

The Art of Sculpture and the Development of Christianity in Ukraine

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Abstract: *The purpose of the article is to offer a comprehensive study on the meaning of sacral art in the formation of Christianity in Ukraine. The scientific novelty of this research is that the artistic features of the sculpture in Ukraine analysed in the process of the formation of Christianity in the region are highlighted for the first time. Based on the elaborated material, it is the interrelation of the art of the Christian sculpture of the area with the developed local pagan traditions that is mostly shown. After all, religious sculpture played an essential role regarding the sacred culture of ancient Ukrainians.*

As a result of the study, it was found that the art of sculpture in wood and stone in Ukraine has ancient traditions. Christianity has drawn all the best from this tradition and adapted it according to its cult: the technique of wood and stone processing, the range of plots, mythological traditions. The mentioned approach may also be applied to other types of sacred art: painting, artistic metal processing, etc., which should be considered in subsequent scientific studies.

Keywords: *the art of sculpture, Christianity, art culture, development of religion, plastic arts, development of art*

The relevance of the problem. Researchers from the independent Ukrainian state have had the opportunity to engage more widely in sacred art and religion. However, even now there is a gap in the achievements of sacred art and culture, particularly when it comes to the period of the rise of Christianity.

Analysis of research and publications. O. Boliuk considered a wide range of art literature on the theme of the use of artistic products made of wood in the equipment of the church¹. However, the analysed works do not take into consideration the problems of using the artworks made of the wood in the religious cult of the formation period of Christianity in Ukraine.

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¹ Oleh Boliuk, Art studies studio of artistic wood products in the church: a brief overview of the historiography of the problem, *Narodoznavchi zoshyty*, 5 (137), 2017, p. 1019-1037.

Some works, though affecting the connection between the art of carving and sacred culture, mainly cover the period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that is, another chronological frame².

More on the mentioned issue is done in the field of cultural studies, at least from the perspective of the spiritual culture. The idea of the immortality of the soul and eternal life was worked out in the study of P. Herchanivska³.

The review of professional publications shows that regarding contemporary Ukrainian scientific thinking the significance of sacred art in the period of the formation of Christianity is quite unexplored.

The aim of the study is to provide for a comprehensive research on the subject of the significance and application of sacred art in the period of the rise of Christianity in the Ukrainian lands.

The methodology of the research is based on the general principles of scientific work: systematicity, authenticity, historicism, and logic. The systematic method of study is chosen to create a credible image of the evolution of the art of sculpture and to determine its place in the sacred culture of Ukrainians of Galicia. The historical and cultural method is involved in the disclosure of historical preconditions of the development of sculpture art in Ukraine.

Results. According to historical science, the artistic treatment of the wood was distributed on the territory of Ukraine from ancient times. What we are interested in is its application in the sacred cult. Thus, according to archaeological data, sculptures of idols were known in the Bugan tribe (who lived in the basin of the Western Bug River) during the III-IV centuries A.D. The facts of the application during funeral ceremonies of idol sculptures "in the form of people" were clearly recorded (at least in 922 A.D.⁴).

With regard to the material from which idols were made, the ancient chronicles mention idols carved out of wood. The chronicles indicate not only the material but also the tools by which they were made: "Not gods, then the wood. Today is, and tomorrow is rotten. Do not eat because do not drink, do not speak, but made by the hands of a tree, an ax and a knife"⁵. In the chronicle mentioned above, we read that the German ambassadors tell Volodymyr the Great, with the aim of persuading him, to accept Christianity from the Pope: "Pope said to you: your land is like our land, and your faith is

² Roman Odrekhivskiy, Ukrainian national revival and development of the art of carving in Galicia (the end of 19 – the beginning of 20 century), *Visnyk Natsionalnoi akademii kerivnykh kadrov kultury i mystetstv*, 2. 2018, p. 239–243.

³ Polina Herchanivska, Invariance and openness of Ukrainian folk religious culture, *Kultura i suchasnist*, Volume 1, 2010, p. 92–96.

⁴ *The history of Ukrainian art: in 6 volumes* (head. Ed. M. P. Bazhan), Kyiv, URE, 1966–1970, V. 1, p. 334.

