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MEDIEVAL ART AND CIVILIZATION

The Image of the Kay Kavus in the Works of Decorative and Applied Art of Byzantium and Iran

Nataliia Dmytrenko∗

Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to find and highlight the finest works of art created by artists and goldsmiths of the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic East on the example of the image of Kay Kavus on Garuda, dating from the 5th to the 12th centuries. The study reflects the following aspects: how the iconography and typology of the image of Kay Kavus on Garuda was formed, with what plots his image was most often associated in works of art, and how this oriental plot, modified over the centuries, was organically synthesized with Christian works of art in relation to works of secular use, made in various techniques and materials. A comparative characterization of the iconography of the items in question is given separately, considering the attribution and places of creation of the works of art.*

Keywords: iconography, Byzantine Empire, Islamic East, Iran, Caucasus, decorative and applied art, courtly art

Introduction

The depiction of Kay Kavus on the Garuda is one of the most unique and less-studied subjects in the context of the influence of West Asia and the Islamic East on the art of the Byzantine Empire. In Iranian tradition and mythology, Kay Kavus was one of the legendary kings of Iran, as mentioned in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, the Book of Kings. In this epic, he appears as the personification of the thirst for power, domination, and pride. According to this poetic source, Kay Kavus sought to ascend to heaven with the help of the fantastic bird Garuda, a powerful mythological creature. Hence, in this article, we will try to solve the following issues: (1) to consider, according to the chronology, the earliest artworks in which the use of the still unformed iconography of this plot can be traced; (2) to identify which plots were grouped with the image of Kay Kavus on Garuda. In order to solve these tasks, it is proposed to consider the works presented in the collections of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, the Dumbarton Oaks Collection,

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∗ Ph.D, Associate Professor at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Kyiv, Ukraine, e-mail: nata_heavy@ukr.net; n.dmytrenko@kubg.edu.ua, tel.: +38 050 352 63 16, postal address: 13-B Holosiivska str., 92 apt. Kyiv, Ukraine 03039

the Shuryshkar Regional Historical Museum Complex in Muzhi, the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck, the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya and the mural paintings of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo, Italy.

Research Methodology

This study is based on the analysis and attribution of the selected works of art reviewed in the scientific periodicals of Byzantine scholars, as well as in research presented in their articles at the Symposium at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in the early 2000's. In parallel with the geographical and geopolitical factors that shaped the territory of the Byzantine Empire, the attribution of specific artworks to locations and places of creation from the state museum collections identified in the study is also considered. It should be emphasized that in the study of the achievements of Greek masters who worked in the Byzantine Empire, spreading their skills in the Balkans and then in the territory of Kyivan Rus, researchers paid less attention to the study of the influence of Islamic art on the development and adaptation of the iconography of early Christian subjects, which primarily took as models the examples of late antiquity, which for a long time was confidently held in various forms of art (monumental painting, jewelry, and even illuminations of the manuscripts[1]).

Thus, the study will use the following methods, such as cultural and art historical methods, which allowed us, when analyzing the works, to see the internal cultural relations between countries and individual territories of the Byzantine Empire, West Asia, namely the Caucasus and the Islamic East. The hermeneutic method was used to interpret the plot and analyze works of art, considering a certain period, region, stylistic trends, and traditions within which the monuments were created to determine their distinctive features in different countries. The semiotic method was used to distinguish between the symbols found in the works in question and to study them. The historical and genetic methods allowed us to consistently research how the origin and development of the iconographic traditions of the image of Kay Kavus on Garuda took place in the context of its sources of inspiration. The historical-comparative method was used to compare the iconography of the monuments, researching the features of the Greek and Eastern traditions, and their interaction in the example of comparing the plot with the image of the Ascension of Alexander the Great, a plot that was widespread not only in the decorative arts of the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic East, but also in the monumental decorations of architecture in European countries. The historical

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[1] Dmytrenko N., *Differences in the Iconography of the Plot 'The Last Supper' in the Illuminations of the Gospels and Psalters of the 10th – 14th centuries Created in the Byzantine Empire*. Anastasis. Research in Medieval Culture and Art. Iaşi: The Research Center of Medieval Art « Vasile Drăguţ ». 2021. pp. 102–104.

and cultural method was applied to the study of periods according to historical factors and how the Byzantine Empire changed under the influence of the various ethnic groups to its territory, which later became one of the main explanations for the changes in the historical and cultural contexts in which jewelry makers worked. The cross-cultural method contributed to the study of intercultural relations between countries that were part of the Byzantine Empire or were influenced by it. The typological method allowed us to study the monuments by identifying specific samples according to materials and place of execution. The formal and stylistic method was used to describe and analyze the artistic features of the works depending on their purpose. The method of iconographic analysis was chosen to study the plot and figurative component, as well as to identify the solution of individual images for their representation. The method of art historical analysis helped to identify various key aspects of the study, to consider the formation of iconography, semantics, and stylistics of the plot of Kay Kavus on Garuda and the Ascension of Alexander the Great as a holistic phenomenon, taking into account the location of the monuments, the influence of socio-cultural, religious, and political factors[2].

Among the surviving works, special attention should be paid to a golden jug made in the techniques of embossing, minting, and engraving, dated to ca. 500–700 from the Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós (collection of the Museum of Art History in Vienna; a copy is kept in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest) **(Fig. 1)**. This hoard, although it belongs to the outstanding examples of late Avar culture, namely the period of the decline of the Avar Khaganate in the late eighth century, attracts attention for its early iconography. It is advisable to compare it in the context of typology with works belonging to the Byzantine and West Asian heritage. It shows a unique early iconography that had no analogs in art until the fifteenth century.

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[2]Evans H. C., *The Final Flowering of the Byzantine World*. The Arts of Byzantium. New the Metropolitan Museum of Art. 2001. Vol. 58, № 4. p. 68.

Fig. 1. Kay Kavus on Garuda. Jug. Late Avar culture. ca. 500–700 AD.
Gold, minting, embossing, engraving. Budapest, Hungarian National Museum.
Photo: N. Dmytrenko, 2016

Thus, in the example of the artwork mentioned above, one can see the following, earlier version of the iconography: on the surface of the jug, the chasing technique is used to emboss the figure of a man on the body of a huge fantastical bird, to whom he holds a small bowl in one hand, and a stylized plant resembling a branch with leaves in the other. The characters are depicted against the background of stylized sprouts. The composition of the plot is enclosed in a circle, around which the floral ornament is repeated. The main character is presented in a complex angle, facing the bird.

The story of the ascension of Kay Kavus was also depicted on Iranian silk fabrics of the 11th and 12th centuries, which contained inscriptions in Arabic and Old Arabic **(Fig. 2)**. Let us consider this exceptional example of decorative and applied art in detail. In the center of the composition is the protagonist holding on to the ropes on the body of a huge bird, which occupies most of the composition. In this image, a smaller version of two paired griffins placed on the upper part of the wings of a fantastic animal, which is characterized by active detailing in the form of feathers on the wings and a wide tail, is added. In the lower part, there are winged animals

resembling lionesses facing the center. The composition is characterized by symmetry, the use of active ornamentation, and detail. This iconography represented on the fabric indicates a very important transitional stage in the comprehension of the plot. It is one of the first artworks that gives grounds to see how paradoxically griffins joined the plot in the Eastern tradition.

Fig. 2. Kay Kavus on Garuda. Iran, 11ᵗʰ Century. Saljuq Silk from the Naqqāraḵāna of Ray. Dumbarton Oaks Collection, acc. no. 30.1. *Photo:*
https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abrisam-silk-index#prettyPhoto[sidebar]/6/

It is necessary to consider the inscription in Arabic at the top of the fabric, which has not been translated before. The upper part of the fabric has the same inscription, which is repeated twice in the mirror image. Thus, after our translation from Arabic, we learned that the inscription reads: "Al-Hassan" – the eldest grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. The inscription on the lower part of the cloth is in an ancient language, so the translation of this part remains unknown and requires the intervention of an experienced expert who could make it. The inscription in the upper part of the cloth emphasizes the mythologized exaltation of the prophets. It is worth noting that, in

addition to fabrics, the plot was also widespread on Iranian bowls of the 10th century, as evidenced by an exhibit from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

To compare the iconography, the works of Byzantine heritage from the State Hermitage collection are of particular interest. The first exhibit is a 12th century silver bowl made in the technique of chasing, engraving, and gilding, 9.5 cm high. It entered the State Hermitage collection in 1885 from the collection of A. P. Bazylevsky. It depicts two scenes: The Ascension of Alexander the Great and Kay Kavus on Garuda. The first surviving fragment of this scene is a frontal image of Alexander the Great in a solemn loros with a central vertical fabric insert with diamond-shaped elements **(Fig. 3)**.

Fig. 3. Ascension of Alexander the Great. Bowl. Byzantium. The Caucasus (?) 12th century. Silver, chased, engraved, gilded. Height – 9.5 cm. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum. Fragment. *Photo: P. Darkevych*

His hands holding the scepters are bent at the elbows and raised. The lower part of the plot is lost. At first glance, different subjects are used in the same work, but they are united by the idea of ascension, although with different semantic meanings. The historical figure of Alexander the Great,

according to the events described in Pseudo-Callisthenes' Alexandria, was perceived in Byzantium as an image that was equated with Jesus Christ and the idea of the Resurrection, exalting a historical figure who, even for the conquered nations, was perceived not as hostile but as majestic and heroic. Instead, the flight of Kay Kavus on Garuda conveys the opposite meaning: the emphasis shifts to the punishment for the excessive thirst for power of the historical character. Let's examine the iconography used by the jeweler in this piece, as it is presented with certain modifications. On the bowl, Kay Kavus is depicted riding a bird. He holds the bird's neck with his left hand and majestically raises a long scepter in his right. The figure is dressed in an exquisite loros and wears a headdress **(Fig. 4)**.

Fig. 4. Kay Kavus on Garuda. Bowl. Byzantium. The Caucasus (?) 12th century. Silver, chased, engraved, gilded. Height – 9.5 cm. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum. Fragment. *Photo: P. Darkevych*

This version of the iconography omits the mythological element of the plot, and instead, secular features and motifs begin to appear in the image. These two subjects in the above-mentioned exhibit are complemented by the

image of The Fighting of the Lion, which once again emphasizes the secular nature of the artwork. The origin of the bowl is still unknown. The work is generally considered Byzantine, although, in the studies of art historians of the first half of the twentieth century, it was suggested that it could have been made in the Caucasus. It is worth noting that this assumption is quite likely, as the Caucasus was under the influence of Byzantium due to the following historical and geopolitical factors. The Western Caucasus was under the protectorate of the Byzantine Empire, as the latter was fighting both the Khazars and Persia for these territories. Similarly, Byzantium and Persia fought for the western part of the Caucasus, which fell to the Arabs at the end of the seventh century.

The next extremely important factor is that the Shahnameh, or the Book of Kings as it is called, as a monument of Persian-Tajik literature, had an impact on the culture of the Caucasus, namely on Georgian literature, which traces the influence of Iranian epics. Moreover, the Shahnameh traces vectors like mythological, heroic, and historical. It is worth noting that the use of both plots in one artwork, namely Kay Kavus on Garuda and The Ascension of Alexander the Great is not accidental, since it is the figure of Alexander the Great that is mentioned in Shahnameh. As you know, in the Persian tradition, Macedonian is known as Dhu al-Qarnayn, which means "The Owner of Two Horns". This explains the image of the conqueror on minted coins wearing a helmet with horns. In Shahnameh his image is based not only on Greek or Macedonian sources but also on Islamic and Iranian legends, focusing on his travels, exalting the figure of a wise king and conqueror who sought the source of immortality[3].

In the context of historical aspects, it will be interesting to explore the following exhibit – a silver plate from the collection of Shuryshkar Regional Historical Museum Complex in Muzhi (OF 798). In 2003, the exhibit was transferred to the collection of the State Hermitage Museum (Inv. № W–1501) in St. Petersburg, where it is kept to this day **(Fig. 5)**.

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[3]Maguire H., *Images of the Court.* The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A. D. 843–1261. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixon (ed.). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997. pp. 183–187.

Fig. 5. Ascension of Alexander the Great. Plate. Crusader, about 1208–1216. Silver with a repoussé medallion and engravings. Diameter – 28 cm, height – 3,3 cm. Shuryshkar Regional Historical Museum Complex, Muzhi (a branch of the Yamalo-Nenetz District Museum, Salekhard), Siberia (OF 798). Inv. W–1501, Saint Petersburg, State Hermitage. *Photo: State Hermitage* https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/digital-collection/43743?lng=ru

Previously, this exhibit was studied in detail by T. Steppan in the thorough article "The Artukid Bowl: Courtly Art in the Middle Byzantine Period and the Relation to the Islamic East" in the context of comparing two decorative bowls depicting the Ascension of Alexander the Great. Dating from ca. 1208–1216, it was made using the technique of chasing and engraving, with a diameter of 28 cm, and preserved the Ascension of Alexander the Great in the central relief part of the artwork. Alexander the

Great is depicted in the center, seated on a carved throne. He is dressed in imperial clothes with a rounded fibula holding his cloak on his chest. A crown is placed on his head. He looks formidable, and his face is covered with a beard. In his hands, he holds baits that resemble wands, to which griffins symmetrically placed on both sides are facing. On either side of the hero's head there are two small medallions with abbreviated inscriptions in Greek: "Αλέξανδρος. βᾰσῐλεύς", which means "Alexander. Ruler."

Turning to the decoration of the overall area of the plate, which is made in the engraving technique, we can trace the image of Kay Kavus on Garuda in one of the medallions, which was not previously noted or identified by T. Steppan in his research. The hero is depicted as a young man with his arms raised, holding a rounded object in his left hand, probably a bird bait. The latter, in turn, is represented with massive paws and claws, as if holding on to the ornamental conditional field of the artwork. It is important to note and emphasize the presence of dynamics in the decoration of the item, namely, the floral ornate elements and sprouts that resemble a vine.

These sprouts form ten decorative medallions, each of which features a character or plot, presented in full-face or frontal view, which creates a fairy-tale world full of secular elements, mythological characters, and historical figures. Secular motifs, such as hunting scenes and floral ornaments, also appear in this work. This exhibit is important for art historical analysis in the context of the synthesis of Byzantine and Oriental art[4].

An interesting observation is that in T. Steppan research published before in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia, in article "The Artukid Bowl: Courtly Art in the Middle Byzantine Period and Its Relation to the Islamic East", he has already addressed this exhibit, mentioning and listing the images in the medallions, although the image of a young man on top of a bird was not mentioned or identified in the list as Kay Kavus on Garuda.

Nevertheless, the most interesting in terms of tracing the iconography is the third image on the silver plate from Muzhi, which represents the hero on a large bird (the upper part, the third medallion) **(Fig. 6)**.

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[4]Steppan T., *The Artukid Bowl: Courtly Art in the middle Byzantine Period and the Relation to the Islamic East.* Perceptions of Byzantium and its Neighbors (843–1261). New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. P. 88

Fig. 6. Kay Kavus on Garuda. Plate. Crusader, about 1208–1216. Silver with a repoussé medallion and engravings. Shuryshkar Regional Historical Museum Complex, Muzhi (a branch of the Yamalo-Nenetz District Museum, Salekhard), Siberia (OF 798). Inv. W–1501, Saint Petersburg, State Hermitage. Fragment.
Photo: T. Steppan

The researcher J. Folda suggests in his article "Crusader Art" that the third medallion depicts an allegory of Jupiter[5]. It is also important that in the analysis of the same plate, art historical studies trace the attribution of the image in the medallion as a "crowned man on the back of an eagle," which is most likely an astrological personification. When analyzing iconography, researchers noted that since the tenth century, there have been only two versions of the composition "The Ascension of Alexander the Great to Heaven" – on griffins or on huge birds (but in no case on one).

Nevertheless, the question of the identification of the subject can be explained by the following: the Romans revered Jupiter as the patron saint of the power of the emperors, as well as the god of the heavens, which explains the presence of a sphere in his hand. That is why even in the frescoes of Herculaneum or marble statues dating back to the first century, one can see

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[5]Folda J., *Crusader Art*. The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A. D. 843–1261 / Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixon (ed.). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997. P. 399–400.

allegorical images of Jupiter in full-length, with a bird next to him. It is worth noting that this iconography is very different from the image of a hero flying on a bird. It is also worth recalling that a similar iconography of a full-length figure with an eagle can be traced in the image of Ganymede, a character in Greek mythology whose image was often traced in the jewelry of ancient Greece of the 3rd century BC, the decoration of bronze mirrors of the 2nd – 4th century BC, and mosaic decorations of the 2nd century AD. A striking example of the latter is illustrated by the perfectly preserved mosaics of the House of Dionysus in the Paphos Archaeological Park in Cyprus **(Fig. 7).**

Fig. 7. Ganymede Abducted by the Eagle. House of Dionysus. 2nd century. Mosaic. Paphos Archaeological Park. Paphos, Cyprus. *Photo: N. Dmytrenko, March 2018*

Without sharing the opinion of researchers regarding the previous attributions of the image of a male figure riding a bird in the medallion, we can assume that the image of the hero on a bird on the surface of the plate is the same image of Kay Kavus on Garuda (as on the previous bowl from the State Hermitage Collection), which was created using earlier iconography, but with secular features, which was not mentioned by researchers in the above sources on the research of images in medallions.

The last two artworks under consideration give grounds to assert with confidence that the simultaneous use of the image of the Ascension of Alexander the Great and Kay Kavus on Garuda indicates that the iconography of both subjects had not yet been fully developed at this time of creation and that Eastern traditions of depicting the plot not only coexisted

simultaneously with artworks of Byzantine origin, but also continued to be actively used by jewelers until the thirteenth century[6].

In addition, the researcher T. Steppan actually claims that the last plates depicting dancers on the crown of Constantine IX Monomachos[7] were taken from a Sassanian bowl from the collection of the State Tyrolean Museum in Innsbruck, which indicates that Persian products as sources of iconography were actively used in Byzantine art since such decorated bowls preserve the traditions of the far East[8].

Dwelling on the exhibit from the Tyrolean Museum, it is worth noting that this artwork dates back from the period 1114–1144, according to an inscription in Arabic placed around the item on the front side, thus indicating the owner of the bowl. Namely, the Artukid emir Rukh ad-Daula Abu Sulayman Daud, whose years of rule in the eastern Anatolian cities of Hisn Kayfa and Khartpert fall within this period[9]. The inscription around the outer surface is in Persian and has not yet been translated **(Fig. 8)**.

Fig. 8. Artukid Bowl (obverse and reverse). Byzantine (?). 1114–1144.
Cloisonné enamel on copper, with gilded partitions: Diameter, 27 cm; height, 5 cm.
Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck. *Photo:* https://beyondborders-medievalblog.blogspot.com/2012/09/the-artuqid-plate.html

[6]Settis-Frugoni C., *Historia Alexandri elevati per griphos ad aerem: origine, iconografia e fortuna di un tema.* Studi Storico. Rome: Instituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1973. P. 358–360.

[7]Kiss E., *The State of Research on the Monomachos Crown and Some Further Thoughts*. Perceptions of Byzantium and its Neighbors (843–1261). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 2000. P. 60–76.

[8]Steppan T., *The Artukid Bowl: Courtly Art in the middle Byzantine Period and the Relation to the Islamic East.* Perceptions of Byzantium and its Neighbors (843–1261). New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. P. 84–97.

[9]Steppan T., *The Artukid Bowl: Courtly Art in the middle Byzantine Period and the Relation to the Islamic East.* Perceptions of Byzantium and its Neighbors (843–1261). New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. P. 84–86.

On the front of the bowl, in the central medallion, there is an image of the Ascension of Alexander the Great. According to the established iconography, which was already formed in the twelfth century, when this plot was most frequently used and disseminated, the main character is placed in a chariot, just as on the marble decoration of the northern facade of St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice[10]. This indicates that the artworks belonging to the Arab and Sassanian cultural heritage that accompany the depiction of the hero's fantastic flight as a personification of glorification were synthesized with the plots that were actively used in the jewelry art of the Byzantine Empire and were used in the court of the rulers of Anatolia. The central image is complemented by six medallions on the front and back sides, between which there are additional compositions depicting dancers, which set the dynamics of the image and create an organic artistic ensemble. The bowl features images of peacocks, lions, palm trees, acrobats and musicians, and court dancers, which are also often seen in works of Byzantine heritage, as exemplified by the decorative arts of both courtly and secular art of the 12th century book miniature. Blue, turquoise, green, white, and yellow pigments dominate among the enamel colors[11].

After examining the two previous artworks, their decorative setting, and the study of the iconography used, it is worth noting that similar motifs, ornamentation with zoomorphic elements, and human figures were also widespread in 13th century, as evidenced by the gemellions from the collection of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. We propose to consider several of these pieces of art. Particular attention is drawn to another gemellion dating from the 13th century from the collection mentioned above, made in the enamel workshops of Limoges **(Fig. 9).**

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[10]Bettini S., *Venice, the Pala d' Oro, and Constantinople*. The Treasury of San Marco. Venice. Milan: Olivetti, 1985. pp. 51–74.
[11]Anderson J. C., *Manuscripts.* The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A. D. 843–1261. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixon (ed.). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997. pp. 82–88.

Fig. 9. Gemellion. Precious metals, copper engraving, Limoges enamel. 13th century. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. *Photo: perlesmedievales* https://www.instagram.com/p/DFbS8W1oYYS/?igsh=OHBmYjF3ZG1hY2lk

Having examined it in more detail, first of all, we should highlight a similar composition and artistic decoration that were used in the previously discussed plate from Muzhi. In this case, it is a central medallion depicting a knight, from which six round petals extend in a circle, overlapping each other. Each of these images contains anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images of men and animals that resemble birds and lions. Between these elements are stylized plant elements in the form of shoots. The central medallion features two full-length figures. The perimeter of the gemellion is generously covered with a wavy ornament.

The next piece from the same collection is the gemellion, made of precious metals and champlevé enamel which dates back to the 13th century. It was acquired by the museum in 1907 and shows a similar design to the previously examined piece **(Fig. 10)**. It has a central medallion and six rounded decorative elements around it. The surface of the work is generously covered with decorative elements in the form of plants, and an ornament with triangular elements stretches along the edge. Despite the state of preservation of the artwork, it is possible to identify some images. For instance, in the center you can trace a figure taming a mythical creature. The medallions around it contain male figures with animals, and several medallions make it difficult to identify the image due to the poor state of preservation of the surface[12].

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[12] Grabar O., *The Crusades and the Development of Islamic Art.* The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World, Dumbarton Oaks. 2001. pp. 235–245.

Thus, even though the museum exhibits in question from the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya are of European origin, it is safe to assume that the influence of oriental motifs was actively eradicated even in the courtly Romanesque art of the 13th century. By borrowing certain artistic elements, details, and patterns of arrangement from artworks of Byzantine and Oriental origin, enamellers and jewelers who used to work in Europe were also able to use such samples in their practice, synthesizing them to suit local court orders[13].

Fig. 10. Gemellion. Precious metals, champlevé enamel. 13th century. Inventory number: 012102-000. *Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya* https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/gemellion-washbasin/anonymous/012102-000-0

It is worth noting that the spread of the plot of the ascension of Kay Kavus on Garuda can also be traced in the European tradition, in particular on a bronze plate from the Ivrean Cathedral casket (Turin province, 12th century), on frescoes of the ceiling of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo (12th century). In the latter case, the composition is complemented by a scene of the Deisis praying in the upper part, although sometimes in the literature this work is identified as a depiction of the Ascension of Alexander the Great, due to the presence of a halo on the main character and the Deisis **(Fig. 11)**.

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[13]Redford S., *The Innsbruck Plate and its Setting*. Muqarnas. Leiden, 1990. № 7. pp. 119 – 135.

Fig. 11. Kay Kavus on Garuda (?). 12th century. Fresco. Palatine Chapel, Palermo.
Photo:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fe/Arabischer_Maler_der_Palas
tkapelle_in_Palermo_001.jpg

In the latter case, early iconography was used, depicting a full-length hero. Nevertheless, the frescoes on the ceiling of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo are quite rare from the point of view of returning to the iconography and traditions of the past centuries. Dating back to the 12th century, the fresco preserves a fantastic plot in an interpretation that is familiar to us from the Iranian bowl and Iranian silk fabric which have already been examined, dating from the 10th and 11th–12th centuries, respectively, repeating the composition in which the main character is placed on the body of a fantastic bird, to which the ropes holding the hero are stretched. Just as in the fabric mentioned above, the composition is flanked by two fantastic animals on either side of the bird's long tail. In addition to the halo around the hero's head, which is almost not traced in iconography, the composition includes images of two bust figures with halos that resemble the composition of prayer – Deisis.

Conclusion

Thus, the image of Kay Kavus on Garuda, occupying an important place in the mythology and decorative arts of West Asia and the East, was further developed in Byzantine jewelry and decorative arts among jewelers. In this context, it was synthesized with the ancient images described in Greek epics, and at the same time opposed to them, acquiring a new semantic meaning. Thereby, the Kay Kavus on the Garuda was simultaneously depicted with such a plot as the Ascension of Alexander the Great to heaven, being traced in art pieces that were created by Byzantine court jewelers, Caucasian craftsmen, or commissioned for rulers as pieces of courtly consumption.

The plot, which at first glance seems quite controversial, was in demand among court enamel artists who combined it with the depiction of mythological, secular scenes, and even scenes that later became crucial part of the classical heritage of Christian sacred art of Byzantine heritage.

List of illustrations:

Fig. 1 Kay Kavus on Garuda. Jug. Late Avar culture. ca. 500–700 AD. Gold, minting, embossing, engraving. Budapest, Hungarian National Museum. *Photo: N. Dmytrenko, 2016*

Fig. 2 Kay Kavus on Garuda. Iran, 11ᵗʰ Century. Saljuq Silk from the Naqqāraḵāna of Ray. Dumbarton Oaks Collection, acc. no. 30.1. *Photo:* https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abrisam-silk-index#prettyPhoto[sidebar]/6/

Fig. 3 Ascension of Alexander the Great. Bowl. Byzantium. The Caucasus (?) 12ᵗʰ century. Silver, chased, engraved, gilded. Height – 9.5 cm. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum. Fragment. *Photo: P. Darkevych*

Fig. 4 Kay Kavus on Garuda. Bowl. Byzantium. Caucasus (?) 12ᵗʰ century. Silver, chased, engraved, gilded. Height – 9.5 cm. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum. Fragment. *Photo: P. Darkevych*

Fig. 5 Ascension of Alexander the Great. Plate. Crusader, about 1208–1216. Silver with a repoussé medallion and engravings. Diameter – 28 cm, height – 3,3 cm. Shuryshkar Regional Historical Museum Complex, Muzhi (a branch of the Yamalo-Nenetz District Museum, Salekhard), Siberia (OF 798). Inv. W-1501, Saint Petersburg, State Hermitage. *Photo: State Hermitage* https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/digital-collection/43743?lng=ru

Fig. 6 Kay Kavus on Garuda. Plate. Crusader, about 1208–1216. Silver with a repoussé medallion and engravings. Shuryshkar Regional Historical Museum Complex, Muzhi (a branch of the Yamalo-Nenetz District Museum, Salekhard), Siberia (OF 798). Inv. W–1501, Saint Petersburg, State Hermitage. Fragment. Photo: T. Steppan

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Preservation of Monuments of Material Culture and Digital Technologies: On the Example of Work on Virtual Reconstruction of the Architectural Decoration of the Church in the Village of Sokhta (Republic of South Ossetia)[*]

Endoltseva E. Yu.[**]
Dryga D. O.[***]
Shigaev I. B.[****]

Abstract: *The study is devoted to the results of studying the lapidary collection consisting of about 15 fragments of architectural decoration related to the ruins of the church in the village of Sokhta, and the development of principles for reconstructing a volumetric model of its architectural decoration. In the summer of 2024, field studies were conducted leading to an orthophotoplan of the ruins and three-dimensional models of 15 fragments were created. As a result of comprehensive research, it became possible to put forward a hypothesis about the original appearance of the temple.*

Keywords: architectural decoration, Caucasus, Middle Ages, volumetric reconstruction.

The tasks of our research group included a visual study of the remains of the church near the village of Sokhta (the gorge of the Patsa River, a tributary of the Didi Liakhvi River), photographic recording and measurements of fragments of the surviving architectural decoration, the creation of three-dimensional models of each of them and of a three-

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[**] Endoltseva E. Yu., Doctor of Art History, Leading Researcher, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; kat345@yandex.ru.
[***] Dryga D.O., Candidate of Technical Sciences, Associate Professor, Department of Mechanics and Control Processes, Engineering Academy, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia named after Patrice Lumumba; hopkuh@gmail.com.
[****] Shigaev I.B., 4th-year student, Novosibirsk State University of Architecture, Design and Arts named after A.D. Kryachkov; shigaeffilya@yandex.ru.

dimensional hypothetical model of the church building and the system of its architectural decoration. These works were carried out within the framework of a two-year research project dedicated to the reconstruction of the architectural decoration of churches of the 9th - 11th centuries in the territory of the Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (a total of six objects were selected). Field research in the Republic of South Ossetia took place in the summer of 2024; in addition to the ruins of the church in the village of Sokhta, the remains of churches near the town of Kvaysa[1] and the village of Nadarvaz[2] were examined.

All the results of the work are posted on a specially created website linked to the official website of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, arch.ivran.ru.

The work on developing principles for the reconstruction of the three above-mentioned churches in the Republic of South Ossetia is complicated by the paucity of surviving sources. Almost no written or graphic evidence has survived, and archaeological work has never been carried out in them. Our group only had the methods of visual inspection and photographic recording, collecting information about the history of the ruins among rural oldsters, and the ability to select architectural, iconographic and stylistic analogies that correspond to the place and time.

Even less is known about the church near the village of Sokhta than about the other two (near the city of Kvaysa and near the village of Nadarvaz). No information about its history has survived, and, as has already been said, no archaeological excavations have been carried out. The most detailed information is contained in the 1975 book by R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze "Architecture of the mountainous part of the historical province of Georgia – Shida Kartli"[3]. Researchers attribute it to a group of 10th century monuments from the gorges of Bolshaya and Malaya Liakhvi and Kudaro[4]. Some references to fragments of the church's architectural decoration are also contained in a catalogue published by a group of Georgian researchers in 2017[5].

During field research in the summer of 2024 (E. Yu. Endoltseva, D. O. Dryga), a ground photogrammetric survey of the area was carried out in order to record the relative positions of the church structure elements, as well as to determine the size of the church and individual stones. The objects were in an abandoned state, the masonry and stones were covered with dense vegetation, in the form of moss, ferns, etc. The shooting was carried out on a Canon 6D camera with two lenses – 28 mm and 16 mm (fish eye). The first

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[1] Endoltseva, Dryga, Alborov, Tabueva, Chugunov, Shigaev, Bystritsky 2024, pp. 65 – 80.
[2] Endoltseva, Dryga, Alborov, Shigaev 2025.
[3] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, pp. 88 – 91.
[4] *Ibid.,* p. 88.
[5] Dadiani, Khundadze, Kvachatadze 2017, p. 133. № 222 – 225.

was used for detailed shooting of the main elements of the structure, the second – for shooting the general situation. In addition to shooting the entire complex as a whole, additional shooting of individual elements/ stones was carried out. Based on the results of the work, we made an orthophotoplan of the central round platform with fragments of the masonry of the eastern apse and three-dimensional models of 15 fragments of architectural decoration. The principles of reconstruction were developed taking into account the data published by R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze, a detailed analysis of the surviving elements of masonry, architectural decoration, analysis of the landscape of the area, and the selection of analogies (E. Yu. Endoltseva, I. B. Shigaev)[6].

For example, R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze published a plan of this church (Fig. 1)[7]. Now it is almost illegible. Moreover, if we believe this plan, the church occupied a much larger space than the trampled area that now survives, surrounded by a later improvised fence (Fig. 2)[8]. However, upon closer inspection, we discovered a manhole that leads to an underground crypt marked on the plan of R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze. The data we obtained during the visual examination were confirmed by an informant, an oldster of the village of Sokhta, Nudar Ostayev, who reported that he descended into the crypt through the surviving manhole along a stone staircase. This underground room was filled with earth and stones during the earthquake of 1991.
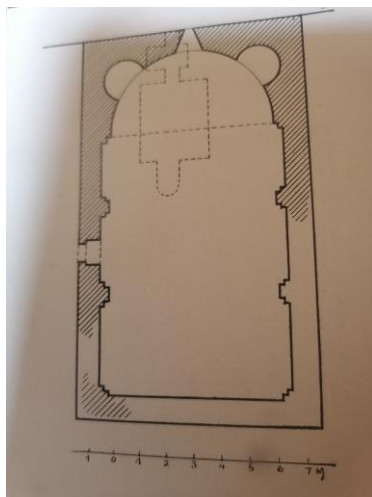
Fig. 1 Plan of the church in the village of Sokhta

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[6] We thank D. V. Beletsky for consultations.
[7] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975. P. 88. Ill. 78, https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section Archive plan.
[8] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the Orthophotoplan section.

Fig. 2 Orthophotoplan of the site where the main ruins of the church in the
village of Sokhta are located

That is why the proposed hypothetical reconstruction of the temple is
based on the plan of R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze, integrated into the
relief of the surviving site (Fig. 3). The entrance to the crypt at the base of the
eastern apse was taken as a reference point.

Fig. 3 Reconstruction of the church in the village of Sokhta,
integrated into the relief of the surviving site

According to the assumption of R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze, "The church was hall, large. Only fragments of its walls have survived.… In the apse of the church there were two high, semicircular niches. The longitudinal walls of the church are divided by pilasters. From the south, the remains of the walls of the southern aisle can be traced. Apparently, there was also a northern aisle, but in its place, from its material, at a later time, a tower was erected"[9].

Most of the fragments of architectural decoration mentioned by R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze were discovered by us on the trampled area. According to the Georgian researchers, "these fragments are not contemporaneous, some date back to the 10th century, others to the 11th century"[10]. Among the most interesting fragments is a rectangular slab with an inscription on Asomtavruli language[11]. Georgian researchers date it to the 10th century, and they translate the inscription as follows: "Glorified Church, have mercy on Theodore. … Rest the soul of Giorgi. Holy Church, have mercy on Ivan the Mason"[12].

Other important fragments include a massive column capital, probably from an arched entrance[13] (Fig. 4), a rectangular slab depicting a flourished cross[14] (Fig. 5), a fragment of the top of a slit-shaped window depicting a horseman[15] (Fig. 6), paired half-columns with an arched capital[16], a rectangular fragment with a woven geometric ornament composed of a three-band weave band consisting of intertwined circles of large and small diameters[17], a rectangular fragment with dense basket weaving[18], a half-column and a half-column with a capital[19], and a rectangular fragment with vertically arranged pairs of birds of prey clawing at four-legged animals[20] (Fig. 7).

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[9] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 88.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 88.

[11] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section Fragments of the western facade.

[12] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 91. Ill. 81.

[13] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section Southern facade, gallery.

[14] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section Eastern facade, fragments.

