

THE ART OF THE PORTRAIT IN THE RELIGIOUS PAINTING OF WALLACHIA AND MOLDAVIA IN THE 15TH – 17TH CENTURIES

Valentin Sava*

Abstract: Beyond the diversity of the forms of socio-economic and cultural-artistic development, at the end of the 14th century, Wallachia, Moldavia and the *knights of Romanian origins* of Transylvania, Banat and Maramureş were gathered in one single system, with feudality institutions of Occidental inspiration, but with mostly Orthodox spirituality, a system that is permanently struggling to find the perfect equilibrium between the Islamic-Ottoman expansionism and the insistent conversion actions of Western Catholicism. Medieval painting promoted the portrait as an artistic genre beyond the canonical constraints of the painting of Byzantine inspiration. The votive portrait of the founder did not necessarily reproduce the individual features of the portrayed person, not even in the last period, when the artistic and technical evolutions could initiate tendencies to a desacralization of the religious themes. The introduction of the portrait reflecting the social class in the Court of the two Romanian Countries through the Central – European sources of Austria, Hungary or Poland produced a major change in the aesthetics of the portrait when the artist came to have a new vision on the way he rendered the physical features and later the mental experiences of the model, sometimes making use of an obvious descriptive exactness in rendering the physical features, the physiognomy of the portrayed person. Just like in the medieval votive portrait, in the case of easel portraits, the artist focused on the representation of external features, according to the social importance and rank of the portrayed person. Gradually, the evolution of the corresponding capture of the physical features, initially sufficient, went up from a qualitative point of view to complete this first effort with a precious performance of the expression of the spiritual characteristics of the portrayed character, insistently claimed by both the artist and the contemplator.

Keywords: *Votive portrait, medieval, founder, Byzantine, canon, painter, monastery, voivode, church.*

* PhD Professor, “George Enescu” University of Art, Faculty of Visual Arts, Iaşi, România
E-mail: valentinsava47@yahoo.com

1. Wallachia

After the defeat from Nikopol (1395), the confrontation between Christianity and the Ottoman expansion, namely the Islam, remained a real fact on the Danube line. The coming of the Ottomans in Eastern Europe and their advance to Central Europe was marked by the fall of the Byzantine Constantinople of 1453. For the Romanian voivodes, the fall of the Christian states in the south of the Danube determined the appearance of different evolutions from one reign to another, according to the character of the respective voivode and also to interior and exterior circumstances, which influenced the ability to resist the Ottoman expansion. As it was in the front line of the anti-Ottoman resistance, Wallachia was the first one to enter a system of specific relations with the High Porte, relations that in the 15th century gradually evolved to an Ottoman domination.

In 1420, for the first time in Wallachia, the Ottomans imposed a voivode of their own will, so in 1432 the first personal *bowing down* of a voivode before the sultan was recorded. In 1436, Vlad Dracul, the father of Vlad the Impaler, was personally going to present *the tribute* to the sultan, while Moldavia, somehow unexposed to the Ottoman expansion of the time, bowed down only two years after the fall of Constantinople, in 1455, during the reign of Aron Vodă, as the said bowing down was necessary to open the market of the areas over the Black Sea, which were already under the Ottoman control, for the Moldavian merchants.

Just like in Moldavia, the voivodes of Wallachia were generally depicted in western outfits, although the Court and the Holy Offices ritual were Byzantine. The Court was itinerant, even if, just like Suceava in Moldavia, Wallachia also had a powerful citadel in Târgoviște. Overall, the power of the voivode, at first disputed with the boyars, gradually prevailed, towards the end of the 15th century. In Wallachia, religious life – which remained mainly tolerant, especially in Moldavia, where the Hussite heretics found shelter after the Catholic Council of Constanza, intertwined with the Eastern influences coming from the south of the Danube, determining significant evolution from an artistic point of view, too, especially at an ornamental level and less or not at all at a structural level. These evolutions came to gradually dominate the art and culture of the following century in Wallachia. The original painting of the narthex of the catholicon of Cozia monastery- Vâlcea, executed according to the style of the Paleologan monastic painting contemporary to the reign of Mircea the Elder (who died in 1418) is preserved even from the year 1391. We also have the 14th century paintings of the Princely Church *Saint Nicholas* in Curtea de Argeș, whose painting was made during the reign of Vlaicu Vodă (1364 – 1366) and which, from a stylistic point of view, belongs to the Byzantine – Paleologue era that was characterized by a remarkable richness and clarity of the iconographic

program, demonstrating high artistic qualities. One of the first Romanian artists known as a representative of the Byzantine – Paleologue style was Stephen, a master painter, probably born in Wallachia, who painted the church of Densuș – Transylvania, in 1443 and the patron icon of the church of Ostrovul Mare –Hațeg Land.¹

The artistic creations of the 16th century are even more famous as, due to the evolution determined by the influence of oriental art in the south of the Danube, real schools of religious painting, represented by highly appreciated artists, master painters, appeared and developed.

Thus, Dobromir the Painter, also known as Dobromir of Târgoviște, painted the church of Bistrița Monastery of Vâlcea, a foundation of the boyars of Craiova, in collaboration with two other artists – the painters Dumitru and Chirtop. The church infirmary preserves mural paintings that also contain a votive picture representing Barbu Craiovescu. The founder's portrait bares the date 1513 – 1514. The same painter, Dobromir, painted – 1517-1526 – the Episcopal Church in Curtea de Argeș and the original paintings are partly preserved in the National Art Museum of Bucharest. Also, in collaboration with Jitian and Stanciu, Dobromir of Târgoviște made the original painting of Dealu Monastery Church from Dâmbovița (1515), which is now faded away.²

Towards the middle of the 16th century, the painter David, together with his son, Radoslav, painted the church infirmary from Cozia Monastery (1543). There, together with another master painter, Maxim, he made valuable frescoes that impress with the vigour of their drawing, accompanied by chromatic harmonies subtly dominated by the earth reds. Certain scenes – like the one representing *Doubting Thomas* – are impressive because of the dramatic dynamism of the composition. Together with Radoslav, David also created an impressive votive picture representing the portrait of the great spatharioi Stroe, considered to be one of the first portraits of realist expression of the old medieval Romanian art.

