. Traditional culture has known rebels, cultural outsiders who, consciously or unconsciously (but more importantly for this study, when the intentions were conscious) came into conflict with generally accepted norms.

The marginality was not provoked artificially - it could not arise outside of all sorts of real or imaginary, clashes with the outside world. The marginal state in traditional culture has always meant breaking the usual ties and creating one's own, nonconformist world. Being in the border areas, on the border of the generally accepted and the impermissible required from the individual an active life position. This activity often involved a struggle, first of all, with superstitions and rigidity, sometimes - with circumstances.

The first model of self-realization of a marginal person of the medieval world, who accumulated all the most desirable and best features of the conventional, was the path of a martyr, saint, monk, i.e. people who imitated Christ. Monasticism as the embodiment of the Christian ideal of a perfect life is the most inspiring, albeit inaccessible due to the strictness of the ideal ascetic norms.

Monasticism was born as an ethical movement, seeking to create space for living subjectivity, to prove the reality of a sublime worldview, personal beliefs, and so on.

Pointing to the ethical parameters of the monastic movement, which emerged as an aristocratically removed from everyday life ideal way of life, we should underline that asceticism, work and prayer have become the life ideal of the intelligentsia, which has always valued contemplative life and shared the inherent antiquity and contempt.

This model is marginal only insofar as the path of virtue, the best and most dreamed of, is open only to some, the best, the worthiest of it. There were two types of engines for this - external and internal. And if the internal factors were described above and related to the motivation for freedom of choice and adherence to spiritual practices in the routine of everyday life, then the external ones were trivial and, as such, almost irresistible in weight and content: "This is the realization of personal freedom with freedom of perception of the

world”<sup>10</sup>. That is, in addition to exceptional moral qualities, a “marginal monk” could also be a free person, for whom the primary is “moral duty”, “symbolic life”, “social metaphors, not the prose of events”<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, the first approval was found by individuals, prominent people who stood out for their super personal service, a kind of exemplary. And they were valued by their contemporaries as the first among the first, the best of the best.

But the marginal perspective in the culture of the Middle Ages is not limited to the presence of such bright figures. Although indeed, become known or those individuals whose behavior and ideas became exemplary in subsequent eras, or those who gain notoriety as examples of illusory achievements. Most border processes often go unnoticed in the cultural-historical process. However, their cultural and historical significance cannot be underestimated. These "little-known hermits, representatives of the Christian world, hid in the forests where they were besieged by visitors or settled in places where they could help travelers find a road, bridge or ford", "became mentors to the poor." and rich, sad and in love" "because they were not "corrupted by the politics of the official clergy"<sup>12</sup>.

Scientific interest is also a purely sociological dimension of the marginality of the Middle Ages, identified and analyzed, in particular in its cultural explications. But we should be aware that these characteristics of the day worked to consolidate the *status quo* of all social strata, the gaps between which before and after that time were not so severe and insurmountable. J. Le Goff noted that "the medieval Christian world committed the desire to break with his condition a mortal sin. As father, as son - this is the law of the Western Middle Ages"<sup>13</sup>. Sustainability and stability were the norm and, as such, resisted any change.

### **Conclusions**

Thus, the Middle Ages world was purely static, where the inviolable guarantee of the stability of the world and its place in it was the basis of human existence. The inviolability of the universe was reflected in the social hierarchy, where the place of the individual was predetermined from birth, and the individual was dissolved in their social roles and statuses. The coverage of society, the dissolution of the team formed a comfortable and conformist spiritual world of the individual.

---

<sup>10</sup> Everett Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1937, p. 228.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> Janusz Sztumski, *Kilka uwag na temat społeczny konsekwencji marginalizacji*, Praca socjalna i polityka społeczna, Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2008, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*, Arthaud, Paris, 1964, p. 29.

Marginal groups that opposed their way of life and value systems to the dominant social universe in the Middle Ages were the early Christian community, the monastic order etc.. Studies of the social composition of members of marginal groups, the content of their spiritual programs and their practice, the analysis of procedures for distinguishing members of marginal groups "their" and "others" suggest that common features for them were equality of group members, their anonymity, external uniformity and gender, lack of clearly defined private property, maximization of a virtuous way of life both in spiritual programs and in their implementation.

Physical and spiritual travel on the basis of self-organization and the need to quench the spiritual morally determined thirst, God's election, the distancing from the hustle and bustle of the world and secular institutions were among the determining factors of cultural marginality of the day. Asceticism was the result of separation from the ruling social hierarchy and at the same time a means of preventing persecution by the authorities. Marginal groups were formed mainly on the periphery of the dominant socio-cultural system, despite the extraordinary spiritual strength with which they influenced the further development of Western European culture.

The extraordinary qualities of individuals of the Middle Ages testify regarding the marginalized persons of the day. These were rebels, cultural outsiders who, by nature or force of circumstance, came into conflict with the social world. The cultural marginals were the righteous, the monk, the hermit, and so on. Internal drivers before falling into a marginal state were dissimilarity to others in certain significant parameters (such as appearance), a high intellectual level of personal development. The alienation caused by this had to be reconciled with the general intentions (matrices of the epoch) of the day. The very presence of a marginal subject gave the standard schemes, the matrices of the era a peculiar sound. Spiritual work to reconcile one's own worldview with the cultural matrices of the day set such a personality horizon, which became the criterion of cultural marginality in pre-modern Europe.

Thus, marginality was not provoked artificially and was not purposefully constructed. In traditional culture, marginality meant breaking the usual ties between the universe and the social world and forming a new, nonconformist world. Being on the verge of the generally accepted and the impermissible and moving beyond this frontier into a new, own world requires an active position of life from the marginal subject. This activity involved the fight against superstitions and rigidity, as well as external circumstances.

The marginal cultures operating on the periphery of the nuclear processes of culture of the epoch are the driving force of sociocultural change. They bring a new understanding of invariants and new models of self-realization.

It is determined that in socio-cultural dynamics, marginality differs in content and form. Marginal content, subject to the response in the core of

culture, is gradually absorbed by it, joining the invariants, and the form (periphery, marginalia) is always present as part of the mechanism of socio-cultural dynamics.

The collective subjects of marginality in the Middle Ages were the early Christian community and the monastic order. The clarifying of the social composition of the members of marginalized groups, the content of their spiritual programs and their practice, and the analysis of procedures for distinguishing members of marginalized groups as "their" and "foreign" allowed us to determine that the common features for the marginalized groups of the Middle Ages were equality, anonymity, external equality, lack of clearly defined private property, maximization of a virtuous way of life (to asceticism) both at the level of spiritual programs and in their implementation in practice. Taking into account these factors, marginalized groups distanced themselves physically, spiritually, and intellectually from worldly life. Marginal groups were formed and functioned mainly on the sidelines/periphery of the sociocultural space of the day, despite the extraordinary spiritual impetus they gave to the modern world and future generations.