⁵ *The story of past years. On the Ipad list*. Translation from Old Ukrainian by V. V. Yaremenko, Radianskyi pismennyk, Kyiv, 1990, p. 139.

not like our faith. Our faith is light, we bow to God, who created the heavens, and the earth, and the stars, and the moon, and all that breathes, and your gods are wood"⁶.

Thus, according to researchers and chronicles, the ancient Slavic idols were predominantly wooden, therefore almost not preserved to these days. Their style and character remain unknown to us. Single stone sculptures are preserved in Podillia, where there are rich deposits of stone. Stylistically, the mentioned sculptures are similar to stone women of the Scythian age, which manifests themselves not only in the general form of the images, but also in many characteristic details (for example, the motive of the horn for drinking, which the deity holds in his hand, or the sword on the belt)⁷.

The ancient chronicle transmits only specific details of the appearance of some of the idols, from which one can understand that the ones described have anthropomorphic appearance:

And Volodymyr began to reign in Kyiv alone,
And he put gods on the hill behind the courtyard:
Perun is wooden, and his head is silver, and his mustache is golden;
Both Horse and Dazbog, and Strybog, and Simargal, and Mokosh⁸.

Among the surviving of the most famous is, undoubtedly, the Zbruchansky idol, found in the river Zbruch in 1848 (Svyatovyt). The god is a tetrahedral pillar, on each side of which we see three tiers of images. The upper level on all four sides is a man in a cap, the middle tier – also on all four sides – a person with an unnecessarily large head, short legs, and helplessly diluted hands. On the lower level (only on three sides) carved reliefs of faces⁹. Researchers interpret this three-tier division as three spheres of the world: the sky is the place where the gods live; the earth is inhabited by people, defenseless in the face of the other, and, finally, hell – the kingdom of evil spirits.

The idea of the immortality of the soul is widespread in Ukrainian mythology and culture. Related to this aspect, the researcher P. Herchanivska states:

This idea (birth, life, death, and immortality) permeates the entire national religious culture – its subject-practical, ritual-ritual, practical-

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

⁷ *The history of Ukrainian art: in 6 volumes* (head. Ed. M. P. Bazhan), Kyiv, URE, 1966–1970, V. 1, p. 115.

⁸ *The story of past years. On the Ipad list*, Translation from Old Ukrainian by V. V. Yaremenko, Radianskyi pysmennyk, Kyiv, 1990, p. 133.

⁹ *The history of Ukrainian art: in 6 volumes* (head. Ed. M. P. Bazhan), Kyiv, URE, 1966–1970, V. 1, p. 116-118.

spiritual level. The mentioned invariant complex, which determines the cyclicity of human existence, manifests itself in various forms of popular consciousness (mythological, religious, philosophical, artistic, aesthetic, memorial), defining the specifics of ritual acts and rituals, folk art-figurative vision of the world, and determines the pattern of behavior and orientation of a human in the context of practical spheres¹⁰.

M. Hrushevsky believes that the treatment of the wood was widespread in the Slavonic way of life. "The remains of woody graves and wood-dishes are widespread in the graves"¹¹, – writes M. Hrushevsky, unfortunately, not specifying which part of Ukraine is being discussed.

If we talk about the Ancient Rus times, then there are already known specific terms like "woodworker" and even "wood unions". About the XI century in Ancient Kyivan Rus' we know that "on every step, we cite the mention of dwarven structures, walls, bridges; the structure of the stone appeared under the influence of others and was very rare"¹².

Thus, eventually, woodworking has developed into a separate branch of professional activity, in particular in large cities, such as Kyiv. D. Doroshenko mentions the foreign traveler Titmar Merzenburg, who noted that in 1018 there were 400 churches in the city of Kyiv¹³. There was a certain amount of woodworkers who would serve specific needs. To conclude everything mentioned above, it can be assumed that most of the churches were wooden.