During the second half of the 16th century, another important painter – Dobromir the Younger of Târgoviște – performed his activity. He painted the narthex of the Tismana Monastery Church in 1564, upon the order of the vornic Nedelco Bălăceanu. Dobromir the Younger realized a really valuable composition characterized by the suppleness and dynamism of the drawing, large rhythms, doubled by a certain musical elegance of the compositions. It is supposed that the same Dobromir the Younger of Târgoviște also painted

¹ Radu Popa – *Cetățile din Țara Hațegului / The Citadels of Hațeg Land*, BMI,3/1972, as well as Vasile Drăguț – *Pictura murală din Transilvania (sec. XIV-XV) / The Mural Painting of Transylvania (14th – 15th centuries)*, București, 1970, or Vasile. Drăguț – *Dicționar enciclopedic de artă medieval românească / Encyclopedic Dictionary of Romanian Medieval Art*, p.292.

² Vasile Drăguț - *Dicționar enciclopedic ...* p.128.

the Snagov Monastery Church near Bucharest; this painting was subject to a lot of subsequent repainting.

Built by Neagoe Basarab between 1517 and 1521, the Snagov Church remains, until today, a study object for researchers, at least regarding the original painting, which is attributed to Dobromir the Younger with a certain degree of probability.

Towards the end of the 16th century, during the reign of Michael the Brave, at least two important painters were remarked because of their activity; Mina – a painter and courtier of Michael the Brave – painted the Căluui Monastery Church (1594) where he created the portrait of Michael the Brave. For that matter, the votive paintings made by Mina the Painter represent a valuable document of the epoch as – together with Michael the Brave – they illustrate the voivode Petru Cercel and the entire Buzești family. Another artist of that time, Nicholas of Crete, was a religious painter and artist at the Court of Michael the Brave. An educated spirit, Nicholas of Crete was also one of the most important diplomats of Michael the Brave at the Central – European Courts. Nicholas of Crete is believed to have painted some churches from Transylvania, like the chapels from Târgu Mureș and Alba Iulia.³

The first half of the 17th century was marked by numerous violent changes of reign, revolutions and foreign invasions that messed up the Carpathian-Danubian territory, which was already marked by the dramatic events that culminated in the tragic end of Michael the Brave and the end of the first Unification of the three Romanian countries, in 1600. The memory of Michael the Brave was not forgotten and the Unification remained an opened objective, also assumed by voivodes like Radu Șerban or Mihnea III, as far as the second half of the 17th century. In the middle of this turbulent century, only the reigns of Vasile Lupu in Moldavia, of Matei Basarab in Wallachia and of the two Rákóczi in Transylvania, due to their longer duration, offered a relative stability, favorable to the art and culture development.

Analyzing the medieval religious art in Wallachia during the 17th century, one needs to remark the evolution of the portrayal representations of the votive pictures towards an accentuated tendency of laicization of the represented figures, as the artists often made use of the representations of simple people, builders, constructors, carpenters or house painters, together with the voivodal figures, of great boyars or important officials of the Court, founders of places of worship built on the entire territory of Wallachia.

In 1644, the painter Stroe of Târgoviște decorated the interior of the Arnota Church, the necropolis of Matei Basarab built between 1633 and

³ Vasile Drăguț - *Dicționar enciclopedic de artă medievală românească*, p. 215.

1636, with mural paintings of remarkable artistic quality. Among these, one may notice the votive picture of Matei Basarab and Lady Helen portrait, a painting of perfect sense of composition, characterized by the elegance of the drawing and a special chromatic refinement. It particularly surprises the realism and expressive force of the portraits.

Another representative of religious painting was Ianache who, in 1667, together with Monk Michael, both master painters, made the mural composition decorating the Săcuieni Church – Dâmbovița, foundation of the clucer Badea Săcuianu, previously built in 1655. Ianache is the author of the Passions cycle, the Deesis, as well as of the suite of military saints in which he demonstrated an archaic vision, dominated by dark tones. Monk Michael painted episodes from Saint Nicholas' life, as well as the figures of the Altar hierarchs, revealing a synthetic concept of the compositions. Later on, Tudoran the Painter painted the church of the fortified Court of Băjești – Argeș (1669) where one may notice a laicization tendency and an obvious preoccupation for the portrayal of the characters of the votive picture. Thus, the portrait of the builder Dragomir is the first portrait of a worker in the history of mural painting of Wallachia.

In 1673, the painter Dima the Romanian together with George the Greek painted the church of the Topolnița hermitage – Mehedinți. A representative of the post-Byzantine art in the original and an autochthonous version of the painting of Wallachia, Dima the Romanian, together with George the Greek stood out by his monumentality and a good knowledge of the compositional organizations.