#### **Bibliography:**

**Batkin, Leonid**, *Yevropeyskiy chelovek na yedine s soboy. Ocherki o kul'turno-istoricheskikh osnovaniyakh i predelakh lichnogo samosoznaniya*, [European man alone with himself. Essays on the cultural and historical foundations and limits of personal self-consciousness], Moscow, 2000.

**Gerasimova-Persidskaya, Nina**, *Muzyka. Vremya. Prostranstvo* [Music. Time. Space], Dukhilitera, Kyiv, 2012.

**Karsavin, Lev**, *Kul'tura srednikh vekov* [Culture of the Middle Ages], Simbol&Airland, Kyiv, 1995.

**Le Goff, Jacques**, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*, Arthaud, Paris, 1964.

**Park, Robert**, *Race and Culture*, Free Press, Glencoe, 1950.

**Putnam, Robert**, *Bowling Alone: The collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, Touchstone Books, 2000.

**Stonequist, Everett**, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1937.

**Sventsitskaya, Iryna**, *Ranneye khristianstvo: stranitsy istorii*. [Early Christianity: pages of history], Politizdat, Moscow, 1987.

**Sztumski, Janusz**, *Kilka uwag na temat spoleczny konsekwencji marginalizacji, Praca socjalna i polityka spoleczna*, Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2008.

**Tönnies, Ferdinand**, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Profil-Verlag, München, Wien 2017.

**Troeltsch, Ernst**, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Macmillan, New York, 1931.

**Eco, Umberto**, *The Name of the Rose*, Vintage UK, London, 2004.

## The Icon of Resurrection: the Transformations in the Russian Art of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Svetlana Ivanova\*

**Abstract:** *The article deals with the problem of Easter iconography. The changes that have taken place in the Russian art of the 16<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup> centuries are examined. During this time, new samples for Russian icon painters have appeared. These are Western European engravings and Bibles with illustrations. The images from there are borrowed by Russian artists. This is how an engraving is copied from the cycle of illustrations of the Apostolic Creed. This creed is different from the Orthodox one. The fifth illustration includes dogma, that is not named in the Orthodox creed.*

*There are different stages of image change. They correspond to the understanding of engraving by Russian icon painters. Firstly, the icon painters interpret the engraving and arrange the images differently from the composition of the engraving. Secondly, they create icons as an exact copy of the engraving. Finally, they create a multi-figure image with a central dominant. This new image is associated in culture with the ancient image of Anastasis, or rather, it is defined as its detailed version. Therefore, the ancient icon of Anastasis is connected with a new context. This makes it difficult both to understand the icon and the history of the "Descent into Hell" image. Only by taking into account the transformation of the icon can we talk about the meaning of the ancient image.*

**Keywords:** *Easter iconography, Orthodox icon, Anastasis, Descent into Hell, Resurrection, Theatrum Biblicum, Piscator, Easter icon.*

The image of the "Resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Anastasis) (Fig. 1) is now also called the "Descent into Hell", although there is no basis for this either in iconography or in church tradition<sup>1</sup>.

---

\* PhD Saint-Petersburg State University of Industrial Technologies and Design, Associated Professor Russian Institute of Art History, researcher 0018@mail.ru

<sup>1</sup> This problem investigates in monography: Иванова С.В. Воскресение и Сошествия во ад: история двух сюжетов в христианском искусстве. СПб.: Российский институт истории искусств, 2019. – 398 с. For a study of the ancient images of Anastasis, see the book Kartsonis A. D., *Anastasis: The Making of an Image*. Princeton, New Jersey, 1986.



The Orthodox iconography of the great Easter feast has an ancient, but at the same time complicated history. More than once over the past hundred years, the question whether it is even possible to depict the most joyful, but also completely incomprehensible event - the Resurrection of Christ - has been raised. Moreover, it is not described in the Gospel, which only says that the women who came to anoint the body of the Lord and did not find It received the news of the Resurrection from the Angel - therefore, sometimes the image of the “Myrrh-Bearing Woman at the Tomb” is associated with this feast.



**Fig. 1.** Anastasis (Resurrection of Christ). Icon from the church of the Assumption in the village of Volotovo near Novgorod, 1470s–1480s.

But the studies show that there is an icon of Easter in Orthodox art. It is the icon “Anastasis”, where two deeds of Christ are shown: the trampling of the destroyed hell and the salvation of mankind represented by the image of Adam.

In this case, it is visibly shown what it is said in the Orthodox Paschal troparion: Christ conquers death and gives eternal life to mortals. This iconography reflects the teaching of the Church about the salvation of man by God (soteriology) - that for which the Lord incarnated, died, and what happened in His Resurrection.

The inscription explains what is depicted as "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ" - in Greek "Anastasis" (Fig. 2). This image appeared in

Byzantium and, together with Christianity, was adopted in Russia. It is difficult to explain what this renaming as the "Descent into Hell" is based on.



**Fig. 2.** Anastasis (Resurrection of Christ). Miniature. Athos, 11th century.

### **Controversies of the modern renaming of the icon as the "Descent into Hell"**

Firstly, such a name contradicts the signature on the icon. It is important that the new name began being referred to not so long ago, a little over a hundred years ago, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - what is more, in art history literature. Recall that, according to Father Pavel Florensky, giving an icon a name that is not accepted by the Church is, in essence, the same as signing an official document for another person in civil life.

Secondly, by inscribing the icon "Resurrection", the master testified that it depicted nothing other than what he called - and implying something else means committing perjury.

This discrepancy - the names and inscriptions - for some reason it is not disputed. On the contrary, attempts are being made to explain it - what gives rise to arguments about a certain "tradition"<sup>2</sup> - but why then do we not see it in Byzantium? Why is it absent at the time of the heyday of ancient Russian art?

In attempts to interpret such a strange discrepancy, one can reach the passionate assertion that "there is no icon of the Resurrection of Christ in

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, see: Loerke M.-M.-O. Höllenfahrt Christi und Anastasis. *Ein Bildmotiv im Abendland und im christlichen Osten*. Regensburg, 2003.

Orthodox iconography!". Similar opinions were expressed by other modern theologians: since the Church commemorates the Descent of Christ into Hell on Holy Saturday, Leonid Uspensky has proposed to bring out the image of the "Resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Anastasis) on this day, on Great Saturday, and on Easter itself, the icon of the "Wife -myrrh-bearers at the tomb".

But, as we can see, here is the second discrepancy with what is accepted in the Orthodox Church: such a proposal runs counter to the ancient church tradition, according to which Anastasis is placed on the lectern both on Easter and on every Sunday of the year.