[15] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section Southern facade, fragments.

[16] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section South facade, gallery window.

[17] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section Southern facade, gallery.

[18] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section Eastern facade, fragments.

[19] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the section Southern facade, portal, fragments.

[20] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the Unknown location section.

Fig. 4 Capital of the column. Three-dimensional model

Fig. 5 Three-dimensional model of the slab with the image of a blossoming cross
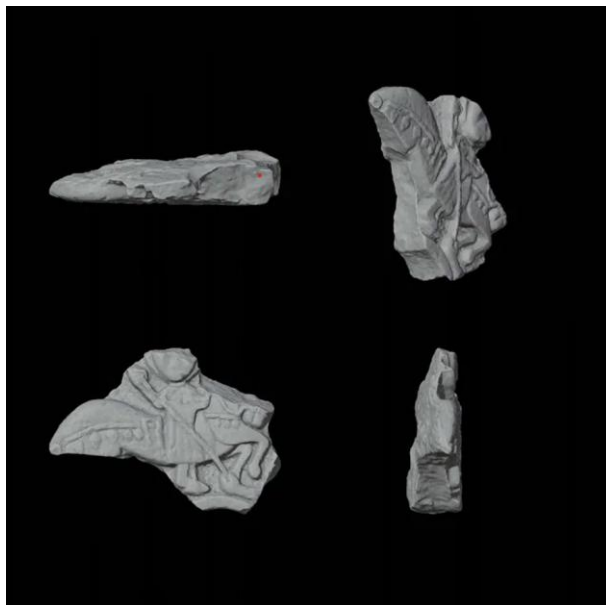
Fig. 6 Three-dimensional model of the slab with the image of a horseman

Fig. 7 Three-dimensional model of the slab with vertically located pairs of birds of prey, clawing four-legged animals

An analysis of the surviving fragments of architectural decoration made it possible to construct typological rows of some elements of the structure (the arched entrance to the southern gallery, the southern portal of the main volume, the design of the eastern façade). In the masonry of the improvised gates of the fence, laid out recently by the villagers, it was possible to discover fragments of stepped pilasters that supported the conch of the apse, and grooves for, possibly, an altar barrier[21] (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8 Three-dimensional model of the church in the village of Sokhta. Interior

R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze divide the surviving fragments of architectural decoration into two chronological groups (in their study, they do not provide reasoned justification for this conclusion). In their opinion, "it is tempting to think that the first relates to the church itself, and the second to the extensions"[22].

While generally agreeing with this hypothetical possibility, in the proposed model for reconstructing the decorative system of the facades we primarily took into account significant analogies, i.e., the closest geographical and chronological, the size of the details, their possible functional and design features.

Thus, we assume that this was a hall church with two pairs of stepped pilasters in the interior, a semicircular vault, a gable roof, an eastern apse recessed into the thickness of the wall (with two semicircular niches), with southern and, possibly, northern vaulted galleries (Fig. 9)[23].

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[21] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the Interior 1 section, fragments.
[22] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 91. Ill. 80, 81.
[23] Since the presence of the northern gallery is the most controversial issue in this concept, it is shown transparent in the reconstruction, https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, in the Northern Facade section.
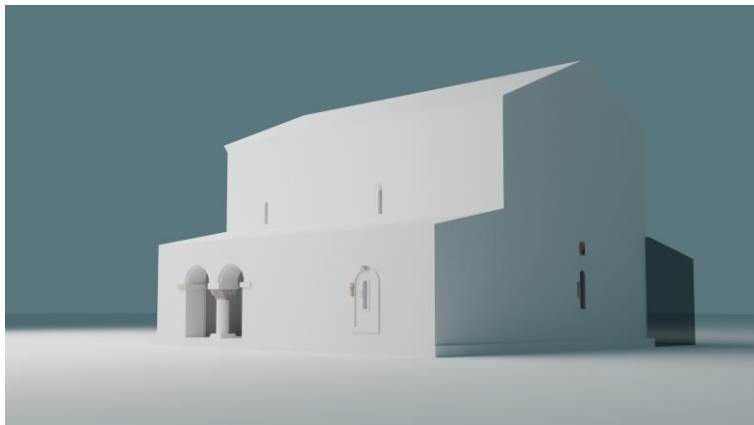
Fig. 9 Three-dimensional model of the church in the village of Sokhta,
view from the southeast

According to the established tradition of those places, the northern facade of church buildings is usually devoid of windows, doors and stone carvings[24]. According to the plan of the main volume of the church (without side galleries), published by R. Mepisashvili and V. Tsintsadze, there was no entrance on the western side of the church[25]. Indeed, quite often in Christian churches of this region the entrance (as well as the gallery or narthex) is located only on the southern side. However, slit-shaped windows usually appear on the western facade (Fig. 10)[26]. As an analogy, we can point to the western facade without doors, but with a small round window of the church in Armaz (9th century) and to the western facades without doors, but with slit-shaped windows in the churches of the Mother of God and St. George in Akhalsopeli (10th century). The size of the slit-shaped window in our reconstruction is related to the size of the fragment of the finial with the image of a horseman, which is placed on the southern facade[27]. The slab with the inscription mentioning the builders of the church could have been placed either on the southern façade at the entrance (the church of St. George in Armaz[28], St. George in Ered[29] (10th century), the church in Dodot[30] (10th – early 11th centuries, etc.) or on the western façade (the church in Dodot)[31]. In our reconstruction, it is placed on the western façade[32].

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[24] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975.
[25] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 88. Ill. 78.
[26] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, Western facade section.
[27] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, section South facade.
[28] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 17.
[29] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 52, 53.
[30] *Ibid.,* pp. 59 – 60.
[31] *Ibid.,* p. 61.
[32] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, Western facade section.

Fig. 10 Three-dimensional model of the church in the village of Sokhta.
Western facade

The southern façade, in accordance with widespread practice, is very solemnly decorated[33] (Fig. 11). There are two slit-shaped windows on the wall of the main volume (in the piers between the pilasters), a gallery with a two-arched entrance and a window. This design scheme repeats the structure of the southern side of the churches in Dodot[34] and St. George in Ered[35] and Beris-sakdari in Ered[36]. Both churches are located near the village of Sokhta[37]. Probably, the base of the arches of the entrance to the gallery rested on architraves decorated with a woven geometric ornament[38], as is done in a similar situation in the church in Dodot[39]. The dimensions of the capital and the fragment with a woven geometric ornament found in Sokhta do not contradict this assumption. The found fragments of half-columns and half-columns with a capital, most likely, could have decorated the portal of the entrance from the gallery to the main volume of the church. Such a decorative solution is also quite common in these places in the church architecture of the 10th – early 11th centuries. For example, a similar composition is found on the portal of the main volume of the church in Katskhi.

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[33] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, section South facade.
[34] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 58. Ill. 48. Ill. 52.
[35] *Ibid.,* p. 54, 55. Il. 44.
[36] *Ibid.,* p. 64. Il. 54.
[37] Endoltseva 2024, p. 234. Interactive map.
[38] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, section Southern facade, gallery.
[39] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 60. Ill. 50.
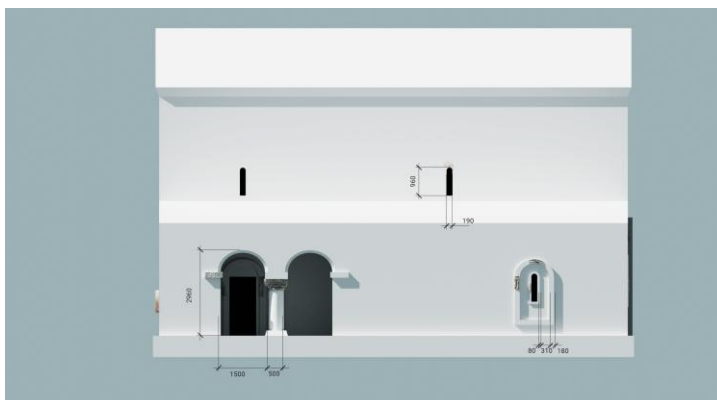
Fig. 11 Three-dimensional model of the church in the village of Sokhta. Southern facade

The dimensions and shape of the three fragments (paired half-columns with a capital with an arched motif, an arched roller and a small fragment with basket weaving)[40] successfully fit into the composition of the frame of the gallery window, based on the model of the window of the southern gallery of the Church of St. George in Ered[41].

The composition of the eastern façade (a flourished cross and a larger fragment with basket weaving)[42] (Fig. 12) repeats a similar composition of the eastern façade of the Beris-sakdari church in Ered[43].
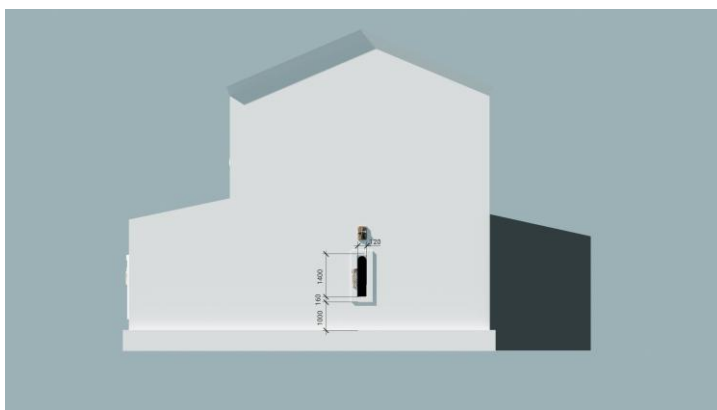
Fig. 12 Three-dimensional model of the church in the village of Sokhta. Eastern facade

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[40] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, South Facade section, gallery window.
[41] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 55. Ill. 45.
[42] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, section Eastern facade.
[43] Mepisashvili, Tsintsadze 1975, p. 65. Ill. 55.

The fragment with vertically arranged pairs of birds of prey tearing apart four-legged animals seems to resemble decorative schemes popular in medieval church architecture in Armenia. It is difficult to say what place it could take in the version proposed for the reconstruction of the church in Sokhta[44] (Fig. 7).

Thus, the resulting hypothetical three-dimensional model of the church in the village of Sokhta fits well into the context of the construction tradition for religious architecture of the 10th century - early 11th century in Kudaro (Kudar Gorge of the middle reaches of the Jodzhora River, now the Dzau district of South Ossetia) and the adjacent territories (Western Georgia) (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13 View of the gorge of the Patsa River from the ruins of the church
near the village of Sokhta

Taking into account the accumulated experience and collected data, it becomes possible to offer the following development prospects. Among the Christian churches of the 9th – 11th centuries located along the Greater Caucasus Range (Sochi District of Krasnodar Krai, the Republic of Abkhazia, North Ossetia, the Republic of South Ossetia, Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Western Georgia, etc.), there are a number of monuments unique in design and architectural decoration (the church in the village of Vesyoloye, the Upper and Lower Church on Mount Anakopia, the church on Mount Lashkendar, churches in the town of Kvaysa, the village of Nadarvaz, the village of Kasagdzhin, the Zrug Church, the monastery in Ubisi, the Church of St. George in Joysubani near the town of Oni, churches in the villages of Iprari, Yeli, etc.). Unusual images on their facades

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[44] https://arch.ivran.ru/sohta_temple, Unknown location section.

(zoomorphic images and ornaments, rare iconographic subjects) reflect the influence of ancient cultures (autochthonous traditional everyday environment, local archaeological cultures, Persian influence, the Byzantine Empire of the Macedonian dynasty, etc.) and demonstrate the unity of the artistic style (flat-graphic)[45]. At the same time, it was this territory (especially the interfluve of the Ksani and Liakhvi rivers due to its geographical location, remoteness and inaccessibility) that played a significant role in the revival of stone construction after the devastating Arab conquests and, accordingly, influenced the development of church architecture in the future (primarily in Transcaucasia and on both sides of the central part of the Main Caucasian Range). Some of these churches are in a ruined state, and the nature of their architectural decoration can only be judged by lapidary collections (churches in the village of Nadarvaz, the town of Kvaysa, the village of Kasagdzhin, in the village of Veseloe, in the Tsebeldinskaya Valley, etc.). In the course of work in recent years, our research group has collected material on the architectural decoration of churches in Abkhazia during the period of the Abkhazian Kingdom and on traditional motifs in the decoration of Christian churches of the 9th – 11th centuries along the Greater Caucasus Range. We have also made virtual reconstructions of the architectural decoration of some churches of this time (from the Republic of Abkhazia (two churches on Mount Anakopia) and the Republic of South Ossetia (near the town of Kvaysa and the village of Nadarvaz)). However, digital volumetric models of the architectural decoration of some other significant churches (in the villages Vesyoloye, Kasagdzhin, Mramba, Lashkendar, etc.) have not yet been created. Work in this direction is new and is being carried out for the first time. Its results will significantly enrich knowledge about the ways of forming iconographic plots and schemes in the architectural decoration of churches and small forms (altar barriers) in the post-Arab period on the territory of the Christian Caucasus (the periphery of the Byzantine Empire, the contact zone with the Muslim world (the Arab Caliphate and Persia).

The creation of an interactive web map of the objects studied, supporting the import of georeferenced raster images, vector data and three-dimensional models with photographs and text documents (on the history of the monument and on the principles of its reconstruction, where necessary), will expand the possibilities for visualization and presentation of data in the framework of scientific and applied research. The results of research and visualization work are planned to be used in the creation of high-quality scientific and educational museum exhibitions with the involvement of the latest technologies and (virtual and real) teaching aids.

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[45] Endoltseva 2024.

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All permition granted

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Zoomorphic Iconography and the Metamorphosis of Ibex Stucco Decorations inside Umayyad Castles in the Early 8th Century CE

Siyana Georgieva⁎

Abstract: *This paper delves deeply into the symbol of the ibex and its profound iconographic metamorphosis. The central focus is whether examining existing stucco sculptures, from the Iranian Style "Out of Place" to Umayyad sculptural embellishment, can illuminate the early popularity of the ibex. The portrayal of this animal in the stuccoes from various Near Eastern sites spanning a millennium confirms its revered status, offering profound insights into the cosmology of ancient Near Eastern peoples. The parallels with the mainstream of Iranian stucco decoration are clear, although not close enough to justify more than this broad deduction. The early appearance of the ibex carries a weighty symbolic message: Samarran ware consistently depicts this caprid with long, branch-like antlers, symbolizing the Tree of Life or Sacred Tree. This symbolism is further exemplified by a piece from the Iranian Plateau, c4500 BC, where the antler trees dominate the entire motif. In other words, the ibex – in the North Mesopotamian and the Iranian plateau – emerges fully formed, carrying an already well-developed symbol of fertility. The study also uncovers a pivotal moment in ancient Islamic art in Umayyad castles, where a new technique emerges, giving birth to three-dimensional figures of ibex heads depicted in profile and executed in high relief in stucco.*

Keywords: Zoomorphic, Metamorphosis, Iconography, Stucco, Ibex, Umayyads.

Introduction

The study of stucco design on hundreds of preserved samples from the ancient Near East reveals one animal's early popularity: the ibex.

The treatment this animal received, for example, on stucco from a wide range of Near Eastern sites over a thousand years, paints a clear picture of the metamorphosis of its revered status while providing us with possible clues towards an ancient world cosmology.

⁎ PhD in Anthropology, Religion and Oriental Civilization, UniToscana, e-mail: siyanageo@gmail.com

A quick examination of the ibex's appearance on Paleolithic bone carvings indicates the animal's long-standing importance as a cultural emblem. The ibex's extinction in the fourth millennium B.C. represents a watershed moment in Near Eastern cultural life.

This study shows examples of ibex concerning fertility and astronomical symbols in Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt. The relationship between ibex, the moon, and fertility appeared at least since prehistory (20.000 B.C.) in European culture and the ancient Near since 10,000 B.C. at least, such as at Kilwa (near the Jordan-Saudi Arabian border), in the 6th millennium BC. Depicted in Tepe Giyan and Tepe Hissar (Iran), and appeared on Samarran ware (Iraq) in the 6th millennium B.C., represented extensively in ancient Egyptian sculptures and reliefs in the 2nd and 1st millennium B.C.

The study clarified that in pre-Islamic culture, the metamorphosis of an ibex in stucco was revered and considered a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation, so the shape of the prow and stern of divine and funerary boats were depicted in the form of an ibex head or horn to lead the deceased in the afterlife, symbolizing its ability to climb routes through the desert, guaranteeing a peaceful and safe passage to the other world and showing the proper path to the gods.

The researcher also notes that a new technique marks the turning point of ancient Islamic art in Umayyad castles for creating three-dimensional figures of ibex heads, depicted in profile and executed in high relief in stucco.

Ibex, or Steinbock, are gorgeous mountain-dwelling goats. These unique creatures are recognized for their spectacular horns, agility on steep terrain, and ability to thrive in harsh alpine habitats. Ibex are found in hilly areas throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Sources

The Ibex in pre-Islamic Arabia can be studied using various sources, including rock art, hunting depictions in relief panels, pre-Islamic Arabian inscriptions, classical Arabic literature, anthropological data, desert kites, and archaeological investigations. The dry areas of the Middle East and North Africa are home to the Nubian ibex (*Capra ibex nubiana*). It is defined as a species of wild goat whose ancestral range encompassed Africa east of the Nile, the Arabian Peninsula, and the southern Levant. The Asian variant even reaches Mongolia in the east and Afghanistan[1]. Because the ibex prefers to

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[1] B.J. Collins, *A history of the animal world in the ancient Near East* (Handbook of Oriental Studies: The Near and Middle East, 64), Leiden, Brill, 2002, p. 13.

live in severe mountainous terrain, it is generally regarded as one of the most challenging game animals to pursue.

The ibex was the most documented mammal in pre-Islamic Arabia[2], specifically in ancient Yemen (Fig.1). It is evidenced widely in inscriptions and rock art and served as a symbol of the moon deity in ancient South Arabia[3] (Fig.2).

Fig. 1: Frieze with a Lion and a Leopard Attacking Animals, Yemen

Fig. 2: Limestone frieze, Yemen

The ibex was most referenced in ancient South Arabian inscriptions as a game animal. The traditional ibex hunt in *Ḥaḍramawt*, which some have believed dates to the pre-Islamic period, is especially relevant to understanding the ibex in ancient Yemen. Several authors have thoroughly investigated this ritual hunt[4].

In the beginning, we must also say a few words for The Samaritan Ibex. Ernst Herzfeld, who guided the excavation of Samarra from 1911 to

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[2] Alessandra Avanzini, *Some thoughts on ibex on plinths in early South Arabian art.* Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy Volume 16, Issue 2, 2005, pp. 144–153.
[3] Robert B. Serjeant, South Arabian hunt, London, Luzac, 1976, pp. 77-79.
[4] M. Rodionov, The Ibex Hunt Ceremony in Hadramawt Today, in R. L. Bidwell, G. Rex Smith, J. R. Smart (Eds.), New Arabian Studies (123–129), University of Exeter Press, 1994, pp. 20-21.

1913, classified this animal as a 'Steinbock,' or ibex[5], and it is worth noting that this animal was one of the first to appear on upper Mesopotamian pottery. Herzfeld classified pottery into nine groups. Hassuna's Samarran ceramics were classified, including jars and bowls of various sizes. The animals listed included two fish, three birds, and thirteen ibexes. The ibex was exclusively discovered on service bowls, which may indicate that these serving bowls were utilized for essential events. So, what does the 'horns 'motif in Samarra symbolize then? There are at least two ways to interpret it. Firstly, scholars believe prehistoric farmers associated animals with antlers, such as goats and deer, with their expectation of rain[6]. The pottery from Tell Hassuna[7] shows four wild goats in a circle, with clouds raining between them[8]. The plate from Samara, shown below, wild goats in a cruciform formation around a diamond, perhaps farmland; on the other plate, the goats are around a tree. In the image of the other plate, the goats are reduced to triangles. On the other plate, there are triangles with horns or horned heads.

The pottery of the Tripolitan culture also contains similar cruciform compositions. However, the "Rain Ibexes" are responsible for the rain here. According to Rybakov, they are an anachronism from the society of hunters and gatherers, when the goddess half-woman half-deer was responsible for the abundant catch. Neolithic farmers, however, reinterpreted the deer goddess as the bearer of rain[9].

All living things, regardless of age or location, sustain themselves from water. Since the beginning of time, man has recognized its significance and been concerned about its scarcity, mainly if he depends on rain. Religious rituals were undertaken in ancient communities to ensure that rain would always fall. Ibex and rain have been associated from prehistoric times, as evidenced by old Near Eastern antiquities[10].

Throughout the prehistoric Near East, the ibex was one of the first creatures to be depicted on pottery, whether in Samarra, Sialk, Tepe Giyan, Susa, or Tepe Hissar, among other localities.

An ibex featuring the Tree of Life design is discovered at Tepe Giyan, approximately 4500 B.C. With its back to the tree, the ibex glances to

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[5] Ernst Herzfeld, Band V. Ausgrabungen von Samarra, Die Vorgeschichtlichen Töpfereien von Samarra, Berlin, 1930, pp. 20-21.

[6] Elena Antonova, *Essays on Culture of Ancient Tillers of Hither and Central Asia: Experience of Reconstruction of World Perception*, Moscow, 1984, p. 104.

[7] Robert J. Braidwood, Seton Lloyd, Fuad Safar, *Tell Hassuna Excavations by the Iraq Government Directorate General of Antiquities in 1943 and 1944*, Journal of Near Eastern Studies Volume 4, Number 4, Oct. 1945, pp. 255–89, http://www.jstor.org/stable/542914.

[8] Boris Aleksandrovich Rybakov, Cosmogony and mythology of Eneolithic farmers. -- SA, 1965, NO. 2, p.14.

[9] *Ibidem*.

[10] Mohammed F. Omar, Some thoughts on the religious role of Ibex in Ancient Near East, Article   2022,   p.   461, https://mafs.journals.ekb.eg/article_268492_7486c7ffd400c2cf915978bd6bbc56c1.pdf.

its right, seeing the waxing crescent formed by the almost touching horns[11]. The ibex would soon disappear, but only after a distinctive motif of the ibex inverted would emerge, as shown in Stage Three[12].

One of the most enduring and widely distributed images from the ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean is a composition of two wild goats (*capras*) arranged around a tree, known as a sacred tree, which is a date palm tree or conifer[13]. It is noteworthy that in specific patterns, this composition features an ibex with the tree of life[14]. It may have been passed down as a component of a mountain culture connecting the peoples of Susa throughout the Diyala region and into Syria from at least the fourth until the end of the second millennium B.C. It had originated in Iran in the Susiana Plain and was used by numerous Near Eastern cultures. It was dispersed over the Near[15].

According to scholars, another source of ibex-related symbolism would be cosmology or celestial symbols in Near Eastern art. The motif of the Taurus versus Leo fight, the Lion attacking the Ibex. According to Hartner, these themes represent various solstitial points, and interestingly, the pair of goats is not related to the representation of the Ibex[16].

Hartner shows how looking at the MUL.APIN tablets[17], the Goat is regarded as the Scorpion's *paranatellon*[18]. The bright Vega in the constellation Lyra is linked to the Ibex. The heliacal rising of Vega is around twenty-five days ahead of that of Antares, the brightest star in Scorpio. Consequently, the autumnal equinox is associated with the ibex motif, portrayed with the sacred tree[19].

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[11] Contenau and Ghirshman, 1935, pl. 51. Tepe Giyan sherd ca 4500 B.C. Many pictures of the ibex with and without the Tree of Life were found at Tepe Giyan's lowest level, which dates to around 5000 B.C., mainly in the form of sherds: Ibid. Plates 47-51.

[12] Richard Dibon-Smith, *The Ibex: History of a Near Eastern Time Symbol*, https://www.academia.edu/15735124/The_Ibex_as_an_Iconographic_Symbol_in_the_ancient_Near_East, 2016, p.21.

[13] Mohammed F. Omar, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

[14] L. Bushnell, *The Wild Goat and Tre Icon and its particular significance for ancient Cyprus*, Postgraduate Cypriot Archaeology Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of Young Researchers on Cypriot Archaeology, Department of Classics, Trinity College Dublin, 21-22 October 2005, BAR 1803, 2008, pp. 21-22.

[15] *Ibidem*, pp. 65-69.

[16] Willy Hartner, "*The earliest history of the constellations in Near Est and the motif of the lion-bull combat*", Journal of Near Eastern Studies, 24, 1965, p. 10.

[17] R. Watson, W. Horowitz, "Preliminary Material", in Writing Science before the Greeks (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011) doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004202306.i-223.2, p. 1.

[18] Willy Hartner, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 16.

Similarly, the Taurus image, flanked by the sacred tree, signifies the spring equinox. The summer solstice is symbolized by the Lion attacking the Ibex[20].

We have therefore followed the development of the ibex from its employment as a lunar emblem in prehistoric times to the sudden realignment of the night skies approximately 4000 BC, which gave the Ibex the Winter solstice, the Lion the Summer solstice, and the Bull the Spring equinox. Simultaneously, the ibex detached itself from the shorter lunar cycle that had probably been the first human calendar, and the moon was linked with the bull[21]. According to Avanzini, the archaic period and the west-central region of Yemen are characterized by a specific way of depicting the ibex, one of the creatures most closely associated with the fearful imagery and aesthetic preferences of the ancient people of South Arabia. The animal is motionless in these representations, which are occasionally isolated and repeated. The animal and the platform it stands on are placed within a rectangular, geometric frame that either truly exists or is easily imaginable, and the horns serve an important decorative role. The artistic vocabulary of such iconography requires a lengthy gestation time, which, given our current state of knowledge, must have started around the late second millennium[22]. With Hartner's theory, we have seen how certain constellations have a very ancient value and, if we base ourselves on the heavens of the fourth millennium B.C., how their symbolism, traceable in many pictographic sources, is to be associated with the solstitial and equinoctial points, and how, in addition, the motif of animal fights or the sacred tree is connected with an exact celestial meaning[23]. One example of a painted hemispherical dome is at Qasr Amra, the desert castle Al-Walid II constructed in the eighth century. It's a significant occasion for us because it shows how ancient astronomical paintings were transmitted to the Islamic world and highlights a critical distinction between decorative principles from the Middle Ages and the Modern Era.

Description, comparison, and analysis of ibex stucco fragments from the Sasanian to Umayyad periods

Southeast of Damghan, Tepe Hissar is one of Iran's most significant stucco sites from the Sassanian period. A lovely, sparsely decorated Sasanian palace with a variety of motif fragments was in this Tepe. These studies are

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[20] *Ibidem*.
[21] Mohammed F. Omar, *op. cit.*, p. 464.
[22] Alessandra Avanzini, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
[23] Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, "Classical Mythology in Mediaeval Art", Metropolitan Museum Studies 4, no. 2 (1933), pp. 228–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/1522803.

instrumental as they help us comprehend the stucco art of this era. Regarding style, Tepe Hissar's stuccoes date back to the fifth century A.D. Although Tepe Hissar's animal stuccoes are distinct, they share stylistic and temporal similarities with Kish stuccoes. In terms of period, Tepe Hissar's animal figures are modeled after Hajiabad stuccos. They replicated the animal stucco style of Hajiabad. Tepe Hissar's stucco style has a strong influence on Chal Tarkhan stuccoes; some Tepe Hissar stucco traits are like those seen in Ctesiphon, Taqe-Bostan reliefs, and a plaster plaque claimed to Susa[24]. The predominant technique used by the Sasanids did not consist of freehand mortar work but of producing square or rectangular tiles of various sizes on site, in series, and using molds[25]. The technique mainly employed by the Sasanians consisted of not working the stucco freely but producing off-site, in series, and using molds. These square or rectangular tiles of various sizes were then arranged to form continuous friezes and wall cladding panels. We can see this stucco tile from the Sasanian period, with the two ibexes standing towards the Tree of Life (Fig.3).

Fig. 3: Relief plaque with confronted ibexes, Iran

In Near Eastern cultures, ibexes are depicted standing on their hind legs to eat the leaves or berries of the 'Tree of Life' (Fig.4).

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[24] Seyyed Rasool, Mousavi Haji, Mohammad Eghbal Chehri, "*Animal Figures of Sasanian Stucco in Tepe Hissar*", Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Vol. 2 No. 2, December 2013, pp. 32-45.
[25] Françoise Demange, *Fastes d'un empire oublié (224-642)*, Paris, Editions Paris-Musées – Findakly, 2006, pp. 51-61.

Fig. 4: Ibex Eating, Iran

Other plaster fragments with stucco elements, such as a rectangular plaque with no margin, have been obtained from the Sassanid palace in Tepe Hissar. It represents a ram or ibex with two half-palmettes. The half-palmette figure appears on the right side of the fragment as a little stem with two drooping leaves[26] (Fig.5). A four-sepal half-palmette rises behind this figure, with the upper sepal point under the ibex's mouth.

Fig. 5: Plaster plaque with a ram or ibex figure of Tepe Hissar

The hollow, elongated, and pointed ear of the ibex is carved in the center, with the tip resting on the horn. Several parallel vertical incised lines indicate the position of the ibex's long beard below the neck and chin. Below the beard, two long twisted hairs hang from the neck in a striking six-bar motif. Around the neck of the ram is a collar-like ring with two thin strips

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[26] S. Ayazi, S. Miri (ed.), *Decorative Architectural Stucco from the Parthian and Sassanid eras*, Tehran, National Museum of Iran Publ., 2007, p. 26.

and a row of round pearls in the center. A square structure on the back of the neck and the thoracic cavity could be the end of two hanging bands[27] (Fig.5). All these elements related to the gift of power that would lead to development later in pre-Islamic art in the Umayyad dynasty.

The study of stucco motifs also from the Sassanid period has indicated which incarnations of the god Bahram were most significant; according to religious texts, the ten incarnations of the god Bahram also include the figure of the ibex[28].

All works dealing with the components of Umayyad art discuss the phenomenon of borrowing from the East via the Sassanians on the one hand and from the West through Byzantium on the other[29].

One example of this kind of art is the Umayyad Palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar in Jericho (known as Hisham's Palace) (724-748 AD), which is decorated with a complex of stucco sculptures (now in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem) that included figures of men and women, animals and hybrid creatures, and head friezes. Robert W. Hamilton, who excavated the palace between 1936 and 1948, discovered and restored them[30].

To judge by the shapes of the animal bodies, the source of inspiration is Eastern – mainly Iranian. At Khirbat al-Mafjar, as in Sassanian representations (Fig.5), the bodies are elongated, blocky, complete, and rotund in the rump and lower belly section, with the hair marked by hatched and engraved lines in various areas; the couchant posture is identical as well, as is the placing of the joint of the leg at a too high level as if extending from the neck. There is also a similarity in the shape of the heads: the head of the ibex and the head of the roe deer at Khirbat al-Mafjar (Fig.6, Fig.7), as well as the one at Chal-Tarkhan-Eshqabad, from the Sassanian period with the exact stucco figure of the ibex (Fig.8), has a long and massive neck and a glued-on eye of the type described above[31]. There is a difference between the three examples in their section and in the transition from the forehead to the jaw, which is molded with a lighter touch in the Sassanian version. However, the pricked-up ears of the ibex at Khirbat al-Mafjar add a unique charm to the animal[32] (Fig.6). This significant group of ibexes appears in two different styles on the façade of the Khirbat al-Mafjar's bath-house porch and its

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[27] Seyyed Rasool, Haji Mousavi, Mohammad Eghbal Chehri, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-45.

[28] M. E. Chehri, "*The Incarnations of the God Bahram on the Stuccoes of the Sassanian Period*", Pazhoheshha-ye Bastan Shenasi Iran, 12(35), pp. 127-158, 2023 (Doi: 10.22084/nb.2022.25014.2387).

[29] Rina Talgam, *The Stylistic Origins of Umayyad Sculpture and Architectural Decoration,* Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, Part I: Text, 2004, p. 48.

[30] Siyana S. Georgieva, *Khirbat al-Mafjar and the Art of Stucco (7th-8th c.)*, Chapter of Master Thesis, Figures modeled in stucco at Khirbat al-Mafjar, Padua, University of Padua, 2023, p. 8.

[31] Hana Taragan, *The Peopled Scrolls at the Umayyad Palace in Jericho*, Department of Art History, Tel Aviv University, Assaph, 31,1998, pp. 93-108.

[32] *Ibidem*.

entrance room, presenting our topic. According to Taragan, the bodies of the ibexes are executed in high relief and depicted in profile, and their three-dimensional heads face frontward.

Fig. 6: Kish, Stucco relief of couchant animal

Fig. 7: Detail Ibex, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*

Fig. 8: The Palace entrance Hall, Peopledscrolls, a fragment

From the analysis, we note that Figure 6 and Figure 7 differ from the stucco used in three-dimensional or high-relief sculpture. The stucco sculpture of Khirbat al-Mafjar includes a large group of crouching ibexes that appear in two different styles on the facade of the bath-house porch (Fig.9, Fig.10, Fig.11) and its entrance room (Fig.12, Fig.14)[33].

Fig. 9: Detail Ibex, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*

Fig. 10: Detail Ibex, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*

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[33] Rina Talgam, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

Fig. 11: Ibexes in plaster, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*

Fig. 12: Detail Ibex with the athlete, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*

The ibexes' bodies are executed in high relief and represented in profile, with three-dimensional heads facing frontward. Ibexes with similar size and posture were discovered at specific Sassanian sites (Fig.13)[34].

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[34] *Ibidem*.

Fig. 13: Carved Stucco Tile depicting a ram, Iraq

The bathhouse entrance room at Khirbat al-Mafjar features ibexes that stand out from their Sassanian counterparts due to their lively facial expressions and the movement elicited by elevating the hind body[35] (Fig.14).

Fig. 14: Detail Ibex, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*

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[35] *Ibidem.*

However, according to Talgam, the ibex statues on the bathhouse's facade are reminiscent of the Sassanian style, with their representation of four legs gathered beneath a heavy, rigid body and their stylized depiction of various anatomical details, like the marking of the belly-to-back transition with a straight line and a row of short lines at right angles to it. The way the ibexes are portrayed on Sassanian panels and low-relief medallions is the source of the stylized version of the ibexes 'orns without the need for foreshortening[36].

Hamilton gives one example of bearded ibexes kneeling on the cornice across the façade of the bath porch: "We documented pieces of eight of these monsters, which may have once numbered ten or more. Each one has a triple pendant hanging from a ribbon around its neck; small traces of buff coloration on one imply they may have originally been painted. [37]".

As Hamilton points out, these animals are frequently depicted flying or falling transfixed in Sasanian royal hunting scenes. With their ribbons, they resemble pets in this context; they are also commonly represented in fabrics and on seals[38]. With one foreleg elevated at the knee and one rear leg spread, the stance is seen on seals depicting gazelle, ibex, and hare, with the heads turned to face the front[39].

According to Hamilton: "Looking up from the floor, spectators would have seen these beasts crouching in the continuous file at the feet of the girls and athletes in their niches. And just as those may have evoked thoughts of the entertainment to be expected in the baths or palace, I imagine the figures of wild game were offered as a reminder of the pleasures of the field"[40].