A main role in the art of the 17th century in Wallachia was played by the painting school from Hurezi – Vâlcea, founded around monastery built between 1690 and 1697, as a foundation of Constantin Brâncoveanu. The painting school from Hurezi was run by Constantinos, a painter of Greek origin, author of the decorations of some representative churches of the 17th century from Wallachia. Thus, between 1688 and 1689, together with the painter John, Constantinos painted the Lady Church from Bucharest, then, between 1693 and 1704, he painted the Great Church from Hurezi Monastery, together with the following painters: John, Andrew, Stan, Neagoe and Joachim. Considered to be the chief of the painting school from Hurezi, Constantinos was an adept of an Athonite painting, having an eclectic vision, with a supple drawing and an elegant and refined coloring.

The great church from Hurezi Monastery (1690 – 1693) presents an ample votive picture made of a true gallery of portraits of priceless artistic and documentary value. It represents Constantin Brâncoveanu with his entire numerous family, with his four sons and seven daughters, as well as his direct ancestors: the relatives of the Basarab and Cantacuzino family. The infirmary, a foundation of Lady Mary, Constantin Brâncoveanu's wife, built in 1696, was painted by Preda, Nicolae and Ianache. The *Saint Apostles*

Hermitage of the same monastery complex from Hurezi, the foundation of the hegumen John of 1698, was painted in 1700 by the hierodeacon Josef and by the painter John and later on, in 1703, Ianache, Istrate and Hranite painted the *Saint Stephen* Hermitage, a foundation belonging to Stephen, Constantin Brâncoveanu the elder son.

Together with the first representatives of the painting school from Hurezi ran by the Greek Constantinos, other master painters appeared, like the already mentioned Hranite, together with Pârvu, Stephen, Simion, Istrate, George etc. The painting school from Hurezi was the most famous painting workshop in the history of Romanian medieval art. By practicing a refined eclecticism and by manifesting a special interest for decorations, the painting school from Hurezi promoted new suggestions of the post-Byzantine painting, of Cretan influence⁴, also promoting the approach to reality in the portrait representation.

The painting school from Hurezi influenced the entire Romanian painting of the 18th century. Seeming to continue the tradition initiated by Tudoran the Painter who, in 1669, at Băjești Muscel, was the one to create the first portrait of an artisan from Wallachia, namely the portrait of Dragomir the Builder, the image being colored in dark tones of black, coffee-tinted, red and white, some representatives of the School from Hurezi also made portraits of simple people, master builders, carpenters or house painters, in the porch of the Great Church from Hurezi. Joachim, a master painter of the School from Hurezi, painted the Great Church of the Hurezi Monastery (1694), as well as the Princely Church from Târgoviște (1699). He made the portrait of master Istrate the carpenter on the walls of the verandah of the Great Church from Hurezi.

Assuming the idea of the compositional representations from Topolnița – Mehedinți, we also need to mention the valuable scene painted in 1673 by the painters George the Greek and Dima the Romanian, which is an unusual compositional representation for the iconography from Wallachia; it is a decoration of the Western façade of the church, representing the scene of the *Doomsday*, which is then frequently met in the iconography of Stephen the Great in Moldavia.

Another painting school, which is representative for this period, though without reaching the amplex of the School of Hurezi, was the painting school from Câmpulung Muscel – Argeș, with the fortified church of *Santa Marina*, a school that also instructed numerous painters who worked especially over the Carpathians, in Bârsa Land. This is where the painter Ioan Negulici (19th century) took his first painting lessons.

⁴ Vasile Drăguț and Nicolae Săndulescu – *Arta brâncovenească / The Brancovean Art*, Bucharest, 1971, as well as Vasile Drăguț - *Dicționar enciclopedic...* p. 171.

Another painter, iconographer and school creator developed his art and talent at the turn of the 17th – 18th centuries. We are talking about Pârvu Mutu (1657 – 1735), who worked both during the reign of Șerban Cantacuzino and of Constantin Brâncoveanu. Born in Câmpulung, but trained as an artist in the faraway north of Moldavia, Pârvu Mutu painted churches for the Cantacuzino family, in Filipeștii de Pădure, Măgureni, Lespezi, Bordești. His painting evolved towards an accentuation of the laic features, through the realistic dimension of the votive pictures containing the portraits of the postelnic Cantacuzino together with his family, in the church from Filipeștii de Pădure. He created one of the first self portraits marked by realism, like the one from the Bordești church, in which he is represented as a painter with a paintbrush in his hand. A remarkable drawer and a good colorist, Pârvu Mutu was a great painting teacher and his most important apprentice was Radu the Painter. Staying in the portrait area, the galleries of founders represented by Pârvu Mutu strongly anticipated the art of the portrait in Wallachia, an art that developed later, in the 19th century. A remarkable piece representing the portraitist work of Pârvu Mutu is the votive picture containing 55 characters, 1692, placed in the narthex of the Filipeștii de Pădure Church, an ample composition with a rich chromatic range representing figures that are clearly defined through a synthetic drawing of great evocative power.

2. Moldavia

In Moldavia, amid foundation and consolidation of the feudal state under the reign of Dragoș and Bogdan, the gothic tendencies mostly coming from Poland strongly influenced the architecture of certain churches, thus creating an original synthesis to which the local element also contributed. The Rădăuți Church, founded by Petru I Mușat, the Ruler of Moldavia between 1375 and 1391, still proves this synthesis that led to the development of the later Moldavian style.

In the 15th century, a central figure of the Moldavian portrait art was Gabriel the Hieromonk, who is also considered to be the founder and leader of the painting workshop that made the interior painting from Bălinești – Suceava in 1493. The votive picture representing the logothete Tăutu is considered to be one of the successes of the Moldavian portraiture, characterized by a vivid and realistic illustration, by a suppleness of the drawing and a shine of the chromatic harmonies. The fragments of exterior painting executed later, in the 16th century, during the reign of Petru Rareș, gracefully completes the tradition of the Moldavian religious painting inaugurated in Gabriel the Hieromonk's workshop. Considered to be the most important artist of Stephen the Great's era, he was the main author of the valuable painted composition from Bălinești, a mural painting belonging to the Byzantine – Paleologue style, a painting characterized by grace and

nobleness, richness of the chromatic harmonies and by a note of humanism of the figures.⁵ The scenes from the *Passions* cycle, represented in a continuous, non-compartmentalized frieze came to define the new style imposed in the Moldavian mural painting of the next century.