Thirdly, despite such a double contradiction - both the inscription of the icon and the sacred church tradition - even theologians do not question the correctness of the new name and the interpretation corresponding to the name. On the contrary, they are trying to find out and justify why the image, supposedly related to the Holy Saturday, is recognized by the Orthodox as joyful! If here is the event of the Descent into Hell, then Christ is shown at the moment of his *kenosis* (Greek), that is, humiliation<sup>3</sup>. But, most importantly, then Christ is also shown before His Resurrection ("in hell with the soul"), in the separation of soul and body, that is, in the state of death! Let us ask the question, is such an image possible in Orthodoxy?

But even this third, most striking contradiction, oddly enough, does not raise questions and doubts about the injustice of renaming the 19th century, when the image "The Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ" began to be called the "Descent into Hell".

We emphasize this idea once again: if we look at the history of renaming, we will see that it did not take place in the Church, but in the works of art historians. Therefore, it is in the history of art that one must look for answers, without offering any innovations in the church and without making loud statements that the Easter icon supposedly does not exist. And when we turn to the history of art, many questions become apparent.

Because it really exists an image of the "Descent into Hell" (Fig. 3), but it is not in any way connected with the Orthodox icon of the Resurrection. It appeared at a different time and in a different culture, as an illustration of a creed not accepted in Orthodoxy<sup>4</sup>.

### **Image "Anastasis" (Resurrection of Christ)**

Concerning Anastasis, judging by the peculiarities of its expressiveness, it appears in the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. In it, we see the figurative techniques characteristic to late Antiquity and early Byzantine art.

---

<sup>3</sup>Иларион (Алфеев), архиепископ. Христос – победитель ада. Тема сошествия во ад в восточнохристианской традиции. СПб., 2009

<sup>4</sup> See: Simor S. B. «I believe». *Images of the Credo from Charlemagne to Luther*. Dissertation. Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1996.

The “grasping of the wrist” - the way Christ holds Adam - is a symbol in both ancient and early Byzantine art. It appears in plots related to returning home, escaping from danger, passing under the power of the one who holds the wrist.



**Fig. 3.** Harrowing of hell. Hjembaek, Denmark, ca. 1475.

The victory of Christ is also shown in a way characteristic to the art of that time. For example, the emperor Justinian, who built the church of St. Sophia, after the suppression of the Nika uprising (532), marked his triumph over the instigators of the riots by sitting on the hippodrome (where the largest number of people could see him), putting his feet on his two defeated opponents. On the mosaic "Christ the Triumphant" in the Archbishop's Chapel in Ravenna (494-520), the Savior tramples on a lion and a serpent (which correlates with the words of the 90<sup>th</sup> psalm). On the icon "Anastasis", Christ tramples Satan and the defeated gates of hell - that denotes His triumph, victory in the Resurrection over the forces of hell and death.

The canon of the image "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Anastasis) is strictly defined, and each image in it has an additional theological significance. Christ holds Adam by the wrist - and this shows the transition of the forefather into the power of the Saviour, his deliverance from the bonds of the fall. Eve, created from Adam's rib, is always depicted next to Adam, she raises her hands in joy to the side of her husband. In addition to Christ and the Ancestors, King David and his son Solomon are also represented here; John the Baptist and Abel.

The whole image is filled with the shine of Glory, the background of this icon is golden, but even against this background the Saviour is shown in the *mandorla*, revealing the divine light. The gradation of mandorla is from black in the center (which, according to the word of Dionysius the Areopagite, means that divine light, which is darkness for an ordinary sinful person) - to the bright edge (the light accessible to human contemplation).

And only below, as a sign of triumph, as a reminder of the already accomplished victory in the completed battle, there are the destroyed gates of hell, which Christ tramples on.

As for ancient monuments, as research shows, in the era of iconoclasm, it was the image of the Resurrection (Anastasis) that was subjected to especially fierce persecution. Despite this, the image of Anastasis has survived up to nowadays, which modern science refers to the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries: a bas-relief of the columns that are now in the Cathedral of St. Mark in Venice<sup>5</sup>. Reliquary crosses of the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries (i.e. the period of iconoclasm) indicate that the iconography of Anastasis was widely known at this time.

The image of Anastasis arose before iconoclasm - and long before the appearance of the image of the "Descent into Hell" in the Western tradition.

### **The Image "Descent into Hell"**

The image "Descent into Hell" (Herowing of Hell, in Latin *Descensus ad inferos*) is completely unrelated to the Orthodox icon of the Resurrection and it appeared in Western European art in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, in the Carolingian Renaissance.

Its origin is due to the "Apostolic Creed", which, in the time of Charlemagne, in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, receives a special status. This creed, despite its name, is later than the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which is accepted in Orthodoxy. It differs in composition from the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, in particular, that its fifth formula speaks not only of the Resurrection, but also of the Descent into Hell. Therefore, it is quite rightly that in the illustrations of the "Apostles' Creed" there also appears that image that correlates with this event.

For the first time, the "Harrowing of hell" image appears in a miniature - an illustration to the "Apostolic Creed" in the Utrecht Psalter (816-830). It is shown how Christ leans towards the abyss, from which flames soar, and raises naked people from there.

At a later time, hell began to be designated as a monster, and people are in its mouth, "the mouth of hell". All people in this image are most often naked, there are no specific persons among them - and Adam and Eve can

---

<sup>5</sup> Weigel T. *Die Reliefsäulen des Hauptaltarciboriums von San Marco in Venedig*. Rhema Verlag, 1997.

only be identified hypothetically. Their torment is still going on, the flame is still burning, the monster is still alive. Hell is depicted as active, not ruined - and the demons are preparing to attack the unarmed Christ. In the hands of Christ, there is a holy battle banner, oriflamme. The outcome of the battle from what is shown is unknown.

\*\*\*

The iconography of the "Anastasis" until the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, although it includes new accents, remains basically unchanged; icon painters turn to those main variants of the composition that appeared in Byzantium. We can only talk about stylistic features that are characteristic to certain eras or schools of icon painting.

On the contrary, a completely different thing can be said about the history of the image "Descent into Hell". It is undergoing major changes. In Renaissance art, these changes occur, perhaps even under the influence of the Byzantine iconography of the "Resurrection of Christ" - which we see in Italian art<sup>6</sup>. Only during the Renaissance, the image of the "Descent into Hell" becomes known in Italian art. Until this time it has not appeared there. The miniatures of "Exultet", the Paschal scrolls, common in Benevento church tradition, have another plot and only similar, but not the same iconography. The old Roman creed, despite its closeness to the "Apostles' creed", does not contain the word "descended into hell".

Italian Renaissance artists, depicting hell, do not use either zoomorphic images or flames, designating it as a cave. This decision then influenced the iconography of the plot in the north of Europe – in Germany and Netherlands. In a specifically Italian style, this image is created by Dürer. The tradition of the usage of the image "Descent into Hell" after the Renaissance is dying out - but once again it becomes relevant in Protestantism, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, it is mainly replicated in engravings.