This was egregiously demonstrated in Hamilton's research, a row of kneeling rams or ibexes rested on the top of the double acanthus frame, opposite to the two smaller niches, of which pieces of eight or more remained: The remains of these monsters revealed that they were modeled in plaster and applied in soft lumps against a pre-existing sculpted ornament, which we identified with the stucco panels surmounting the frame. The central panel features four monsters, two facing right and two facing left. One of the beasts can be placed precisely on the ascending curve of the arch on the left side as from its[41] (Fig.15, Fig.16).

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[36] Jens Kröger, Sasanidischer Stuckdekor, Philipp Von Zabern, Mainz Am Rhein, 1982, pp. 148-186.
[37] Robert William Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, p. 240.
[38] Ernest Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien*, Felsdenkmale aus Irans Heldenzeit Berlin, Dietrich Reimer, 1920.
[39] Robert William Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 240; Ernest Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien*.
[40] Robert William Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
[41] *Ibidem*, p. 102.

Fig. 15: Ibex with athlete, *Hisham's Palace* (*Khirbat al-Mafjar*)

Fig. 16: Ibex with athlete, *Hisham's Palace* (*Khirbat al-Mafjar*)

The presence and prominence in the bathing square of a statue known as the caliph, the lion pedestal in the Khirbat al-Mafjar, and the ibexes, all of which are attributes of Sasanian kingship and appear to implicate a noble owner, clearly influence the historical interpretation of the building[42].

Hamilton points out that the Umayyad sculptors were following the example of the tradition of Persia several centuries earlier, where, as he points out: "The paradox here consisted of introducing relief as a substitute for painting and doing it without adjustment to the architectural setting. In this, the Umayyad sculptors were following an example of some centuries' standing from Persia, where, as Herzfeld has remarked, the famous rock sculptures and the subsequent dependent works in plaster were an interpretation in relief of the dominant art of painting[43].

The definition of ornamental details such as the eyes or manes of ibexes represented as a novelty in Palestinian or Syrian architectural contexts is sufficient evidence of a very close cultural-historical relationship between these ibex figures and the art of stucco relief in Iraq and Persia[44]. The carved stucco figures of ibex found in Khirbat al-Mafjar display those decorative motifs, and the technique used is precisely the same as those found in other Umayyad structures such as Qasr al-Hallabat and Qasr al-Mshatta.

According to Arce, the stucco plaster is mainly composed of a mixture of gypsum and lime in an approximate proportion of one to three or two to three. The technique is also standard Umayyad: the decoration is sculpted and modeled directly into the hardening plaster with a blade or stucco knife (no molds or stamps were used) before drying and hardening completely. A few eyes or holes drilled in specific places reinforce the *chiaroscuro* effect. This craft, therefore, has a more expressive quality than mold-impressed rigid plaster ornamentation[45].

Regarding its prehistoric past, we have seen how the ibex appeared in full bloom on the Near Eastern plains, its crescent shape signifying its long link with the moon or its horns already holding the Tree of Life. It is currently only speculative how long back in human history this animal, or its horns, was considered sacred. But it might be essential to remember that the research of lunar notation on Paleolithic bones turned up interesting information that the first animal discovered in connection with the annotated

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[42] *Ibidem*.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 239.
[44] Siyana S. Georgieva, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[45] Ignacio Arce, The Umayyad Congregational Mosque and the Souq Square Complex at Amman Citadel. Architectural Features and Urban Significance, Proceedings of the 2nd International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East 22-26 May 2000, Copenhagen, Vol. 2, Edited by Ingolf Thuesen with the assistance of Alan George Walmsley Department of History and Cultures, University of Bologna / Eisenbrauns Bologna, 2016, p. 121.

bones was an ibex, and why it wasn't associated with the Umayyade tradition.

Even with the ruins of the Qasr al-Mshatta façade, we can constantly see our ibex hiding and feeding among the leaves of the tree of life, symbolizing the fertility metaphor. At this point, we can excellently demonstrate that the turning point of ancient Islamic art in Umayyad castles is marked by a new technique that creates the three-dimensional figures of ibex heads, depicted in profile, and executed in high relief in stucco.

Conclusion

Despite the small number of ibex stuccoes found at Khirbat al-Mafjar and Qasr al-Mshatta, the diversity of motifs and the importance of the studies are clear. Animal motifs, such as ibexes, gazelles, and rams, are particularly significant for accurately dating Umayyad buildings. The animal figures studied in the stuccoes of Khirbat al-Mafjar and Qasr al-Mshatta belonged to those fashionable animal motifs, and the Umayyad artists were particularly interested in these creatures, which may be observed in other creative works of this era or, better, in connection with the Sassanid heritage. This demonstrates the ibex's symbolic significance in the theological and social ideas of the Umayyads. As we have seen in our story, the holly, a symbol of fertility, has several designs adorning its top. Combining the Tree of Life with animals is assumed to symbolize luck and fertility, especially regarding the significance of animals such as the ibex. Animals and flowers predominate in the arabesque motifs, a Islamic architecture and art hallmark. Indeed, ibexes are created in architectural accents[46].

It is possible to locate an object's dating and determine the regions and periods in which the iconographic element was created. This can identify iconographic elements unique to the modeled stucco objects of a particular area during pre-Islamic history, particularly during the Umayyad period.

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Fig. 3: Relief plaque with confronted ibexes, Iran
Fig. 4: Ibex Eating, Iran
Fig. 5: Plaster plaque with a ram or ibex figure of Tepe Hissar
Fig. 6: Kish, Stucco relief of couchant animal

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[46] Masoud Mohammadzadeh, Hajjar Pour, Ali Hossein, *An analytic study on architectural decorations in early Islamic architecture*, European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences, 2014, vol.3, No.1, pp. 108-116.

Fig. 7: Detail Ibex, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*
Fig. 8: The Palace entrance Hall, Peopledscrolls, a fragment
Fig. 9: Detail Ibex, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*
Fig. 10: Detail Ibex, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*
Fig. 11: Ibexes in plaster, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*
Fig. 12: Detail Ibex with the athlete, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*
Fig. 13: Carved Stucco Tile depicting a ram, Iraq
Fig. 14: Detail Ibex, *Khirbat al-Mafjar*
Fig. 15: Ibex with athlete, *Hisham's Palace* (*Khirbat al-Mafjar*)
Fig. 16: Ibex with athlete, *Hisham's Palace* (*Khirbat al-Mafjar*)

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The Worldview of the Ukrainian People in the Artistic Images of Ukrainian Folk Songs

Lyudmyla M. Sbitnieva *
Olena F. Sbitnieva **

Abstract: *The history of Ukrainian musical art shows that a folk song is its most important component, existing since ancient times. It is a living chronicle, where each image reflects the worldview of the Ukrainian people, their dreams, hopes and experiences. Folk fantasy, using simple rhythms and rhymes, conveys deep spiritual values that have been formed over the centuries. Ukrainian folk songs, with their bright images and melodiousness, especially express love for homeland and its people, and also reflect universal human values that are relevant for all times and peoples. Ukrainian folk songs are a priceless treasure that is passed down from generation to generation. They are not only a source of aesthetic pleasure, but also an important source of information about the history, culture, and worldview of the Ukrainian people. The purpose of this article was to study the worldview of the Ukrainian people in the artistic images of Ukrainian folk songs.*

Keywords: *worldview, Ukrainian folk songs, folk music, artistic images of songs, folk song genres, folk vocal and instrumental creative work, Ukrainian folklore.*

The entire treasure of vocal and instrumental melodies from the earliest times of mankind's existence, due to oral transmission from previous to subsequent generations, we attribute it to folk music, which plays a very important role in the cultural life of peoples. Folk music is a collective form of creative work, and in its very beginning, it was also an individual creation

* Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor of Musical Art and Choreography Department, Educational and Research Institute of Arts at the State Institution "Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University", Ukraine, ORCID ID: orcid.org/0000-0001-5370-531X, e-mail: sbitneva.l@gmail.com.
** PhD of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor of Academic and Variety Vocal Department, Musical Art and Choreography Faculty at the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Ukraine, ORCID ID: orcid.org/0000-0002-2201-2120, e-mail: sbitneva.elen@gmail.com (corresponding author).

that, over time, spread among the masses and became the property of the people. Folk song, which dates back to ancient times, is an important part of Ukrainian music and Ukrainian culture. The Ukrainian people have been creating courageous and harsh, yet extremely lyrical poetry for centuries, which reflected the worldview of the Ukrainian people at every stage of historical development. Many famous Ukrainian composers, ethnographers, and culturologists have studied the history of Ukrainian folk songs development, among whom it is worth mentioning: Ivan Kotlyarevsky, Yuriy Fedkovych, Ivan Franko, Lesya Ukrainka, Pavlo Tychyna, Maksym Rylsky, Mykhailo Stelmakh, Sofia Hrytsia, Halyna Verkhovynets, Anatoly Avdievsky and many others. This topic has been the subject of study of composers from other countries (the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók, the Finnish composer Ilmari Krohn, the Czech historian Zdeněk Nejedlý, and others). The researchers noted that Ukrainian folk songs conveyed the rich inner life of Ukrainians; according to Nejedlý, they were in some ways close to both the Eastern group of Slavic folk songs and Western European folk songs. But, undoubtedly, the artistic images of Ukrainian folk songs mainly reflected the worldview of the Ukrainian people.

Ukrainian mythology, which influenced the worldview of the people and was reflected in folk creative work, is one of the links of the pan-Slavic and world mythology, which has its roots in ancient times, in distant prehistoric and pre-Christian times. The scientific study of Ukrainian mythology began in the middle of the 19th century, it was studied by M. Kostomarov, M. Maksymovich, O. Potebnia, M. Sumtsov, I. Nechuy-Levytskyi and others. They believed that the basis of ancient Ukrainian mythology, as well as that of European mythology, was the same phenomenon: celestial bodies, a sky studded with stars, the sun, the moon, stars, clouds, wind, rain, thunder and lightning. In the ancient Ukrainian mythology of pre-Christian times, we find the forms (real images) taken from the earth, because it was close to a man. Ukrainians took all the images of ancient religion from nature, which was nearby, and in their mythology they transferred them to heaven, that is, everything that happened in heaven had happened on the earth. That is why we see in the images of myths the sky, which sometimes appeared as a field, sometimes as the sea, sometimes as a maple leaf, and the clouds appeared as forests, rocks, etc.[1].

Folk creative work, which reflected the ideas, aspirations and ideals of the people, occupied an important part of Kyivan Rus era aesthetics. The main role in ancient Ukrainians' aesthetic ideas formation was played by folklore genres and, first of all, the calendar and ritual cycle. It is the calendar and ritual songs from ancient times to the present day that have shaped

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[1] Nechuy-Levytskyi, Ivan, *Svitohlyad ukrayins'koho narodu. Eskiz ukrayins'koyi mifolohiyi [The Worldview of the Ukrainian People. Ukrainian mythology outline]*, Oberehy, Kyiv, 1993, pp. 3-7.

Ukrainians' ideas about beauty and moral values. Folk was manifested in many plots and was realized in folk coloring, interpretation, assessment, figurative vision. Ukrainian folklore, the scientists believe, was the starting point from which the cultural history of the Ukrainian people began. Undoubtedly, folk music played an extremely important role in the cultural life of nations; it was the beginning of the musical culture of the Ukrainian people.

Ancient Ukrainians-Slavs spiritualized nature and attributed to it all the experiences characteristic of humans. This was reflected both in the poetic text and in the musical language of the songs. It should be noted that we have no written musical records from ancient times. But, for example, from Arabic sources of the 9th century, chronicles from the princely era, drawings of Bulgarian manuscripts, the 11th century frescoes of St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv and from the famous epic poem "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" we get known that already in those ancient times there existed not only a song culture, but also Ukrainian instrumental music that accompanied the song. It is known about military bands and simple musical instruments such as trumpets, flutes, tambourines, bagpipes, reed-pipes, harps, 8-string Slavic lutes, two-elbowed pipes, etc. From the epic poem "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" it is known about the legendary poet-singer Boyan, and from The Galician–Volhynian Chronicle we got known about the singer Mitus' (during the reign of King Daniel). From historical records, we also know about the existence of professional musicians and singers who were the authors of humorous and satirical songs in the "folk spirit". The Kyivan Chronicle of the 12th century mentions the folk singer Manuel. Unfortunately, only a few monuments have survived to our time, testifying to the folk singers and musicians who lived in ancient times. Unfortunately, only a few documents have survived to our time, testifying to the folk singers and musicians who lived in ancient times[2].

In St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv, one of the oldest bandurist's images has been preserved on a fresco located on one of the choir aisles, where the bandura has its original appearance, at first glance it resembles an Italian lute with strings only on the neck. These few pieces of information assure us that even in the most ancient times there were singers and musicians who sang about military campaigns, performed in princely courts and at folk festivals.

The oldest and most ancient types of folk music are the melodies of ritual songs, which date back to the pre-Christian period. These are songs related to annual holidays or household events (carols, Shchedrivka, Haivka, Vesnianka, Kupala and harvest songs), or songs that are related to certain significant events (wedding, baptismal or funeral songs). They also tell about

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[2] Krypiakevych, Ivan, *Istoriya ukrayins'koyi kul'tury [History of Ukrainian Culture]*, Lybid, Kyiv, 1999, p. 635.

the life of animals, birds, plants[3]. In rituals and customs, in carols, in Shchedrivka ('lavish') and Vesnianka ('spring') songs, as well as in spring games, in Kupala songs, in proverbs, etc., we see ancient Ukrainians' worldview manifestations regarding natural phenomena that struck the imagination, thoughts and fantasy of the people, who created pagan 'gods' with similar psychological characteristics to themselves. The antiquity of these melodies is evidenced by the musical language peculiarities. For example, in the world-famous "Shchedryk" song we find the repetition of the same motif in the minor third volume, or in "Oy, kolyada-kolyadnytsya" ("Oh, carol, carol singer") adjacent pitches alternate in the major second volume. It should be noted that these melodies have signs of old church modes.

In Ukrainian mythology, we find ancient forms of patriarchal and agricultural life, as well as the transfer of the form of family life from earth to heaven. In Ukrainian carols and Shchedrivka songs the images of the father-master, the mother-mistress, the daughter-maiden and the beautiful son-gentleman can often be met. Also we meet images of Ukrainian mythology characters: pagan Master god, goddesses of the Sun, goddesses of Dawn, goddesses of Clouds, goddesses of Spring. The change of summer and winter, heat and cold, day and night, light and darkness, the eternal struggle of light and dark forces touched the human imagination of those times. All these nature manifestations struck the imagination and awakened thoughts. Ancient Ukrainians glorified 'the bright heavenly forces', as we see from the ritual songs, to have their favor, which would contribute to the appearance of a large number of lambs, calves, so that the frost would not freeze the rye, wheat and so that trees would bear fruit in the gardens and poultry breeding would be successful in the farmsteads. Carols and Shchedrivka songs, in which young people praised the "master" and which were performed at Christmas, were one form of Ukrainian myths. The soul of an ancient Ukrainian could not yet think logically and therefore had to call on the help of the 'imagination'. Ancient Ukrainians glorified the 'light heavenly forces', served the 'dark forces', to attract the favor of heaven, to contribute to the achievement of practical goals. The purpose of the Ukrainian people's appeals to the 'heavenly forces', like of other peoples of the world, was practical: they asked the pagan 'gods' for all kinds of necessary things. The artistic images of these carols and Shchedrivka songs contained a rich language, and the pictures of folk life revealed the unique flavor of the ancestors' original world. The poetic content of these works reveals to us a picture of the folk life of their ancestors, who were attracted by images of the starry sky, the sun, the change of seasons and so on. But in the images of these songs we also find the family of 'bright' pagan gods of ancient

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[3] *Ibidem*, p. 623.

Ukrainians, which is the 'heavenly family': the clear Moon, the clear Sun, the fine Rain, the small Stars, etc. Such musical works show the secular spirituality of the people and the centuries-old traditions of their unique culture. The musical and poetic material of the songs allows us to create in the imagination a lyrical picture of the Ukrainian landscape, in which the beauty of nature is in harmonious unity with the structure of the peasant family. The ancient Slavs spiritualized nature and attributed to it all the experiences that a person had, and this was reflected in the poetic content of their works.

We see in the artistic images of the songs that the Ukrainian people imagined their pagan gods in the most attractive form for them, i. e. in the image of a rich landowner-farmer's family. The most common plot in Ukrainian carols and Shchedrivka songs describe the master's household, his oxen, cows, sheep, bees and his field which is covered with thick stacks. In later images of the songs, we already see the everyday life and color of the princely period, the image of the pagan god as a warrior, a warrior-prince, a princely son with his army, and female ones are shown as the images of a princess or a princely daughter. During the period of Christianity introduction, its ideas provided the content of cultural, educational and artistic values development process, which began to emerge and develop in ancient Ukrainians' religious life new forms. In the Christian period, when church singers and liturgical books appeared, we find that a Christian flavor took the place of Ukrainian people's mythology, where pagan gods were replaced by images of Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Peter (the Apostle), Saint Nicholas (of Myra and Bari) and the Holy Mother of God (the Blessed Virgin Mary).

The folk-poetic material of the songs, possessing a unique artistic and figurative element, has always contributed to the development of the emotional sphere and the ability to see the beauty of the world around. The enchanting artistic image of the songs, in which birds and animals, trees and wind reign, give us an understanding of the deep humanity of the Ukrainian people, their lyricism and sly folk humor. The artistic images of Ukrainian folk songs carry the human imagination into the enchanting world of fairy tales, and through the means of poetic allegory, people, especially children, learned about nature and human life. We can say that in this way, the worldview and attitude towards the surrounding world of future generations were largely formed.

Researchers believe that the 16th-18th centuries became an important era in the development of Ukrainian folk song. It acquired characteristic features that began to distinguish it from the folk songs of other peoples. A new form of Cossacks' dumas (epic ballads), historical songs and lyrical-epic musical works of an improvised-recitative nature appeared, which reflected the struggle of the Cossacks with the Turks and Tatars and other wars with

enemies. From this period, the creative work of folk singers: kobzars, bandurists and lyre players (often organizing themselves into singing fraternities), spread throughout the land. The further development of folk music showed its closeness to the European musical system, in which there was a division into major and minor in the specified mode, but there were also specific signs of national originality, for example, the development of 'subvocals'. Due to these elements, Chumak's (means 'a traveling salt merchant'), Burlak's (means 'a river boat or barge puller'), Kolomyika, bachelor's and different love songs were filled with the private experiences of an individual person in various life situations[4].

It is also possible to distinguish such a feature of folk music that remains the property of a few, such as songs by professional folk singers: kobzars, bandurists, lyre players, etc. It is known that during the Cossacks' period of Ukrainian history, the kobza was widely used; not only Cossacks (warriors) but even girls played it. The torban, a musical instrument that is not much different from the kobza, was also widespread. Musicologist Vasyl Yemetz points out that both the playing and singing of different kobzars could differ significantly when performing the same song. This depended on singers from different regions of Ukrainian land performance specifics. But the content of the songs was common. This was especially true of dumas, peculiar epic songs, many of which had such a feature as the presence of melodeclamation. Musicologist Filaret Kolessa, who studied the phenomenon of dumas, believed that duma was a melodic recitative with a free rhythm and a variable improvisation form. He emphasized that the Dumas were not available for every musician to be performed correctly: "Only talented professional kobzars and some lyre players can sing the Dumas"[5].

There were special military kobzars who composed regimental music. It is known that Hetman Ivan Mazepa played a torban, the neck of which was inlaid with his personal coat of arms. This musical instrument made of palisander and ivory was kept in the V. V. Tarnovs'kyi Chernigiv historical museum until its recent loss.

In 16th and 17th centuries tax collection registers with singers and 'musicians' were in operation on the territory of contemporary Ukraine. These registers are a valuable historical source that allows us to study the musical life of that time. It is believed that the heyday of kobza occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries. Already in the second half of the 17th century, 'musician's guilds' appeared in the country, evidence of which was the statute of the Kyiv Musician's Guild since 1677. An interesting phenomenon

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[4] 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.
[5] Yemetz, Vasyl, *Kobza ta kobzari. Repryntne vydannya [Kobza and Kobzars. Reprint edition]*, Muzychna Ukrayina, 1993, p. 30.

of the 18th century was the existence of singing and instrumental choirs in manor estates, which also contributed to the development of musical art in Ukraine. Considering the musical abilities of the Ukrainian people, it was in Ukraine that a singing and music school was founded in the city of Hlukhov in 1737.

The people created dumas and songs that were not detached from reality, because this would contradict the very nature of folk poetry. In *The Travels of Macarius, Patriarch of Antioch*, we find information that the 17th-century Arab traveler Paul Za'im (Paul of Aleppo), who traveled through Cossack Country, was impressed and captivated by the spiritual potential of the Ukrainian people. He wrote that there were a lot of children in Ukrainian towns and all of them, even orphans, were taught to read.

There were many widows and orphans in Ukraine, because it had been so long ago that survival and persistence had been the most important problem of the Ukrainian people for centuries. The people, having a spirit of rebelliousness, an eternal desire for freedom and independence, did not lose their spiritual strength in the continuous wars for independence. And this important trait, the attraction to spirituality, is undoubtedly inherent in the Ukrainian people. Ukrainian songs and epic ballads are one of the manifestations of this attraction. Historical songs and dumas, previously called Cossack songs or venerable songs, accompanied the long path of the liberation struggle. They arose as a genre of folk poetry based on the best achievements of folk poetic creativity in the 15th - 16th centuries. A significant role in their emergence was played by folk historical, social and everyday Ukrainian folk songs. They are known in the world as original epic and lyric-epic works, performed to the accompaniment of a kobza, bandura or lyre[6].

It is well known that the end of the 18th century was a period of complete enslavement of the Ukrainian people, when the Hetmanate was abolished and the Zaporizhian Sich was destroyed. It was during this period that the decline of the old kobzar tradition was observed[7].

There is an opinion that the Ukrainian folk song is not only the best manifestation of the spiritual qualities of the people, but it has repeatedly been a means of national revival. Kobzars were highly respected and often performed as people who traveled throughout Ukraine and, with their singing and playing the kobza, fanned the sparks of popular anger, calling on the people to fight against the oppressors ruling Ukraine. Considering only the 17th - 18th centuries, some of the most famous names have come down to us: the legendary Marusia Churai, Semen Klymovsky, Yavdokha Zuikha and

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[6] Talanchuk, Olena, *Ukrayins'ki narodni dumy ta istorychni pisni [Ukrainian folk epic poems and historical songs]*, Veselka, Kyiv, 1990, pp. 5-9.

[7] Yemetz, Vasyl, *Kobza ta kobzari. Repryntne vydannya [Kobza and Kobzars. Reprint edition]*, Muzychna Ukrayina, 1993, p. 45.

others. History has left us the names of blind kobzars whose fame spread in Ukraine at that time: Andriy Shut, Ivan Kravchenko-Kryukovsky, Khvedir Hrytsenko-Kholodny, Arkhip Nikonenko, Ostap Veresai and others[8].

Experiencing the artistic image of such songs, in which the heroic resonates with the lyrics, the sincerity of courageous and strong people who completely love their country, we feel a variety of emotions: pride, admiration, love, anger, etc. Mykola Hohol emphasized that the Ukrainian folk song showed the entire history of the Ukrainian people, their pain and suffering, love for their own land, love for their mother, women, as well as faith in a bright future. It can be argued that Ukrainian folk creative work is the starting point from which the history of the Ukrainian people's culture has begun. Vivid poetic and musical language emphasizes the closeness and organic unity of man and the surrounding world, their inseparable connection. The folk song reflects the traditions of family upbringing, a deep sense of attachment to own family, respect for elders, maternal love, etc. The love lyrics of Ukrainian folk songs celebrate the beauty of a Ukrainian woman, the depth of her feelings for her beloved, her loyalty, tenderness, and strength of spirit. The feeling of deep love for own motherland, for own people, is especially vividly sung. The national in these songs is closely connected with the universal human's.

It should be noted that Ukrainian folk art has a distinctly vocal character, although since ancient times the Ukrainians have used many musical instruments to accompany singing. The oldest Ukrainian musical instruments are: from plucked instruments first was the harp (several strings that were stretched on a square frame), and later the kobza and the bandura appeared; the tsymbaly from percussion string instruments; bowed string instruments were the violin and the basolia. Of the ancient woodwind instruments, the sopilka was very popular, and in the Western Ukraine (mainly Carpathian Mountains) the reed-pipe and the trembita were also widespread. The tambourines and the kettle-drums were used as rhythmic percussion instruments. The kobza is one of the oldest national musical instruments. In its original form, as we can see on old drawings with Cossack Mamai's portrait, it had 3-5 strings, later in the 18th century it had 12 strings, and now it has 35 strings. Its shape has also changed. The kobza (or bandura) is a wooden musical instrument made from willow. In the old days, the strings were made of guts, or there was an alternation of gut and metal strings. The kobza has an old structure of Greek origin, with an admixture of other influences. At first, according to the historian Alexander Rigelman, the kobza and the bandura were different musical instruments, but later both got the same name and an attitude as to the same instrument. There are several versions regarding the origin of this musical instrument. One states that the

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[8] *Ibidem*, p. 48.

kobza (bandura) is of Asian origin[9]. According to it, the kobza is an old musical instrument, which was widespread among the Cumans (Turkic nomadic people from Central Asia) in the 12th century, who occupied the steppe expanses in the south-east of Ukraine at that time. Later, kobza was borrowed from the Cumans by the Tatars, and only then it appeared in Ukraine. It should be mentioned that the Turks also use a musical instrument similar to the kobza which it is called the kobyz (qobyz). There is also another opinion that in the 15th century the kobza came to Ukraine from the Crimean Tatars, who lived on the Crimean Peninsula at that time. Regarding the origin of the bandura, some researchers have concluded that it first appeared in the Arab-Persian East, and later, around the 15th century, it reached Ukraine through Greece. Others believe that the bandura first appeared in England in the 16th century and was called the mandore. This musical instrument was distributed in European countries (first in Spain, where it was called the bandurria, later it began to spread in Italy, then it reached Poland, and only then it ended up in Ukraine). Bandurist chapels were formed in Poland at the king's court. There is an opinion that the bandura became a more popular musical instrument from that time and replaced the kobza. The bandura was outwardly similar to the kobza, so the people also called the bandura a kobza, which is precisely what explains the duality of the name of this Ukrainian national musical instrument. A historian Mykola Sumtsov believed that the bandura appeared in Ukraine thanks to the Serbs, who were the first teachers of Ukrainian military musicians and singers. There is no doubt that the kobza has long been widespread in the cities and villages of Ukraine. The 16th-century Polish historian Bartosz Paprocki gives examples of Cossacks who not only skillfully shot, but also "sang and played the kobza"[10]. Other researchers emphasize that the kobza (bandura) has been a national Ukrainian musical instrument since ancient times, because as early as 1580 in Ukrainian scientific sources there are mentions of bandura players. For example, it is known that Prystrunky (additional strings placed on the bandura's soundboard, which expand its range and capabilities) first appeared in Ukraine, as it can be seen on a drawing from 1785. But although it is still not entirely clear where the kobza (bandura) came from, one thing is clear: for centuries these instruments have served the Ukrainian people. They were not only entertainment, but also a part of folk creative work, in which, through the means of kobzar songs, they told about the struggle of Cossacks against enemies, about the glorious Zaporizhzhia and other pages of Ukrainian history, and, thus, awakened national feelings. Dumas (epic ballads) about Morozenko, Petro Sahaidachny, Marusia Bohuslavka, about the people's glorious past reveal truth and falsehood, preach spirit's cheerfulness, assure life's importance.

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[9] *Ibidem*, p. 16.
[10] *Ibidem*, p. 17.

The kobza (bandura) is a musical instrument that has always been loved by the Ukrainian people. But there is no doubt that whether they were the creation of the Ukrainian people or had come from abroad, these instruments reminded Ukrainians of their glorious past and awakened dreams of a bright future.

Not in vain, understanding the significance of the kobza, the outstanding Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, who glorified the beauty of his own land, the greatness, kindness and patience of his people, called his poetry collection as "Kobzar". In each poetic line of "Kobzar" the poet's suffering for the pain of his people can be felt. It is said that it is impossible to imagine T. Shevchenko without Ukraine, but it is impossible to imagine Ukraine without T. Shevchenko. For Taras Shevchenko, folk songs were a school of wisdom and truth, a living history, a faithful and sincere advisor in his life and creative work. Panteleimon Kulish, another famous figure of Ukrainian culture, called entire Ukrainian literature as 'kobza'.

Over the centuries, the Ukrainian people have created a huge number of historical songs and dumas, which were performed by folk singers. The people created epic ballads and songs that told about the unadorned surrounding them reality. The artistic images of these songs, most of which were characterized by strict and courageous poetry, depicted for us the life and hopes of ordinary Ukrainians, their struggle for independence and a better future life. Ukrainian folk songs and dumas reflect moral norms and views, aesthetic tastes of Ukrainians, so they will never lose their scientific and cultural significance. From the historical songs, whose artistic images portray courageous and strong people, it is evident that heroism is almost always closely intertwined with lyricism. Listening to Ukrainian folk songs, the audience involuntarily begins to think about human destinies, about a person's experiences and loneliness, and a deep sense of empathy arises.

The 17th century marked the beginning of Ukrainian folk songs artistic elaboration period. Lyre players, bandura players, and kobzars traditionally traveled through the villages and cities of Ukraine, performing historical songs and songs about the difficult daily life of the Ukrainian people.

The artistic images of Ukrainian folk songs have significant potential to influence the worldview of children's personalities, to awaken the strong energy resources of each person. In different historical times, folk pedagogy used children's folk songs to form a certain type of worldview, moral and aesthetic attitude towards the world and people. The artistic images of Ukrainian folk songs taught children to feel and understand beauty, and aroused a desire for artistic creativity. From mother's heartfelt lullaby, which sang nature, love and tenderness, humanity and goodness, the process of children's awareness of the beauty of the world around them began. Children become aware of a folk song's artistic and figurative essence through the

emotional experience of a musical and poetic artistic image, awareness of poetic content. Ukrainian folk-poetic song material has a unique figurative element that contributes to children's ability to experience emotionally, monitor the development of artistic images, find something new, appreciate the melody's beauty, and also develops auditory and vocal qualities. The musical images of fairy-tale songs reveal a fantastic, yet beautiful world, where children's imagination meets sincere humanity, gentle lyricism, and witty humor. The fabulous, magical image of the songs, in which birds and animals, the forest and the wind rule, tells children in an allegorical form about the human existence essence. A simple rhythm and a beautiful melody, the deep content of the works provide an opportunity to develop in children a sense of musical form, the ability to think in images, awakens creativity. Images of folk poetry genre works carry the imagination into the magical world of a fairy tale, where due to a poetic allegory, watching the song heroes' lives, children get to know about nature, human life, because in songs characters' images, various traits of people's temper are met. Acquaintance with songs makes children proud of creative work, the history of their people, which is permeated with wisdom. The vivid and poetic language emphasizes the integral closeness of a man and the surrounding nature, their inextricable connection. Songs that were created by the people many centuries ago are still popular among the people today: "Shchedryk", "Oy ye v lisi kalyna" ("Oh, there is a viburnum in the forest"), "Kosari" ("Mowers"), "Zhuravel" ("Crane"), "Idy, idy doshchyku" ("Let it rain"), "A vzhe vesna" ("And it's already spring"), "Dobryy vechir, divchyno" ("Good evening, a girl"), "Oy, syvaya ta i zozulen'ka" ("Oh, gray cuckoo"), "Nad richkoyu-berezhkom" ("Above the river bank"), "Divka Yavdoshka" ("Eudokia maiden") and other. The musical and poetic images of these songs evoke moral emotions and introduce children to the rituals and traditions of the Ukrainian people, because the folk song reflects the family upbringing peculiarities, deep and pure relationships between a person and its family, respect for elders, and especially maternal love. Folk songs, through musical intonations, encourage and enable young people to experience various shades of human emotions.

It is with the help of Ukrainian song artistic means that people from time immemorial sought to fill labour with a special meaning, decorate everyday life and humanize relationships between people. It should be pointed out that, over the centuries, amid various environments and influences of other nations, the Ukrainian people manifested their individuality, crystallized those spiritual melodies, but only later did the collection and arrangement of this "extremely large and rich material" begin, as Vasyl Barvinsky notes in his article "Ukrainian music" in the book under the general editorship[11]. In the songs' artistic images, we feel each character's

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[11] Krypiakevych, Ivan, *Istoriya ukrayins'koyi kul'tury [History of Ukrainian Culture]*, Lybid, Kyiv, 1999, p. 623.

temper peculiarities. We believe that folk songs, which fully reflect the worldview and national self-awareness of the Ukrainian people, teach us to understand the creative wisdom of the people. Mykola Lysenko (a Ukrainian composer, pianist, conductor and ethnomusicologist) wrote that in Ukrainian folk melodies, mostly minor, with small intervals and characteristic bold increases, symmetrical pattern and regular rhythm, we see, that in these songs, as in a mirror, the type of the Ukrainian was reflected, who is calm and deep by nature, with an aesthetic ear and a philosophical mind[12].

Since the 18th century, many prominent composers have turned to Ukrainian folk songs in their works (Pyotr Tchaikovsky and other). Thanks to the arrangements of Ukrainian folk songs by Mykola Leontovych (about 200), many of them have gained wide popularity throughout the world: "Shchedryk", also known as "Carol of the Bells", «Oy u hayu pry Dunayu" ("Oh, in the grove near the Danube"), "Nich yaka misyachna" ("What a moonlit night"), "Ty zh mene pidmanula" ("You've tricked me"), "Yikhav kozak za Dunay" ("A Cossack was traveling across the Danube") and other.

Conclusions

A review of Ukrainian musical art history defines folk song as one of the important links that dates back to ancient times. Ukrainian folk song is a living history of the people, woven from their dreams, hopes and experiences, which sounds in every image.

We do not know exactly when certain songs appeared, because only some of them are associated with specific names and historic events. Unfortunately, we also don't know the names of those ancient songwriters, however, each song originally had a specific author. But even today, the song preserves the golden thread of memory, stands guard over those sacred springs that inspire the Ukrainian national revival.

The Ukrainian people have created a huge number of epic ballads and historical songs, the artistic images of which reflect the life, hopes, and struggle for the country's independence. These songs continue to be performed, although quite rarely. They are preserved for future generations of the Ukrainians, who should know about the glorious past of their ancestors.

The inexhaustible sources of folk imagination, through simple rhythms and rhymes, truly carry the golden grains of all the best that has been sown for centuries in Ukrainian folk oral creative works with its summits of spirituality and educational wisdom. It is folk songs, in the artistic images of which the national self-awareness and the worldview of the people are reflected, that are distinguished by their vivid content and enchanting melody.

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[12] Yemetz, Vasyl, *Kobza ta kobzari. Repryntne vydannya [Kobza and Kobzars. Reprint edition]*, Muzychna Ukrayina, 1993, p. 5.

The feeling of deep love for own motherland, for own people, is especially vividly praised in them. It can be argued that through the artistic images of Ukrainian folk songs, we become aware of those universal and eternal values that are present in all ages and are inherent to all peoples of the world.