Staying in the area of the mural painting of the 15th century in Moldavia, we should mention the mural paintings before 1481 from Dolheștii Mari-Suceava, the Saint Parascheva Church, founded by the hetman Șendrea, porter of Suceava. In the votive picture, the image of the hetman Șendrea is tributary to the characteristics of the first phase of Stephen the Great's period in the religious painting, a feature that was preserved despite certain transformations subsequently suffered by the church construction, in the 18th century.

The interior frescoes of the *Ascension* Church from Neamț, made in 1497, are also attributed to the 15th century. They are considered to be the last painting composition dating from Stephen the Great era, a composition that was subsequently affected by some repainting of the 19th century. Among the master painters, Nichita is mentioned in a document of 1415, during the reign of Alexander the Good (1400-1432), together with Dobre, as they were both hired to paint for several churches from Roman (*in Târgul de Jos*) and Rădăuți, for the voivode Alexander the Good. We also have to mention Stephen the Painter, who is recorded in a document of 1425 where it is said that Alexander the Good gave him four villages as a reward, thus making the *material* proof of the artist's high value and appreciation.

The analysis of the human face representation in the portraitist work of the 15th century would be incomplete if we do not mention the contribution of the embroidery workshops and of the miniaturists. The Moldavian embroidery developed during the reign of Stephen the Great (1457-1504) promoted a monumental vision, an expressive sobriety of the compositions, calm and noble chromatic harmonies, as well as a perfect technical execution. Several works of art like the *Epitrachelion* from Putna (1469), the Funeral veil of Mary of Mangop (1477), the *Epitrachelion* from Putna of 1480, containing the votive portraits of Stephen the Great and his son Alexander are recorded as remarkable examples. Other examples may be the following: the Dvera representing the *Ascension* (Putna -1484), the Dvera representing the *Dormition* (Putna – 1485), the Epitaph from Putna (1490), the Dvera from Putna representing the *Crucifixion* (1500) – containing the portraits of Stephen the Great and of Mary Voichița, the Dvera from Putna representing the *Annunciation* (1500) or the *Epitrachelion* from Dobrovăț-Iași, made in 1504 and representing the embroidered portraits of Stephen the Great and Mary Voichița.

⁵ Vasile Drăguț – *Dicționar enciclopedic...* page 51. The Church of the Bălinești Court, Grămești commune -Suceava, a foundation of the logothete Tăutu before 1493.

In the case of miniature, both before and during the time of Stephen the Great, it was created by several high value miniaturist artists. The most important miniaturist of the 15th century was Gabriel Uric, a calligrapher and miniaturist coming from Neamț Monastery. By the making of the *Tetraevangelion* ordered by Lady Marina, the wife of Alexander the Good, in 1429, nowadays kept in the Bodleian Library of the Oxford University – England, Gabriel Uric proved the force of his talent in humanizing the expression of the characters he represented. By using a calm drawing, a particular chromatic refinement, soft harmonies, Gabriel Uric with his way of representing the four evangelists created a model that was then constantly continued by the Moldavian mural painters and miniaturists of the 15th century and of the following periods. A follower of the miniaturist Gabriel Uric, Theodore Mărișescu was an important representative of the calligraphic art and miniature from the time of Stephen the Great. Between 1491 and 1500, he illustrated five tetraevangels, richly adorned with frontispieces and miniatures, demonstrating his appetite for a solid construction of the composition, an elegance of the pagination, as well as for a large and natural drawing. Another artist, Philip, a miniaturist monk from the time of Stephen the Great, used a compositional scheme in which the stylized motif (geometrical, floral or zoomorphic) was extended by repetition. A remarkable example is represented by the *Tetraevangelion* made in 1502 that was offered as a gift to the Zografu Monastery, nowadays being part of the patrimony of the National Library of Vienna. Another calligrapher and miniaturist was Nicodim, author of the famous *Tetraevangelion from Humor* (1473) that contains the votive image of Stephen the Great in miniature. Together with the miniatures representing the four evangelists, Nicodim also created several frontispieces and initials. At Stephen the Great's command, Pahomie, another calligrapher, copied the *Evangel from Voroneț* (1490), a remarkable work, famous for the beauty of its frontispieces, vignettes and initials, all made from gold and colours, nowadays part of the collections of the History Museum of Moscow, Russia. Just like Pahomie, another calligrapher and miniaturist, Palade remained known as the author of the *Evangel from Putna*. Made between 1488 and 1489, this work of the Moldavian decorative art is famous for its special decoration representing frontispieces and initials of an exceptional value.

Returning to painting and portrait representation in the religious painting from Moldavia, once with the next century, the 16th century, we witnessed the apogee of the religious painting development in the Moldavia of Peter IV Rareș; during his two reigns, the most representative works that remained until today were created: Voroneț, Humor, Moldovița, Probota, Dobrovăț, Hârlău etc.