When creating engravings, the image is inverted from left to right. If in miniatures and frescoes, hell was located to the left of Christ, now it is on the right, and the Savior is heading in this direction.

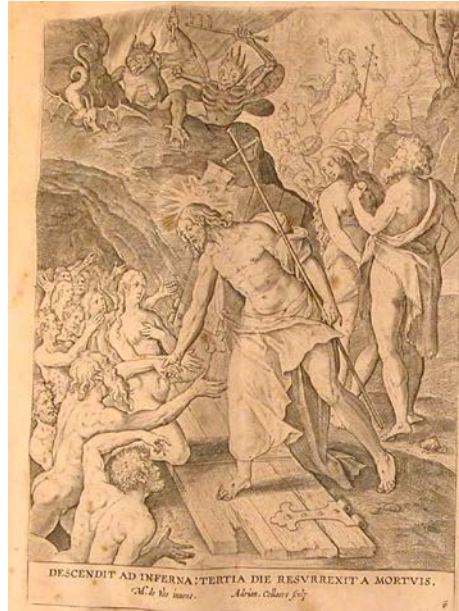
At this time, another important change should be noted. The illustrations of the Apostolic Creed do not show each event separately named in it, but combine all the events named in a certain formula into one engraving<sup>7</sup>. For example, in the illustration of the third formula, both the

---

<sup>6</sup> About this: Иванова С.В. Образ «Сошествие во ад» в творчестве итальянских художников (XIV-XVI вв.) // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета технологии и дизайна. СПб., 2018. Вып. 4. С. 24-31

<sup>7</sup> See: Иванова С.В. Апостольский Символ веры в книжных иллюстрациях в западноевропейском искусстве. // Вестник Православного Свято-Тихоновского Гуманитарного Университета. Серия 5: Вопросы истории и теории христианского искусства. М. 2015. Вып. 1 (17). С. 45-54.

Annunciation and Christmas are depicted at the same time, framed together as one image. Thus, in the illustration of the fifth formula, "Descent into hell" and "Rise from the grave" are combined (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4.** Resurrection (as "Rising from the grave") and Descent into hell. Fifth engraving of the "Apostles' Creed" from the Piscator's Bible. Adrian Collaert, by M. de Vos. 1674. F. 453.

### **The way of association of two images**

So, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Anastasis) and "The Descent into Hell" are two different images that arose in different cultures - Byzantine and Latin - not connected with each other either by their history or iconography, moreover, they have different scenes.

The action of Anastasis takes place in the heavenly world, this is the moment of the Resurrection of Christ, His triumph over death, the complete victory over hell and the devil, the return of paradise to man. All the action in the "Descent into Hell" takes place in the underworld, which he (he= the devil?) enters having a unique purpose: to destroy the Saviour. How could these two so different images be associated with each other?

The answer to this question can be found in the history of Russian art of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Western European influences become strong in Russia.

Namely, when icon painters begin to use various Western European engravings as models for creating new images. Between the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>



centuries, Protestant albums of engravings and illustrated Bibles appeared in Russia, and Russian icon painters turned to the images of such “Face Bibles” as models for their work. Recall that at the moment of confrontation with Catholicism in Protestantism, they once again turned to the "Apostles' Creed" - which is presented on Protestant engravings.

For example, in the “Theatrum Biblicum”, printed in the Netherlands by Nicolas Ioannes Piscator, in the section illustrating the gospel narrative, the West-European image of Resurrection, “Rise from the tomb” is placed (Fig. 5). This image was unusual for the Orthodox art of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore, when creating icons like “I Believe”<sup>8</sup> or icons that were supposed to depict the Resurrection, Russian icon painters turned to the next section of this Bible - illustrations of the “Apostolic Creed” - and used its fifth engraving, not assuming the possibility of another Creed, different from the Orthodox one.



**Fig. 5.** Resurrection (as “Rising from the grave”). Engraving of the Gospel from the Piscator’s Bible.

However, these differences exist, and as we have already noted, just in the fifth formula. The engraving illustrating this formula depicts two

---

<sup>8</sup> Иванова С.В. Икона «Символ веры» в русском искусстве. // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского Университета. Серия 15: Искусствоведение. СПб: Издательство Санкт-Петербургского Университета, 2015. С. 64-74.



events: the descent of Christ into hell and his Resurrection (in Western European iconography, as the Rising from the tomb). The descent is shown here as it began to be depicted in Italian art (the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries), without the hellish mouth. It is this engraving that Russian icon painters have begun to copy, giving it iconographic features.

This is how that image appeared, which is characteristic only for Russian art, created as a copy of an engraving, where two images side by side, the Descent into Hell and the Rise from the Sepulcher - which is typical for the Creed, which is different from the Orthodox one. It could be said that the image of the "Descent into Hell" for the first time (the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) becomes a reality of Orthodox art. But here it is necessary to take into account the possibility that the icon painters simply did not understand its meaning and interpreted it differently.

### **Stages of accommodation of new iconography**

The confirmation that the icon painters of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries did not understand what is depicted in the engraving can be seen in the iconography of the new image "Rise from the tomb with the Descent into Hell."



**Fig. 6.** Resurrection (as "Rising from the grave") and Descent into hell. 1679 – 1681. From the Archangel Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin.

On earlier similar icons, we do not see an exact copy, but a modification that reflects the understanding of the icon painter. Since he perceives the first image as corresponding to "Anastasis", he places it above the image of the Rebellion from the Tomb (Fig. 6).

The place of action of the image "Rise from the grave" is our world, the earthly reality, and the icon painters of the 16th-17th centuries placed it in the lower right corner, although copying the engraving, but changing its composition.

Then, in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, "The Rise from the tomb with the Descent into Hell" is depicted as an exact copy of the engraving: the location of the plots relative to each other is preserved (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7.** Resurrection (as "Rising from the grave") and Descent into hell. Mikhey and Savva Slovenins. 1764.



**Fig. 8.** Resurrection (as "Rising from the grave") and Descent into hell. First half of the 18th century. State Museum of Palekh Art.

For the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the new iconography is already characteristic, where the figure of Christ is twice located along the central vertical (Fig. 8). It turns out a stable compositional dominant, around which other events are located. This includes not only those events that are mentioned in the Gospel, but also apocryphal stories (the story of the Prudent Robber, the myrrh-bearing wife of Tiberius, the story of the ubrus etc.).

An analysis of the composition of these plots allows us to name as their source the collection "The Passion of the Christ" - a translated work from Western European literature, which has had a wide circulation in Russia since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and has become popular among the people, especially among the Old Believers.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the official church art was oriented towards academic models. The Western European image "Rise from the tomb" has become well-known in Russian art - it is this image that we see in the main cathedrals in St.Petersburg. But among the peasants and old-believers, both the Anastasis icon and the multi-figured image "Rise from the tomb with the Descent into hell" continue to exist.