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From Locus Sacrum to Exhibition Space.
Decontextualizing and Aestheticizing Medieval Art

Raul Andrei Saucă [*]

Abstract: *The transfer of medieval art from a liturgical context to a secular exhibition setting generates profound changes on its perception. This process generates phenomena of decontextualization, aestheticization and desacralization, which dilute the original meaning of the artifacts, transforming them from cult objects into museum exhibits evaluated predominantly from an aesthetic and historical perspective. This paper examines the impact of this transfer on the sacredness of medieval art and explores strategies by which museums can counteract the loss of the spiritual dimension. These solutions include the reconstruction of the original context as much as possible, highlighting the immaterial dimension of medieval sacred art, detailing devotional practices, saints' hagiographies, sacred symbolism, integrating evocative scenographic elements (light, music, scents), using immersive technologies and creating an atmosphere conducive to a contemplative experience. Relevant examples, such as The Cloisters or the Musée de Cluny, demonstrate that careful curatorial approach can facilitate the recontextualization of medieval art without compromising its transcendental dimension. Museums can go beyond mere conservation and exhibition spaces to become environments for rediscovering an authentic relationship with the sacred, offering visitors an experience that goes beyond mere aesthetic admiration and enters the realm of spiritual reflection.*

Keywords: *medieval art, exhibition spaces, decontextualization, aestheticization, resacralization*

Introduction

The impact of exhibition spaces on the sacred dimension of medieval art calls for a subtle and interdisciplinary analysis, given the complexity of the interplay between artistic expression, sacredness and the contemporary secular context. This paper examines how the display of medieval artifacts in museums and art galleries influences perceptions of their sacredness. Sacredness, a defining attribute of medieval art, undergoes a reappraisal

[*] PhD student, The Doctoral School of Visual Arts, "George Enescu" National University of Arts from Iași, e-mail: raul-andrei.sauca@student.unage.ro

under the influence of the secular setting of museum institutions, thus reshaping the public's experience of these creations[1].

Museum institutions, by their very nature, decontextualize sacred objects, dislocating them from the original sphere of liturgical and devotional practices[2]. Sacredness does not reside exclusively in the objects, but is manifested in a complex ensemble of rituals, representations, symbolic expressions and transmitted knowledge, each with a profound charge within a well-defined spiritual ecosystem[3]. Once transferred to the museum space, these artifacts lose their religious function in favor of an aesthetic, historical and cultural valorization, where the human and interpretative perspective tends to replace the transcendent dimension. This paradigmatic shift raises essential questions about the authenticity of the sacred experience in museum display and about the capacity of institutions to restore, in a way that is intelligible and meaningful to contemporary sensibilities, the spiritual depth inherent in these objects.

In trying to understand the meaning and direction of medieval art in the context of contemporary exhibition spaces, we can refer to the essential questions posed by Paul Gauguin: "*Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going*?"[4]. In addition to origin, essence and destiny, these questions also concern the search for meaning and relevance of medieval art in a secularized world. Nikolai Berdiaev emphasizes the importance of introspection, stating that the meaning of things is hidden within man himself[5]. Deciphering the meaning of medieval art thus requires a thorough exploration of human values and beliefs, as well as an understanding of the historical and cultural context in which it was created.

Secularization represents a significant challenge in understanding medieval art. Contemporary society is faced with a loss of familiarity with religious symbolism and context, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as "*illettrisme religieux*"[6]. Museums as cultural institutions address an increasingly diverse public with heterogeneous cultural references and often a lack of specific religious knowledge. In this context, medieval art, originally conceived as an expression of faith and an instrument of devotion, risks being

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[1] Roque, Maria, "Le sens caché : Exposition de l'art chrétienne au musée*"*, *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 170-175, p. 171.

[2] Branham, Joan, "Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space", *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, The Walters Art Museum, 1995, 33-47, p. 33;

[3] Stoleriu, Adrian, *Interferențe vizual-artistice. Artă și sacralitate în contemporaneitate*, Artes, Iași, 2019, p. 80.

[4] Ibidem, p. 8.

[5] Berdiaev, Nikolai, *Sensul creației*, Humanitas, București, 1992, p. 67 apud Stoleriu, Adrian, *Interferențe vizual-artistice. Artă și sacralitate în contemporaneitate*, Artes, Iași, 2019, p. 9.

[6] Roque, Maria, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

reduced to a mere aesthetic or historical value, thus losing its spiritual dimension.

Nevertheless, the sacred continues to exert a strong fascination and draw audiences to art, including medieval art. Despite the process of secularization, people are in search of points of security and connections with the idea of transcendence. Medieval art, in this sense, can offer a way to explore and experience the spiritual dimension of existence. Museums in turn can become cultural spaces of the sacred, where visitors can experience a form of spiritual reflection.

In analysing the impact of exhibition spaces on medieval art, it is crucial to consider a number of key issues: decontextualization, aestheticization and ritualization. Decontextualization refers to the separation of objects from their original liturgical and devotional context, which can lead to a loss of their original spiritual significance. Aestheticization describes the emphasis on the aesthetic value of objects at the expense of their religious function[7]. Ritualization concerns museums that create their own exhibition rituals, which may replace or alter the original religious significance of the objects[8].

In this article, we will look at issues related both to how museums might convey the sacred significance of medieval art in a secularized context, and the extent to which the museum experience can become a form of pilgrimage or encounter with the sacred. By analyzing these issues, the paper aims to offer insights into how exhibition spaces influence perceptions of the sacredness of medieval art and how museums can balance the preservation of historical and artistic value with the transmission of spiritual meaning, providing contemporary audiences with a relevant and inclusive experience.

Medieval art: a sacred perspective

In order to understand the impact of exhibition spaces on medieval art, it is essential to clarify the initial framework in which it functioned. Medieval art was conceived as a means to reach the sacred, to facilitate the connection between the believer and the divine. Some of the creations had a naturalistic, even theatrical aspect, the aim being to bring people closer to the church[9]. The works are distinguished by their universality, their detachment from the material world and their search for the higher realities of human

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[7] Aboudrar, Bruno Nassim, „Le musée et le paradoxe du sacré profane", *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 25-28, p. 25.

[8] Rey-Regazzi, Jean, "Ce qui nous lie (au musée)", *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 160-164, p. 161.

[9] Norris, Michael, *Medieval Art: A Resource for Educators*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005, p. 107.

existence. For the most part, medieval art is defined as religious and sacred art by its primary function of serving religious worship[10].

Before they were displayed in museums, many medieval works of art were integrated into a complex system of religious meanings and devotional practices[11]. Icons, reliquaries and liturgical objects were not seen as mere decorative objects, but as bearers of divine grace, as means of communication with God and the saints. Icons are representations of divinity and are considered windows to heaven, bridges between the mundane and the sacred. The "*Nomina sacra*", considered the earliest forms of visual expression of Christianity, form the basis of the cult of icons[12]. The attainment of transcendental quality is essential in sacred art, and in ancient times, icon-painters adhered to a strict set of rules, not only in terms of the technical excellence and conceptual depth of their work, but also in relation to their own inner conduct. As "*homo religiosus*"[13], the artist assumed an attitude of deep devotion, considering the act of creation both an artistic expression and an exercise in asceticism.

Byzantine art played a key role in defining medieval aesthetics and spirituality by embellishing churches, transforming them into transcendent spaces designed to inspire piety and facilitate religious experience. Medieval visual representations played a fundamental role in reinforcing and reaffirming sacred beliefs, functioning as a structured mnemonic mechanism. These images ordered and sequenced historical events, regulated the unfolding of the liturgical spectacle and anchored the viewer in a spatio-temporal framework correlated to the rhythms of sacred time[14]. They also made it easier to recall the essential points of Christian doctrine, thus providing an indispensable visual support for internalizing and perpetuating religious principles.

The monumental mosaics and frescoes used to create an atmosphere of heavenly nature, inviting the faithful to contemplate divine beauty. Beyond the purely aesthetic, Byzantine art served as a means of worship and connection with the sacred. Icons, placed in places of honor, were venerated as representations of the divine, and gestures of adoration in front of icons, such as worship and candle lighting, were considered acts of faith. Byzantine art brought the believer closer to the divine, mediating between the material and spiritual worlds.

Iconography is a key element in understanding medieval art, providing a complex visual language through which religious and spiritual

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[10] Kessler, Herbert L., "On the State of Medieval Art History", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70, No. 2, 1988, pp. 166-187, p. 173.
[11] Roque, Maria, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
[12] Melniciuc-Puică, Ilie, „Abbreviations and Symbols Founded in Biblical Manuscripts and Christians Icons", *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2010, p. 11.
[13] Eliade, Mircea, *Sacrul și profanul,* Humanitas, București, 1992, p.17.
[14] Kessler, Herbert L., *op. cit.*, p. 186.

messages were conveyed. Ottonian miniatures, for example, are recognized for their ability to communicate important ideas[15]. Each image, color and symbol had a precise meaning, rooted in the tradition of the church and sacred scripture. "*Christ Pantocrator*", "*Virgin Mary with Child*", saints and scenes from the Bible were depicted according to strict canons[16], designed to ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of the message conveyed. Through iconography, the faithful could better understand religious dogmas, biblical events and the lives of the saints, thus strengthening their faith and closeness to God. Constantine Cavarnos states that Byzantine iconography is a sacred, spiritual art that has seven functions, including perfecting the beauty of a church, instructing in the Orthodox Christian faith and inspiring the saints depicted in icons[17].

Medieval art, especially Byzantine art, is a unique phenomenon in which aesthetics is intertwined with spirituality and religious function transcends mere decoration. Through icons, mosaics and frescoes, Byzantine art not only embellished places of worship, but also facilitated access to the sacred for the faithful, conveying profound religious and spiritual messages. This sacred perspective on medieval art is essential to understanding the impact that modern exhibition spaces have on the public's perception of it.

The impact of musealisation on the sacredness of medieval art

The musealization of medieval art involves a process of relocating sacred objects from their original liturgical space into a secular setting, which brings about a significant change in their perception. Objects originally created for liturgical use - icons, reliquaries, frescoes - had a precise function in religious rituals, not simply as objects of contemplation, but as an active part of the sacred act. Icons were venerated in a context involving prayer, lit candles and collective participation in the liturgical act.

Transferring these objects into the museum space, where they are displayed under glass cases or on walls, transforms them from ritual artifacts into aesthetic objects. As Judith Walker Mann points out, medieval art is inseparable from its spiritual context, and removal from this environment can lead to a loss of its sacred dimension[18]. This alteration alters the perception of the viewer, who no longer interacts with the object through faith, but through a purely aesthetic perspective. Museums tend to privilege aesthetics over the original function of medieval works of art. This transition is marked by a change in the status of the sacred object: from an element of religious cult to an exhibit to be admired from a formal point of view. For example, a Gothic

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[15] Diebold, William, "Medievalism", *Studies in Iconography*, Vol. 33, Special Issue Medieval Art History Today, 2012, pp. 247-256, p. 253.

[16] Stoleriu, Adrian, *op. cit.,* p. 130.

[17] Cavarnos, Constantine, *Ghid de iconografie bizantină*, Editura Sofia, București, 2005, p. 14.

[18] Walker-Mann, Judith, Medieval Art, *Bulletin (St. Louis Art Museum)*, New Series, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1992, pp. 1-68, p. 33.

altar, which originally structured the liturgical space of a church, becomes a dislocated sculptural ensemble, and its iconographic details are appreciated for their fine craftsmanship rather than for their theological significance. This aestheticization is visible in the way museums present medieval art, emphasizing authorship, style and material without adequately including the spiritual dimension of the works. Michael Norris points out that many medieval objects are now evaluated in terms of their artistic and historical value, completely ignoring their liturgical significance.

Another consequence of musealization is the trivialization of the spiritual dimension of sacred objects by reproducing them in banal contexts. Icons, for example, are often reproduced on souvenirs, T-shirts or decorative objects, leading to a desacralization of the original image. In this case, the talent and faith of the medieval artist, who created the icon as an act of devotion, become irrelevant in the face of a process of commercial consumption. This trend raises questions about the authenticity of the modern aesthetic experience in relation to medieval art. Is the icon still a window to the divine when it is industrially reproduced on a coffee mug? The decontextualization of medieval artworks transforms them from instruments of religious meditation into mere cultural artifacts, fundamentally altering the purpose for which they were originally created.

The loss of the original context, the aestheticization of the sacred object and the commercialization of religious symbolism lead to a reduction of the sacredness of these artifacts. While museums play an essential role in preserving artistic heritage, they also contribute to redefining the way in which the public relates to medieval objects. A more sensitive approach, including the spiritual dimension of these works, could contribute to a better understanding of their authentic value.

Resacralization strategies in exhibition spaces

There are, however, some ways in which museum institutions can counter the effects of decontextualization and aestheticization on medieval art in order to restore some of the original sacredness of these objects. Although the transfer from the "*locus sacrum*" to the exhibition space inevitably involves a shift in function and perception, certain curatorial and museographic strategies can facilitate a deeper understanding of the sacred dimension of medieval art for contemporary audiences.

A first essential strategy is to reconstruct, as far as possible, the original context of medieval artworks. Museums can try to evoke the complex set of relationships with liturgical space, rituals, beliefs and devotional practices through various means. For example, displaying fragments of ecclesiastical architecture alongside sculptures or murals may give an idea of their original place. In the case of reredoses, mentioning that they were placed above altars and existed in connection with the Eucharistic

celebration and the relics can significantly enrich the visitor's perception. The Wallraf Museum in Cologne is an eloquent example in this respect, with the way in which the polyptychs are displayed, reflecting a sensitivity to the original spatial configuration. By adopting a cross-shaped plan for the medieval painting section and replacing the comfortable pews with church pews, the museum to some extent recreates the ecclesiastical atmosphere, thus facilitating an aesthetic and interpretative experience closer to the original one[19]. This approach suggests to the visitor the primary form of viewing these works in their ecclesiastical context.

Another important strategy aims to highlight the immaterial dimension of medieval sacred art[20]. Sacredness is not only contained in physical objects, but also in the beliefs, symbolic meanings and ritual functions associated with them. Museum institutions can make use of extensive explanatory panels to elucidate the iconographic dimension, the theological underpinnings and liturgical function of the artifacts on display. The detailed exposition of devotional practices, the hagiographies of the saints depicted and the sacred symbolism help to transcend a mere aesthetic perception, facilitating a deeper understanding of the spiritual dimension and sacredness inherent in medieval art. In the context of analyzing the retablature, Fanny Fouché suggests that it is essential to convey the fact that these works were not just paintings, but had a specific purpose and were linked to beliefs and devotional practices of the late Middle Ages[21]. The evocation of the medieval church as a place of hyper-sacralization and as the epicenter of Western Christian society can contribute to an understanding of the original significance of these objects.

Clever use of museography and scenography can also contribute to an attempt at re-sacralization. The museum space itself can be designed to induce an atmosphere of recollection and reverence, similar to that of a sacred place. While the direct equation of the museum with the temple or church is a nuanced and hotly debated issue, certain architectural components, lighting schemes, acoustic characteristics and even the direction of the visitor's path can be deliberately designed to foster a contemplative aesthetic and reflective experience, evoking the atmosphere of sacredness specific to ecclesiastical spaces. The exhibition "*Le sens caché: Exposition de l'art chrétienne au musée*" emphasizes that the museum alters the visual appreciation of the object, bringing it closer to the viewer and emphasizing its formal aspects, often ignoring the theological, liturgical and devotional

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[19] Fouché, Fanny, "D'un temple à l'autre, le retable: jaillissement de l'invisible au Moyen Age comme au musée?", *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 65-68, p. 67.

[20] Guiragossian, Olivia, "Le sacré exposé: espaces, dispositifs, paroles", *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 97-101, p.97.

[21] Fouché, Fanny, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

connotations[22]. Therefore, a scenography that takes into account the original function of the objects and the way they were perceived in sacred space might be more effective in conveying sacredness. The example of the Wallraf Museum, with its use of the color royal blue and stellar motifs borrowed from the palette and motifs of medieval wall panels, illustrates how visual elements can prepare the visitor for a more sensitive reception of the medieval context[23].

Another strategy could involve the integration of sensory experiences specific to the medieval sacred context, aimed at authentically recreating the religious atmosphere of that period[24]. For example, inserting fragments of Gregorian music or diffusing delicate incense fragrances (with caution and prior information to visitors) would help to create a multi-sensory atmosphere of deep spiritual evocation. In parallel, the use of contemporary technologies, such as augmented or virtual reality, could make it possible to visualize reconstructions of medieval sacred spaces, making it easier to understand how works of art were integrated into the liturgical and ritual complex of the time.

Last but not least, transparency and honesty about the process of decontextualization and potential loss of meaning are crucial. Museums should recognize that transfer into a secularized space inevitably alters the perception and meaning of sacred art. Discussions of the selection process, the history of collections and the impact of musealization can help visitors to understand the complexity of the relationship between object and sacredness in the museum context.

The resacralization of medieval art in museums is not a simple or completely achievable process, given the intrinsically different nature of the original sacred space and the modern exhibition space. However, by adopting museographic and curatorial strategies that emphasize contextual reconstruction, highlighting the immaterial dimension, creating an evocative atmosphere and providing detailed information, museums can facilitate a deeper understanding of the sacredness of medieval art for contemporary audiences, going beyond a mere aesthetic appreciation and inviting reflection on the role these objects played in the spiritual life of their time.

Case studies from the museology of successful recontextualizations

The Cloisters, a branch of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, is one of the most successful examples of museums that exhibit medieval art without decontextualizing it. This is due to a number of factors, including the architecture of the building, the organization of the exhibitions, and the strategy for displaying the artifacts. The museum building was constructed

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[22] Roque, Maria, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
[23] Fouché, Fanny, *op. cit*., p. 67.
[24] Guiragossian, Olivia, *op. cit*., 98.

using original architectural elements taken from 12th-15th-century European monasteries, including arches, capitals and colonnades[25]. The pieces added not only lend authenticity to the space, but also allow visitors to experience medieval art in a setting that reflects the structures for which it was originally created. The Cloisters not only exhibits liturgical objects, sculptures and manuscripts, but integrates them into reconstructed spaces that restore their original function. Medieval stained-glass windows are not simply displayed on the walls, but placed in Gothic windows[26], allowing natural light to highlight them exactly as they would have been seen in a medieval church. This type of contextualization reduces the impact of disconnecting the art from its original space, providing a museum experience deeply rooted in the medieval spirit. Sculptures and reliefs are also integrated into medieval architectural structures, such as portals and reclaimed colonnades[27]. Rather than being placed on simple pedestals, many of these artifacts are arranged to suggest their original position in a monastery or cathedral. For example, statues of saints are placed in specific niches, while altars and crucifixes are presented in spaces that evoke their liturgical use.

The museum gardens also contribute to this atmosphere. The Cloisters includes several medieval gardens reconstructed on the basis of historical manuscripts, using plants specific to the Middle Ages[28]. These gardens provide an additional sensory dimension, recreating the monastic atmosphere and complementing the visitor experience. Another key element of the museum's presentation of medieval art is the carefully controlled use of light to mimic natural light. This approach creates a solemn atmosphere akin to that of the original places of worship, allowing visitors to perceive the objects on display as closely as possible to the medieval experience.

Another fitting example of a museum is the Musée de Cluny, a conversion of a former abbey built in the 15th century, which was originally the residence of the Abbots of Cluny in Paris[29]. The presence of this authentic architectural setting helps to preserve the medieval atmosphere and place the artifacts in contexts close to the original ones. Visitors not only discover medieval art objects but step into a real medieval space, which contributes to an immersive and authentic experience.

The museum groups its collections in a way that reflects the original use of the objects and captures the atmosphere of the medieval era. For example, the tapestries from the famous "*Lady with the Unicorn*" cycle are

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[25] *, "Medieval Monuments at the Cloisters as They Were and as They Are", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1972, pp. 170-175, p. 171.
[26] Barnet, Peter, Wu, Nancy, *The Cloisters: Medieval Art and Architecture*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005, p. 89.
[27] *, "Medieval Monuments at the Cloisters as They Were and as They Are", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1972, 170-175, p. 173.
[28] Barnet, Peter, Wu, Nancy, *op. cit.,* p. 16.
[29] Kessler, Herbert L., *op. cit*.

displayed in a semi-dark room with discreet lighting, evoking the medieval noble spaces where such tapestries were used. This manner of presentation helps both to protect the sensitive material of the tapestries and to recreate the intimacy and refinement of medieval interiors.

The Musée de Cluny also uses modern technologies to re-contextualize medieval objects[30]. Through digital projections and virtual reconstructions, the museum gives visitors the opportunity to see how certain artifacts originally looked and were used in their heyday. One relevant example is the use of augmented reality to recreate the original colors of Gothic sculptures. Over the centuries, many of these sculptures have lost their original polychromy, but with the help of technology, the museum gives visitors a faithful image of what they looked like in the Middle Ages.

Museum Schnütgen in Cologne houses one of the most significant collections of medieval art in Europe and is an outstanding example of a museum institution that succeeds in displaying medieval art without decontextualizing it[31]. Housed in the 12th-century Romanesque-Gothic church of St. Cäcilien, dating from the 12th century, it provides an organic contextualization of the collections. The museum uses display methods that avoid isolating objects from their historical context. For example, religious sculptures are placed on authentic medieval architectural structures to evoke their original position in churches or monasteries. Instead of being placed on simple plinths in a neutral environment, these sculptures are displayed in niches, next to colonnades or on church walls, giving visitors a clearer picture of their original function. Museum Schnütgen avoids the harsh lighting typical of modern museums and uses mainly natural light through Gothic windows[32]. This type of lighting creates plays of shadows and reflections that emphasize the details of the sculptures and objects of worship, bringing the visitor's experience closer to that of a medieval pilgrim in a medieval church. For artifacts that require special protection, discreetly integrated, warm-temperature lighting sources are used to avoid artificial contrast between the objects and their surroundings. This approach maintains the visual coherence of the exhibition and avoids turning the medieval objects into mere aestheticizing exhibits.

Through these rigorous strategies, aimed at both the harmonious integration of historic architecture and the refinement of display methods, the implementation of innovative technologies, the careful management of lighting and the exploitation of authentic heritage elements, The Cloisters, Musée de Cluny and Museum Schnütgen succeed in presenting medieval art

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[30] Sortiraparis, Cécile, Sortiraparis, Laurent, *Le Musée de Cluny, le musée du Moyen-Âge de Paris*, *son programme et ses trésors séculaires* 14.01.2025, Sortiraparis, 22.03.2025.
[31] Sternberg, Maximilian, "Modern Stagings of the Medieval at the Schnütgen-Museum in Cologne (1910–1939)", *The Art Bulletin*, 102:1, 79-105, p. 79.
[32] Sternberg, Maximilian, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

in a way that preserves its sacred dimension, almost completely eliminating the risk of decontextualization or, in certain circumstances, achieving an exemplary recontextualization.

Conclusions

Much medieval art was created to serve religious worship, playing an essential role in facilitating the connection between the believer and the divine. By moving it from the liturgical to the exhibition space, its sacred dimension is undergoing a profound reassessment, leading to a change in the way the public perceives and interacts with it.

One of the main effects of this transfer is decontextualization, which deprives the objects of their direct connection with the ritual act and the beliefs that generated them. Sacredness does not reside exclusively in objects, but is the result of a set of practices, beliefs and rituals. By separating artifacts from this framework, they lose their original function and become mere museum exhibits, valued mainly for their aesthetic and historical value. As a consequence, museums tend to promote a formal reading of these works, emphasizing style, technique and materiality at the expense of their spiritual significance.

Another major phenomenon is aestheticization, whereby medieval art is perceived more as an object of artistic contemplation than as an instrument of religious devotion. This change fundamentally influences the experience of the public, which no longer interacts with icons or relics in the same way as it would in a religious context. Aestheticization also translates into a change in the way these artifacts are presented in museums, which frequently adopt neutral scenographies, removing any element that might suggest their original use. At the same time, contemporary secularization is contributing to a diminishing public capacity to understand religious symbolism. The phenomenon of "*illettrisme religieux*" underlines the difficulty for modern visitors to decipher the sacred meanings of medieval art, leading to a superficial interpretation centered on the artistic value of the objects. This amplifies the process of de-sacralization, in which objects gradually lose their religious significance and are reduced to the status of cultural artifacts.

However, the fascination with the sacred remains a persistent element in the museum experience. In spite of secularization, contemporary audiences show a continuing interest in the spiritual dimension of art, seeking a connection with the transcendent. This raises the question of how museums can convey the sacred significance of these artifacts, balancing the preservation of historical and artistic value with the restoration of a form of spiritual experience for visitors. One possible solution mentioned in this article is to implement resacralization strategies aimed at restoring some of the spiritual dimension of medieval art. These include reconstituting the original context of the objects by displaying them in architectural ensembles

similar to those from which they originate. The use of appropriate lighting, scenographic elements inspired by medieval churches, and detailed explanations of the liturgical function of the artifacts can also facilitate a better understanding of their significance. Some museums, such as The Cloisters in New York or the Musée de Cluny in Paris, have successfully implemented such strategies, offering visitors an authentic experience.

Another key aspect is the integration of sensory experiences that can recreate the medieval sacred atmosphere. Playing fragments of Gregorian music, using subtle incense smells and creating the right soundscape can help evoke an atmosphere closer to that of medieval ecclesiastical spaces. New technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, allow visitors to experience the original spaces in which these artifacts were created and used, facilitating a deeper understanding of their original significance. Transparency about the museumization process is crucial. Museums should clearly explain to visitors the impact that display in a secular context has on the perception of sacred art. Information about the history of the objects, how they were used and their theological meanings can help to preserve a link with their original sacredness.

The museumization of medieval art involves a complex transformation of the perception of these artifacts, entailing the risk of losing their sacred significance. Decontextualization, aestheticization and secularization contribute to this mutation, but resacralization strategies can offer solutions to preserve and communicate the spiritual dimension of the works. Through a sensitive museographic approach that takes into account both the artistic value and the religious significance of objects, museums can offer a deeper and more authentic experience, keeping alive the sacred message of these objects in the contemporary world.

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Typology and Classification of Monumental-Burial Spaces from the Islamic Period in Maragheh (East Azerbaijan): Islamic Period Mausoleums of Maragheh

Maryam Samari[*]
Karim Hajizadeh Bastani[**]
Habib Shahbazi Shiran[***]
Saeid Sattarnejad[****]

Abstract: *Monumental-burial spaces, as components of ritual architecture, reflect the beliefs and values of the community associated with the deceased. These structures exhibit diverse architectural forms, necessitating comprehensive scientific research. In the northwest region of Iran, studies have predominantly focused on mausoleum structures such as tower tombs and square-domed structures, despite the broader diversity in their architectural designs. Archaeological evidence and historical records suggest that Maragheh, during the Islamic era, was home to a variety of ritual spaces, influenced by its multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition. This cultural diversity played a significant role in shaping the approaches to the creation of monumental-burial spaces in the city. This research, conducted through field and library-based studies using descriptive-comparative and analytical-historical methods, aims to address the following questions: 1-What are the architectural characteristics of monumental-burial spaces in Maragheh during the Islamic era? 2-Which burial architectural traditions influenced the monumental-burial spaces in Maragheh? The findings reveal that monumental-burial spaces in Maragheh can be categorized based on their structural form into two types: troglodytic structures and constructed buildings. Additionally, in terms of spatial placement, they are divided into two groups: surface-level spaces (visible) and subsurface spaces (concealed). The findings also indicate that the Mongol Ilkhanid*

[*] PhD student, Department of Archaeology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran, m.samari@uma.ac.ir.

[**] Co - supervisor, corresponding author, Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran, kar.hajizadeh@gmail.com.

[***] Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran, habibshahbazi35@gmail.com.

[****] PhD, Department of archaeology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, saeidsattarnejad@yahoo.com.

period witnessed the greatest diversity in architectural structures and the spatial arrangement of these spaces. During this time, the ritual-religious framework of Maragheh's society underwent significant political and religious transformations. These changes played a pivotal role in shaping the diverse architectural styles of the mausoleums from this period.

Keywords: *Maragheh, monumental-burial spaces, typology, Islamic era.*

1-Introduction

Graves and burials are among the most significant archaeological discoveries, offering invaluable insights into the spiritual dimensions of human cultures. A notable form of burial involves placing the deceased within mausoleum structures. These architectural creations not only served as final resting places but also functioned as monumental space out of respect and reverence for the deceased; such spaces were created as either troglodytic structures or constructed buildings in various sizes. The dimensions of these mausoleums often reflected the social and religious status of the deceased.

The origins of burial spaces in northwest Iran trace back to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Ages. Notable examples of human burials have been uncovered at archaeological sites such as Hajji Firuz and Dalma Tepe. By the Bronze Age, particularly during the Middle and Late phases, the development of cemeteries—or monumental-burial spaces—became more organized and systematic. In later periods, cemeteries featuring diverse structures and monumental sites, such as Shahr-e Yeri, came into existence. The architectural variety of tombs in this region reflects the beliefs and cultural practices of its communities. This diversity resulted in a wide array of tomb forms, including cromlechs, kurgans[1], stone-enclosure structures, megalithic structures, pits[2] and several other types.

With the advent of Islam, burial traditions underwent significant changes. The most prominent features of these changes included the absence of objects placed in graves, the use of simple pits[3] and positioning the deceased's face toward the Qibla. While during the early Islamic period, mausoleums were built over the graves of certain companions and prominent figures of the Islamic community, such as Harun al-Rashid[4], the predominant burial tradition was burying within pits. Starting from the 4th century AH

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[1] Farshid Iravani Ghadim and Soleyman Mamizadeh Giglu, *Typology and Introducing the Iron Age Ceramics of Jafar Abad Kurgan's in Khoda Afarin Area (The First Excavation)*, 2013.
[2] Reza Rezalou and Yahya Ayremlou, *Iron Age Graves I, Gilvan Khalkhal Cemetery,* 2017.
[3] Saeid Sattarnezhad and Tayebeh Hoseinpoor Derakhshesh, *An Analysis of the Stones of the Islamic Era of Onar Meshkinshahr Cemetery (Northwest Iran)*, 2021, p. 29.
[4] Mehdi Ghoravi, *Mausoleums in the Scope of Iranian Culture*, 1997, pp. 100–101.

(913–1010 CE), the creation of mausoleums gradually gained prominence[5]. In the Seljuk and Ilkhanid eras, numerous monumental-mausoleum spaces were erected in the northwestern Iran[6]. However, most studies have focused on surface-level, constructed mausoleums—such as tower tombs and domed-square buildings—leaving other types of monumental-burial monuments in the region relatively understudied. Archaeological excavations and surveys of some Islamic-era mausoleums in the Maragheh county have provided a solid foundation for studying such ritual-burial spaces. This research is particularly significant since Maragheh served as the administrative center during the Mongol Ilkhanid period, which facilitated the arrival of groups with non-Islamic beliefs into the region. Consequently, the importance of this study becomes evident. Chronologically, the research focuses on the Islamic period, while its geographical boundaries are confined to Maragheh. Based on archaeological surveys conducted by the first author, approximately 10 sites in Maragheh were surveyed and excavated as part of the archaeological investigations. Following this, the findings were examined through library-based research, employing a descriptive-comparative and analytical-historical methodology. This study seeks to address the following questions: 1-What characterizes the architectural style of monumental-burial spaces from the Islamic period in Maragheh, and which architectural traditions does it adhere to? 2-How can the monumental-burial spaces of the Islamic period in Maragheh be categorized in terms of type and form?

2-Research Background

The study of burial or mausoleum spaces in northwestern Iran can be divided into two time periods: pre-Islamic and post-Islamic. Research to date has studied various pre-Islamic cemeteries in this region, including Khanqah Cemetery in Khalkhal[7], the megalithic and kurgan graves in Ardabil Province (Hesariy & Aliyɛari, 2012), Khorramabad in Meshginshahr[8], the Masjed Kabud of Tabriz, Sarand-Daghdaghan in Heris, Jafarabad in Khoda Afarin[9], and others. The chronology of these cemeteries predominantly spans from the Middle Bronze Age to Iron Age I and II. During the Islamic era, tomb structures in the Azerbaijan of Iran have been studied by both Iranian and international scholars, including prominent figures such as Ismail Dibaj,

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[5] Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250*, 2003, pp. 129–130.

[6] Abbas Daneshvari, *A Stylistic and Iconographic Study of the Persian Tomb Towers of the Seljuk Period*, 1977; Mohammad Mehdi Oghabi, *Encyclopedia of Historical Monuments in the Islamic Period*, 1997.

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[8] Reza Rezalou, *The Final Report of the First Season of Excavation of Khoram Abad Cemetery*, 2013.

[9] Iravani Ghadim and Mamizadeh Giglu, *Typology and Introducing the Iron Age Ceramics of Jafar Abad Kurgan's in Khoda Afarin Area (The First Excavation)*, 2013.

Mohammad Yousef Kiani, Mohammad Karim Pirnia, Abbas Daneshvari, Arthur Pope, Blair and Bloom, Hillenbrand, and others.

Within the written sources from the Islamic era, several monumental-burial structures in Maragheh are mentioned, including the Mausoleums of Amid al-Din Abu al-Fazail Sa'id ibn Muhammad Baghdadi[10], Muhyi al-Din Muhammad ibn al-'Arabi al-Ta'i al-Hatami[11], Muhyi al-Din Maghrebi[12], 'Ala al-Din Arslan ibn Korpe Seljuqi[13], and Caliph Al-Mustarshid Billah, the 29th Abbasid caliph[14]. Qajar-period travelogues also offer brief descriptions of some tomb structures, such as the Kabud Mausoleum Tower[15] (De Morgan, 1896) and the Gonbad-e Sorkh[16]. In modern times, various researchers have studied the burial monuments of Maragheh, including André Godard[17], Blair and Bloom[18] (Kiani 2006) Mohammad Yusef Kiani[19] Ismail Dibaj[20] and others.

Closer analysis of these studies reveals that the research has predominantly focused on surface-level mausoleum buildings, such as Kabud Tower-Tomb, Modavar Tower, Gonbad-e Sorkh, Gonbad-e Ghafariyah, and Guy Burj (Juy Bush). However, an entire category of subsurface monumental-burial structures that remains unexplored. Additionally, rock-carved burial structures have been largely overlooked in scholarly work. Notably, a segment of burial traditions during the Islamic Middle Ages, particularly the Ilkhanid period, involved rock-cut burial structures. This study, therefore, stands as the first attempt to classify and categorize the monumental-burial spaces of Maragheh. It also delves into the origins and factors driving the development of these architectural traditions within the region.

3-Description and Analysis

Maragheh is situated in northwestern Iran, on the southern slopes of the Sahand volcanic mountain range in East Azerbaijan Province. Today, the county is divided into two districts: the central district and Saraju. However, during the Islamic Middle Ages, the county of Maragheh was classified as

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[10] Kamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majmaol Al-Adab Fi Mojam Alalqab*, 1995, p. 222.

[11] Abu Abdollah Ibn Arabi, *A Brief History of the State*, 1985, p. 3.