Voroneț, which was built in 1488, during the reign of Stephen the Great, was enlarged in 1547, when the Metropolitan Gregory Roșca added an

opened porch. The nave preserved the original paintings characterized by the specialists⁶ through a marked monumental expression, a clarity and vigour of the drawing, as well as through a calm harmony of the colors. The church titivation brought to its present form after 1547, with exterior mural paintings, transformed Voroneț and other churches treated on the same manner in a jewel of the Moldavian medieval art, remarkable for its chromatic harmony and the compositional rigor of the painted images. The presumptive author of the exterior paintings would be Mark Pristavu⁷ who created a really balanced compositional assembly, a kind of the *Sistine Chapel of the East* where the dominant color is the already famous *Voroneț blue*.

Voroneț shelters one of the most precious votive pictures of Stephen the Great, which was discovered quite recently, due to some operations of fresco cleaning. On this occasion, the specialists presumptively identified the real physiognomy of Stephen the Great, without a beard, with a short mustache, which is a different representation from that of the “iconography” that was known almost up to the end of the 19th century and that showed Stephen the Great wearing a beard, according to the “classic” model of the voivodal iconography⁸. The narthex of the Voroneț Church was painted in the same period.

Humor, a monastery founded in the 15th century by Oană the Vornic, was re-founded in 1530 by the logothete Theodore (Toader) Bubuiog. The external painting of the church, made in 1535, was executed by Thomas, the Court painter of Peter IV Rareș. The exterior of the church, which does not have a tower on the nave and it has an opened porch, presents a rigorously space distributed painting on the walls surface, with a warm chromatic harmony, doubled by a certain, graceful rhythmic of the drawing. The interior of the church was decorated by three masters, led by Thomas and it is still known for the exceptional quality of the painting from the narthex vault. At Humor, we record several votive pictures illustrating the portraits of Peter IV Rareș and his family, on one side, and the funeral picture of the Logothete Theodore Bubuiog and of his wife, Anastasia, on the other side. The Humor Church also has a valuable iconostasis and icons dating from the 16th century and made by the iconographer masters of the time.

Built in 1532 by Peter IV Rareș, the interior and exterior of the Moldovița Monastery Church were also painted five years later, in 1537, by

⁶ V. Vătășianu – *Pictura murală din nordul Moldovei / The Mural Painting from the North of Moldavia*, Meridiane P.H., Bucharest, 1974, as well as in *Studii de artă veche românească și universală / Studies of Old Romanian and Universal Art*, by the same author, Meridiane P.H., Bucharest, 1987, p. 101.

⁷ According to V. Drăguț, the name of Mark Pristavu figures on an inscription painted on the Southern façade of the church.

⁸ Also see the oil portrait made by Gheorghe Asachi, found in Stephen's the Great at Putna Monastery.

Thomas of Suceava, who was a painter and a team leader. The first Moldovița Monastery that was previously built in 1410 and known as “the new monastery” ruined because of the instability of the terrain it was built on. Just like at Humor, the portrait of Peter IV Rareș is presented in the votive picture from the nave, together with Lady Helen and their sons, Stephen and Iliăș. In the votive picture from Humor, the voivode is illustrated together with Lady Helen and their only son, Iliăș.

Thomas of Suceava can be considered not only a *painter*, but a great master of old art. A document from 1541, calls him “*Thomas, painter of Suceava, courtier of the glorious and great Moldavian voivode Peter*”.⁹ Author of the exterior frescoes from Humor (1535), he led the team of painters from Moldovița who worked two years later (1537) realizing a magnificent chromatic subtleness dominated by a warm red that covered a large compositional movement according to which the scenes were organized. The drawing is fine and firm through its varied and noble typology, demonstrating virtuosity and a solid schooling in the representation of the images inspired by the Old and New Testament. A representative work for Moldovița is the scene of the *Siege of Constantinople*.

Staying on the Northern Moldavia territory, we need to mention another great emblematic artist for the religious painting coming from the 16th century Moldavia, namely the painter Dragoș Coman (also known as Dragoș, the son of father Coman of Iași). Main author of the interior and exterior mural paintings from Arbore, Dragoș Coman created a successful synthesis between the traditional background of the autochthonous painting and the stylistic elements of the occidental art, in 1541.

Owner of a very supple drawing and of a noble and sparkling coloring, through the two votive pictures from the narthex and from the nave, Dragoș Coman made a varied and convincing typology, together with a perfect harmony and equilibrium of the compositional solutions.

In the votive picture from the narthex, on the southern wall, under the arcosolium, Dragoș Coman represented the hetmam Luca Arbore and his wife Juliana, together with their two deceased children, Theodore and Nichita. The votive picture situated on the western wall of the nave represents the hetman Luca Arbore together with his wife Juliana and all their five children. For the recognized qualities of his art, Dragoș Coman was considered the most important Romanian artist of the 16th century.¹⁰

Another foundation of Peter IV Rareș, the Probota Monastery Church, was also painted in 1532, both in the interior and the exterior. Later, the interior painting suffered some re-paintings, while from the exterior painting little was preserved, being mainly degraded.

⁹ Vasile Drăguț – *Dicționar enciclopedic...* p. 303.

¹⁰ P. Philippot – *Die Wandmalerei-* München, 1973, quoted by Vasile Drăguț in *Dicționar enciclopedic...*p. 132.

The tradition of the votive pictures from Voroneț representing Stephen the Great, who is illustrated together with Mary Voichița and his son Bogdan, or the pictures from Pătrăuți, also from the 15th century (1487) where Stephen the Great is represented together with one of his daughters, also records the representation of Stephen the Great from the *Descent of the Holy Spirit* Church (1503-1504) from Dobrovăț-Iași. The painting, executed in 1529, surprises through the monumentality of the compositions, the expressivity of the drawing and an almost severe subtleness of the coloring. The votive picture represents Stephen the Great together with his son, Bogdan III (the One-Eyed) and Peter IV Rareș. The iconographic scenes from the walls of the Dobrovăț Church have a strongly monastic orientation, illustrating themes like *The Ladder of Vertues* or *The Miracle of Saint Sava*. The chapel and the gate tower are different from the rest of the monastery complex, presenting Baroque – Moldavian decorations belonging to the 18th century.