The situation changes with the building of the Church of the Resurrection in St. Petersburg ("Savior on Blood"), which, at the request of Nicholas II, should be decorated in accordance with ancient iconography<sup>9</sup>. The search for the origins begins, which was destined to end with the revolution.



**Fig. 9.** Anastasis (Resurrection of Christ).1370s–1380s. State Russian Museum.

Art criticism works, which were published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, accept a new designation of the image (for example, N.P. Pokrovsky uses the names

---

<sup>9</sup> Иванова С.В. Анастасис: в поисках канона. Образ Воскресения в русской иконографии на рубеже XIX-XX веков. Верующий разум. СПб., 2014. № 1 (3). С. 64-77.

“Anastasis” and “Descent into Hell” as identical). But there has been no study showing the legitimacy of such an association. This is how that “tradition” arises, which at present seems to be “old”, and therefore time-honored.

Just as not a single dogma of the Creed can be changed, so in icon painting any random change can lead to the loss of the meaning of the icon. Unfortunately, such a rough change was allowed in relation to the image of the “the Feast of Feasts” (Fig. 9) - the Resurrection of Christ.

### **List of illustrations:**

**Fig. 1.** Anastasis (Resurrection of Christ). Icon from the church of the Assumption in the village of Volotovo near Novgorod, 1470s–1480s.

**Fig. 2.** Anastasis (Resurrection of Christ). Miniature. Athos, 11th century.

**Fig. 3.** Harrowing of hell. Hjembaek, Denmark, ca. 1475.

**Fig. 4.** Resurrection (as “Rising from the grave”) and Descent into hell. Fifth engraving of the “Apostles' Creed” from the Piscator’s Bible. Adrian Collaert, by M. de Vos. 1674. F. 453.

**Fig. 5.** Resurrection (as “Rising from the grave”). Engraving of the Gospel from the Piscator’s Bible.

**Fig. 6.** Resurrection (as “Rising from the grave”) and Descent into hell. 1679 – 1681. From the Archangel Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin.

**Fig. 7.** Resurrection (as “Rising from the grave”) and Descent into hell. Mikhey and Savva Slovenins. 1764.

**Fig. 8.** Resurrection (as “Rising from the grave”) and Descent into hell. First half of the 18th century. State Museum of Palekh Art.

**Fig. 9.** Anastasis (Resurrection of Christ). 1370s–1380s. State Russian Museum.

### **Bibliography:**

**Kartsonis, A. D.,** *Anastasis: The Making of an Image*. Princeton, New Jersey, 1986.

**Loerke, M.-M.-O.,** *Höllenfahrt Christi und Anastasis. Ein Bildmotiv im Abendland und im christlichen Osten*, Regensburg, 2003.

**Simor, S. B.,** «I believe». *Images of the Credo from Charlemagne to Luther. Dissertation*, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1996.

**Weigel T.,** *Die Reliefsäulen des Hauptaltarciburiums von San Marco in Venedig*, Rhema Verlag, 1997.

**Иванова, С.В.,** Апостольский Символ веры в книжных иллюстрациях в западноевропейском искусстве. // Вестник Православного Свято-Тихоновского Гуманитарного Университета. Серия 5: Вопросы истории и теории христианского искусства. М. 2015. Вып. 1 (17). С. 45-54.

**Иванова, С.В.,** Анастасис: в поисках канона. Образ Воскресения в русской иконографии на рубеже XIX-XX веков. Верующий разум. СПб., 2014. № 1 (3). С. 64-77.

**Иванова, С.В.**, Воскресение и Сошествия во ад: история двух сюжетов в христианском искусстве. СПб.: Российский институт истории искусств, 2019. – 398 с.

**Иванова, С.В.**, Икона «Символ веры» в русском искусстве. // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского Университета. Серия 15: Искусствоведение. СПб: Издательство Санкт-Петербургского Университета, 2015. С. 64-74.

**Иванова, С.В.**, Образ «Сошествие во ад» в творчестве итальянских художников (XIV-XVI вв.) // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета технологии и дизайна. СПб., 2018. Вып. 4. С. 24-31

**Иларион (Алфеев)**, архиепископ. Христос – победитель ада. Тема сошествия во ад в восточнохристианской традиции. СПб., 2009.



# **BOOK REVIEWS**

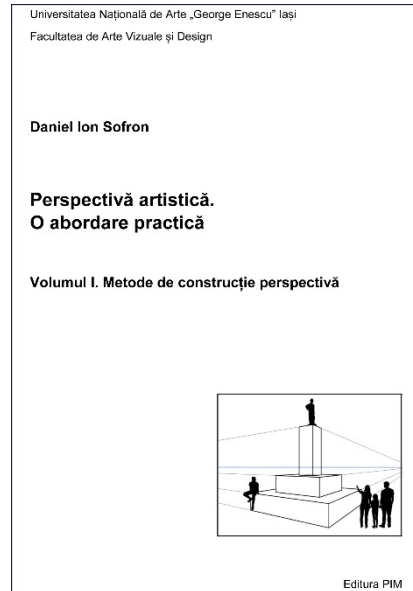




# Perspective in Art. A Practical Approach - Daniel Ion Sofron Book Review

Maria Urmă\*

Daniel Ion Sofron, *Perspectivă artistică. O abordare practică / Perspective in Art. A Practical Approach*, PIM Publishing House, Iași, 2022, 2 volumes, 240 pages.



Perspective representation has preoccupied artists in all historical periods, starting with the observational perspective of Antiquity, continuing with the intuitive representation of the Middle Ages and culminating in the theorising and scientific representation of the Renaissance and Baroque eras. The exploration of spatial depth, of the third dimension, has fascinated mankind since the dawn of times. The modern period has turned perspective representation into a work and control tool in spatial compositions, with electronic technology facilitating this type of representation.

Studies on perspective have mostly been carried out in art and architecture education, the authors of perspective treatises generally being teachers in this field.

In Romania, the first author of a treatise on perspective is Horia Teodoru, a Romanian architect who studied in France and who introduces the theory of perspective in our higher education system. His two-volume treatise, *Perspectiva*, published in 1968, lies at the foundation of the Romanian studies on perspective subsequently written by Adrian Gheorghiu,

---

\*Professor, PhD, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, “George Enescu” National University of Arts from Iasi, e-mail: [urma3@yahoo.com](mailto:urma3@yahoo.com)

Aurelian Tănăsescu, Mircea Enache, Iulius Ionescu and Zamfir Dumitrescu. Starting from the fundamental theoretical bases, the current studies on perspective attempt to provide practical finality to perspective representation by making use of a modern and simplified language.