[12] Muḥammad Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Ilkhani Tansukhnameh*, 1989, p. 20.

[13] Kamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majmaol Al-Adab Fi Mojam Alalqab*, 1995, p. 343.

[14] Nakhchivani Hindushah, *Tajrib Al-Salaf*, 1978, p. 296.

[15] Jacques de Morgan, *Mission Scientifique En Perse*, 1896.

[16] James Justinian Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople, between the Years 1810 and 1816 (Etc.)*, 1818; Robert Byron, *The Road to Oxiana*, 2007, p. 58.

[17] Andre Godard, *The Art of Iran*, Frederick A. Praeger, 1965.

[18] Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800*, 1996.

[19] Mahmmad Yusuf Kiani, *Iranian Architecture in the Islamic Period*, 2006.

[20] İsmail Dibaj, *Historical Monuments and Monuments of Azerbaijan*, 1967.

part of the fourth[21] and fifth province[22]. In that period, the county of Maragheh included regions such as Saraju, Banajun, Dizjerud, Gavdul, Hashtrud, Behestan, Anguran, and Qezel Ozan. Its tuman (a town consisting of one hundred villages) encompassed Maragheh, Basui, Dehkhwarqan, and Nilan[23]. Topographically, Maragheh consists of both mountainous and plain regions. Its position on the southern slopes of the volcanic Sahand mountain range has led to the formation of easily workable tuff stones (Figure 1). Four main rivers flow through this county: Sufi Chay, Mordi Chay, Leylan Chay, and Quri Chay. Around these rivers, sites from various cultural periods have developed over time. Historians and geographers of the Islamic era frequently described Maragheh as situated beside the Sufi Chay River (also known as Safi Rud) and surrounded by lush gardens[24]. Today, the city remains surrounded by gardens and enjoys a moderate climate. These favorable natural conditions attracted the attention of early Ilkhanid rulers, resulting in the construction of numerous monuments from that era, which still endure in Maragheh[25]. These historical and cultural elements provide a rich foundation for various scientific studies.

Fig. 1 The Geographical Location of Maragheh (Authors, 2022)

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[21] Hamdallah Mustawfi, *Nuzhat Al-Qulub*, 1975, p. 99.
[22] Zakaria Ibn Mohammad Ibn Mahmoud Qazvini, *Āthār Al-Bilād Wa-Akhbār al-ʿIbād*, 1994, p. 641.
[23] Hamdallah Mustawfi, *Nuzhat Al-Qulub*, 1975, pp. 99–100.
[24] Shahab al-Din Yaqut Hamavi, *Muʾjam al-Buldan*, 1979, p. 172; Muḥammad Abūʾl-Qāsim Ibn Hawqal, *Ibn Hawqal's Travelogue (Surat al-Arz)*, 1987, p. 335.
[25] Saeid Sattarnezhad, Mohammad Rahmatpour, and Javad Jaleh Aghdam, Preliminary Report of Archaeological Excavation of Kaboud - Circular Site of Maragheh (East Azerbaijan, Iran), 2021, p. 64.

4-Typology of Monumental-Burial Spaces

The monumental-burial spaces of the Islamic era in Maragheh are categorized into two primary types based on their structural and physical characteristics: troglodytic spaces (dakhme or rock-cut tombs) and constructed buildings.

Troglodytic spaces are divided into: Subsurface troglodytic spaces, Surface-level troglodytic spaces. Constructed buildings are classified as: Surface-level constructed buildings and subsurface constructed buildings (Figure 2). Each type of structure exhibits a distinct architectural style, setting it apart from other categories.
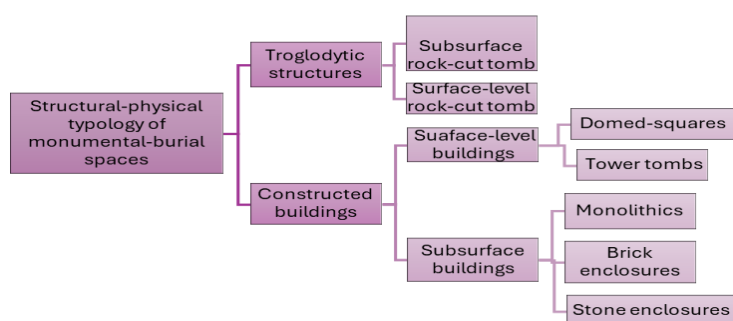
Fig. 2 Structural-Physical Typology of Monumental-Burial Spaces in Maragheh during the Islamic Era

4-1-Troglodytic Monumental-Burial Structures

Troglodytic monumental-burial structures, commonly known as rock-cut tombs, are chamber-like spaces hewn into the earth or rock formations. Influenced by the beliefs of the deceased's community, these structures can be categorized into two types: subsurface and surface-level troglodytic structures. Surface-level structures are typically carved into cliff slopes. Access to these spaces may be achieved via rock-cut stairways, such as the Goyjeh Qaleh rock-cut tomb in Maragheh[26], or without stairs, requiring the use of ropes for entry. An example of the latter is the Fakhrika rock-cut tomb in Mahabad, which lacks steps and is carved into a cliff slope. The floors of these spaces featured burial pits where bodies were placed, later covered with stone slabs. The edges of the pits were carefully carved to ensure the slabs fit securely. The use of such spaces in northwestern Iran dates back at least to the Iron Age II and III. Examples of rock-cut tombs from this period have been discovered at sites such as Esmail Aqa[27], Goyjeh

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[26] Wolfram Kleiss, Planaufnahman Urartaischer Burgen In Iranisch Azarbaidjan Im Jahre 1972, 1973.

[27] Yildiz Van Hulsteyn, *Urartian Built and Rock-Cut Tombs*, 1981.

Qaleh in Maragheh[28], Fakhrika in Mahabad, Qabirli Kohul in Ajabshir, and other areas. During the Islamic era, limited research and knowledge of burial traditions resulted in a poor understanding of troglodytic monumental-burial structures (dakhme). However, historical sources from the period indicate that the construction of rock-cut tombs was a notable burial tradition in Islamic territories, particularly during the Ilkhanid era in Iran[29]. Specific burial traditions during this time often involved troglodytic structures and subsurface burial buildings, yet these traditions have received little attention due to their obscurity. As a result, prior to this study, information on the architectural design and burial methods of these structures remained highly fragmented and incomplete.

4-1-1-Subsurface Troglodytic Burial Structures

These troglodytic structures have been carved out of the earth and rock formations, entirely concealed beneath the surface. Access to them is possible only through stairways or sloping corridors. The interior spaces of these tombs have been carved in square shapes and, in some cases, circular forms. The walls are plain, devoid of decorative or functional elements. Preliminary surveys by the first author in Maragheh identified examples of such tombs at the Durbaduran (Dobaradaran) and Pirhashem sites. The Pirhashem site, located in the village of Varju'i (Vara'u'i) near Maragheh, served as a ritual-ceremonial space. Evidence of an Ilkhanid-era mihrab (prayer niche) [30] and several subsurface troglodytic graves have been preserved within this site. The rock-cut tombs at the Pirhashem site were carved into limestone bedrock. Unfortunately, these tombs have been completely looted by illegal excavators, leaving no information about burial traditions. However, the general layout of these burial spaces consists of chamber-like structures carved into the rock bed. It appears that access to the chambers was provided through sloping corridors.

Another example of such tombs was identified at the Durbaduran site, approximately 500 meters to the north and northeast of the Maragheh Observatory mound. This subsurface rock-cut tomb was carved into limestone bedrock and features a subsurface chamber accessed via hewn stairs. The tomb includes burial platforms on the northern and southern walls, with its entrance facing east. The interior walls are plain and undecorated; however, a stone coating was applied to the walls, particularly around the entrance. Similar coatings have been observed on the walls of the Ilkhanid-

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[28] Wolfram Kleiss, Planaufnahman Urartaischer Burgen In Iranisch Azarbaidjan Im Jahre 1972, 1973; Saeid Sattarnejad, Samad Parvin, and Maryam Mastalizadeh, Stylistic Study of Gowijeh Qaleh's Rockcut Tomb from Maragheh, 2020.

[29] Abu Soleiman Banākati, *Tarikh Banakti, the First Shrine of Al-Albab in the Introduction of Histories and Genealogy*, 1969, p. 425.

[30] Farhad Pourianzhad, Saeid Sattarnejad, and Samad Parvin, Buddhist Remains from Times of Il-Khanate in North-Western Iran, 2023.

era troglodytic sanctuary at the Imamzadeh Masum of Varju'i[31]. These coatings, consisting of a stone-like layer, covered the walls entirely and served to enhance the structural integrity of the space. In these rock-cut tombs, bodies were likely placed on stone platforms, and after the burial ceremonies, the entrances were sealed with carved stone slabs. Finally, the corridors leading to the tombs were completely filled with soil from the surrounding area. These rock-cut tombs are located directly beneath the surface, remaining entirely concealed (Figure 3). The origins of subsurface burial troglodytic architecture and the tradition of creating Islamic-era subsurface rock-cut tombs in Maragheh appear to date back to the Ilkhanid period[32]. These tombs were influenced by burial architectural traditions from northern China and Mongolia, where similar subsurface rock-carved tombs have been preserved.

4-1-2- Surface Troglodytic Burial Structures

Another type of troglodytic burial space takes the form of rock-cut tombs, intricately carved into mountain slopes or cliffs. These structures are highly visible from great distances. Similar examples of such troglodytic sites were prevalent during the Iron Age, particularly within the Urartian and Mannean cultures of northwestern Iran[33]. However, in the Islamic period, burial within troglodytic rock-cut tombs emerged as a novel tradition, indicating the introduction of a new cultural influence and non-Islamic beliefs in the region. Notable examples of surface-level rock-cut tombs have been identified on the western slope of Observatory mound, dating back to the Ilkhanid period. The rock-cut tombs on Khajeh Nasir al-Din Observatory mound are designed as independent chambers with rectangular plans, featuring semi-circularly carved corners. The floors of these chambers contain burial pits, which were covered with a stone slab after the body was placed inside. These spaces are devoid of decorative elements or intricate architectural features, with the walls carved in a simple manner. The entrances of all the tombs face westward, toward the setting sun, while the burial pits are oriented along an east-west axis (Figure 3). Islamic-era written sources mention the burial of adherents of Christianity in these tombs[34]. As a result, the local population remained well-acquainted with these burial spaces and the adjacent troglodytic church up until the Qajar period. Similar

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[31] Mehdi Razani and Yaser Hamzavi, *Characterization of Historic Mortar from the Architectural Decoration and Plaster of Rocky Temple of Verjuy in Maragheh, Iran*, 2018.
[32] Rašīd-ad-Dīn Faḍlallāh Hamadani, *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, 1994, p. 1053.
[33] Yildiz Van Hulsteyn, *Urartian Built and Rock-Cut Tombs*, 1981.
[34] Samuel Graham Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs* Student Missionary Campaign Library, 1895, p. 78.

examples of such rock-cut tombs have been discovered around the troglodytic churches of Cappadocia, Turkey[35].

Fig. 3 Right image: Subsurface rock-cut tomb at the Pir-Hasham site (Authors, 2022); Left image: Rock-cut tomb at Maragheh Observatory mound (Authors, 2022)

4-2- Monumental-Burial constructed buildings

These structures represent the most prevalent type of burial-monumental buildings in the region. The mausoleum in question was constructed using locally sourced materials such as hewn stone (Sinjan), brick, and lime mortar. Based on the materials used in their construction, these structures can be categorized into three groups: 1) Monolithic structures, 2) brick enclosure structures, and 3) Composite structures. The most notable examples of surface-level constructed monumental-burial buildings are tower tombs and domed-square mausoleums. Extensive research has been conducted on these monuments, providing a relatively comprehensive understanding of their architectural features. Constructed monumental-burial buildings are classified into two types based on their placement: surface-level structures and subsurface structures. The choice of placement was influenced by the beliefs and social status of the deceased. Some of these structures were constructed entirely underground, and after the burial ceremony, the tomb was fully covered with soil.

Mausoleum buildings account for the majority of such structures. In many villages, surface-level built mausoleums are locally known by names such as 'Imamzadeh,' 'Olia,' and 'Ojagh.' Examples include the Olia or Imamzadeh structures in the villages of Ahagh, Sarujieh, and Qarababa in the city of Khodajoo. These spaces are held in high spiritual regard by the local communities.

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[35] *Fatma Gül Öztürk, A Comparative Architectural Investigation of the Middle Byzantine Courtyard Complexes in Açıksaray–Cappadocia: Questions of Monastic and Secular Settlement*, 2010, p. 319.

4-2-1-Surface-Level Burial Structures

Surface-Level Burial Structures are buildings erected above ground, directly over graves. This distinctive feature has led to their architectural details being documented in Islamic-era written sources, particularly from the Qajar period[36]. The most significant examples of such mausoleums in Islamic architectural studies are referred to as "āramgāh." These structures are categorized based on their design and construction into two types: tower tombs and domed-square mausoleums. The architectural design of these structures, despite their burial nature, is well known to the local population. Some Ilkhanid-era mausoleums are located within cemeteries. Examples include the Imamzadeh of Sheikh Jan village, Khormazard, Ahagh, Aqajari, and Varju'i. These sites served as ritual-burial spaces, around which cemeteries gradually emerged. In this context, the graves surrounding these mausoleums share a deep spiritual connection. The mausoleums belonged to spiritual or sectarian leaders, often referred to as 'Sheikh' or 'Pir,' such as the Imamzadeh of Sheikh Jan village or the Imamzadeh Pir-Hashem of Varju'i village. Spiritual-religious leaders were buried within these mausoleums after their passing. In subsequent periods, their followers were also buried nearby, gradually forming cemeteries. Examples include the cemeteries of Pir Avhad al-Din Maraghi, Sheikh Baba, Imamzadeh Masoum, Sheikh Jan, and Aqajari. These cemeteries feature gravestones of various shapes and decorative styles, examples of which can still be observed across many regions of Iranian Azerbaijan. In the author's first surveys, approximately 15 surface-level mausoleums were identified in Maragheh. Over time, some of these structures have been partially or entirely destroyed due to natural and human factors, leaving behind only traces. However, several of these mausoleums have preserved their sacred essence over the years and continue to hold ritual significance for the local community.

4-2-1-1-Tower tomb

A tower tomb is a building built over a grave, typically with a circular plan, although some, like the Gonbad-e Kabud in Maragheh, feature a polygonal cylindrical design. Archaeological evidence and Islamic-era written sources suggest that the construction of mausoleums in Maragheh dates back to at least 530 AH (**1135–1136** CE**)**. The earliest example from the Seljuk Atabegs period was built over the grave of al-Mustarshid Billah, the 29th Abbasid caliph (Khwandmir, 1/2001: 181). While limited information exists about the architectural features of this site, some Ilkhanid-era sources reference the location of this mausoleum. The Borj-e Modavar Tower (563 AH/1167-1168 CE), Kabud Tamb Tower (593 AH), and the Goy Borj Tower (Ilkhanid?) are notable examples of tower tombs in Maragheh. These tower

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[36] Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople, between the Years 1810 and 1816,* 1816; Byron, *The Road to Oxiana*, 2007, p. 58.

tombs can be categorized based on their plans into two types: circular and polygonal. Differences also exist in the accessibility of their basements (Sardab). For instance, the basement of the Kabud Tower tomb is located below ground level and accessed via a stone staircase, whereas the basement of the Borj-e Modavar Tower, like those of tower tombs No. 3 and 4 (discovered during archaeological excavations), is at the same level with the surrounding ground and does not require stairs for access (see Figure 4). Since the burial nature of many of these structures remains uncertain, during the Qajar period, people—lacking sufficient knowledge of regional history—mistakenly attributed them to Mongol rulers. For example, the Kabud Tower tomb was erroneously identified as the tomb of Hulagu Khan's mother, while Gonbad-e Sorkh was recorded as the grave of Hulagu Khan or his vizier. In the villages of Khormazard and Sheikh Jan, remnants of such mausoleums can still be found. Although the main structures have been largely destroyed over time, evidence of their overall architectural design remains intact.

4-2-1-2-Square-Domed Constructed Mausoleums

Square-domed mausoleum buildings and their derivatives have long been among the most esteemed types of monumental-burial spaces in Iran, persisting from at least the 4th century AH (913–1010 CE) into modern times. Among these, Gonbad-e-Sorkh stands out as one of the region's most prominent examples. It is recognized as the oldest surviving constructed square-domed mausoleum in Iranian Azerbaijan region. Historically, the mausoleum was situated along the Maragheh-Tabriz route, near the city gates. During the Ilkhanid period, a cemetery developed in this area, eventually encompassing the dome within its boundaries. Gonbad-e-Sorkh is celebrated for its exceptional brickwork, which features a rich variety of intricate motifs. The decorative brickwork on the facade of the structure's entrance is notably akin to that of the tomb of Iz al-Din Kaykawus in Sivas, Turkey[37]. After the Seljuk period, square-domed mausoleums continued to evolve in Maragheh. One notable example from the Ilkhanid era is the Gonbad-e Ghafariyeh. Like the Gonbad-e-Sorkh, it was situated near the city gate. Its decorations were a blend of brickwork and mosaic tiles, and the building has been built using brick and hewn stone. Within the southern wall of the structure, a stuccoed mihrab is featured. This tomb was built during the reign of Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan, the Ilkhanid ruler [38]. The domed mausoleum of Mir Aghalar belonging to the Zandieh era and the mausoleum of Sadr Kabir are notable examples of domed mausoleum structures in Maragheh (Figure 4). The square-domed mausoleums of the later periods are characterized by simpler decorations compared to those from the Seljuk and

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[37] Richard Piran McClary, *Brick Muqarnas on Rūm Saljuq Buildings - The Introduction of an Iranian Decorative Technique into the Architecture of Anatolia*, 2014, p. 8.
[38] Andre Godard, *Athar-e Iran: Annales Du Service Archeologique de l'Iran*, 1992.

Ilkhanid eras. A significant feature of the mausoleum structures within Maragheh is their integration into educational environments (madrasas). This strategic placement has greatly contributed to their preservation, protecting them from extensive damage. For instance, mausoleums such as the Gonbad-e-Sorkh, Gonbad-e Kabud, Gonbad-e Modavar, and Gonbad-e Ghafariyeh were located within the courtyards of madrasas (Islamic schools) and have remained relatively well-preserved. In contrast, the Göy Tower Tomb, positioned outside the educational spaces, was completely destroyed.
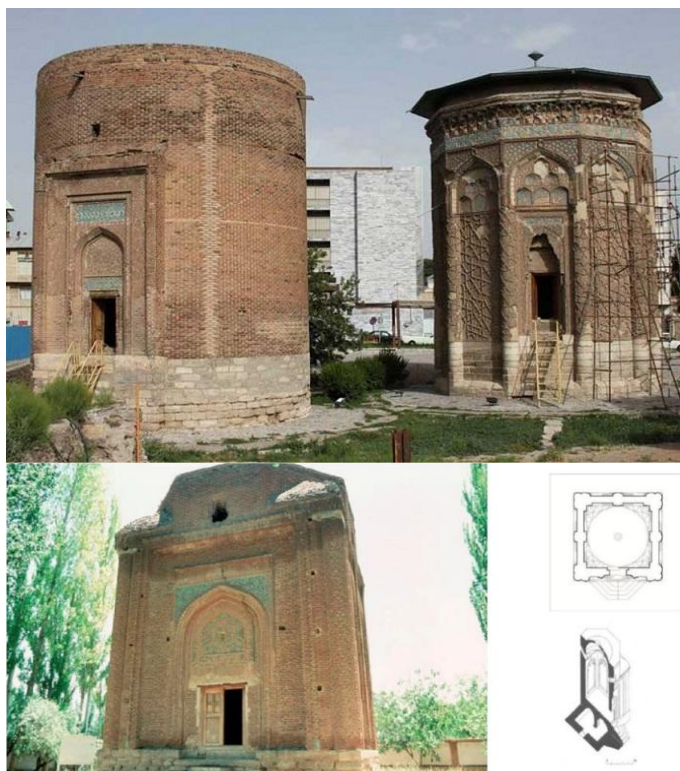
Fig. 4 Examples of square-domed mausoleum structures
and tower tombs in Maragheh[39]

4-2-2-Subsurface Constructed Buildings

These structures have been constructed below ground level. Their construction typically utilizes bricks and hewn stones. Fully buried beneath the surface, these graves are covered by a layer of soil. Examples of such

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[39] Saed Sattarnaejad and Samad Parvin, *Manifestation of Islamic Decorative Arts in the Architecture of Gonbad-e-Kabood and Gonbad-e-Ghaffariyeh,* 2019; Saeid Sattarnezhad, Samad Parvin, and Elham Hendiani, *The Symbology of Swastika in the Gonbad-e-Sorkh Tomb*, 2020.

graves have been uncovered during excavations at the Aghalar Cemetery and the Dorbaduran site. The Aghalar Cemetery was one of the main and largest cemeteries of the Islamic era in the city of Maragheh. Based on the inscription on the Gonbad-e-Sorkh, its use as a burial site dates back to the year 542 AH (1147–1148 CE). Burial activities continued intermittently in this cemetery until the late Pahlavi II era. The identified mausoleums in this cemetery exhibit architectural forms such as monolithic, brick enclosure and stone enclosure.

4-2-2-1-Brick enclosures

Brick enclosure graves also known as entirely brick-constructed structures, were rectangular in shape and built into the ground. These graves consisted of four brick-lined walls, with bricks of varying sizes—most commonly measuring 5×20×20 cm—secured with mud mortar. The average dimensions of the graves were a length of 160 cm, a height of 74 cm, and a width of 36 to 40 cm. The bricks were well-fired, with one featuring decorative embellishments. The graves were sealed with stone slab coverings. Within one of the graves, four distinct burial layers were discovered, highlighting that burials were performed intermittently, as in other grave types. Examples of these graves have been unearthed at the Dorbaduran and Aghalar sites, and they are thought to date back to the Ilkhanid period and beyond (Figure 5).

Fig. 5 An example of brick-enclosure graves

4- 2-2-2-Monolithic Graves

These graves were constructed as four-walled using monolithic limestone blocks. The limestone slabs, finely hewn and measuring approximately 20 to 30 cm in thickness, were carefully crafted. The dimensions of the stones matched the graves, with an average length of 200 cm and a height of 100 cm. After a body was interred, a hewn stone slab was placed on top as a cover. The presence of these covers suggests that multiple burials were conducted within the same grave over time. For example,

excavations at the Aghalar Cemetery documented and recorded at least three distinct burial layers within a single grave. Also, examples of these graves have also been discovered during illicit excavations at the Dorbaduran and Pir-Hashem sites. While the graves are oriented in an east–west direction, the burials within them are positioned in varying orientations. The alignment of the skulls shows no consistent standard; however, in some cases, the skeletons were found facing the Qibla. These graves are entirely subsurface, with no visible traces on the ground's surface (Figure 6).
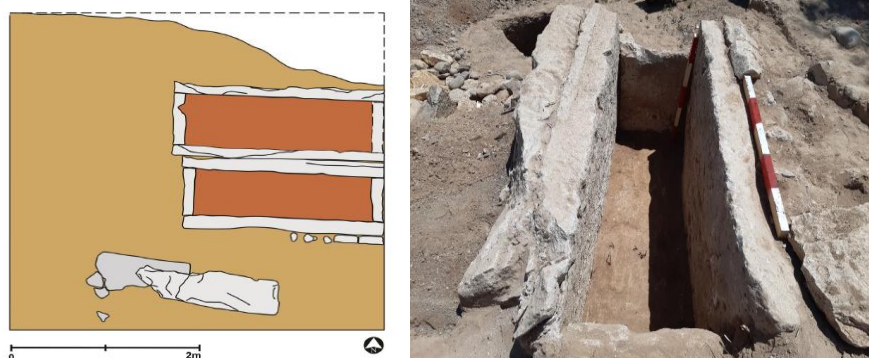
Fig. 6 An example of monolithic graves in Maragheh

4-2-2-3-Stone Enclosure Graves

These graves are rectangular in shape and were constructed below ground. They feature four walls made of hewn stones. The stones used in their construction measure approximately 222 cm in length (aligned east–west) and stand about 1 meter tall from the base to the edge. Carefully hewn, the stones are stacked using a dry-stone technique, without the use of mortar. Despite this, the walls maintain a relatively even alignment. The materials for these grave structures are sedimentary stones sourced from the surrounding areas of Maragheh. Many of these stones are repurposed from the plinths of historical buildings within the city. The graves are aligned in an east–west direction, with the remains within them arranged in a disorganized manner. One of the most notable examples of these graves was uncovered during the excavations at the Aghalar Cemetery (Figure 7). Although parts of the grave have been damaged, the northern wall remains intact. This grave is constructed as a dry-stone enclosure, with the body placed on a platform. The face of the body is oriented northward and covered with a layer of soil. It is believed that the grave featured a platform, and its opening was sealed with a stone slab. Based on this design, this grave appears to belong to the category of graves that facilitated repeated burials over time.

Fig. 7 An example of stone enclosure graves

5-Discussion

The monumental-burial spaces of the Islamic era in Maragheh exhibit remarkable structural diversity. Recent studies highlight that the most significant variety can be observed in the burial spaces of the Ilkhanid period, which is considered the most pivotal political and cultural era in Maragheh's history. During this time, the arrival of the Mongol Ilkhanids and designation of Maragheh as a governing center spurred significant urban and scientific advancements in the city. The influx of groups with diverse religious beliefs—such as Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism—introduced profound changes to Maragheh's political and religious framework. According to written sources from the Islamic era, during the Ilkhanid period, Maragheh was characterized by notable political and religious diversity. Adherents of religions such as Islam (Shia and Sunni), Buddhism, Christianity, and even Judaism established their own ceremonial and worship spaces. This diversity of beliefs within the city contributed to the development of a wide array of burial spaces. Some of these burial sites closely adhered to the architectural traditions of burial found in northern China and Mongolia. For instance, the subsurface mausoleums identified in sites like the Observatory mound, Pirhasham, and Dourbadouran reveal clear influences from these traditions. Similarly, sub-surface rock cut tombs of comparable types have been documented in the regions of Turfan, China, and Mongolia. These mausoleums were created into the ground, accessible solely through stairs or inclined pathways leading to the burial chambers. Inside, two platforms were constructed along the walls, serving as sites for burials. This burial tradition appears to have been customary in the subsurface tombs of Dourbadouran and Pirhasham, as well. Thus, the tradition of mausoleum construction can be traced back to Mongolian origins, gaining prominence in Maragheh following the arrival of the Mongol Ilkhanids, particularly in the early period

of their rule[40]. Historical Islamic sources also reference the burial of notable Ilkhanid figures, such as Hulagu Khan, within a rock-cut tomb located in the Azerbaijan region[41]. During the early period, when the Ilkhanid khans had not yet converted to Islam, they were buried in the subsurface rock-cut tomb after their deaths. This tradition continued until Ghazan Khan embraced Islam. Following this transition, the tradition of constructing prominent, surface level mausoleums (āramgāh) became widespread. Ilkhanid rulers, such as Ghazan Khan in Shanb, Tabriz, and Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh in Soltaniyeh, Zanjan, commissioned magnificent mausoleums for themselves. Constructed subsurface mausoleums represent another category of burial structures in Maragheh. Architecturally, these mausoleums differ from troglodytic subsurface mausoleums. They are constructed as small chambers made of brick or stone and situated below ground level. Examples of such tombs have been identified in the Dourbadouran site near Observatory mound[42]. In terms of architectural design, these mausoleums show striking similarities to those found in the Turfan region of China, which are associated with Uyghur culture (Figure 8). The mausoleums in these regions were constructed as brick enclosures beneath the ground's surface. Following the migration of a group of Uyghurs to the Azerbaijan region during the Ilkhanid period[43], it seems that they introduced some of their burial traditions to this region. These graves are situated near the Observatory mound. According to Islamic-era written sources, Uyghur scholars were actively engaged in scientific endeavors at this observatory[44]. Consequently, the origins of the constructed subsurface mausoleums from the Ilkhanid period in Maragheh can be traced back to regions in northern China and Mongolia.

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[40] Hamadani, *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, 1994, p. 1053.

[41] Banākati, *Tarikh Banakti, the First Shrine of Al-Albab in the Introduction of Histories and Genealogy*, 1969, p. 425.

[42] Saeid Sattarnezhad, Behrouz Omrani, Hossein Naseri-Someeh, and Seyed Mehdi Hosseininiya, *Study and Classification of Ritual-Religious Rock Architecture in the County of Maragheh*, 2020.

[43] Roxann Prazniak, *Ilkhanid Buddhism: Traces of a Passage in Eurasian History*, 2014, p. 664.

[44]Kamāl al-Dīn ibn al - Fuwaṭī, *Majmaol Al-Adab Fi Mojam Alalqab*, 1995, p. 367.
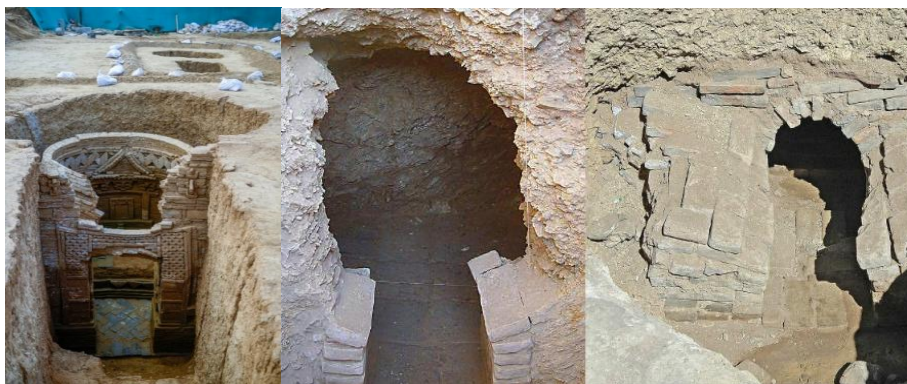
Fig. 8 An example of Uyghur brick enclosure mausoleums in Mongolia

Constructed square-domed mausoleums and tower tombs are among the most remarkable examples of burial spaces in this region. The construction and expansion of these structures flourished in Maragheh during the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods. Scholars have proposed various theories regarding the origins of these burial structures, suggesting influences such as ancient Iranian traditions, jihad, Shiism, and Turkic Asian traditions. However, one aspect that seems overlooked in studies of their origins and history is the ideology of the patrons who commissioned these structures. Significantly, the peak period for the popularity of mausoleums in the Azerbaijan region corresponds to the Seljuk era and, more notably, the Mongol Ilkhanid period. The Mongols and Uyghurs, before adopting Islam, were largely influenced by Buddhist and shamanistic beliefs. According to the traditions prevalent among these groups, the tombs of kings and prominent tribal figures were intended to remain concealed. In regions such as northern China and Mongolia, subsurface brick-enclosure mausoleums have been discovered, entirely constructed below ground level. This burial tradition persisted when the Mongol Ilkhanids first arrived in Maragheh. Even today, the precise locations of the mausoleums of early Mongol and Ilkhanid kings in Iran remain unknown[45]. Following the adoption and formalization of Islam, the tradition of concealing mausoleums was completely abolished by the order of Ghazan Khan[46]. The exact locations of the mausoleums of Ghazan Khan Mahmoud Ilkhanid and Sultan Mohammad Oljeitu are well-documented. It seems that the expansion of mausoleum construction in this region began precisely when the Seljuks and Ilkhanids embraced Islam. After converting to Islam, the tradition of concealing graves was abandoned, and burial sites became fully visible and accessible to the

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[45] Banākati, *Tarikh Banakti, the First Shrine of Al-Albab in the Introduction of Histories and Genealogy*, 1969, p. 375.
[46] Ahmad Ibn Ali Maqrizi, *Behavior for the Knowledge of the Kings*, 1997, p. 375.

public. Kings and prominent figures of society constructed tombs in the form of mausoleums, with clear architectural influences from pre-Islamic Iranian designs[47]. However, the concept of creation of mausoleums was a prevalent tradition among some East Asian societies. After adopting Islam, these societies promoted the creation of constructed surface-level mausoleums. This cultural influence contributed to the remarkable abundance of Ilkhanid-era mausoleums in the northwest region of Iran, surpassing those from other historical periods.

6-Conclusion

As noted, during the Islamic era in Maragheh, a variety of architectural methods were employed to bury the deceased. Research on the monumental-burial spaces of this period reveals that these structures can be categorized into two main types: subsurface (concealed) and surface-level (visible) structures. The placement of these structures was heavily influenced by the beliefs of both the designers and the deceased. Islamic-themed structures commonly feature Quranic verses and Islamic motifs, while non-Islamic burial structures were discreetly created into the ground. A chronological study of these mausoleums highlights that the greatest diversity is evident in those from the Ilkhanid period. The burial spaces from the pre- and post-Ilkhanid periods can largely be divided into two main categories: constructed mausoleum buildings reserved for distinguished members of society and simple pit graves designated for ordinary individuals. The architectural diversity seen in Ilkhanid-era burial spaces in Maragheh reflects the city's rich cultural and religious diversity, partially shaped by Mongolian-Buddhist influences. For instance, concealing graves from public view, an ancient Mongolian tradition, became widespread in early Ilkhanid Maragheh. However, after the Ilkhanids embraced Islam, this practice was abandoned. Instead, surface-level constructed mausoleums and graves adorned with prominent tombstones became prevalent. This trend of making graves more visible continued in the subsequent periods. The overall findings of this study reveal that during the Islamic era, tomb architecture showcased significant diversity, with a substantial portion attributed to the Mongol Ilkhanid period. This research can serve as a stepping stone for future studies on monumental-burial spaces of the Islamic era in other regions.

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[47] Javad Neyestani, *A Research on the Tomb Buildings of Central Mazandaran in the 9th Century AH with Emphasis on the Features of Indigenous Architecture*, 2004; Hassan Hashemi Zarjaabad, *Religious Buildings of the Sassanid Era and Its Impact on Khorasan Tomb Architecture in the Islamic Era*, 2011, p. 71.