Of course, by going back to the representations of the painting from Pătrăuți, the *Holy Cross* Church, built in 1487 preserves the high artistic quality painting in which the portrait of Stephen the Great is considered to be one of the most beautiful representations of this voivode. Together with the votive picture, we may notice two other compositions of great value: the scene of the *Grief*, the *Cavalcade of the Military Saints*, clear works, of remarkable composition. The drawing is also refined and expressive, doubled by a subtle colouring that represents the Byzantine – Paleologue tradition assimilated to the Moldavian artistic environment. The *Doomsday* scene from the western façade was painted later, in the second half of the 16th century.

Also, from the period of Peter IV Rareș reign, we can mention the interior painting of the *Saint George* Church from Hârlău founded by his father Stephen the Great, a really valuable painting, assimilated to the great contemporary creations of Northern Moldavia. Towards the end of the 16th century, one can record the works of two other important painters, John and Sofronie, masters of the mural painting compositions decorating the Sucevița Monastery Church, built before 1596. Even today, it continues to impress with the richness of the painted adornment decorating both the interior and the exterior of the Sucevița Monastery, the compositions that are dominated by the epic spirit, in a diverse chromatic range dominated by green, as the painting has a strongly ornamental orientation, receptive to the innovations of the Renaissance painting. The drawing refinement is accompanied by a varied and harmonious coloring, sprinkled with subtle modulations of chromatic intensity.

It also surprises the savant distribution of the compositional units in scenes that became emblems of Sucevița: *The Ladder of Vertues*, *The Bringing of Saint John the New of Suceava Relics*, *The Legend of Saint Nicholas* or *The Legend of Moses*. As regards the portraitist's art, the votive

picture in the nave represents the family of the voivode Ieremia Movilă. The Prince is accompanied by the following persons: Mary, the voivode's mother, followed by Lady Elisafta, Ieremia Movilă's wife and three sons and five daughters. The above mentioned physiognomies are vivid, full of expressiveness, demonstrating the influences of the Renaissance style representations coming from the West. The perceptible difference between the way in which a portrait is represented, for example, the portrait of the Logothete Tăutu from the votive picture from Bălinești (16th century) made by Gabriel the Hieromonk and the portrait representations from the end of the 16th century made by John and Sofronie, exempts the viewer from any other comment.

Also towards the end of the 16th century, the documents record George (Ghiorghi) and Gregory (Gligori) as builders of the Aroneanu Church – Iași, built in 1594 and, probably, the Hlincea Church – Iași, also built in 1597. The record of these monuments is connected more to their quality of bearers of the Wallachian influences over the Moldavian architecture, influences that were felt at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Together with these great names of the autochthonous religious painting, we should also mention the names of some painters who came from abroad, like George of Tricala, who died in 1530, a painter from Thessaly and Stamatello Cotronas, a Greek painter. George of Tricala is believed to have painted the *Holy Cross Church* from Pătrăuți and the *Saint Procopius Church* from Milișăuți.¹¹ Deceased in 1530, he was buried in the *Saint George Church* from Hârlău. His funeral stone is preserved at the National Art Museum from Bucharest. In his turn, Stamatello Cotronas made the exterior mural paintings of the Râșca Monastery Church, on the southern façade, which is better preserved, representing sequences from *The Life of Saint Anthony* and fragments from the composition called *The Ladder of Vertues*. Punctually, we also should mention the existence of some other valuable compositions of mural paintings dating from the 16th century, both in the chapel of the Bistrița Monastery Church, Alexander the Good's necropolis and in Părhăuți, where the *All Saints' Church*, built in 1522 by the logothete Gabriel Troțușan, shelters a mural painting that was executed after 1530, illustrating a rigorous and cursive drawing, an elegance of the contours, but most of all the presence of some realist, plastic observation elements.

Of course, in the decorative arts as well, the presence of portrait representation continued its evolution began in the previous century. We are talking about the great and the small dvera from Slatina made in 1561 representing the portrait of Alexander Lăpușneanu together with Lady Ruxandra, the voivode's wife. At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, we should mention Zosima and Mardarie, the first Romanian embroidery masters, famous authors of the dvera from the Putna Monastery, given by

¹¹ Vasile Drăguț – *Dicționar enciclopedic...* p. 152. The artist's birth year is unknown.

Bogdan III the One-Eyed, son of Stephen the Great, in 1510. The dvera has a representation of the *Dormition*, with no equivalent in the Byzantine art from the point of view of the iconography,¹² equally proving in a superlative manner, the unique artistic qualities of the composition, from the point of view of drawing and chromatics. The Putna Monastery, a strong monastic center built by Stephen the Great between 1466 and 1469, which subsequently became a voivodal necropolis, is a strong artistic center able to coagulate the great artistic energies of the two centuries, the 15th and the 16th. Its influence as an artistic center also extended over the next century, especially after the reconstruction of the church between 1654 and 1662 by Vasile Lupu and George Stephen. In the 16th century, we find Spiridon of Putna, a calligrapher and miniaturist who, inheriting Gabriel Uric with his large and firm drawing, created the Gospel of 1502 that still impresses by the solid artistic construction and the elegance of the pagination.