As its title shows, *Perspective in Art: A Practical Approach* serves as a practical guide for the course on *Perspective*, a study subject that is included in the academic curriculum of most study programmes at the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design in Iași. The author, Daniel Ion Sofron, is a member of the academic staff in this higher education institution.

The book is a practical guide for representing space and objects in space, a basis for artistic and technical representations in perspective. It includes examples of how to solve the essential tasks necessary to reinforce the knowledge of perspective drawing, which serve as applications of the course content.

The book is structured in two volumes, the first one, entitled *Methods of perspective construction*, including the main perspective representations (frontal perspective and 2-point perspective) and the most important methods of construction of these two types of representations (the freehand method and the constructed method). The second volume, *Construction of the circle. Shadows. Reflections*, deals with rendering natural aspects in perspective: the representation of circles, shadows of objects and mirrored images.

Using a step-by-step approach, the author presents all the stages of perspective drawing in clear and suggestive graphic schemes, accompanied by a concise text. It further explains the course content and it also provides students with the opportunity to independently study and master the main methods of perspective construction.

With this book, Daniel Sofron brings out necessary content for the development of present-day education. This teaching material is in line with the current trend of transmitting knowledge not only through direct interaction and graphic representations on the blackboard, but also through electronic technology. From this point of view, the book meets the contemporary requirement of acquiring skills through individual study.

The inclusion of works created by students reveals the effectiveness of the practical approach proposed by this book, which thus becomes a very useful documentary material. In addition, reducing the construction and representation methods to their essence brings more clarity to the field.

The step-by-step approach, which implies explaining the successive stages of the elaboration of perspective representation, makes this book a much-needed document in art education.

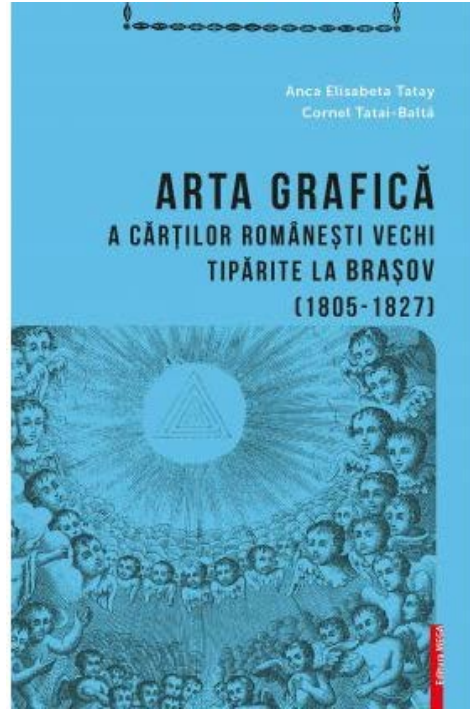
Although, at first glance, the book seems to be useful only to students, it is also addressed to specialists, who can use it to further study and gain in-depth knowledge, since it presents the practical construction methods of the main types of perspective representation.

At the present stage, perspective knowledge is indispensable both in artistic representations and for the purpose of creating and controlling spatial compositions, which is much more accessible due to the development of electronic technology.

## On Graphic Arts of the Early Romanian Books Printed in Braşov in Romanian Art History Book Review

Ana-Magdalena Petraru\*

Anca Elisabeta Tatay, Cornel Tatai-Baltă *Arta grafică a cărţilor româneşti vechi tipărite la Braşov/ The Graphic Arts of the Early Romanian Books Printed in Braşov*, Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, 241 pages



Anca Elisabeta Tatay, distinguished for her merits in art history with the George Barişiu prize of the Romanian Academy (2013) and her father, Cornel Tatai-Baltă, reputed art historian, university professor and art critic from Alba Iulia co-author a series of volumes on old Romanian books and their art, interdisciplinary research pertaining to the history of the book and art history, in general and engravings and graphic art, in particular.

The table of contents starts with an argument and comprises three chapters, the first on Braşov as an important printing centre of Transylvania (1539-1827), the second on minor ornaments: title pages, frontispieces, vignettes, seals (1805-1827), the third on the illustrations of the books printed in Braşov (1805-1827), conclusions and a rich bibliography. The list of reproductions and illustrations occupy the second half of the book, followed by indices and the authors' bio notes.

In the argument, the authors claim that the history of the book and of Romanian print is tough, yet fascinating and according to the researcher from Iaşi, Elena Chiaburu, the documents from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century are so

---

\* Ana-Magdalena Petraru, Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Letters, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University from Iaşi, România, e-mail: [alina.petraru@gmail.com](mailto:alina.petraru@gmail.com)

many, that it is impossible to conduct any research without narrowing down the topic. Moreover, the art historian Alexandru Busuioceanu drew attention to the fact that Romanian xyloengravings were of particular cultural and artistic value especially due to the previous investigations of the authors related to Neamț monastery (1940), Blaj (1995), Râmnic (1998), Sibiu (2007, 2018), Buda (2010, 2011) or Bucharest (2015), completing the studies in periodicals (p. 9).

Regarding Brașov as an important printing centre of Transylvania (1539-1827), it is argued that Gutenberg's printing press spread rapidly to the Romanian space and it was the hieromonk Macarie that printed the first books in Slavonic language at Târgoviște or Dealu Monastery (in 1508, 1510 and 1512, respectively). In Transylvania, the first Romanian book, the so-called Lutheran *Catechism* comes out in 1544 due to the efforts of Philip the Moldavian, whereas the *Tetrevangelium* of 1546 in Cyrillic alphabet is considered far more valuable than other European ones due to its xyloengravings (p. 11). However, in Brașov, it was Johannes Honterus, a reputed scholar with studies in Vienna, who printed the first books in 1539, along with his collaborator, Valentin Wagner, student at the University of Wittenberg. Together they print textbooks (Latin and Greek grammars), classical works (by Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca, Aristotle, Plato, Saint Augustin or Erasmus from Rotterdam) and some books for Lutheran propaganda. It is important to mention that some textbooks from Brașov such as *Rudimenta Cosmographia* by Honterus (Krakow 1530, Brașov 1542) were used as geography, astronomy and natural sciences textbooks in German schools at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with many reprints in various European cities (pp. 11-12). As a landmark, Honterian engravings have an elegant title page pertaining to the style of Renaissance and Valentin Wagner's *Imagines mortis selectiores* (1557) was decorated with xyloengravings based on the famous images of death, i.e., *Bilder des Todes* illustrations of Hans Holbein the Young accompanied by original verses<sup>1</sup> (p. 13). In this period, deacon Coresi also distinguishes himself, working on dozens of religious books, in Slavonic, Romanian and bilingual editions. Apart from the orders that aimed at propagating the Reform among Romanians, there is also the return to the Orthodox faith and, according to the authors, the most illustrative work in this sense, is the 1581 *Evangelion* with the stamp of the patron, Lucas Hirscher (pp. 14-15). The first calendar in Romanian, printed in 1733 at Brașov was inspired by Serbian and Kiev models. The rise of the Romanian bourgeoisie at Brașov, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> cent. and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. contributes to the rise of the history of (old) books and their art (p. 16). The pleasant graphic aspect of the printings from Brașov from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. due to wood and

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Răzvan Teodorescu, *Civilizația românilor între medieval și modern*, vol. 1, București, Ed. Meridiane, 1987, pp. 62-64, 66-70, fig. 15-29.

metal engraving attracted researchers such as Dragoş Morărescu or Ruxandra Moaşa Nazare (p. 19), Gh. Oprescu<sup>2</sup> arguing that wood engraving and the printing of religious books skyrocketed in Transylvania despite the hardships of the Romanian people from Blaj, Sibiu and Braşov during those times (p. 20).