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MEDIEVAL CULTURE IN
CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

The Concept of the Archetype and Archetypal Models from the Perspective of Femininity in Visual Arts

Gabriel Leontin Păun*

Abstract: *It is a fact that the world as a whole is diverse and that, in general, increasingly intense interactions between people, cultures, and civilizations generate a psychological need for identity. This is because individuals, when confronted with foreign ideas and models – with "the other" – define their own identity, their "self." We cannot ignore or overlook that in the cultural sphere, linguistic, psychological, mental, and religious barriers come into play – an entire spiritual edifice formed over centuries of differentiated and specific evolution.*

1. Introduction

The Romanian Explanatory Dictionary defines the archetype as: "A model, an initial type used as a guide; (especially) the original manuscript of a work or a deep, innate psychic structure that generates symbolic images and governs the organization of human experience"[1]. We will choose the second definition – the archetype as a symbolic sign – for the purpose of reflecting the chosen theme. In the 1950s, psychologist Carl G. Jung described archetypes as "archaic remnants whose presence cannot be explained by anything in the individual's life and which appear to be aboriginal, innate, and inherited forms of the human mind"[2]. Jung argued that archetypes are not known to the conscious mind, in which there are clear examples that define them. Instead, archetypes are imprinted in the subconscious, where they remain fluid and unknown, organized through a long evolutionary history that has continuously nourished the human mind as it reacts to real phenomena, to sights and sounds. After years of observing and interpreting dreams and fantasies across many cultures, Jung concluded that archetypes tend to form representations or motifs that reveal themselves only through symbolic images. These representations can vary significantly in detail, but they do not lose their fundamental structure. They have no known origin and

* Adjunct Professor, "George Enescu" National University of Arts from Iași, România, leopaun@yahoo.com

[1] *Dicționarul Explicativ al Limbii Române*, https://dexonline.ro/definitie/arhetip
[2] C. G. Jung, Marie-Luise von Franz, *Man and his Symbols*, Ed. Anchor Press, New York, 1964, p. 67.

can appear anytime, anywhere in the world – making their general model a "collective" phenomenon of the human subconscious. Archetypes are thus connected to the uncontested universality of the collective subconscious, to ancestral memory, tradition, and the past. When used and applied in culture and folk art, they allow for easy generalizations about the world, its structures, and its inhabitants. Jung introduced archetypes as inherited predispositions within the human psyche to form primordial images. They are defined by their form, not their content, which allows for different manifestations across cultures, religions, or social groups.

Carl Jung proposed the theory of archetypes, claiming that there is an inherent tendency in how human beings unconsciously understand the world. The theory of archetypes explains how the symbolic meanings found in myths psychologically influence our unconscious mind. As an extension of Jung's theory, we aim to provide a theoretical framework that connects mythology and psychology, defining archetypal symbolism from the perspective of visual arts. Similar to myths, visual art is a symbolic narrative. In what follows, we will identify, as much as possible, symbolic content in visual art based on archetypal symbolism.

Carl Jung[3] suggests that all human beings share a deep, universal unconscious, which lies beneath the personal psyche (including the conscious and subconscious mind). The collective unconscious is made up of contents and behavioral patterns that are identical across all human beings and thus constitute a common psychic substrate of universal nature, present in every individual. As a result, all human beings – who essentially share the same biological equipment (e.g., the brain and central nervous system) – are likely to perceive shared meanings embodied in a symbol, even at an unconscious level.

Returning to archetypes, they are defined as components of the collective unconscious – more precisely, an innate tendency to experience things in a particular way that cannot be consciously acquired. They exist universally in the psyche and psychologically prepare the individual to face life experiences that are universally shared[4]. Archetypes are unconscious psychic impulses – hereditary traits that shape and motivate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors long before any conscious awareness develops. Archetypes are similar to other sensory and cognitive patterns; for example, the receptive fields of the retina are not consciously perceived but determine the structure of visual perception[5].

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[3] *Ibidem*, p. 74.
[4] Sally Walters, "Algorithms and archetypes: Evolutionary psychology and Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious", Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems, nr.3, pg. 289, vol. 17, 1994, https://doi.org/10.1016/1061-7361(94)90013-2, 03.01.2025
[5] Leonid I. Perlovsky, Robert Kozma, *Neurodynamics of Cognition and Consciousness*, Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2007, pp. 230-250.

Jung initially identified a few essential archetypes: the hero, the shadow, the anima, the animus, the mentor (or wise old man), and the mother. Furthermore, mythologist Joseph Campbell[6] extended Jung's concept of the hero archetype into a more complex domain – the monomyth (the hero's journey), a structure common to all mythic hero stories across different cultures and religions. This metaphorical structure outlines seventeen stages that the hero must go through to complete their journey. These stages are generally grouped into three major categories: departure, initiation, and return. Interestingly, this structure also applies to modern society and is evident in contemporary art and mass media. These archetypes are considered essential in comparison to other types, such as:

The Self archetype – the image of the divine, the civilizing hero;

The Erotic archetype – Animus/Anima, representing the Feminine, the Masculine, and also the Androgynous;

The Parental archetype – The Paternal symbolizes Justice and Power, while the Maternal stands for Love, the Mother, the Daughter, Faith, and also nature-related archetypes like Fertility and Affection;

The Child archetype – representing Purity;

The Shadow archetype – representing the Mask, the mirror of the inner self, or the concept of duality.

2. Discussions

In the cultural sphere, projection is an active element in the formation of superstitions, myths, and religions. The construction of a supersensible reality is the result of projecting psychic forces outward. This supersensible world can be reinterpreted as a psychology of the unconscious. This idea is found not only in Freud but also in Jung, in a specific manner. For Jung, religions are the result of the projection of archetypal contents, and God is an external projection of the Self archetype – the archetype of harmoniously integrated psychic totality[7]. Every man carries within himself the image of the eternal feminine – not the image of a specific woman, but of woman in general. This image is, essentially, an inherited attribute passed down from ancient times and inscribed in the organic system, a "type" (an "archetype") of all ancestral experiences related to feminine nature, a sediment of all impressions concerning womanhood, a system of inherited adaptation. Throughout history, femininity has been seen as a set of traits that make up the specificity of the feminine character. When we speak of the term "feminine," we observe that its roots lie in biology, and in Freud's view, anatomy is destiny. Femininity has its origins in social structures. The famous feminist manifesto published by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949

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[6] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princenton Press, U.K., 2008, pp. 35-38.
[7] Pamela J. Brown, Jungian Psychology and the New God Image, http://www.dbcuuc.org/sermons/000604.html, 11.03.2020.

asserted that one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one. The symbol of womanhood, present as an archetypal figure – an initial model to be followed – according to psychology, is a deep structure that generates symbolic images and governs the organization of human experience, a concept that designates the primary, original, ideal model.

For Beauvoir, cultural understandings of femininity are imaginary constructs. This foreshadows Jacques Derrida's argument that linguistic structures are conceived through a series of dualities, so that concepts do not arise from an intrinsic nature but rather from a relationship of difference with the other[8]. For Beauvoir, the binary of sex positions man as "the subject" and woman as "the other." Woman is defined and differentiated in relation to man, yet not with reference to herself[9].

Intellectual perceptions of masculinity and femininity have been transformed into visual arts since antiquity. Fertility and motherhood, as well as the relationships between women and men, are dominant themes in ancient representations. One of the earliest illustrative examples of gender representation is the faceless Paleolithic statue known as the Venus of Willendorf (circa 28,000–25,000 BCE). It is a depiction of a female figure in a symbolic and conceptual context, representing feminine fertility. In the following sections, we will identify the most well-known and commonly used archetypes in visual arts, from prehistory to the present day, in order to highlight the persistence of those archaic remnants as defined by Jung. Representations of women in both art and mythology can serve as vehicles for understanding how feminine archetypes have evolved over time. Jung's theoretical framework concerning the human psyche aligns with Taoist principles: the extrovert is balanced by the introvert; the external material world is balanced by the internal world; the masculine principle – Animus (Yang in Yin) – is balanced by the feminine principle, Anima (Yin in Yang). Just like physical inheritance stored in our genes, cultural patterns are preserved in our collective consciousness. They can be invoked, forgotten, or even suppressed. Nevertheless, archetypes can be summoned as symbols at any moment – hence their power to manipulate, to motivate, and to influence. One of Sigmund Freud's most important contributions to the development of psychology as a science – as well as to anthropology, ontology, and epistemology – was the introduction and clarification of the concept of the unconscious and its role in the development and functioning of human behavior. Freud's first theory of the structure of the psyche distinguishes three instances of personality: the unconscious, the ego, and the superego, noting that complex and hard-to-identify interdependencies exist between them. From Freud's perspective, the unconscious is a personal, individual

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[8] Simone de Beauvoir, "The Second Sex. A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader", Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan (ed.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 51-54.
[9] *Ibidem*, p.52.

realm – the most primitive and elemental part of the psychic life. The phenomena unfolding within this true reservoir of repressions are among the most complex and unpredictable in terms of manifestation. This psychic instance is driven primarily by instinctual drives – authentic biological forces that continuously strive to break through into the conscious mind. The unconscious is a veritable ocean of energy, housing both accepted and illicit, unwanted, and unacknowledged drives. If the ego represents control, and the superego the censorship of the ego's actions based on internalized norms, then the unconscious lies at the opposite pole, with its domains of manifestation (dreams, Freudian slips) and its characteristic elements (instinctual drives) and their consequences (aggression, sensuality). Whereas Freud considered the unconscious to exist solely at the individual level, Carl Gustav Jung defined the concept of the collective unconscious as a shared database of all humanity, emerging from millions of years of soul formation. According to Carl Gustav Jung, symbolic art originates from the realm of the collective unconscious. Not being repressed or forgotten, the content of the collective unconscious – which does not exist in itself as such – represents only a potential, which can be inferred only from the content of an artwork, similar to a priori ideas. Only from the completed work of art can we deduce the symbol that, through imagination, guides us to reconstruct the original model. In this way, the contact between the human psyche – within the collective unconscious – and the archetype can generate the transformation of archetypal symbols into art. Primordial images are, in fact, archetypes, and they represent psychic residues of the same types of experiences lived by countless human ancestors. In Jung's view, the effect of art lies in the unconscious stimulation of the archetype and in connecting the artist's and viewer's consciousness to the fundamental, deepest resources of the collective unconscious. Thus, the role of art is to educate, to guide consciousness toward the living sources of the archetype, from which the people of a given time may absorb – according to their capacity for understanding – the perennial truth of the primordial image.

3. Results

The mother archetype is perhaps the most recognizable and commonly encountered. We can deduce three main relationships in connection with the creative artist: 1) the biological mother or a close family member; 2) any woman or caregiver, such as a nurse or a teacher; 3) the mother in a more figurative sense – anything that evokes a sense of devotion, such as a church, the sky, the earth, or a home. There is also the mother archetype embedded in everything that represents Mother Earth (Nature), associated with the creation and birth of all things. The mother is symbolized by the phases of the moon, the womb, and any similar forms, representing fertility and fecundity. The act of giving life through birth is the most

recognized aspect of the mother archetype. Her body is soft and rounded, with an exaggerated emphasis on reproductive qualities such as the breasts, abdomen, and hips.

The example of the Venus of Willendorf statuette (ca. 28,000–25,000 BCE) was certainly not created as a portrait of a specific person, but rather as a representation of the reproductive and child-rearing aspects of womanhood. In combination with the emphasis on breasts and pubic area, it is believed that the Venus of Willendorf served a symbolic function relating to fertility or motherhood.

A similar role is played by the goddess Gaia in ancient Greek mythology and art. She was considered the Mother of Creation, the one who brought the world out of chaos into light, the mother of all gods, and the oldest deity responsible for the creation of the world. In the symbolism associated with this goddess – Mother Nature – who heals and sustains all life on this planet, the archetype is personified in sculpture or painting as a representation of the universal nature of woman and the protective essence embodied by the figure of the mother.

Fig. 1: *Gaia*, Roman bas-relief

Fig. 2: *Gaia*, *Den stora modern*

Gradually, the projection of this archetype in visual arts often appears bathed in an aura of light or wearing a symbolic crown of divine origin, indicating the devotion she deserves. The mother is usually depicted with outstretched arms, off ring food or comfort, caring for those around her (man or child), and is essential to their existence.

Fig.3: Gerard David, *Madonna and Child* **Fig.4**: Michelangelo, *Madona di Medici*

Virgins are typically classified as representations of a woman's independent and autonomous qualities. Some of the symbols associated with virgins include youth, sensual beauty, artistry, and wisdom. The most familiar aspects of the virgin archetype involve the personification of eternal youth, a reverence for beauty, and an unrestrained, confident nature. These characteristics are represented by a slender, sometimes prepubescent body, often with luxuriant hair, surrounded by flowers, colorful textiles, or precious metals. She is usually depicted alone or accompanied by cherubic figures, whose presence indicates a non-earthly origin. When shown in the presence of men, the virgin is either painted or sculpted as a warrior engaged in battle or as a lover whose embrace is fierce and passionate. The true power of the virgin archetype is revealed in her ability to command control over a situation – whether engaged in love or conflict. Independence, confidence, and passion are her most empowering traits. As we can observe, this archetype has multiple subdivisions: the beloved virgin, the chaste virgin, the warrior virgin, and so on. Each of these variations finds a corresponding artistic representation from Greek/Roman Antiquity to the present day.

Fig. 5: Jacques-Louis David, *The Vestal Virgin*   **Fig. 6**: *Joan of Arc*, miniature

The earliest representations of Mary date back to the early Christian period (2nd–3rd centuries), discovered in the Roman catacombs. One type of icon shows only Mary (without the infant Jesus) standing, usually glorified and making a gesture of prayer, blessing, or prophecy. This type of image appears in a series of ancient apse mosaics. Complete depictions of the Madonna more frequently include the Christ Child, who is shown either facing the viewer or raising his hand in blessing. The most famous Byzantine image, the Hodegetria, was originally of this type, although most later copies are half-length. This image type often appears in sculpture as well and can be found in delicate ivory carvings, limestone decorations on church doorways, and in painted wooden or plaster statues in nearly every Catholic church. The enthroned Madonna is a type of image dating from the Byzantine era and was widely used in medieval and Renaissance times. These depictions of the Madonna and Child often take the form of large altarpieces. They also appear as frescoes and apse mosaics. In medieval examples, the Madonna is often accompanied by angels supporting the throne or by rows of saints. In Renaissance painting, particularly in High Renaissance works, the saints are grouped more informally in a type of composition known as Sacra Conversazione. The seated Madonna and Child is a style of image that became especially popular in 15th-century Florence and was imitated elsewhere. These depictions are usually small in size, suited for a small altar or domestic use. They typically show Mary holding Jesus in an informal and maternal manner. These paintings often include symbolic references to the Passion of Christ. Very few ancient images of the Virgin Mary survive, although the image of the Madonna has roots in the painting and sculptural traditions of the earliest Christian communities in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Important to the Italian tradition are Byzantine icons, especially those created in Constantinople (Istanbul), the capital of the longest-lasting medieval civilization, whose icons played a vital role in civic life and were celebrated for their miraculous properties. Byzantium (324–1453) saw itself as the true Rome, being a Christian empire speaking Greek, with Italian colonies living among its citizens, participating in Crusades launched at its borders, and eventually looting the churches, palaces, and monasteries for many of their treasures. Later, in the Middle Ages, the Cretan School became the primary source of icons for the West, and its artists could adapt their style to Western iconography when necessary.

Old age is often portrayed as a negative archetype – a hideous, aged, and dried-up woman, a symbol of life's passage. This archetype manifests either in the features of the character, emphasizing signs of aging, or as a skeletal figure representing death. This physical connection highlights the most important aspect of old age as a means or bridge between life and death. Old age is also associated with magic or incantation. Its connection to

the supernatural gives it a sense of wisdom and mystery. Old age completes the circle of life, marking the passage of time and becoming a memento mori about youth and lost beauty. Its presence in a visual artwork evokes fear and respect. Although usually represented as a negative character, in pre-Hellenic mythology it was attributed with the power that comes from seeing beyond time. This prophetic talent and knowledge are achieved only through living a full and long life. The power of this archetype in visual arts is emphasized through the wrinkles and dry skin that mark the passage of time and accumulated experience.

Fig. 7: *Life and Death*, unknown author

Fig. 8: Paul Rubens, *Portrait of an Old Woman*

In early Christian and medieval art, the image of the woman primarily served to emphasize a typological meaning. By the end of the medieval period, women were depicted in moralizing narratives such as the Biblia Moralisées from the 13th century, which alternated biblical stories with elaborate commentary by Parisian theologians, as well as in the 1400–1530 manuscripts of Speculum Humanae Salvationis, where illustrations often focused on the importance of foreshadowing and distorted certain events at the expense of biblical narrative[10]. With the introduction of the printing press, Northern European artists in the 16th and 17th centuries published books depicting biblical women such as Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel as true models of virtue. The Renaissance, Baroque, and 18th-century art often used biblical women as acceptable excuses for depicting the contemporary ideal of the nude female form. Characters such as Lot's daughters and Bathsheba were reproduced repeatedly. In the 19th century, the "good" biblical wife tended to be overshadowed by the "bad" one. An example of this is the typology of the character Delilah, who becomes a projection of the femme fatale, a seductress.

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[10] Speculum Humanae Salvationis, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speculum_Humanae_Salvationis, 20.05.2020.

Fig. 9: The Adoration of the Magi from *Speculum humanæ salvationis*

20th-century art sees the emergence of secular images of biblical women, replacing earlier religious conceptions and treating them through formal, personal, or national perspectives. The artist of the Speculum Humanae Salvationis[11], in an undated work, replaces the figure of Adam with a basilisk with a woman's head – an imaginary creature interpreted by popular Christian thought as one of the appearances of evil, of Satan. Many medieval artworks illustrating the creation cycle – in frescoes, mosaics, and stained glass – are intended to project a sequence of events that will unfold in the New Testament; for example, the creation of Eve was understood as foreshadowing the birth of the Church (Ecclesia). Thus, in a Parisian Biblia Moralisée (c. 1240), Eve, assisted by God-Christ, leaps from Adam's side as he sleeps. Above this scene, the Crucifixion is depicted, with a crowned Ecclesia emerging from Christ's wounded right side.

Traditional early Christian iconography presents Adam and Eve on either side of the Tree of Knowledge, which is itself encircled by a serpent. They cover their intimate parts with leaves, as seen, for example, on the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (in the Treasury of St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican)[12]. This image conveys a typological-redemptive message, suggesting that the divine grace lost by humanity will be restored to the faithful after death.

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[11] *Ibidem*.
[12] *Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/junius-bassus, 12.03.2020.

Fig. 10: *Adam and Eve, Sarcophagus Junius Bassus*

16th-century artists continued to refrain from portraying the carnal nature of Eve that tempted Adam. This perception is clearly illustrated in the left panel of a diptych created by Hugo van der Goes around 1470, where Eve, with her body slightly turned toward Adam, picks the fruit from the tree without the serpent's help, which is also depicted as half-woman. The moralizing attitude persists in 17th-century Dutch art. In the work Adam and Eve (1638) by the master Rembrandt, the primordial couple – depicted as middle-aged – is shown at the moment of temptation: the tree is wrapped by the serpent, emphasizing its evil nature, and Eve is shown tempting Adam with an apple as round as her belly. A different interpretation of this biblical moment comes from Tintoretto, for whom this episode signifies a struggle between the masculine and the feminine. Adam is portrayed as a submissive figure, while Eve takes a dominant stance in The Temptation of Adam (1550).

Fig. 11: Hugo van der Goes, *The Fall of Man*   **Fig.12**: Rembrandt, *Adam and Eve*

Fig.13: Tintoretto, *The Temptation of Adam*

Under the influence of John Milton's Paradise Lost, the 18th century witnessed the emergence of a secular image of Eve, transmitted into modern art primarily through her transformation into a femme fatale – a blend of beauty, seduction, and independence intended to destroy man. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting, Lady Lilith[13] (1864–1868, reproduced in 1872–1873) visually embodies this interpretation, portraying a beautiful, melancholic woman gracefully combing her hair. She is no longer the first wife of Adam, but rather a sensual and earthly woman[14].

Fig. 14: Gabriel Rossetti, *Lady Lilith*   **Fig. 15**: Constantin Brâncuși, *Adam and Eve (Le roi des rois)*

Constantin Brâncuși's sculpture Adam and Eve (1916–1921) presents a modern reinterpretation of the primordial couple as two nearly equivalent figurative components fused into a unified structure composed of geometric forms. Adam is depicted as a zigzag-edged rhombus, while Eve is represented in the upper part through an interaction of curves and spheres. Sculpted from oak, Adam serves as the pedestal for Eve, carved in chestnut wood.

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[13] Amy Scerba, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting 'Lady Lilith' (1864–1868?): oil", Feminism and Women's Studies, EServer.org, 02.03.2020.
[14] *Ibidem*.

Marc Chagall's approach in the lithograph Paradise: The Tree of Knowledge for the Bible Verve II, 1960[15], blends Christian and Jewish exegetical traditions in the depiction of the couple, showing Adam and Eve lying on the ground, with the Tree of Knowledge sprouting from their intertwined bodies as if they were one. This atypical iconography refers to Christian theology, where the Tree of Knowledge is associated with the mystical Tree of Life.

Fig. 16: Marc Chagall, *Paradise: The Tree of Knowledge for the Bible Verve II*

Fig. 17: Roberto d'Oderisio, church fresco, *Santa Maria Incoronata* Church

Alongside Eve, another biblical figure frequently appears in visual arts over the centuries, representing a distinct typology – the deceitful and seductive woman: Potiphar's wife, from Genesis in the Old Testament. Potiphar is a figure in the biblical story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis. It is said that Potiphar was captain of the palace guard. Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, is taken to Egypt, where he is sold to Potiphar as a domestic servant. Potiphar appoints Joseph head of his household, but Potiphar's wife – unnamed in the Bible and Christian tradition – becomes angry with Joseph for resisting her seduction and falsely accuses him of attempted rape.

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[15] Marc Chagall in colectia Zaidan Gallery, http://www.zaidan.ca/art_gallery/Chagall/Chagall-Paradise.htm, 20.02.2020.

Potiphar throws Joseph into prison, where Joseph's gift for interpreting dreams is eventually brought to Pharaoh's attention.

In early Renaissance art, Potiphar's wife symbolizes Luxuria, as seen in a fresco by Roberto d'Oderisio in the Church of Santa Maria Incoronata, Naples (1340–1343). Sitting on a bed presumed to be in the woman's chamber, she lifts her dress to expose her legs while Joseph flees in fear.

Joseph's story fascinated Rembrandt, who created numerous drawings, engravings, and paintings based on the Old Testament figure. In one 1634 engraving, Potiphar's wife is shown stretched out on the bed, nude, grabbing Joseph. Considered "unprecedented in its erotic candor"[16], the work highlights the stark contrast between the characters' desires – Joseph averts his gaze while the woman shamelessly reveals her body. Rembrandt likely intended to emphasize the moral implications through his dramatic use of light and shadow, with Joseph brightly lit on the left and Potiphar's wife engulfed in darkness on the right.

Fig. 18: Rembrandt, *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*

Judith, the pious widow of Bethulia, is one of the few biblical women identified with both the traditional Catholic version of the Virgin Mary and as a heroic figure. The biblical story tells that Judith, widowed after the death of her husband Manasseh, decides to save her city by seducing and beheading the Assyrian general Holofernes. To do so, she bathes, perfumes herself, dresses festively, and adorns herself with jewelry[17]. After killing Holofernes, she returns with his head and saves her people, choosing to live the rest of her life alone. In Northern European art of the 16th century, Judith appears as a sensual woman who uses her feminine charm to seduce Holofernes. Thus, she is often associated with other seductive women such as Delilah. Artists frequently portrayed her as a sinful, aggressive seductress – cold and unflinching in her act. A notable example is Judith (1525) by Hans Baldung Grien.

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[16] Shelley Perlove, Larry Silver, *Rembrandt's faith: church and temple in the Dutch golden age*, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009, p. 99.
[17] Biblia Ortodoxă, Cartea Iuditei, cap. 10/ The Orthodox Bible, Book of Judith, chapter 10, https://www.bibliaortodoxa.ro/carte.php?id=45, 02.02.2020.

Fig. 19: Hans Baldung Grien, *Judith*

Fig. 20: Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*

Fig. 21: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*

Caravaggio's Judith Beheading Holofernes (1598–1599) captures the figures dramatically lit from the side, extracted from a dark background. Their facial expressions reveal the artist's deep emotional insight – Judith's face shows a mix of determination and revulsion, suggesting psychological ambivalence.

Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes (1614–1620) is an emblematic work. In this painting, Judith bears the artist's own face, while Holofernes resembles Agostino Tassi – the master who raped her. The scene is powerful and violent, unlike previous representations: the maid, typically passive (as in Caravaggio's work), is here an active accomplice, matching Judith in strength and fury.

The portrayal of Judith as a woman who betrays and kills her lover becomes a recurring theme in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Gustav Klimt approached this subject in two iconic works: Judith I (1901) and Judith II (1909). Judith is depicted as a sensual, erotic woman, her face bearing an expression of sexual ecstasy, emphasized by parted lips and intense eyes.

Both images present Judith as the quintessence of the femme fatale, while the use of gold leaf transforms her into an emblem of this universal archetype.

Fig. 22, Fig. 23: Gustav Klimt, *Judith I* and *Judith II*

The use of female biblical typologies was also intended to reflect virtuous models aimed at German and Flemish elites. One such figure is Sarah, who embodies feminine virtues and is illustrated by Rembrandt in Abraham and the Angels (1656). In this engraving, the guests are seated at the entrance to a home on what appears to be an oriental rug. Abraham bows his head humbly as he addresses the central figure – God – who announces the miraculous birth. Behind them is Ishmael, Abraham and Sarah's 13-year-old son. God is portrayed as a bearded elderly man, while the two accompanying angels have distinctly individualized features and hybrid characteristics, blending masculinity with traditional angelic traits. Sarah is represented as a beautiful woman whose inner grace and loyalty are synonymous with humility and faith.

Fig. 24: Rembrandt, *Abraham and the Angels*

A central image in both Orthodox and Catholic iconography, depictions of the Virgin Mary have persisted since early Christianity (2nd–3rd centuries), as found in the catacombs of Rome. Initially narrative in style, the classic Madonna image began to develop in the 5th century, following the Council of Ephesus in 431, which confirmed her status as the "Mother of God" or Theotokos[18]. The iconography that emerged in the 6th–8th centuries became especially important during the medieval period (12th–14th centuries), both in the Eastern Orthodox and Latin spheres.

According to an 8th-century tradition, the iconography of the Virgin Mary originated from a portrait painted from life by the Evangelist Luke. Several icons (such as Panagia Portaitissa) claim to be either the original or direct copies. In the Western tradition, Madonna representations were extremely diverse, as seen in the practices of Renaissance masters like Duccio, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Giovanni Bellini, Caravaggio, and Rubens – and later, certain modernists such as Salvador Dalí and Henry Moore. In contrast, Orthodox iconography has generally remained more faithful to traditional types.

Very few early images of the Virgin Mary have survived, although the Madonna's image has roots in the pictorial and sculptural traditions of the earliest Christian communities in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. There are several types of representations of the Virgin Mary. One depicts her standing alone (without the infant Jesus), usually glorified and in a gesture of prayer, blessing, or prophecy. This type of image appears in a series of ancient apse mosaics[19]. While theft was one way Byzantine images made their way west into Italy, the relationship between Byzantine icons and Italian Madonna imagery is much richer and more complex. Byzantine art played an essential role in Western Europe, especially when Byzantine territories included parts of Eastern Europe, Greece, and even Italy. Byzantine manuscripts, ivory carvings, gold and silver objects, and luxurious textiles were widely distributed throughout the West.

In Byzantium, the usual title for Mary was Theotokos or Mother of God, rather than Virgin Mary, and salvation was believed to be granted to the faithful at the moment of God's incarnation. This theological concept takes pictorial form in the image of Mary holding the child in her arms. Another frequent representation shows both the Virgin and the infant Jesus standing. The most famous Byzantine image of this type, Hodighitria, portrays the Virgin holding the child on her left arm and pointing to him with her right hand. Jesus holds a scroll, symbolizing the Gospel, the good news brought into the world through his arrival. This type of image appears frequently in

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[18] Conciliul de la Efes/ The Council of Ephesus, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conciliul_de_la_Efes, 11.03.2020.
[19] Dorian SJ Llywelyn, Mary and Mariology, http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com, pg.540-541, 03.02.2020.

sculpture and can be found in delicate ivory carvings, on limestone in cathedral doorposts, and in polychrome wood or plaster figures in nearly every Catholic church. One particularly renowned example is Raphael's Sistine Madonna[20].

Located in Paris, Sainte-Chapelle was built in 1239 at the request of King Louis IX of France to house newly acquired holy relics, believed to include a piece of the True Cross, the Crown of Thorns, and other Passion artifacts. The reliquary at Sainte-Chapelle integrates three elements: the Old Testament's "Wisdom Incarnate" in the design of the throne; the New Testament's Incarnation (God as Jesus in Mary's womb) related to the sacred relics; and the Capetian fulfillment of sacred kingship. Beginning in the 12th century, several medieval theologians, including Guibert of Nogent, saw the ivory throne as a typological precursor to the Virgin Mary and referred to her as the "living throne of God"[21]. This designation persisted from the 9th century through the Middle Ages.

The Virgin and Child statue from Sainte-Chapelle is a key example of a new genre of small-scale statues that marked a shift in the French aristocracy's devotional practices – from public church prayer to more intimate, private worship. This statue was made specifically for Louis IX. The move toward private veneration arose from the medieval desire for an internal, personal religious experience. To facilitate such experiences, small statues like this were created between the 11th and 13th centuries. Their modest proportions emphasized the humanity of religious figures, allowing for a more direct spiritual connection.

Fig. 25: Anonymous artist, *Virgin and Child*, *Sainte-Chapelle*

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[20] *Ibidem*.
[21] Willem Van Loon, *Istoria artei*, Editura Snagov, București, 2001, p. 204.

The rediscovered humanity in the Virgin and Child statue was central to intimate devotion. The image of Christ evolved from that of a "Shepherd" in the 3rd century, to a "God-King," and by the 12th century to a "God born of man." As focus shifted from divinity to morality, a dedicated cult of the Virgin arose. During this time, the portrayal of the Virgin transitioned from a seated position – signifying the throne of wisdom – to a standing one, symbolizing a gentle, caring mother. When Mary is shown standing, she no longer serves as a throne for Jesus, but appears more dominant, not merely as the Theotokos, but as a human mother. In this statue, Mary and Jesus are depicted with natural behavior through their interactions and appear full of life and emotion. They play with an apple, perhaps an allusion to original sin. Another ivory statue from the same period, Virgin and Child from Saint-Denis, also emphasizes their humanity. From the Byzantine period comes the image of the Virgin on a throne, widely used throughout the medieval and Renaissance periods. These representations of the Madonna and Child often took the form of large altarpieces. They also appeared as frescoes or apse mosaics. In medieval depictions, the Madonna is often accompanied by angels holding up the throne or surrounded by rows of saints. In Renaissance painting, especially in the most recognized works, saints are often grouped informally in a composition known as Sacra conversazione.

The humble, pious Madonna is sometimes depicted with Christ in her lap. This style emerged from Franciscan piety and is likely attributed to Simone Martini[22]. It quickly spread through Italy, and by 1375, to Spain, France, and Germany. This portrait style became popular in the early Renaissance.

Andrea Pisano's Madonna and Child (Madonna col Bambino, 1340), carved in marble and housed at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence, was originally installed on the exterior of the bell tower next to Florence Cathedral. The sculpture captures a dynamic interaction between Mary and Jesus – while Mary tickles her child, he smiles and tries to push her hand away. The image illustrates the heightened realism of Tuscan art during a period when modern family values and the importance of children were being addressed seriously for the first time.

The work attributed to the Master of Sant'Anastasia (Crocifissione, c. 1330, carved in stone) stands out through the large heads and expressive hands that emphasize the characters' gestures. Standing beside Jesus, St. John grimaces in pain, while Mary raises her clasped hands in a pleading gesture. Christ turns his head toward Mary, his mouth open in suffering, as if crying out to his mother[23].

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[22] Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, Ed. Lund Humphries, New York, p. 112.

[23] J. M. Greenstein, *The creation of Eve and Renaissance realism. Visual theology and artistic invention*, Cambridge University Press, San Diego California, 2015.

Fig. 26: Andrea Pisano, *Madonna and Child*

Fig. 27: Maestro di Sant'Anastasia, *Crucifixion*

Tino di Camaino, in his work Madonna and Child/ Throne of Wisdom (Madonna Sedes Sapientiae, c. 1318–19, marble), presents the seated Virgin on a throne, herself a support for Christ, rendered in a monumental form. The inscription above, Sedes Sapientiae ("Seat of Wisdom"), refers both to her support of Jesus and to His divine wisdom in human form. Crowned and seated on her own throne, Mary also holds a book on her lap, referring to the idea that Christ is the Word of God[24].

Despite the innovations brought by the painters who portrayed the Virgin in the 13th and 14th centuries, she can still be recognized by her clothing. Typically, when portrayed as the mother of the newborn, she wears a blue mantle over a red garment. This mantle usually covers her head, replacing the sheer silk veil. Mary holds Jesus, who shares her halo and regal appearance. Often, the Virgin's gaze is directed toward the viewer, acting as a mediator for prayers flowing from the believer to her, and then to her son. However, medieval Italian artists also followed the traditions of Byzantine icon painting, developing their own methods of illustration.

Fig. 28: Tino di Camaino, *Madonna and Child*

Fig. 29: Cosmè Tura, *Madonna and Child*

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[24] Liana Castelfranchi Vegas, Alessandro Conti, *L'arte medievale in Italia e nell'Occidente europeo*, Jaca Book, 1993, p. 83.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Italian painters expanded their repertoire to include historical events, independent portraits, and mythological subjects, while Christian imagery remained dominant. Most artworks of the period were sacred. While religious themes often included Old Testament subjects and images of saints, the Madonna remained a central figure in Renaissance iconography.

Cosmè Tura's work Madonna and Child (Madonna col Bambino, c. 1460–70, Grimaldi Fava terracotta collection) is executed in relief, emphasizing the head and hands of Mary and the sleeping Christ Child. Tura developed a highly personal style, exaggerating proportions for expressive effect. Mary's wide forehead and elongated praying hands convey spiritual intensity. The sculpture may have been a preparatory study for a painting or a later conceptualization of the subject in a new medium.

Benedetto da Maiano from Florence created Madonna and Child Giving a Blessing (Madonna col Bambino Benedicente, c. 1480, polychrome terracotta collection – Grimaldi Fava). This original relief panel was made for a noble family, with symbols referencing devotional practices. The Latin inscription on the Virgin's open book, Magnificat anima mea Dominum ("My soul magnifies the Lord"[25]), is a verse from the Bible often recited during evening prayers. The Virgin's sleeve is adorned with a star, highlighting one of her honorary titles, Stella Maris ("Star of the Sea"). Christ's right hand, now missing, was originally raised in a gesture of blessing.

Fig. 30: Benedetto da Maiano, *Madonna dell'Olivo*
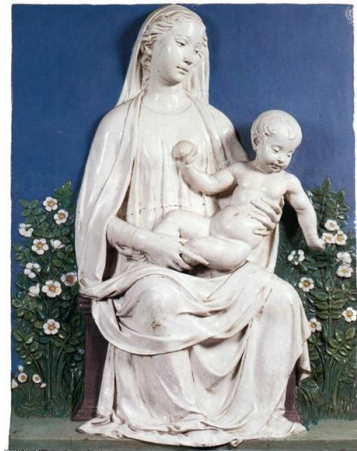
Fig. 31: Luca della Robbia, *Madonna in the Garden of Roses*

[25] Benedetto da Maiano, Bernardo di Stefano Rosselli, Madonna and Child Giving Blessing (Madonna col Bambino Benedicente), terracotta; Grimaldi Fava Collection, https://issuu.com/piccoligrandimusei/.../castelfiorentino_pp2, 19.03.2020.