Staying on the Moldavian territory, especially the field of the embroidery and miniature workshops of the 17th century, we talk about one of the most important Romanian scholars, miniaturists and artists of the Middle Ages, Anastasie Crimca (Crimcovici). Born in the second half of the 16th century, somewhere between 1605 and 1608, he was bishop of Roman and twice, between 1608 and 1617 and between 1619 and 1629, Metropolitan of Moldavia and a founder of the Dragomirna Monastery. He created several graceful, brilliant miniatures by which he proved a surprising compositional inventiveness and a predilection to narration. He also cultivated an expressive graphism and decorativism, he made a Liturgical Book in 1610, a Gospel in 1614 and a Psalter in 1616. Regarding the present investigation theme, we need to mention that in the Gospel of 1614, Anastasie Crimca made his self portrait that is nowadays preserved in the Dragomirna Monastery Museum.

Once consecrated, the tradition of embroidery in the Moldavian decorative art constantly cultivated the voivodal portraitist representations. At the beginning of the 17th century, the funeral veil for Ieremia Movilă (1606) and for his brother, Simion Movilă (1608) were created under the influence of the Polish Court portrait, of *Sarmatic influence*¹³. The portrait of Ieremia Movilă is “*the only one in the art of the Moldavian laic embroidery in which aulic intentionality is outlined... and the first psychological portrait in the Romanian medieval art*” (see, next¹⁵, Maria Ana Muzicescu, *The Medieval Embroidery ...*). Later, during the reign of Vasile Lupu (1634-1653) we can

¹² Vasile Drăguț – *Dicționar enciclopedic...* p. 322. Masterpiece of the Moldavian medieval embroidery, representing the Dormition in the center and medallions of the 12 citadels where the apostles were preaching at the time of the Dormition on the margins.

¹³ Ana Dobjanschi and Victor Simion – *Arta în timpul lui Vasile Lupu / Art during the Time of Vasile Lupu*, as well as Vasile Drăguț - *Dicționar enciclopedic*, p. 183. A more detailed version, Maria Ana Muzicescu-Broderia medievală românească / *The Romanian Medieval Embroidery*, Meridiane P.H., București, 1969, pp. 17, 18.

mention the embroidered portraits of Lady Tudosca, the voivode's wife and of his son, John, two portraits that, together with the votive representations from the Churches of the Three Hierarchs or Golia – Iași, preface the appearance and development of the realist portrait.

During the 17th century, we can mention several church painters, respectable successors of the religious painting workshops tradition of the previous centuries. Thus, in the Dragomirna Monastery Church – Suceava, a foundation built by Anastasie Crimca between 1606 and 1609, the nave preserves precious mural paintings executed by the masters Crăciun, Mățieș, Ignat and Gligorie. The painter Crăciun is considered to be the main master of the paintings from the nave and altar of the Dragomirna Church (1610). Together with Mățieș, Ignat and Gligorie, Crăciun resorted to an accentuated complication of the architectonic compositions and backgrounds, according to a vision of his own, with strong decorative tendencies.

Towards the half of the 17th century, Vasile Lupu brings foreign masters to decorate the interior of the *Three Hierarchs* Monastery from Iași, a commercial center that became the capital city of Moldavia even from the time of Alexandru Lăpușneanu's reign (1564). A jewel of the decorative art, sculpted in stone and gilded, the interior of the *Three Hierarchs* Monastery Church had to be painted in order to be worthy to be the place meant to shelter Saint Parascheva of the Balkans relics, redeemed for a great amount of money given by the voivode to pay the debts of the Constantinople Patriarchy, a church that temporarily became a Metropolitan Church as well. That is why Vasile Lupu brought to Iași the Muscovite master Sidor Pospeev, who also worked on Miron Barnovschi's order, between 1628 and 1629, together with the painters Iacov Gavrilov, Deico Iacovliev and Pronca Nichitin. Between 1641 and 1642, these four masters painted the *Three Hierarchs* Monastery Church from Iași, realizing a special painting in which the fresco facing was made according to the Russian recipe, with rice straws. There is a lot to tell about the prosperous reign of Vasile Lupu, but at the same time we could talk about the enlightened era of Varlaam Moțoc, the Metropolitan of Moldavia, who, between 1632 and 1653, supported the politics of construction and endowment of the churches of Vasile Lupu's Moldavia. From Varlaam's time, we still have proofs of exterior painting on the southern façade of the *Saint Elijah* Church from Șcheia – Suceava, built starting with 1488, during the reign of Stephen the Great, a church that is very similar to the one from Voroneț, built in the same year. On the interior, the *Saint Elijah* Church from Șcheia – Suceava shelters the votive picture of Stephen the Great and his family.

Going back to the *Three Hierarchs* Monastery Church, the votive picture represents the portrait of Lady Tudosca, John, Vasile Lupu's children and the portrait of the voivode himself. On the occasion of the empiric restoration made at the end of the 19th century, when the monument was demolished in

order to be rebuilt, with certain architectural modifications, the *Three Hierarchs* Church lost its original painting made by Pospeev and his team. A few pickled fragments (about 20) were preserved, being deposited partly in the National Art Museum of Bucharest and partly in the deposit of the *Three Hierarchs* Church from the Gothic Hall – Iași, the ex refectory of the monastery. Among these fragments, the viewer might be surprised by the beauty of an angel head, made by the Muscovite masters in a realistic manner and with great sensitivity.