As far as the chapter on minor ornaments is concerned, the authors proceed to a minute analysis of the title pages, frontispieces, vignettes, seals between 1805-1827. They analysed 32 title pages (two referring to the same book, the 1805 *Little Octoih*), out of which 15 were simple (made up of thin lines, sometimes accompanied by geometrical models), and 3 had only a little ornament at their base such as a child with a garland of flowers sitting on a shell or a child posing near a basket of flowers (p. 21). Seven title pages are included in simple frames, whereas the last seven ones have larger frames in the style of a Louis XVI gate, some hosting, under their arch, ornaments such as a writer at his desk, a child with a book and pen, a vase with vegetal elements. At their corners, the gates show Moses's tablets and Aaron's staff (alluding to the Old Testament) and the Bible and the Eucharistic chalice, respectively (alluding to the New Testament) (p. 22). For each description, figures are provided in the second part of the book.

In the contents of the books from Braşov, Anca Elisabeta Tatay and Cornel Tatai-Baltă identify a seal, 44 frontispieces and vignettes, i.e., the small ornaments that open or end a chapter. They encountered only two religious frontispieces with anthropomorphic figures, the former, of larger dimensions, showing Jesus Christ and the four evangelists in the aforementioned *Little Octoih*, in a rustic, yet singular composition, our Romanian art historians noting the solemn figure of our Saviour, standing, the cross in His hands, the stigmata of his hands and rib visible, and the animated gestures of the evangelists and their symbols; the larger one renders the supper at Mamre (*Euchologion*, 1811) as the Byzantine iconographic representation of the Holy Trinity. Two smaller frontispieces contain religious symbols, one, the motif of the wheat herringbone with the divine eye in the middle as symbol of the Holy Trinity and the other, consisting of vegetal elements surmounted by a little cross with Moses's tablets in the middle in an oval medallion and the cross, chalice and Eucharist bread specific to Catholicism as symbols of the Old and New Testament, respectively. Among others, the authors also identify frontispieces of geometric elements recalling Romanian art and the motif of the sun (*Little Octoih*, *The Horologion*) (pp. 25-26).

Out of the numerous vignettes, only two show Christian symbols, both from the 1806 *Horologion*: the eye of God in a triangle and a character sitting at the writing desk near a cross in an 18<sup>th</sup> century atmosphere. There

---

<sup>2</sup> Gh. Oprescu, *Grafica românească în secolul and XIX-lea*, Bucureşti, Fundaţia Regală pentru Literatură şi Artă, 1942, p. 281.

are many vignettes displaying vegetal motives pertaining to the rococo style, very fashionable in 18<sup>th</sup> cent. Western Europe (e.g.: the 1810 *Psalter*, the 1811 *Euchologion*, etc.). In a very elegant manner, convex and concave curves are displayed, flowers fruits, a basket allowing art historians to draw parallels between the old Romanian books and other European ones of the time, also identifying gaps and additions (pp. 27-28). Alongside rococo, the influence of neoclassicism is also asserted, in the pipeline when the books from Braşov were printed (in a frontispiece with an owl and its spread wings, previously interpreted as symbol of wisdom, reflection, science and wealth (*ibidem*), a vignette showing a water fountain, a bust framed by two obelisks and the one portraying the goddess Minerva) (pp. 30-21). A rare element is the engraving of the seal of the Phanariot ruler Ioan Gheorghe Caragea, a circle surmounted by a crown with a cross with two garlands at the base, each comprising a six-pointed star and the emblem of the principality of Wallachia at its centre (pp. 32-33).

The third and most comprehensive chapter, on the illustrations of the books printed in Braşov (1805-1827) thoroughly discusses 31 books that came out during this period, including them in a table at the end of the chapter for quick reference. The first one is *Bucoavnă, 1805*, inter alia, the authors dealing with the xyloengraving showing St. Nicholas, a figure that spreads kindness which made him so beloved. Wearing church vestments, he has a contemplative attitude and the cloudy sky highlights him (p. 37). St. Nicholas also completes the new xyloengravings of the second book tackled, *Horologion, 1806*: Jesus, Great Archiereus on the clouds, the Annunciation, the Dormition of the Mother of God and the Seraphs' Hymn (pp. 39-40). The authors link Braşov prints to others, in this case noting that there has been an institutional collaboration between Braşov and Buda since the wood plaques of two of the engravings, the Annunciation and the Dormition of the Mother of God are unsigned and engraved by Carolus Fridericus Hederich Frigyes according to the documents of the University of Pesta printing house (p. 41). The illustration of King David decorates the *1807 Psalter*, the third book dealt with by the two art historians, as well as its subsequent editions of 1810 and 1816. Naively treated, the engraving has the inscription of the prophet and king David, elegantly dressed in golden clothing similar to the Flemish ones of the 15<sup>th</sup> cent or Stephen the Great in some portraits, he is praying on his knees, his arms spread, an aureole on his head, like the saints. The engraver found inspiration in a work from Dosoftei's 1673 *Psalter* (p. 45). *The Little Octoih, 1810* has the resurrection as illustration with an indecipherable signature in which Christ rises triumphantly from a ray of light surrounded by clouds, blessing with His right hand and holding the flag of the resurrection in His left hand, two sleeping soldiers at His feet, a Western type of representation in iconography, equally spread in the Balkan area (p. 46). Ioniţ Ion Voinea signs a crucifixion xyloengraving on the 1811

*Euchologion* on which the dead Jesus Christ is depicted with His eyes shut, a common device in the Byzantine art of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> cent. (*ibidem*).

More comprehensively discussed is *Uşa pocăinţei/ Door of Repentance*, 1812 translated into Romanian from Greek by monk Rafail who dedicates it to the metropolitan Dosithei of Wallachia and illustrates it with five copper engravings (the angel of God, death, judgement day, heaven and hell) that could have benefited from more artistic craft (pp. 49-50). The authors argue that the European art of the Middle Ages is full of images of hell, the one in the book with an almost naked devil riding a monster in flames resembling the miniature from the *Winchester Psalter*, also known as *The Psalter of Henry of Blois* from the 12<sup>th</sup> cent., currently located at the British Library (pp. 60-61).