Madonna and Child (Madonna col Bambino), also known as Madonna in the Garden of Roses (Madonna del Roseto, c. 1450–60), by Luca della Robbia, is made of glazed terracotta and held at the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. Artists often depicted Mary and Jesus among flowers and gardens to emphasize that Jesus took His earthly nature from His mother, like a flower growing from the soil. Jesus is shown reaching for a white rose, a common symbol of the Virgin Mary's purity. Della Robbia was best known for innovations in glazed terracotta, a technique where molded clay is covered with colored glazes, creating a durable surface that enhances modeled detail.

In many depictions of the Virgin with the Christ Child, artists allude to her fears regarding His future. In representations of the Crucifixion where Mary directly witnesses the suffering and death of her son, sorrow often becomes a central theme. The Virgin's presence emphasizes her psychological involvement in her son's drama, from birth to death. In Sandro Botticelli's Madonna and Child (Madonna col Bambino), also called Madonna of the Book (Madonna del Libro, 1480–81, Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan), the Madonna is shown reading a prayer book. Jesus is positioned between her and the book, symbolizing in Christian belief that Christ is the Word of God. The mother's expression is melancholic, suggesting she knows Christ's destiny. The nails and crown of thorns held by Jesus (probably added later by another artist) reinforce the idea that Mary foresaw her son's future and the events leading to His crucifixion.

In biblical and apocryphal narratives, Mary's words and actions express humility, foresight, and understanding. Artists have also used her image to allude to broader concepts that define Christian faith. The Virgin Mary represents the Church in her role as caretaker of the faithful, serving as an emblem of total devotion.

Fig. 32: Agostino di Duccio, *Madonna and Child*

Fig. 33: Michelangelo, *Madonna of Bruges*

A serene depiction of the Madonna appears in Agostino di Duccio's work, likely created around 1481, in which the Madonna and Child are surrounded by four angels, also known as the Madonna d'Auvillers. At the top of her forehead, the artist added the unusual detail of a medallion bearing the face of a cherub. Mary was the first human being privileged with the knowledge of the Savior's identity, and the divine source of this knowledge is symbolized by the angelic face adorning her head. Michelangelo's Madonna of Bruges differs significantly from previous representations of this subject, which typically depicted the Virgin as humble and devoted. In Michelangelo's sculpture, Mary is portrayed with less warmth or emotional engagement with the child, who pulls away from her, prefiguring the tragedy of His future. This tragic dimension finds further expression in Michelangelo's iconic Renaissance sculpture Pietà, housed in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. The Virgin Mary cradles the body of Christ after the crucifixion – a theme of Northern origin popular in France at the time, but not yet common in Italy. One of the most enigmatic representations of the woman figure appears in Édouard Manet's painting A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (1881–82), a work that has sparked much speculation. Many believe the woman is a courtesan, given the absence of gloves, which would have indicated respectable social status. Others, however, interpret the barmaid as a secular Madonna[26], due to the position of her hands turned outward – echoing poses from many contemporary depictions of the Virgin Mary. Regardless of the painting's deeper meaning, it is undoubtedly a commentary on society and the rapidly evolving roles of women in newly industrialized Paris.

According to Gilbert Durand, the imaginary is a "path through which the representation of an object is assimilated and shaped by the subjective impulses of the individual; reciprocally, subjective representations are explained through the subject's previous adaptations to the objective environment." The imaginary can thus be both product and process: it is the outcome of the conflict between objective and subjective and a process that involves assimilation, shaping, and adaptation[27].

Reflecting on artistic imagination, philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenburger states that "art thus testifies to a universal human need to fabricate images and provide a corporeal support to visual and textual imagination"[28].

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[26] "The Bar at the Folies-Bergeres de Edouard Manet", Sunday Telegraph "In The Picture", The Courtauld Institute Galleries, 2002, https://www.andrewgrahamdixon.com/archive/itp-141-the-bar-at-the-folies-bergeres-by-edouard-manet.html, 19.03.2020.
[27] G. Durand, *Structurile antropologice ale imaginarului/ Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1998, p.15.
[28] Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *Imaginarul/ L'imaginaire*, Editura Dacia, București, 2009, p.38.

E.H. Gombrich asserts that "every image implies the association of a concept and a sign, and it is not correct to isolate the sign and then the concept because, reduced to a sign, the image no longer signifies anything"[29]. The sign-symbol image is what gives meaning, message, and consistency to visual language, as it is an iconic sign. This icon exists only in the presence of its model or imaginative archetype. The explanatory approach to this idea can be realized both through decoding symbolic reading mechanisms of the visual artistic image and through a semiotic analysis of the visual language within the structure of the artwork.

Lorenzo the Magnificent described the ideal beauty of the Italian Renaissance woman as someone "of an attractive and ideal height; with fair skin, but not pale; fresh, but not radiant; grave in demeanor, but not proud; sweet and pleasant, without frivolity or fear. Her eyes are lively and her gaze free of pride or malice; her body is well proportioned, so that, among other women, she appears noble… in walking and dancing… and in all her movements, elegant and charming; her hands are the most beautiful that Nature could have created"[30].

However, when it comes to the representation of women, they had multiple roles: artworks featuring female portraits depicted them either as models of ideal beauty, as commemorative figures, or in recognition of donations made.

In the case of commemorative portraits, noble origin and wealth were of great importance and needed to be communicated visually – often posthumously. Women are also depicted in religious paintings as donors, such as in the work of Flemish artist Hugo van der Goes, The Portinari Altarpiece, created for the church of Santa Maria Nuova Hospital in Florence, which includes the portrait of the commissioner, Maria di Francesco Baroncelli, and her daughter[31]. When it comes to idealized portraits, works by the brothers Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo titled Portrait of a Lady depict three different faces, but the images do not differ substantially. They preserve equal proportions and perfect symmetry – attributes of beauty such as blond hair, high forehead, rosy lips, and fair complexion.

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[29] E. H. Gombrich, *Artă și iluzie/ Art and Illusion*, Editura Meridiane, Bucureşti,1986, p. 84.
[30] *Ibidem.*
[31] Hugo van der Goes and the Portinari Altarpiece, http://arthistoryblogger.blogspot.com/2011/07/hugo-van-der-goes-and-portinari.html, 19.02.2020.

Fig. 34: Hugo van der Goes, detail from *Portinari Altarpiece*

During the Italian Renaissance, especially the Quattrocento, women were often portrayed in profile – a format Leonardo da Vinci addressed as follows: "How to draw a profile portrait after seeing the subject only once: one must commit to memory the variations of the four different traits in the profile, namely the nose, mouth, chin, and forehead"[32]. Regarding the preference for the profile pose, theorists explain that this type of flat representation was intended to illustrate chastity and modesty, as the lack of eye contact or frontal gaze signaled a rejection of possible seduction[33].

Fig. 35: Fra Filippo Lippi, *Portrait of a Woman and a Man at a Casement*
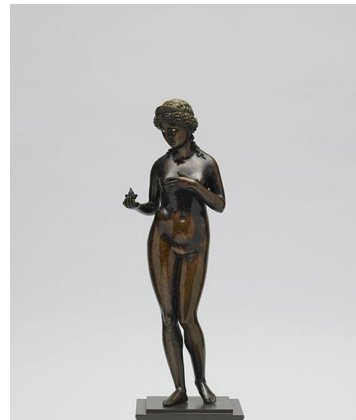
Fig. 36: Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, *Venus Caritas*

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[32] The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://jpsleesketchbook.weebly.com/field-trip-3.html, 19.03.2020.
[33] Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames, the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture", History Workshop Journal, 1988, p. 12, 20.03.2020.

In couple portraits, one of the best-known examples is by Fra Filippo Lippi, Portrait of a Woman and a Man at a Casement – the earliest surviving double portrait of the Early Renaissance, the first known portrait of a woman in a hypothetical interior, and the first to include a landscape in the background. A coat of arms is visible in the painting, and the woman wears jewelry and garments belonging to noble families. On the sleeve of her dress is a motto, according to art historians[34], "lealtà" (loyalty), embroidered in gold thread and pearls. The work was probably made to commemorate the marriage of Lorenzo di Ranieri Scolari and Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti. Classical sculptures from Antiquity were considered the most beautiful representations of the female form and served as prototypes for the ideal. By the late 16th century, Peter Paul Rubens – the leading painter of the Baroque – became famous across Europe for his religious altarpieces and grand mythological scenes. Today, however, the master is best known for his preference for full-figured, voluptuous bodies, so much so that we now refer to such body types as "Rubenesque." Venetian painters found new ways of depicting Venus, often reclining nude in a landscape or domestic setting. Although reflecting the proportions of classical statuary, The Venus of Urbino (1538, Uffizi Gallery, Florence) emphasizes the sensual warmth of the female body rather than its ideal geometry. The small bronze sculptures made by Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi – nicknamed L'Antico by his contemporaries – were a delight for collectors. "Antico was the first sculptor to realize the commercial advantages of producing identical replicas of his compositions… He created an original wax model around an iron armature… The wax could be poured or packed into the resulting mold cavity to make the casting model – often in separate components (e.g., head, torso, limbs). Despite the commercial potential of this casting approach, Antico did not use it on a large scale"[35].

The magnificent and complex sculpture by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (1647–1652), illustrates a blend of the sacred and the profane. Commissioned in 1644 by Cardinal Federico Cornaro as a funerary chapel for his family, the artist had complete freedom to imagine and describe in stone the sublime ecstasy felt by Saint Teresa of Ávila upon experiencing divine love. The swirling movement of her garments reflects the saint's restless state, her entire body in a state of tension. This combination of mysticism and sensuality is striking – and remains controversial to this day.

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[34] Keith Christiansen, Stefan Weppelmann, Patricia Lee Rubin, "Understanding Renaissance Portraiture", in The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini, 2-25. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/354/oa_edited_volume/chapter/2778920, 29.02.2020.
[35] C. Avery, 'Antico' in J. Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, Macmillan Publishers, Londra, 1996, Vol. 2, pp. 139-142.

Francesco Laurana was an itinerant artist who worked in Italy and southern France (Provence), an enigmatic figure whose body of work includes a series of idealized female portrait busts considered among the most sublime sculptures of the 15th century. His Bust of Eleanor of Aragon depicts the wife of William II Peralta, Lord of Sciacca and Count of Caltabellotta, who died in 1406. The posthumous portrait of Eleanor was idealized into a model of formal perfection that served as a benchmark for developing a feminine beauty standard in painting, embodying spiritual balance and ethical virtues.

Fig. 37: Bernini, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*   **Fig. 38**: Francesco Laurana, *Bust of Eleanor of Aragon*

A particularly remarkable work by Rubens is a Portrait of the Family of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1613–15), notable not only for the intimacy of the scene – Brueghel was a close friend and collaborator – but also because it presents a previously unseen approach to the family portrait. While group portraits were common at the time, the master's composition is unusual in how it centers the woman, who lovingly embraces her children in a protective and dominant gesture, while the male figure, Brueghel, is compressed into the edge of the frame. There's a practical explanation for this atypical dynamic – possibly the husband was added later. The position of the woman is unusual for the patriarchal family portraits typically commissioned in the Netherlands at that time. This image would later inspire Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works – for instance, Auguste Renoir's La Loge (1874), where the man is hidden in the background, in the shadows.

As far as the archetype is concerned, in 16th-century painting, in the works of Quentin Massys, we find the archetype of the "Holy Virgin." This is not the earliest example of a female saint, but the painting contains several visual elements indicating that the Virgin Mary wears a blue garment, symbolizing her elevated status in society (lapis lazuli was an expensive mineral sourced from Afghanistan at the time), embroidered with gold thread,

giving the impression that she belongs more to the social elite than to a religious painting. Like most saints, Massys's virgin has an essential attribute: she holds the infant Jesus in her arms, indicating her sacred character, accompanied by three cherub-like angels. Given that the work was likely commissioned by a noble family and not intended for a religious space, it shows that this character's projection represented the ideal of womanhood as motherhood – a positive female representation with well-defined attributes in a domestic, intimate, and protective setting. However, not all representations of women have been "positive." There are depictions of beings that oscillate between the grotesque and the sublime, between seduction and threat[36]. One such example is found in Goya's work Song and Dance (Cantar y Bailar, 1819–20), in which an elderly woman holds a guitar and opens her mouth to sing, appearing to float. Below her is a figure perceived as a witch due to the bowl and spoon with which she seems to be stirring a potion. Drawing on stereotypes of good and evil, we notice in Goya's painting two ways of illustrating evil. The archetype of the demon is an ambivalent concept – ranging from the belief in its nonexistence (as a fantastic embodiment) to its ubiquity and reality. Demonological obsession also took hold of the collective imagination in the 14th century, manifesting as anxiety intensified by the aggressive realism of sermons and artistic depictions. The traditional bestiary was expanded by scholarly texts from which terrifying images emerged – monstrous humans and hybrid creatures. The demon became a being capable of taking on any living form and gradually appeared in all representations in humanized form, diminishing the fear it may once have inspired.

Fig. 39: Goya, *Song and Dance*   **Fig. 40**: David d'Angers, *Mary Robinson*

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[36] Lorenzo Lorenzi, *Witches: Exploring the Iconography of the Sorceress and Enchantress*, Antique Collecto, SUA, 2005, p.118.

David d'Angers was the most innovative and influential portrait sculptor of the Romantic period. His early works, such as the bust of Mary Robinson, reflect the influence of neoclassical trends. Mary Robinson is depicted with striking simplicity and a focus on geometric abstraction. Her features and bow-shaped lips are precisely rendered. Her hair is styled in two large curls, an elaborately stylized coiffure. The geometric purity of the portrait is emphasized by the complete absence of decorative elements such as clothing, jewelry, or hair accessories.

Conclusions

Each archetype – whether inspired by the Holy Scriptures or by the realities of the time – be it the saint, the mother, the sensual woman, the witch, etc., has been historically classified or placed within the category of either "good" or "evil." This has led to a simplistic division of certain archetypes, which, as we have shown, are deeply rooted in the history of humanity. The examples provided here will serve as support material for the periods that will be discussed further, up to the present day.

The role and status of women in society developed significantly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With the onset of industrial and technological revolutions, women's independence grew increasingly widespread, and as more and more middle- and upper-class women gained personal incomes that allowed them to acquire or commission artworks, artists began to depict them in idealized, feminine, and seductive forms, often nude.

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Visual Prayer - The Sacred Dimension in the Art of the 1980s Generation and its Contemporary Resonances

Chiriac Emanuel[*]

Abstract: *It is inconceivable to disregard the reverberations of the artistic manifestations of the 1980s, particularly regarding Romanian art and its tendency toward codification through a religious symbolic system inspired directly by the Church. This study follows precisely this subtle thread of the blossoming of an art that bears witness to God, an art in which visual representation acquires the status of a silent prayer, by focusing on the visual language elements capable of conveying the depth and subtlety of Christian spirituality. Set against a cultural backdrop shaped by the ideological dictatorship of the communist regime, such artistic expressions opposed the harshness of censorship concerning religious freedom, and are interpreted here through the conceptual lens of artistic neo-Orthodoxy, under which this particular period of the 1980s is analyzed. Artists such as Constantin Flodor, Sorin Dumitrescu, Paul Gherasim, Horea Paştina, Horia Bernea, Onisim Colta understood this movement as a form of re-sacralization of the image, in which artistic creation becomes a personal religious experience. Moreover, artistic collectives such as Prolog, which crystallized around some of these figures, functioned as vehicles of cultural resistance, transmitting this spiritual legacy into contemporary art through the recovery of an authentic religious sensibility. Thus, the present research constitutes both a case study of sacred visual expressions at the end of the communist regime and an investigation into the enduring echoes of this aesthetic in the contemporary artistic landscape.*

Keywords: sacred dimension, visual arts, religious symbolism, neo-Orthodoxy, Romanian painting.

Introduction

We often find symbolism as a form of visual expression that offers the freedom of codification and the impulse to discover through the image. Sacred art is full of symbolism and strives to capture subtlety. Closely linked to the spirituality specific to the Christian religion, Byzantine art is oriented towards metaphysical, sensitive beauty. It is characteristic of Byzantine aesthetics that the visual arts move away from mimesis, even rejecting

[*] PhD student, "George Enescu" National University of Arts from Iași, România; Adjunct Professor, Saint "Dumitru Staniloae" Faculty of Orthodox Theology, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, România, emanuel.chrc@yahoo.com, teologie.ortodoxa@uaic.ro

secular models. Thus the disproportion, the lack of volume and form, the absence of flesh, appear as a manifestation of the idea that the material world is the transient one. The canon and symbolism have the function of creating images of the divine and the world of the soul in opposition to the world of the physical. This aesthetics is connected with the dualistic religious attitude towards the world, an attitude that considers the terrestrial world as "incarnation", as Cătălin Gheorghe observes in *Estetica Artelor Vizuale[1]*. If God became incarnate in man, then the Christian has a duty to live in total likeness to Him, keeping faith and love as the way of knowing the world. The icon is the most representative image of the Byzantine direction: "And the Word became flesh" (John 1, 14). Jesus Christ is the divine form that took concrete flesh (and therefore also form), the first to be represented in iconography as the clear evidence of the Incarnation. Also, "[Christ] is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

There is indeed a sacred side to the earthly world. Eliade briefly highlights it in God's dialogue with Moses: "Do not come near here [...] but take off your shoes from off your feet, for the place on which you are treading is holy ground" (Exodus 3, 5). He also refers to the importance of living it, concluding that "the discovery, that is to say the revelation of sacred space, has an existential value for the religious man"[2]. Except that, in modern times, "man gives up looking upwards, his preoccupations turning exclusively to the horizontality of existence."[3] Onisim Colta addresses this subject in *Cu fața spre centru*, talking about the Center that Eliade also describes, that fixed point necessary for support, orientation. "The discovery or projection of a fixed point [...] is equivalent to the Making of the World"[4]. Many artists of the 1980s find this fixed point in Orthodoxy, so, starting with Paul Gherasim, we will see this subtle sacred space engraved.

At a time when the communist ideology imposed a regime of severe control over cultural and religious life, Romanian art in the 1980s generated a profoundly distinctive direction in which visual expression became, discreetly but firmly, a form of spiritual confession. This art was to become "an art anchored in myth and ritual, an art charged with meaning, built on a cultural code."[5] Away from the official discourse and aesthetics of socialist realism, a number of artists have found in the plastic language a way to re-sacralize the image, symbolically constructing an inner space in which the sacred can be present, lived and represented once again. This tendency has often been associated with what contemporary art critics have called artistic neo-orthodoxism or neo-Orthodoxy - an orientation in which artistic form

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[1] Cătălin Gheorghe, *Estetica Artelor Vizuale*, Ed. Artes, Iași, 2010, p. 29.
[2] Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul și profanul*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2005, p. 19.
[3] Onisim Colta, *Cu fața spre centru*, Editura Brumar, Timișoara, 2008, p. 18.
[4] Mircea Eliade, *op.cit.*, p. 20.
[5] Onisim Colta, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

becomes the bearer of theological and spiritual values, not through the conventional illustration of religious themes, but through a deep interiorization of the visual language and symbols of the Orthodox tradition. In this framework, art is no longer an ideological or aesthetic discourse in itself, but it is transformed into an act of visual prayer, a gesture of withdrawal from the contingent and opening towards the transcendent. It becomes, as Mircea Eliade says, a veritable hierophany[6].*"Hierophany reveals a <<fixed point>>"*[7].

The general context of culture in the 1980s and the infiltration of the neo-Byzantine spirit

"Towards the end of the 1970s, the general situation in Romania showed signs of regression on all levels, resulting from the return to a neo-Stalinist political rigorism."[8] The 1980s in Romania have been considered by Magda Cârneci in *Artele Plastice în România 1945-1989. Cu o addenda 1990-2010* as a real return to the past, full of "stagnation and decadence"[9], marked by a tightening of ideological control exercised by the communist regime over all forms of artistic expression. In this climate of repression, in which any manifestation of a religious nature was suspect and frequently forbidden, visual artists faced a fundamental dilemma: how to express an authentic spirituality in a context hostile to the sacred? In the absence of direct freedom of expression, painting became a medium of subtle resistance, a vehicle through which the religious dimension was camouflaged, disguised or transfigured into symbolic language." Socialist realism was, for a long time, the only accepted plastic expression."[10] Paradoxically, in the field of art, a revival of spirituality is taking place, with artists using themes and symbols in the spirit of Christian art in their language.

The official exhibitions privileged socialist realism or anodyne themes, while any attempt to reintroduce religious symbols was considered ideologically inappropriate. That "state kitsch [...] is embodied in an art <<of apparatus>> that resolutely turns its back on even the previously academizing modernism in order to regain a kind of socialist neorealism."[11] The thematic lines are, for example, portraits, allegorical compositions, figures of great leaders, historical figures of Romania, folklore. There is also a mass

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[6] hierophany - the act of manifesting the sacred. The word is formed by joining the Greek adjective hieros (Greek ἱερός; sacred/holy) with the verb phainein (Greek φαίνειν; to uncover/bring to light).

[7] Mircea Eliade, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

[8] Magda Cârneci, *Artele Plastice în România 1945-1989. Cu o addenda 1990-2010*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2013,p. 111.

[9] Magda Cârneci, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

[10] TVR- Adevăruri despre trecut: Arta sacră în epoca de aur - artiștii, 15 decembrie 2022, Gheorghe Preda.

[11] Magda Cârneci, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

"culturalization" of the people, with the national festival "Song of Romania", which discourages professional art by involving amateur and naive art. A return to history also persists, with historically inspired themes that are nevertheless distinguished by a qualitative aesthetic, such as the work of Vasile Gorduz or Paul Vasilescu. Onisim Colta calls this orientation a danger of defining man as a "historical being"[12], instead of a being with vertical aspirations. Historiographical consciousness is brutally and inappropriately encouraged, not so much to know our past and our forebears as to stifle the future.

Paradoxically, it was precisely this ideological pressure that fostered the emergence of a deeply interiorized art, and artists found in sacred art a source of inspiration that not only allowed them to tap into a rich visual tradition, but also to introduce into the plastic space a set of perennial spiritual values: humility, inner light, contemplation. In this way, religiosity was not rendered through explicit narration, but through the quality of presence: a "visual silence" that functioned as a mute prayer. The first notable group to combat the communist spirit was the "Păltiniș group", a group of intellectuals formed around the philosopher Constantin Noica. They considered high culture "the only valid form of resistance to political aberration"[13] Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu, Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, open a perspective to which many authors in the plastic arts are also affiliated. A thin thread connects these lovers of culture, namely spiritual awakening, which remains the only dissidence that the regime has not been able to destroy, despite its attempts. In an interview with Cristina Chirvasie, Dan Mohanu recalls the rapid demolition of 23 churches in Bucharest in the 1970-1980s, the first of which was Enei Church. "Until the demolition was decided, [...] we improvised a small site and extracted a few fragments from the porch, the only place where we had old paintings from the first half of the 18th century."[14] By this manifest desire to break down all forms of exaltation, the neo-Obizantinist current is born precisely contrary to it.

Neo-Byzantinism did not confront the regime with a frontal opposition, but created a form of silent defense, in which the image, despite the restrictions, continued to bear witness to a transcendent reality. "These artists proposed a twofold form of resistance through art, on the one hand through culture, through a personal example, to an alienated, atheistic and aberrant political system, and on the other hand through an extremely audacious attempt to create an enclave at the heart of a world characterized by entropy, by syncretism devoid of any trace of sacred thrill."[15]

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[12] Onisim Colta, *op.cit.*, p. 18.
[13] Magda Cârneci, *op.cit.*, p. 117.
[14] Dan Mohanu în *Lemnul viu. Revoluția Modelelor*, Cristina Chirvasie, Ed. Fundației Culturale Memoria, București, 2023, p. 183.
[15] Onisim Colta, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

This style developed as a symbolic dimension of great refinement, in which spirituality is not ostentatiously asserted, but discreetly suggested, inviting the viewer to a meditative reading of the canvas, enclosing an assumption of simplicity as a spiritual value. In opposition to visual spectacle or descriptive realism, such as that proposed by historical socialism, the artists affiliated to this direction choose an essentialized visual vocabulary, based on archetypal forms such as the circle, the cross, the square, the vertical and horizontal line, symbolic geometry. Sorin Dumitrescu's "hypersigns" use geometry as a language to emphasize that there is a deeper space, as Colta also remarks, "in his <<soaring>> architectures verticality, elevation is invoked"[16]. The restrained, sober palette, inspired by Byzantine iconography: muted reds, ochres, lime whites, dark blues or deep blacks, emphasizes vibrancy and presence.

The Prolog Group and contemporary echoes of religious symbolism

"Sometimes God may dispose the matter of the world to utter through it human words, or to form a human face. But those words or that face are not so necessary and appropriate a form to him as they are to the human soul. In general, however, God manifests Himself through the world, through the ordinary forms of its existence, far more inadequate to render the divine life."[17]

What Father Dumitru Stăniloaie expresses theologically starts from the inadequacy of the material world to express divine life, but this theory develops by also focusing on God's readiness to manifest himself through any form of life. It is precisely this disposition that has a special resonance in the context of the Prolog group. The artists of this movement do not aim to render the Divine in an illustrative way or to make the sacred message accessible. On the contrary, their approach aims to reveal humility, free from any visual spectacle. In line with Father Stăniloaie, the group develops a poetics of discretion and transparency. The name "Prolog" is not accidental, for it suggests a series of symbolic beginnings, a form of opening towards new meanings. Prolog has never functioned as a strictly organized movement, but rather as a loose communion of spiritual intentions, in which each artist kept a voice of their own, but worked in accordance with a common inner "listening". Prologue " is a soul connection, a bond in spirit and truth, I would say, that is strong, enduring and holds them together. There is nothing formalistic about it."[18] This attitude was in resonance with

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[16] *Ibidem*, p. 35

[17] Dumitru Stăniloaie, *O teologie a icoanei/ Studii*, Editura Fundației Anastatsia, Editor Sorin Dumitrescu, 2005, p. 91.

[18] Dan Mohanu în *Lemnul viu. Revoluţia Modelelor*, Cristina Chirvasie, Ed. Fundaţiei Culturale Memoria, Bucureşti, 2023, p. 174.

the Orthodox ethos, with the Isist teaching, but without being closed in a religious literalism and without any aesthetic doctrine. The group's spirit could even be seen as daring from two points of view that Magda Cârneci captures. On the one hand, compared with the international context of art at the time, the painters' choice of a figurativism adorned with a system of religious symbolism shows their indifference to the inflation on the international market. On the other hand, active participation in the Orthodox Church can be seen "as a gesture of moral courage and spiritual independence"[19]reported to communist propaganda.

Paul Gherasim – born 1925

Onisim Colta calls Paul Gherasim "the most significant artist constantly living in the Myoritic spatial horizon of the group of those chosen to prefigure painting in ritual, in doxological act"[20]. Of course, the entire Prolog group considers him the father of Neo-Byzantine painting, being the eldest among them. The peasants in Gherasim's painting are transfigured into totemic, essentialized figures in a universe of liturgical contemplation. So are nature and flowers. Two directions of his artistic style can be identified, one of them stemming from the inspiration of iconography, as we can see in Figure 1, with a specific coloring of ochre and blue. He is recomposing the iconographic canon, using tinges specific to the expressionism of the time. The artist understood the artistic act as a spiritual work, where the plastic form is inseparable from the spiritual content. The second direction can be seen in his pure symbolism, where his chromatic range is dominated by "leaden grays that dramatically charge the composition" and balance is achieved with "pigments of purplish reds or muted crimsons"[21]. His work, though less long-lived, is marked by its strength.

Fig. 1 Paul Gherasim - *Martyrs*, 2005

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[19] Magda Cârneci, *op.cit.*, p. 133.
[20] Onisim Colta, *op.cit.*, p. 91.
[21] *Ibidem*, p. 102.

Constantin Flondor – born 1936

Constantin Flondor is both the founder of the Prolog group, together with Paul Gherasim, Horia Paştina and Mihai Sârbulescu, and of the "1.1.1." and "Sigma", starting in theory from "some constructivist experiences, with an emphasis on teamwork"[22], Onisim Colta's observation which reveals the origin of the dominant group spirit of the Neo-Byzantine. In fact, "the need for solidarity, to be together with others may be one explanation"[23] says the artist in an interview at Elite Art Gallery, Bucharest. Flondor's artistic search combines happening, action, installation, photography, film and performance, later returning to painting as a re-encounter with the self, the essence of nature being captured in works such as the Veranda series (Figure 2). Flondor pursues delicacy, transparencies but also spontaneity.

Fig. 2 Constantin Flondor - *Veranda*, 2012

Fig. 3 Horia Bernea - *Prapor*, 1982

Horia Bernea – born 1938

Horia Bernea was a member of the Prolog group representing a figure of post-war Romanian art, not only as a painter, but also as a cultural reformer as director of the Romanian Peasant Museum. He integrated in his work signs and structures inspired by traditional iconography, redefining the relationship between art and faith in an uncanonical but deeply orthodox way. The "Prapori" series, including Prapor 1982, Figure 3, is considered by Onisim Colta to be inexhaustible, as it is not "a variation on the same theme",

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[22] Onisim Colta, *op.cit.*, p. 74.
[23] https://www.eliteart-gallery.com/interviu-constantin-flondor/

but "an obsessive repetition of its formulation"[24], being surprised by the relentless joy of each beginning.

Sorin Dumitrescu – born 1946

Quoting Magda Cârneci, we can confirm about Sorin Dumitrescu that "he remains without a doubt the guiding spirit and the most active theorist of the group."[25] His exhibition "Hypersigns" from 1980 includes drawings, paintings, sculptural objects of great visual and poetic force, in the opening of the exhibition Dumitrescu enjoying the choice words of Nichita Stănescu. As one of the members of the Prolog group moving towards an increasingly purist orthodoxy, he transforms his works "in the direction of a high religious aestheticism, synthesizing elements of Byzantine and post-Byzantine iconography from the register of the icon"[26]. Dan Mohanu saw this strong turn towards the icon as a way of turning its back on contemporary art, which has been in danger of falling "into a kind of epigonism without substance, of mannerism" since the period of the "hyper-signs"[27].

Fig. 4 Sorin Dumitrescu - *Church*, 2004

Fig. 5 Onisim Colta – *Holy Book*, 2020

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[24] Onisim Colta, *op.cit.*, p. 35.
[25] Magda Cârneci, *op.cit.*, p. 133.
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 134.
[27] Dan Mohanu în *Lemnul viu. Revoluția Modelelor*, Cristina Chirvasie, Ed. Fundației Culturale Memoria, București, 2023, p. 169.

Onisim Colta – born 1952

"Light has always fascinated me precisely by the power of its immaterial presence, by its imponderable content, perceiving it as an essential element that announces the presence of spiritual energies that hold things together."[28] Light is also that Center considered by Eliade the supreme balance of man. This is Onisim Colta's way of thinking, with repercussions in plastic art. This presence of light helps him to create huge volumetries in contrast with the shadow, volumetries of objects of worship, objects with sacred or liturgical significance, as we can see in The Holy Book, 2020 (Figure 5). Marcel Tolcea also captures another side of light, "it is the Absence of light, the window, beyond the columns, the beehive, the persistence of the shadow, the book's tabs, the celestial wake of the footprint. But what is truly fascinating in his art is how this Absence paradoxically becomes Presence. [...] Onisim Colta constructs a visual discourse about an Absence - Presence constructed in a sacred space of expectation."[29]

Horea Paștina – born 1956

An echo of the Prolog group is also represented by Horea Paștina, recognized for his iconically simple paintings, in which floral, vegetal or domestic motifs are transposed into contemplative, sacramental registers. His works are distinguished by the delicacy of his pictorial gesture and a luminous palette dominated by white, ochre and warm tones. Within the Prolog group, Pastina is the gentle voice, close to the philocalic spirit and the blessed silence of forms reduced to their essence. In an interview with Cristina Chirvasie, he describes his humble activity himself, "my paths were: to the Father[30], in church and at home[...] Father worked every day. I tried to do the same thing at the easel."[31] From the close friendship with Father Dumitru Stăniloaie emerge a series of "transparent" portraits, the human features getting lost in the unsaturation of color, revealing precisely that sacred vibration of the Father. One of these can be seen in Figure 6, created in 2019.

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[28] Onisim Colta, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

[29] Marcel Tolcea, speech at the opening of the exhibition *The Birth of Light, Onisim Colta*, 10 mai 2023, appeared in the catalogue *Nașterea Luminii / The Birth of Light*, Muzeul de Artă Arad, Ed. Alutus, Miercurea Ciuc, 2023, p. 32.

[30] Referring to Father Dumitru Stăniloaie.

[31] Horea Paștina în *Lemnul viu. Revoluția Modelelor*, Cristina Chirvasie, Ed. Fundației Culturale Memoria, București, 2023, p. 207.

Fig. 6 Horea Paștina -
Father Dumitru Stăniloaie, 2019

Fig. 7 Horea Paștina -
The Stone Cross, 1991

Considerations

As a cultural legacy, we can understand that the painting of the 1980s took shape as a profound act of cultural and spiritual resistance. Manifesting itself in an oppressive climate dominated by the atheist ideology of the communist regime, we could observe the neo-Byzantine infiltrations of artists who still believed in a strengthening center that was faith. The members of the Prolog group reconfigured the meanings of painting, reconnecting with Christian-Orthodox values and cultivating an aesthetic of visual silence that can be read as a visual Prayer. The legacy of the Prolog group and the socio-cultural context of the 1980s is also reflected in contemporary art, where the preoccupation with the sacred continues to generate forms of plastic expression that glorify the inner beauty. In the context of a universal postmodernism marked by conceptual art, the function of painting is in a state of crisis, questioning its traditional role.This aesthetic climate seems to confirm the considerations of the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, who proclaimed the "death of art"[32], understood as an end in terms of its classical form. Hegel anticipates "the shift of emphasis from the understanding of art as a response to social needs [...] to its autonomous status"[33], which ends in a growing distance from the Church. Thus, in spite of the fragmentation of artistic

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[32] G.W.F. Hegel, *Prelegeri de estetică*, vol. I, Ed. Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, București, 1966, p. 17.
[33] Adrian Stoleriu, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

discourse, the sacred does not disappear, but is recreated in new forms, retreating in the form of symbol.