The second church, built and decorated during the reign of Vasile Lupu, was the Golia Monastery Church from Iași, a foundation of the Logothete John Golăi and his wife, Anna. The church has existed from the 16th century, under a basic form, its construction being continued and defined with the help of Vasile Lupu, with a new architecture that reunites the Eastern tradition with elements of late Western-European Renaissance architecture, in a surprisingly unitary and natural whole. The painter who painted the interior of the church was an autochthonous master, Mathew, son of John, who performed the most valuable mural décor of that epoch from the 1660 Moldavia. Preserved until today, partially in original, some of the paintings were partly and clumsily remade in the 18th century. Visiting this church on February 3rd 1653, Paul of Aleppo mentioned its beauty, also remarking the existence of an old and “*miraculous icon of Virgin Mary*”¹⁴ inside the church. From Paul of Aleppo we also have a description of the votive picture representing Vasile Lupu with his Lady and daughters, as well as Stephen, son of Vasile Lupu. According to some researchers¹⁵ the traces of older painting discovered on the porch and narthex walls and brought to surface on the occasion of a restoration performed in 1943, by the way in which the characters are distributed, prove that Vasile Lupu did not demolish the old church built in the 16th century, but it enclosed it in the new construction made between 1650 and 1653, only remaking the altar, doubling its length and making it higher. In fact, a grafitto mentioning *anno 1594* was brought out on the porch walls, without giving any certitude that the said sign dates from the time of the first founder of the old church, the logothete Golăi.

It is interesting to notice that some researchers consider that the painter Mathew, son of John, the one that is believed to have performed the interior painting of the Golia Church in 1660, is, in fact, only a restorer of these paintings, the restoration being made much later, in 1838.¹⁶ During the same period, another master, Sylvan the Painter executed the mural painting of the *Saint Michael* Church from Rădeana – Neamț (1652), another master painter,

¹⁴ Paul of Aleppo, *Călători străini în Țările Române / Confessions of Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries*, volume II-VI, București, 1970, 1976.

¹⁵ Ana Dobjanschi and Victor Simion – *Arta în timpul lui Vasile Lupu / Art during the Reign of Vasile Lupu*, page 46, as well as Vasile Drăguț - *Dicționar enciclopedic...* pp. 154 and 173.

¹⁶ Vasile Drăguț - *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Romanian Medieval Art*, p. 198. The author does not give the names of those researchers.

painted for Ștefăniță Lupu in 1660 the Hlincea Church near Iași, a foundation of Mary Zotta, the daughter of Peter V the Lame.

The last great composition of mural painting from Moldavia, executed according to the Post-Byzantine traditions, was the interior painting composition from the Cetățuia Monastery Church – Iași, a foundation of Gheorghe Duca of 1672. The painting was made by a complex team made of the painters Michael, Dima and George of Ianina and the painters Nicholas and Stephen of Iași.

Despite a certain *heterogeneity*¹⁷ mainly determined by the contribution of some master painters coming from outside Moldavia, one can certainly state that the 17th century is *Vasile Lupu's era in the Romanian culture* as the 19 years of regency represented a real *epoch* just like in the case of the reign of Stephen the Great and of Peter IV Rareș (15th – 16th centuries).

The last example could be that of the creation of another master painter, Joseph of Vatopedi who, at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the next century, made valuable paintings like those from the *Domnition* Church of Deleni – Hârlău (Iași), initially built between 1668 and 1669 and then transformed, in 1722.

In its faithful contact with the art and culture of its neighbors, whether it was Wallachia or Transylvania, or the strong influence coming from Poland, the Romanian medieval art from Moldavia did not transpose, but each time it creatively interpreted those elements that were accepted and assimilated, the interpretation being produced including the level of the voivodal or boyar portraiture, taking into account the specific data, determined by the existence of the Romanian spiritual background protected by the Orthodoxy shield, without excluding the non-Orthodox influences coming from the West or the Christian influences coming from the Russian East.

Bibliography:

Dobjanschi, Ana and **Simion, Victor**, *Arta în timpul lui Vasile Lupu / The Art during the Reign of Vasile Lupu*, Meridiane, București, 1979.

Drăguț, Vasile, *Pictura murală din Transilvania (sec. XIV-XV) / The Mural Painting of Transylvania (14th – 15th centuries)*, București, 1970,

Drăguț, Vasile, *Dicționar enciclopedic de artă medievală românească / Encyclopedic Dictionary of Romanian Medieval Art*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică P.H, București, 1976.

Drăguț, Vasile and **Săndulescu, Nicolae**, *Arta brâncovenească // The Brancovean Art*, București, 1971

Muzicescu, Maria Ana, *Broderia medievală românească / The Romanian Medieval Embroidery*, Meridiane P.H., București, 1969.

¹⁷ Ana Dobjanschi and Victor Simion – *Arta în timpul lui Vasile Lupu / Art during the Reign of Vasile Lupu*, page 50, 51 as well as Vasile Drăguț, *Dicționar enciclopedic...*p. 154. or Răzvan Theodorescu and Ioan Oprea – *Piatra Trei Ierarhilor / The Stone of the Three Hierarchs*, The Meridiane P.H., Bucharest, 1979 and reediting 2008, pp. 35-37.

Paul de Alep, *Călători străini despre Tările Române / Confessions of Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries*, , volume II-VI, București, 1970, 1976.

Philippot, P., *Die Wandmalerei*, München, 1973.

Popa, Radu – *Cetățile din Țara Hațegului/The Citadels of Hațeg Land*, BMI,3/1972.

Theodorescu, Răzvan and **Oprea, Ioan**, *Piatra Trei Ierarhilor/ The Stone of the Three Hierarchs* , Meridiane P.H., București, 1979

Vătășianu, V, *Pictura murală din nordul Moldovei / The Mural Painting from the North of Moldavia*, , Meridiane P.H., București, 1974.

Vătășianu, V, *Studii de artă veche românească și universală / Studies of Old Romanian and Universal Art*, Meridiane P.H., București, 1987.