Christianity, which came from Byzantium to change paganism, was, undoubtedly, a more structured religion than the previous one, and required the existence of a particular group of people to serve the worship – priests and masters of various branches, in particular, wood carvers and stone. As to the level of organization of pagan pre-Christian religion, the views of scientists are divided here. Some researchers believe that Pagan Faith was less organized than Christianity. The adherents of the mentioned ideas are D. Doroshenko and M. Hrushevsky. According to D. Doroshenko, the ancient gods did not have a clear image and strictly delineated functions. There were no temples or priests, the place of which was occupied by ordinary diviners or healers¹⁴.

M. Hrushevsky believes that during the times of Igor or Volodymyr the pagan cult of honoring the gods in the form of anthropomorphic images

¹⁰ Polina Herchanivska, Invariance and openness of Ukrainian folkreligious culture, *Kultura i suchasnist*, Volume 1, 2010, p. 94-95.

¹¹ Mykhailo Hrushevskiyi, *The history of Ukraine-Rus': in 11 volumes*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1991-2010, V. 1, p. 264.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Dmytro Doroshenko, *Essay on the history of Ukraine: in 2 volumes*, Kyiv, Globus, 1991, V. 1, p. 46.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

could only be at the initial stage of its development. Probably, idols were placed in public spaces, whereas "the masses of the people could stand at the old sacrifices and prayers in the circle of trees and wells"¹⁵. The religious outlook of our people in pre-Christian times was based on the cult of nature¹⁶. Moreover, there is no wonder that the image of the tree has remained in the religious symbolism of the Ukrainian people to these days: for example, planting trees or image trees on the graves. According to the testimonies of the contemporaries of the pagan period, the Slavs replaced temples or images with the tree where people prayed, sacrificed, etc.¹⁷.

Researchers who worked on the issue of the introduction of Christianity in the Ancient Rus believe that the main direction of the process of formation of philosophical thought, the development of the own philosophical ideas autochthon pagan religion revealed a relatively small influence – it has always remained a marginal side factor of the historical and philosophical process. The period of the XI century is called the era of Orthodox-pagan syncretism. It is important to mention that certain pagan remnants have remained in Christianity in Ukraine.

Consequently, it can be assumed that at the time of the remarkable rise in the historical scene of the Galician-Volyn principality (XII-XIV centuries), sacred and memorial sculptures should be regarded as such, which served only Christian religion among the other cults. The burial process was conducted as the process of the burial of the deceased into a dug hole (with the exception of specific graves of prominent people in the churches, etc.).

Thus, P. Herchanivska notes:

Christianity has become a culture of the people with an already established set of rules in the field of Christian dogmatics, cult, church organization, and artistic norms – canons that built a system of rigid guidance, a kind of coordinate system that regulates religious life the people and his artistic creativity. The folk craftsmen perceived not only the Christian canonized iconographic system (a set of plots, rules of the image of biblical plots and characters, symbols, attributes of holiness, etc.), but also a system of views on a picturesque image – as evidence of truth, the reality of biblical legends as well as a reminder of the foretype¹⁸.

Conclusions

With the spread and affirmation of Christianity in the Galicians lands, it was logical to gradually transfer the art of carving to service from

¹⁵ Mykhailo Hrushevskyyi, *The history of Ukraine-Rus': in 11 volumes*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1991-2010, V. 1, p. 326.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 315.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 325.

¹⁸ Polina Herchanivska, Color in the Ukrainian folk culture. *Aktualni problemy istorii, teorii ta praktyky khudozhnoi kultury*, XXX, 2013, p. 45.

the pagan worship to Christianity religion. The mentioned issue was provided due to the fact that the art of carving wood and stone has ancient traditions and is deeply rooted in the sacred culture of Ukrainians. Christianity chose the best of the wood carving tradition – the technique of woodcraft and stone processing, the range of plots, mythological ideas, etc. Therefore, in the further epochs, a high development of church sculpture art has occurred. However, the mentioned idea deserves a separate study. In the prospect of future research, similar studies regarding the development of church painting, bone carving, metal craft, and other forms of art as well as their significance in the formation of Christianity in Ukraine are planned to be conducted.