List of illustrations:

Fig. 1 Paul Gherasim - *Martyrs*, 2005, source https://sensoarte.ro/clipa-de-arta/paul-gherasim-retrospectiva/

Fig. 2 Constantin Flondor - *Veranda*, 2012, source https://www.galateca.ro/servicii/arta/constantin-flondor.html

Fig. 3 Horia Bernea - *Prapor*, 1982, source https://www.wikiart.org/en/horia-bernea/prapor-1982

Fig. 4 Sorin Dumitrescu - *The Church*, 2004, source https://ansazura.com/en/artist/sorin-dumitrescu/the-church

Fig. 5 Onisim Colta - *Holy Book*, 2020 source https://www.uniuneascriitorilorarad.ro/ARCA/2020/2_2020/09_album_colta_2_2020.html

Fig. 6 Horea Paștina - *Father Dumitru Stăniloaie*, 2019, source https://horeapastina.com/in-agora/

Fig. 7 Horea Paștina - *The Stone Cross*, 1991, source https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/The-Stone-Cross--Crucea-de-Piatra-/AC59D53F77A98FEC

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BOOK REVIEWS

18th Century Engravers in Romanian Art History. M. Striblițchi as a Case in Point

Ana-Magdalena Petraru *

Anca Elisabeta Tatay, Cornel Tatai-Baltă, *Gravorul Mihail Striblițchi (A doua jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea) / Mihail Striblițchi, the Engraver (Second Half of the 18th Century),* Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, 350 pages.
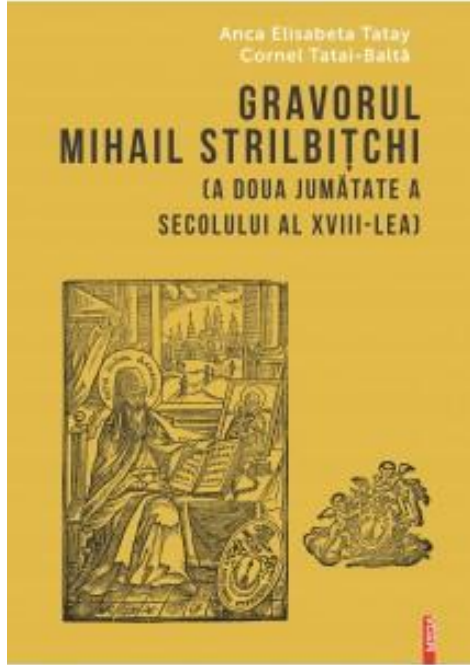
The two art historians from Transylvania, Anca Elisabeta Tatay, and her father, Cornel Tatai-Baltă give us an accurate account of the life and activity of Mihail Striblițchi, reputed engraver of the 18th century in their latest book which came out two years ago. Rigorously organized in their research, the two art historians start with an argument, continue with a short overview of the engraver's life and activity, deal with the engravings, prints and apart from conclusions, they include comprehensive tables on books he contributed to, places where they are kept nowadays, engravings signed by him or attributed to him and his collaborators, the format of his books, printing houses they came out at and their illustrations, a general bibliography of the

* Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Letters, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, email: alina.petraru@gmail.com.

volume and another one on him, ending with reproductions of title pages, book covers, illustrations and ornaments.

According to the argument of the volume, their work was published in the larger context of an increasing interest in old Romanian books and their illustrations (1508-1830), included in the comprehensive treaty on art in our country from prehistory to modern times, i.e., *Arta din România. Din preistorie în conteporaneitate*, vol. I-II, edited by Răzvan Theodorescu and Marius Porumb (2018)[1]. Three recent articles drafted by the authors lie the foundations of their endeavour[2] (pp. 9-10) and their gratitude is especially expressed towards two "distinguished ladies from Kiev, Alina Kondratiuk (Lavra Pekerska) and Valentyna Bochkovska (Museum of Books and Printing of Ukraine), reputed researchers who, in February 2022 (when Russia started the war against Ukraine), had to leave their own country" (p. 5).

Main contributor to Romanian culture, Mihail Striblițchi (ca. 1730-1805/ 1807), probably of Polish-Russian-Ukrainian descent, graduated from the Theological Academy of Kiev and distinguished himself as editor, engraver, translator and author, among others (p. 11). His engravings were (un)favourably discussed by few authors, Iorga and Balș (1922) arguing that he was 'detestable in style, brutally reproducing Russian models in a time when old Byzantinism was contaminated by Western influences', whereas Ștrempel (1956) praised his engravings as particularly 'appealing' and 'suggestive' (pp. 15-16).

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[1] Cornel Tatai-Baltă, *Grafica de carte, sec. XVI-XVII,* in *Arta din România din preistorie în contemporaneitate,* vol. I, edited by acad. Răzvan Theodorescu, acad. Marius Porumb, București – Cluj-Napoca, Editura Academiei Române – Editura Mega, 2018, pp. 393-401 (Țara Românească), pp. 503-504 (Moldova), pp. 637-639 (Transilvania). Cornel Tatai-Baltă, *Grafica de carte, sec. XVIII,* in *Arta din România din preistorie în contemporaneitate*, vol. II, ed.: acad. Răzvan Theodorescu, acad. Marius Porumb, București – Cluj-Napoca, Editura Academiei Române – Editura Mega, 2018, pp. 53-57 (Țara Românească), pp. 77-79 (Moldova), pp. 105-108 (Transilvania).

[2] Anca Elisabeta Tatay, Cornel Tatai-Baltă, *Primele ilustrații ale unui calendar românesc (Iași, 1785, tipograf: Mihail Striblițchi)*, in *Apulum, Series Historia & Patrimonium. Supplementum* (Alba Iulia), LXI, 2024, pp. 121-149; Anca Elisabeta Tatay, Cornel-Tatai Baltă, *Ukrainian Sources of the Illustrations in the Gospel of Iași from 1762*, in vol. *Bibilica et Philologica*, Konstanz (Germany), Harting-Gorre Publishers, 2024, in print; Anca Elisabeta Tatay, Cornel Tatai-Baltă, *Reprezentările Regelui David semnate de Mihail Striblițchi (1782-1794)*, in vol. *Zamfirei Mihail omagiu,* ed.: Cătălina Vătășescu, Lia Brad Chisacof, Simona Nicolae, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Scriptor & Ed. Mega, 2024, in print.

It is believed that M. Striblițchi descended from a family of engravers, and he initially made the portrait of the preacher Nicholas Mauroeides from Kefalonia (1708-1788) in metal from his Greek book; it came out in Iași in 1756, and it was the first of its kind as he would continue his engravings in wood and leave metal aside. The authors note that it is also the first portrait of a local author in old Romanian books printed on our territory (pp. 18-19). The four evangelists bear his signature, and they are part of the 1762 *Gospel Book* of Iași (p. 20). For instance, Luke is said to have been engraved following the Baroque tradition in which the intense feelings of the character are grasped in movement, along with the folds of his vestments (p. 23). In 1777 at Iași, two books come out at the Metropolitan Printing House, *Catahisis* and *Book of Hours/ Ceasolov* and their marvellously ornamented title pages bear Striblitchi's signature (p. 25). The former also contains an illustration by Striblițchi on Jesus Christ which determined George Oprescu to label it as 'correctly drawn and beautifully traced'[3]. The Saviour is depicted as stepping on clouds with the globe on the cross in one hand, a symbol used since the Middle Ages to allude to Him as Master of the world and blessing with the other hand, also a feature of Baroque art, according to A. Tatay and C. Tatai-Baltă (p. 26). The latter shows the Annunciation in the margins of the title page frame, unusually rendered for the Romanian space, argue the authors, surmounted by God the Father with a triangular nimb, flanked by saints Joachim and Anne, a theme that had not been encountered in engravings in our country (pp. 27-28).

Another book that was published in Iași under the auspices of Mihail Striblițchi is the 1784 *Prăvilioara*, a collection of explanations on the seven Christian sacraments; it contains an engraving of the Metropolitan Gavriil (Gabriel) of Moldavia during the religious service accompanied by a priest (possibly Striblițchi himself) and an apprentice in a ceremonial composition animated by the characters' attitude developed on two registers, a heavenly and an earthly one: Jesus Christ is shown sitting on clouds, flanked by two military saints, George and Gabriel, a device often employed in Baroque art (pp. 38-39). *The 112 Yearbook/ Calendarul pe 112* (Iași, 1785) printed in

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[3] See Gh. Oprescu, *Grafica românească în secolul al XIX-lea*, vol. I, București, Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1942, p. 123, 302.

Romanian[4] is richly ornated with various wood engravings, some signed by him and his son, others, less so; yet the authors suspect it was the work of father and son, as in the case of the frontispieces and vignettes (p. 42). The yearbook stirred much interest in its time, and the relation with the influences of planets and signs, all astrological and astronomic landmarks related to the measurement of the annual and monthly cycle, not to mention the meteorological implications adjusted to a defined space and its surroundings draw on Christianity and speak of the need to master the anguish of time that gave birth to divinatory literature in Antiquity. It is the authors' belief that despite the lacking signature, the engraving of the *Zodiac* belongs to M. Striblițchi (pp. 43-44). They further discuss the zodiacal signs and their interpretations, their governing planets and the various beings or objects that are specific to them (pp. 48-54).

His activity as translator is equally accounted for; he translated from Russian and published in Iași a physiognomy treatise, *Curioznică și în scurt arătare celor ce iubesc a cerca vrednice învățături din fiziognomie* inspired by the German model of Gaspar Lavater, *Von der Physionomik*, Leipzig, 1772[5]. It provides us the first notions of anatomy of the body in Romanian, Striblițchi drawing without signature, the head of a man, his forehead wrinkled within a rectangle of typographic ornaments and an inscription above his head inviting readers to reflection; nature, with all its facets (that would later become a phenomenological cube which would equally reveal and hide from us, based on our position) has been construed as a secret writing, a figure in the carpet in the Jamesian acception, a huge cryptogram of the Creator only wise men could decipher using several techniques (physiognomy, necromancing, hydromancy, astronomy, etc.) (p. 57). In 1785, other books come out at M. Striblițchi's printing house in Iași, namely *Hrisovul lui Alexandru I Mavrocordat Domnul Moldovei* and the *Evangelion* (or *Molitvenic*) (pp. 59-60). In the following year, an *Oktoikh* was published and the volume is elegantly decorated with the portrait of Saint John of Damascus, bearing the insertion and the coat of arms of Moldavia with the name of the typographer in question,

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[4] For further details, see Ioan Bianu, Nerva Hodoș, *Bibliografia românească veche (1508-1530)*, tom II, 1716-1808, București, Atelierele Socec & Co., Soc. Anonimă, 1910, pp. 301-302.

[5] See also, Eugenia Dima, Gabriela E. Dima, *Traducătorii români și traducerile laice din secolul al XVIII-lea*, Ed. Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Iași, 2016, p. 45, 222.

Mihail Stribliț. Saint John of Damascus appears to be a bearded old man who has also grown a moustache, sitting at his writing desk inside; an inkwell, a rosary and an icon of the Mother of God with baby Jesus in her arms can be found on this desk. The saint is wearing Oriental clothes, similar to those of monks and, in the background, an open window invites us to a bird-eye view of the city, people walking (pp. 62-63). In 1789, three lay bilingual books came out at M. Striblițchi's printing house, *De-ale casei vorbe rusești și moldovenești*, *În scurtă adunare a numelor* both compiled by the engraver and *Lecționele* by Toader Școleru with the first frontispiece containing stylized vegetal elements (p. 66). A *Psalter* is published in 1790 and here, old frontispieces and vignettes would be mixed with new ones along with a full page xylo engraving of King David II by Striblițchi (pp. 67-68). The depiction is obviously different from the many images of the creator of the psalms in old Romanian books[6]. Portrayed as standing and playing the harp, on the table before him there is an open book with music notes, the crown and the sceptre lying on a pillow in a monumental chamber with high columns that support an arch, and walls which have big lattice windows. God is represented as a sun, Yahve written on it, and the rays enlighten the saint (p. 69). Among his engravings, there is the Entombment of Christ of the 1792 *Book of Hours*, drawing on German graphic art in the era of Enlightenment; all characters around Christ confess a strong love and composed pain in a setting in which a natural display of feelings and the diversity of attitudes are obvious. Intersemiotically put, in a linguistic stance adopted by R. Jakobson in the definition of translation, M. Striblițchi professionally drew and engraved the biblical scene recorded by the Book of Books, similarly to Renaissance artists Albrecht Dürer with his 1509 *Small Passion Cycle* and Lucas Cranach the Elder's one (p. 74). M. Striblițchi was also a spy who had to leave Iași when needed, hence his activity at Dubăsari whose proven existence resides in the three works there, *Bucvar* (1792), of interest to all those who wanted to become literate, *Cântec după răposare preluminatului cneaz Grigorie Alexandrovici Potemkin Tavricescu* (1793), a book-length song following the death of the general, and the *Book of Hours/ Ceaslov* (1794), followed by the books printed at Movilău: *Istoria lui*

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[6] According to the authors' previous research, i.e., Cornel Tatai-Baltă, Anca Elisabeta Tatay, *Instrumente muzicale în xilogravura de carte românească veche (sec. XVII-XIX),* in *Transilvania* (Sibiu), nr. 5-6, 2018, pp. 30-36.

Alexandru cel Mare/ History of Alexander the Great (1796), *Psaltire/ Psalter* (1796) and another *Bucvar* (1800), to which a volume of poems can be added, *Poezii noo* (1795?) that came out at either Dubăsari or Movilău. The Dubăsari *Bucvar* of 1792 contains an engraving of the Holy Trinity by Striblițchi, in its Western drafting, also frequent in the Eastern world, in general and the Romanian one, in particular (pp. 75-76). In addition, the authors deal thoroughly with the nine illustrations of the 1794 *Book of Hours* (pp. 78-88). After 1800 or to be more precise, following M. Striblițchi's death which occurred in 1805/1807, three engravings were recorded in books from the Neamț monastery and the authors attribute one of them to the clergyman tackled by the current volume (p. 89).

A 'rare and curious' clerical figure[7], priest M. Striblițchi was definitely involved in the work of many covers of church books for the Metropolitanate of Iași and the monasteries of Moldavia, and the results will most likely surface in the future[8] (p. 93). The authors found the oldest source on Striblițchi's activity in Moldavia to be the skin cover for *Apoftegmata adică Cuvinte vitievești sau filosofești* (1755), a text translated from Russian into Romanian by Vartolomei Măzăreanu at the request of the Metropolitan of the time, currently in the collections of the Mihai Eminescu University Library in Iași (p. 94). The oldest *Pomelnic* of the Putna monastery still kept in its library and dating from 1756 has the cover bearing the signature of priest Mihai from Iași and the initials M.S. can be encountered on the front. The central circular medallions differ, the front being marked by the representation of the Crucifixion, whereas the back proposes a Western theme, not encountered by A.E. Tatay and C. Tatai-Baltă so far in the graphics of old Romanian books, the Mother of God in pain. Here, the Virgin whose hands are joined in prayer, holds her head down and glances with great sorrow at the lifeless body of Her Son, lying on His grave. The pain is similar to the sword that pierced His heart, also depicted by the craftsman. Behind Her, a barren cross rises and, on the background, we can grasp the city of Jerusalem. Both scenes are surrounded by flowers (pp. 95-96). Among the book covers of lay books, there is the one of the French-Turkish Dictionary (1805), with

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[7] Dumitru Furtună, *Preoțimea românească în sec. al XVIII-lea: starea ei materială și culturală*, Vălenii de Munte, Ed. Neamul Românesc, 1915, p. 165.
[8] Dimitrie Dan, *Protopopul Mihail Striblițchi (schiță biografică și bibliografică)*, in *Candela* (Cernăuți), 1912, p. 7.

the Moldavian coat of arms on the front and the Wallachian one on the back (p. 99).

To conclude, the volume presents M. Striblițchi's life and activity for the first time in our country. The authors' research led to the following results: 30 titles of the books he contributed to are kept in today's libraries and 10 volumes for whom he gave us marvelous skin covers. They analysed 45 engravings, all in wood, except for one in metal, besides the frontispieces and vignettes of the books he had a part in between 1777-1800 (p. 102). Out of them, 41 bear his signature in various ways. He tackled mainly religious themes as priest and exarch of Moldavia during his time at the printing house of the Metropolitanate in Iași. However, his lay prints, which fill a gap, are poor with respect to ornamentation, except for the 1785 *Yearbook*, a phenomenon encountered where Romanians lived at the time (p. 103). Undoubtedly, he was the most important editor, typographer and engraver of the second half of 18th century Moldavia (p. 104); last but not least, we should cherish him for his engravings that were role models for some miniaturists active on Romanian territory at the time or afterwards (p. 106). Thus, we recommend the book to all art historians, specialists and amateurs interested in old Romanian books and their engravings, the history of the book and print in our country and neighbouring ones.

The Trainer of Geniuses: Florian Colceag, PhD Professor

Paula - Andreea Onofrei⁎

Florian Colceag, *Potențialul extraordinar al copilului tău. Cum să-i recunoști și să-i dezvolți genialitatea / The Extraordinary Potential of Your Child. How to Recognize and Develop One's Genius,* Bookzone Publishing House, 2024, 272 pages.
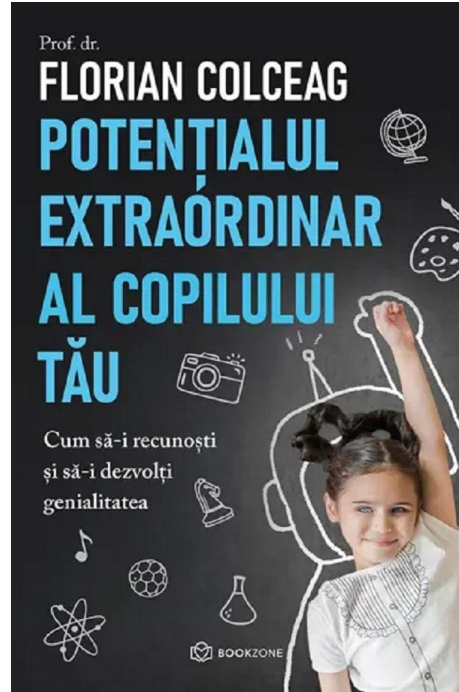
According to Professor Florian Colceag, PhD Professor, also known as "The trainer of geniuses", each child has the innate ability to become extraordinary – it is the duty of the parent and of the teacher to unlock the genius inside the child.

We consider this book to be a revolutionary essential guide for all parents / teachers that want their children / students to grow being curious, creative, balanced and happy. The main idea of this book is that one can develop and grow the genius of a child. In a world which cares less and less about education, in a world where smartphones, tablets, computers and television sets steal more and more of our precious time and of our possibility to become better, this book offers practical help in order to cultivate one's genius in a natural, stimulative environment, far away from the negative influences of nowadays'

⁎ Lecturer of English, PhD, Faculty of Computer Science, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, paulaonofrei.ro@gmail.com, paula.onofrei@info.uaic.ro

world. Parents and teachers do play a vital, essential role in the development of a balanced and creative personality, also being an emotional and intellectual guide for the child. What is important about this book is the fact that it offers a holistic approach, blending liberty, knowledge, perseverance, empathy.

First of all, let us focus our attention on the content of this volume, which is structured in the following way: Introduction, Chapter 1-7, Conclusion, Instead of ending, Selective Bibliography.

To begin with, Chapter 1, entitled *"Codul de referinta" catre un mic geniu* [*"The Reference Code" towards a Small Genius*] deals with the journey towards the development of one's personality, also presenting the features of a personality with genius potential. Furthermore, it is highly emphasized the idea that children up to the age of 10 have a special mental flexibility and can reach their full potential, provided that their parents (the so-called "seven years from home") and also their educators unite their forces in order to build the architecture of a future personality. In a nutshell, the essence of this chapter is concentrated in the following translated fragment: one's personality is "a dynamic force that models each individual through feelings, emotions and experiences, being unique for the unique defining of each human being. The development of personality begins ever since the child is in the intrauterine phase, being deeply influenced by the emotions and activities that the mother has, thus modelling the future of her child. In the prenatal phase, the fetus is extremely receptive to the emotional changes of the mother, this fact can have a significant impact on one's future development. Moreover, the environment and the specific culture influence the development of one's personality, showing that identity and society role are modeled by a combination of individual and collective factors.

Holistic education is about the development of the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social, physical, artistic and creative potential of each child; it also encourages the involvement of children in the process of learning and personal and collective responsibility.

A future genius personality can be recognized as one has the following features: insatiable curiosity, perseverance, overflowing creativity, deep empathy, outstanding autonomy regarding learning, ability to focus intensely.

The role of parental behaviour and the values transmitted by parents are essential for the modelling of the child's social, emotional

and communicative abilities, underlining the importance of the example offered by the adult in one's development."[1]

Chapter 2, named *"Cum putem creşte un geniu?"* [*"How can we grow a genius?"*] is a well-structured part that underlines the evolution of a child according to age phases, to be more specific it includes the prenatal period and birth, 1-12 months -baby, 1-3 years small child, 4-6 years preschool child, 7-12 years pre-puberty child, 13-18 years adolescent, after 18 years. The conclusions of this chapter are the following: "The pre-natal period is essential in the development of the child, having a deep influence on one's emotional, intellectual and physical development, underlining the importance of a positive environment and of a harmonious connection between mother and her unborn child. What we have found intriguing is the statement: "A 2 year old child has twice the number of synapses of an adult. Therefore, a child's brain can learn faster than in any other period of one's life. Consequently, the child's experience at this age has a decisive impact on one's long-term development."[2] In this respect, it is of vital importance to offer your child the proper attention, activities and feedback in order to create a safe, relaxed environment for learning.

Chapter 3 is called *"Caracteristicile unui copil-geniu si cultivarea unor abilitati esentiale" ["The Features of a Genius-Child and the Development of Essential Abilities"].* In my opinion, this is the essence of this book, for it is a clear, well-structured radiography of the essential aspects that should be identified, first of all, by parents and afterwards by teacher and academic professors. In this respect, this volume offers the list of Mensa (a nonprofit international organization of people having an IQ higher than the average people, Mensa members are among the first 2% regarding the results obtained after applying the intelligence tests used by the organization). To continue, we are going to mention here some of the signs of a gifted child who may have the potential of becoming a genius:

-unusual memory

-early reading

-unusual passion or interest in topics which are less common or extensive knowledge of some topics

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[1] Colceag Florian, PhD teacher, *Potentialul extraordinar al copilului tau. Cum sa-i recunosti si sa-I dezvolti genialitatea [The Extraordinary Potential of Your Child. How to Recognize and Develop One's Genius]*,   Bookzone Publishing House, Bucharest, 2024, Conclusions, page 24, my translation.

[2] Idem, page 54, my translation.

-awareness regarding world events
-asking questions all the time
-a very developed sense of humour
-musical talent
-the child enjoys being in control
-the child creates new rules for games.

Moreover, there are NASA studies which are debated upon (George Land and Beth Jarman, 1960) regarding creativity and genius in the case of children. It is also mentioned the fact that there are some very clear signs of a gifted child who is above the average, having a very high potential. "The child becomes bored easily, one has rich vocabulary for one's age, being very curious, a deep morality and developed sense of humour, one has difficulties at school and regarding social interactions. In many cases, the child presents signs of desynchronization, meaning there is a gap between intellectual development (which is high) and emotional development (which is below one's age), the child showing signs of hypersensitivity and emotional dependency.

What is particularly intriguing is the fact that this book takes into account the 8 types of learner (Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences) and suggests activities that would be suitable for each type of intelligence. It is essential to have both teachers and parents that address these types of intelligence in specific ways, because we all know that a predefined curriculum will not help students who are different, but it will only lead to standardized learning which does not encourage creativity, critical thinking and curiosity to discover more.

Special attention should be given to the subchapter called *"Metode de stimulare a inteligentei intelectuale si emotionale" ("Methods of stimulating intellectual and emotional intelligence"),* because our children are also the result of our involvement as parents and shapers of HUMAN BEINGS. Empathy is also highly ranked in the list of social abilities and there are clearly defined ideas that underline the fact that the Romanian school is not designed for encouraging life skills, for developing one's creativity and genius abilities. The challenge is, therefore, on the shoulders of parents and private teachers to develop the child's innate features, consequently this books rings a bell regarding not only the way our educational system is designed, but also the possible paths to be taken and

developed in order to have better results as accomplished learners of all ages.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to "The Early Education of a Child", Chapter 5 deals with "Typologies and Learning Styles", Chapter 6 is about "The Proper Environment for a Child's Evolution" and the last one, Chapter 7 is about "Autism and Intelligence. Is Autism Associated With Being a Genius?"

In a nutshell, this book **The Extraordinary Potential of Your Child. How to Recognize and Develop One's Genius** is valuable because it offers well-structured pieces of advice concerning the development of children up the age of adulthood, it is both a theoretical and practical volume that is meant to raise awareness regarding the beautiful gifts that need to be developed in our toddlers, schoolgirls and schoolboys and adolescents. Moreover, Florian Colceag, known as "The Creator of Geniuses", has trained the mathematics olympic team of Romania, he has reached the world record of having 60 golden medals at international contests obtained by the students that he has guided and trained with passion and perseverance.

Book Review

Teodora Popovici *

Luminița Diaconu, Andra Jugănaru (eds.), *The Soul's Communion with God in Western and Byzantine Christianity*, Bucharest, Bucharest University Press, 2024, 230 p.
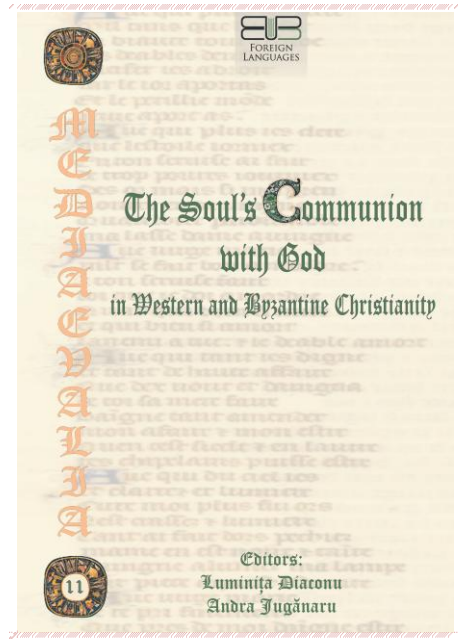
This collection of papers explores the various representations of the soul's communion with God in the Latin and Byzantine Christian traditions, drawing upon an array of texts spanning from the early Christianity to the late Middle Ages. It is part of the *Mediaevalia* collection, a series of volumes edited by the Center for Medieval Studies (CMS) at the University of Bucharest. The volume is bilingual, featuring articles in English and French, based on the contributions presented at the international conference organized by the CMS in 2022. The material is organized in four sections: a brief introduction, the main body of papers, a *Varia* section, and a segment dedicated to book reviews. Each paper includes an abstract and a bibliography. Articles written in English are accompanied by abstracts in French, while articles in French include abstracts in English.

The **introduction** provides a short overview of the most relevant literature on the subject and presents each paper included in the volume. It touches upon Neoplatonism and the writings of the Church Fathers, making observations about the ways in which thinkers of this period depicted man's aspirations toward spiritual unity with God. The introduction is concise and

⊠ Research Assistant, Institute for South-East European Studies, Bucharest; PhD student, University of Bucharest; e-mail: teodora.popovici@s.unibuc.ro.

capably written, although it might have benefited from a slightly more detailed description of the main theme of the volume: the soul's communion with God. As noted on page 7, this topic refers to 'the various theological, philosophical, literary, and artistic expressions that depict the soul's journey toward the union with the Divine'. The papers collected in this volume reveal that this concept could encompass a variety of spiritual experiences, such as prayer, contemplating the divine nature, receiving visions from God, witnessing miracles, searching for methods to communicate with God, and partaking in the Christian rites. These elements point to the richness and significance of this volume for several key fields, including cultural, intellectual, and literary history.

The volume features papers from both senior and early-career researchers. One of the contributions that stand out is **Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides**' (Macquarie University) paper about the Christian reinterpretation of Platonic philosophical language in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Pseudo-Macarius. This study offers an interesting insight into the continuity of ideas between ancient Greek philosophy and Christian thought, illustrating how Platonic metaphors such as *baccheia* and *theoria* could be appropriated to express religious ideas in the works of early theologians. The author argues that these Platonic concepts retained part of their civic meaning as they were reinterpreted in early Christian context. Overall, this study is notable for its well-focused point and engaging use of examples.

György Geréby (Central European University) explores the diverging perspectives on prayer within the Byzantine and Western theological traditions, adopting a comparative lens. The author begins by contrasting the views of Evagrius Ponticus with those of Ignatius of Loyola. Although this comparison might seem unusual given that these theologians lived more than a thousand years apart from each other, Geréby adopts Evagrius' ideas as a reference point for the Eastern Orthodox theological tradition because they were perpetuated by later Byzantine authors, such as Gregory of Sinai. Evagrius firmly discouraged the use of visualization and imagination during prayer, arguing that Christians should attempt to remove all sensory images from their minds, while Ignatius encouraged Christians to visualize the words and actions of the holy figures to whom they were praying. The author argues that this contrast stemmed from the different understanding of the soul and intellect within these two theological traditions. The Byzantine line of thought maintained a strong connection to Platonic ideas, whereas Western theologians were influenced by Stoic philosophy. This point is eruditely illustrated with further examples from the works of other authors, such as Plotinus, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Hugh of Balma, William of St. Thierry, Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Gallus, Ludolph of Saxony, and Gregory of Sinai.

Andra Jugănaru (University of Bucharest) discusses Gregory of Nyssa's ideas about the initiation into the divine mysteries and the spiritual progress toward God. The author emphasizes that, in Gregory's view, knowledge of God involved acknowledging His incomprehensibility. The analysis is built on multiple passages selected from Gregory's works, including the *Life of Moses*, the *Life of Saint Macrina*, the *Eulogy to Basil the Great*, *Homilies on the Song of the Songs*, *On Virginity*, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, and his epistles. The paper offers particular attention to Gregory's use of oxymoron such as 'luminous darkness' and 'sober drunkenness', noting that he paradoxically saw the soul's journey to God as a movement from light to darkness. The author is highly familiar with the modern editions and translations of Gregory's writings, quoting them extensively. The discussion of the primary sources is solid and nuanced; however, one potential weak point of the analysis is the limited use of secondary literature. The cited authors (Jean Daniélou, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Sarah Coakley, Anna Silvas) are doubtlessly established in their fields, but the study could have engaged yet more with the existing scholarship on Gregory's theological ideas. For example, when exploring Gregory's metaphors of light and darkness, the paper could have mentioned the works of Martin Laird,[1] Philip Kariatlis,[2] or Ann Conway-Jones.[3]

Liviu Damian (University of Bucharest) focuses on Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, highlighting several key themes: the problem of evil, the relation between reason and dignity, the ontological argument, and the nature of knowledge. Although the philosophical ideas discussed in this paper have generally been known to Boethian scholarship for some time, they remain worthy of renewed discussion and tend to be frequently revisited by researchers.[4] Boethius' *Consolation* has been widely influential throughout the Middle Ages and the modern period, undergoing many translations over the centuries.[5] The author opted for the English translation of David R.

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[1] Martin Laird, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Mysticism of Darkness: A Reconsideration", *in* "The Journal of Religion", 79 (1999), no. 4, pp. 592-616; *idem*, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, especially the chapter "The Luminous Dark Revisited", pp. 175-204; *idem*, "Darkness", *in* Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, Giulio Maspero (eds.), *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, transl. Seth Cherney, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2010, pp. 203-205.

[2] Philip Kariatlis, "'Dazzling Darkness': The Mystical or Theophanic Theology of St Gregory of Nyssa", *in* "Phronema", 27 (2012), no. 2, pp. 99-123.

[3] Ann Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa's Tabernacle Imagery in its Jewish and Christian Contexts*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.

[4] For example, see one of the latest contributions on the *Consolation*: Michael Wiitala (ed.), *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2024.

[5] For example, see Noel Harold Kaylor, "The English and German Translation Traditions of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*", *in* "Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis", 10 (2015), no. 2, pp. 121-129.

Slavitt (2008),[6] but also references the anonymous early modern translation by "I.T." (1609), edited and revised by H.F. Stewart.[7] The article examines various passages of Boethius' work and compares his philosophical views with those of other authors, such as Apostle Paul, Augustine, Anselm, Descartes, and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet.

Clelia Attanasio (University of Bonn) examines the concept of *excessus mentis* as understood by the 12th-century theologian Richard of St. Victor in his work *Benjamin Major*. The *excessus mentis* can be described as a state of ecstasy that occurs after surpassing six levels of deep contemplation, and it cannot be fully comprehended without having experienced it. Attanasio argues that, in Richard's view, the *excessus mentis* is similar to a state of deification (*deificatio*), in the sense that this contemplative peak results in the union between the intellectual faculty of the human mind and God's grace; thus, at the moment of *excessus mentis*, the mind unites and identifies itself with the Divine. The author also highlights the Neoplatonic elements in Richard's thought, which are primarily derived from the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Overall, this paper is well-constructed and presents a new contribution to understanding Richard's theological views.

Another merit of this volume is the inclusion of papers written by junior researchers. **David-Gabriel Carpen** (University of Bucharest) proposes a close reading of Severus of Antioch's eulogy to Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus, delivered in Antioch in 515. This study is well-documented and stands out for its useful synthesis of the most relevant literature on Severus' life. The author presents Severus' arguments for celebrating the memory of the two saints and points to the inspiration which Severus took from the funeral oration composed by Gregory of Nazianzus himself at the death of Basil the Great. As this paper demonstrates, Severus' encomium was more than a laudation to the two Cappadocian Fathers; it also had substantial pedagogical value and served as an occasion for mystical reflection.

The *Varia* section reflects the editors' commitment to showcasing the broader intellectual life of the CMS, apart from the collected papers of its annual conferences. Although the articles featured in this section may not strictly fit within the main theme of the volume, they generally explore related topics within the area of cultural studies. This section similarly encourages contributions from masteral and doctoral students. **Mihaela Boboșilă** (University of Bucharest) explores the relation between the soul

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[6] Ancius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, transl. David R. Slavitt, Cambridge/London, Harvard University Press, 2008.

[7] Boethius, *The Theological Tractates,* transl. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and *The Consolation of Philosophy,* revised by H.F. Stewart, Cambridge/London, Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd, 1968 (first published 1918).

and the body in the *Golden Legend*, a 13th-century collection of hagiographies compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, which was read extensively in the West during the late medieval period. Meanwhile, **Cătălina Nistor** (University of Bucharest) focuses on the beauty practices and ideals described in the early 14th-century medical treatise of Henri de Mondeville, highlighting their significance for the cultural history of the body.

Aleksandar Anđelović (University of Vienna) discusses one of Michael Psellos' polemical letters to ex-patriarch Michael Keroullarios (letter Π111, dated c. 1058-1059). The main focus of this study is the concept of *paideia* (understood as cultural capital or broad cultural education), which was central to Psellos' criticism of Keroullarios. Psellos condemned the dethroned patriarch not only for his questionable morality, but also for his lack of classical education, which was considered essential for a theologian of his time. In his analysis of Psellos' letter, Anđelović uncovers a complex and fascinating network of references to ancient Greek texts, including Homer's *Iliad*, Euripides' *Helen*, Plutarch's *Life of Phokion*, and Lucian of Samosata's *Downward Journey* and *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*. The second part of the paper explores Psellos' affirmation of loyalty toward Emperor Isaac I Komnenos, as well as his program of political philosophy, to which the concept of *paideia* was essential. To conclude, this article presents an engaging new contribution to the study of the mid-11th-century intellectual debates in Constantinople.

The volume closes with a book review section discussing recent publications in the area of cultural and literary history. As a general conclusion, this collection of papers makes a valuable addition to the *Mediaevalia* series, now on its eleventh volume since its initiation in 2011. The articles featured here address significant questions within their fields, and the editors are to be commended for curating a cohesive and engaging volume.