Other illustrations accounted for are from *The Paraklesis of Saint Haralambos*, 1815 which renders the saint as an old man who inspires respect as protector against the plague and other diseases (pp. 66-67), the 1816 *Bucoavnă* (The Holy Trinity, also present in the subsequent editions and in the 1826 *Horologion*), the 1824 *Bulgarian Bucvar*, a collection from other spelling books compiled by Petru Berovici with illustrated animals for children, namely a monkey, an elephant, a rhinoceros, a stag, a beaver, a crocodile, a hippopotamus, an ostrich, a crane, a whale and a dolphin (pp. 69-70). The last ones are the 1824 *Paraklesis of Saint Haralambos and of Saint Mina*, the illustration of the former resembling the 1815 one, the latter being depicted as a Roman soldier since he was part of the troops sent to the East (p. 72), the 1826 *Horologion* that also contains the illustrations of The Life-Giving Spring and the Holy Communion, apart from the ones of the previous editions (p. 74) and the 1827 *Metrical Psalter* illustrated for Ioan Prale (1769-1849) from Iaşi showing King David (p. 76).

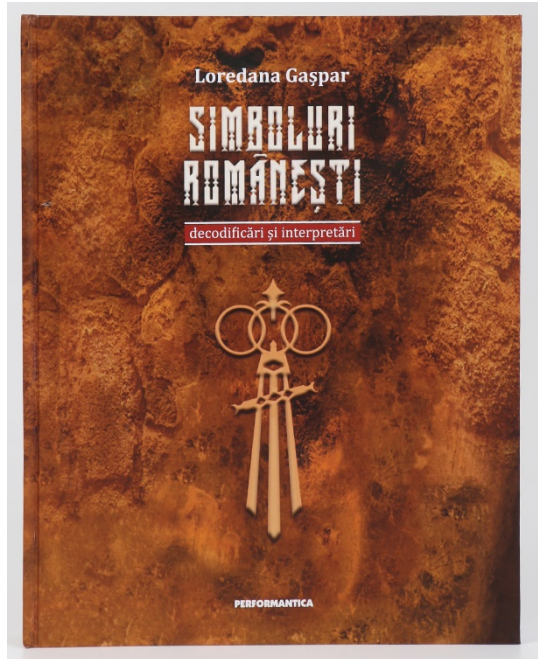
Anca Elisabeta Tatay and Cornel Tatai-Baltă conclude that their interpretations of the 24 illustrations from the books that came out at Braşov between 1805-1827 reveal that religious and lay themes were approached, the authors of the wood and more rarely employed metal engravings mainly remaining anonymous. The iconographic topics are Byzantine, sometimes with Western influences, with an impact on the glass painted icons from southern Transylvania. Less popular than the ones from Blaj and Sibiu, they compensate though the novelty of the themes tackled. The book is, therefore, a must read for all specialists in art history, history of the (old) book in its graphic dimension, students and anyone who wants to get acquainted with the topic.



## Romanian Symbols Decoding and Interpretation Book Review

Mihaela Samoil-Cozma\*

Loredana Gașpar, *Simboluri românești decodificări și interpretări/ Romanian Symbols Decoding and Interpretation*, Performantica Publishing House, Iași, 2022, 362 pages



The work is a research that has been carried out for over ten years, a massive documentation, the author making use of a rich biography, but also studying in the field in many villages, hamlets, and museums. Up to nowadays, no such study has been written. The courage to tackle such a study is extremely salutary, all the more so as information, practices, customs, traditions and traditional household are disappearing with each generation, and researchers to study them have been very few in number, and those currently in existence are almost non-existent.

The author synthesizes the main Romanian symbols found in the Romanian area, taking a look at each of them from the Neolithic period to the present day. In several cases, the meticulous research reveals the preservation of the main substratum of meanings, but in others mixtures of influences due to the dynamics of the populations that have left their mark, determining a different meaning in the reading of the symbols. In practice, none of the symbols can have a single interpretation, each being influenced in its reading by the context and substrate to which we are attached.

---

\* Student, History and Theory of Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, "George Enescu" National University of Arts from Iași, e-mail: [mercato\\_pp@yahoo.com](mailto:mercato_pp@yahoo.com)

The book presents two types of discourse, one oriented towards the depths of abstraction, the other iconic – directed towards the mystery of Faith, but not religious Faith, but the Faith of knowledge. The two discourses – the lexical one and the iconic one – in which the image comes and points, uncovers and reveals the archetype of the first graphic sign, they intertwine spectacularly, offering a complex key to understanding, sometimes on certain meanings, sometimes on the moment of the beginning of creation starting from the core of the symbols.

The search for the whole by penetrating deeper and deeper layers has led the author to search and find a Mystery that creates the image of an archetype. In the twenty-nine chapters (Point, Circle, Volute, Angle, Rhombus, Column, Twin Segments, Circular and Angular Spiral, Wandering Path, Water Wave, Ram's Horns, Sun, Moon, Stars, Flower of Life, Swastika, Tree of Life, Man, Horse, Bird, Snake, Wolf, Bull, Bear, Carpathian Lion, Egg, Rope, Sacred Knot, Fantastic Beings), Loredana Gașpar chronologically traces the path that symbols have travelled through time, but also notices the many facets that a symbol can have. It is an assiduous approach that tries to lead to a decoding of symbols and to create the initial structure that formed it.

"Myths give rise to traditions, rituals, emotionally charged objects that want to copy the behaviour of a divine ancestor. Over time, these practices are either preserved with great interest, forgotten or given other functions. Historical time sometimes mercilessly kidnaps mythical time, other times they happily cohabit together, which is still the case today."

The author decodes, but also interprets the symbols, always referring to archetypal myths and to the historical time that has blurred or enhanced some symbols. A common characteristic of symbols is that they are perfectly camouflaged behind an aesthetic veil that sometimes diminishes or complicates their true meaning. Repetitive decoration, violent chromaticism, especially after industrialisation, inadequate positioning or neighbourhoods that make the symbol a zone of gratuitous, ornamental writing, sometimes make reading and interpretation cumbersome, but this has not prevented the author from transcending beyond these syncopations and penetrating to the core of the archetypes.

In addition to the ancient authors who studied the myths Simion Florea Marian, Artur Gorovei, Tudor Pamfile, I.-A. Candrea, Elena Niculiță-Voronca, Romulus Vulcănescu or the even fewer who have studied symbols (Nicolae Dunăre, Constantin Prut), Loredana Gașpar speaks through her two discourses – lexical and iconic – about meanings, but also about the courage of creation starting from the core of the symbol, thus decoding deep mysteries.