Nowadays we are familiar with some names of the stone sacral carving masters of ancient Ukraine – Bakun¹⁹ and Avdiy²⁰. The carving masters' skills of the Galicia-Volyn principality were high, and they also worked on other lands. In particular, master Bakun and other stone carvers of Galicia in the 13th century who worked on the Vladimir-Suzdal lands²¹, established their school of white stone carving on the basis of the Ukrainian tradition. The style and the plot of the Galician white stone carving was close to Western European one. Carved mascarons, rhombic motives etc. – we can find analogues in the Western European carving.

The artistic image of Christianity in Ukraine was established on the basis of ancient Ukrainian and Western Romanesque traditions. According to M. Fihol, local Christian structures in Ancient Halych are the result of the combination of the Eastern Slavic structure of temples and architectural-plastic Romanesque architectural decoration.

In the ruins of the Assumption Cathedral in Halych a large number of fragments of architectural details with stone carvings, profiled pilasters, fragments of columns, curly masks have been found. In general, the cathedral was not marked by the wealth of architectural decorations. M. Fihol compares this with the laconic application of sculpture in the exteriors of Ukrainian wooden churches²².

Unfortunately, only a few sculptures and carvings of the Galicia-Volyn principality of the period we covered have survived until nowadays. The reason for this is not only the destructive power of time and wars, but also the actions of individual historical figures. Thus, in the castle of Peremyshl, there was a stone-built "square stone" cathedral of St. John, erected by Volodymyr Rostyslavovych (apparently one of Rostyslav Volodymyrovych's three sons, Yaroslav's grandson). Prince Volodar himself was buried in this church. However, during his time in power in Peremyshl,

¹⁹ Mykhailo Fihol, *Art of ancient Halych*, Mystetstvo, Kyiv, 1997, p. 127.

²⁰ *The history of Ukrainian art: in 6 volumes* (head. Ed. M. P. Bazhan), Kyiv, URE, 1966–1970, V. 1, p. 243.

²¹ Mykhailo Fihol, *Art of ancient Halych*, Mystetstvo, Kyiv, 1997, p. 127.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 44-45.

Lithuanian prince Jagiello gave the cathedral to Roman Catholics in 1410, and in 1470 an old Ukrainian cathedral was dismantled and a new Roman Catholic cathedral was built from its stone²³.

Obviously, the whole carving and other decorations of the temple were lost. Such cases were not rare. On the territory of Ukraine (the Galicia-Volyn principality region), in particular in its Galician part, there were many cave monasteries and churches carved from stone. It also testifies to the prevalence of masonry traditions. These include the Sinevid Monastery, mentioned in 1240, which was situated on the shortest route from Halych to Hungary (which ran over Stryi²⁴, below from Halych on the Dniester river), Bokatyn Monastery of St. Michael, known in the 14th c. and cut in the limestone cliffs of the steep mountain above the Dniester²⁵ and several others. It is possible that some places, including the altars of these monasteries, were decorated with wood carvings. In the XII-XIII centuries the production of stone and clay icons became widespread in the art of ancient Rus'²⁶. This kind of art has existed in all lands of ancient Rus', including the Galician land²⁷.

Carved icons have often been used in the Christian cult. After all, at this difficult time, they were very practical – easy to carry and more resistant to the environment than the colored ones. In addition, the theme of these icons, as we can see from the surviving ones, fully corresponded to the turbulent fighting times of the period of newly established Christianity – the image of Jesus Christ, Theodore Stratilate. The latter is depicted as a warrior in chain mail. Thus, the sculpture not only served as an icon for prayings, but also affirmed the spiritual strength and belief in oneself as a victorious warrior. All these aspects were associated with the sacred culture of the new Christian religion, which coexisted for a long time with the parallel existence of the old pagan one. Thus, together with the approval of Christianity in Ukraine, carving has played an important role in the decorative and illustrative decoration of the Christian cult.

²³ Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, *The history of Ukraine-Rus': in 11 volumes*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1991-2010, V 2, p. 470.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 471.

²⁶ *The history of Ukrainian art: in 6 volumes* (head. Ed. M. P. Bazhan), Kyiv, URE, 1966–1970, V. 1, p. 244.

²⁷ Mykhailo Fihol, *Art of ancient Halych*, Mystetstvo, Kyiv, 1997, p. 176.

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