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MEDIEVAL ART AND CIVILIZATION

La genealogia della sovranità nel trattato *Insegnamenti di Neagoe Basarab a suo figlio Teodosio* (1521)

Laura Mesina*

*"A genealogy is not a history of the past [...]]
Genealogy is a history of the present in terms of its past"¹.*

Abstract: Genealogy dominates in an implicit way the paraenetic medieval and Renaissance literature. The parenthesis is completely different from the chronicle, because it does not seek to identify either the origin of a community or the purpose of its actions, but tries to capitalize on the disruption, the hazard, and the apophatic in order to create a mosaic of vices and virtues and thus to support in the more specific way the exercise of power.

The portrait of the prince is not the mirror reflection of his consanguineous ancestors either. It is a rather exact and pragmatic reflection of the general conjunction between teachings and reality. This is why the method of genealogy may critically work in both such a text and such a portrait.

Unanimously recognized as the most important parenthesis of the post-Byzantine Orthodox world, the Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosie (1521) constitute the point of articulation of a hermeneutical approach and the method of genealogy in the mirrors of princes. This is why I will map the genealogy of sovereignty with the help of an archeology of political presence in this exemplary paraenetic attributed to Neagoe Basarab, prince of the post-Byzantine Romanian Renaissance.

Keywords: genealogy of sovereignty, genealogy as a critical method, *Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosie* (1521), mirrors of princes, paraenetic literature

I. La genealogia come metodo critico

A parere dei suoi teorici di riferimento, Friedrich Nietzsche e Michel Foucault, la genealogia² come metodo critico di comprensione del passato

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¹ Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 7.

non si ritroverebbe né si applicherebbe al vecchio mondo, ritenuto completamente dipendente dalla ricerca ossessiva delle origini e da una visione falsificatrice della tradizione e della realtà³.

Nello spirito dell'odierna ontologia, dell'ontologia *metamoderna*, e dell'emergente realismo contestuale⁴, la stessa accezione di genealogia come metodo critico può dischiudere prospettive sorprendentemente nuove proprio sul passato rinnegato in precedenza. Da una parte, perché assistiamo oggigiorno alla ridefinizione dello statuto dell'oggetto della conoscenza storica e al riconoscimento della rilevanza del contesto e delle fonti; dall'altra, il recente neorealismo⁵ registra l'equilibrio del rapporto tra realtà e significato – bilanciamento in cui, nell'ultimo quarto del XX secolo, il primo termine ha subito una svalutazione ontologica rispetto al linguaggio e alle immagini-schermo.

Tuttavia, come comprendere un periodo antico in questa nuova prospettiva, allorché ci rapportiamo a testi ermeneutici? Come poter attingere la realtà dell'epoca attraverso il filtro del linguaggio? Tanto più nel caso di costruzioni complesse, polifoniche, dallo statuto di testimonianze identitarie, con un ruolo politico e una importante funzione culturale. Come fare a comprenderne la rilevanza per i periodi successivi, pur rispettandone il carattere storico e l'ancoraggio al contesto? Quale genealogia mettono in atto tra il passato e il loro presente e quale genealogia ci tramandano?

Un esempio cosiffatto è rappresentato dall'impressionante trattato parenetico relativo alla signoria di un principe romeno del Rinascimento⁶ post-bizantino: *Gli insegnamenti di Neagoe Basarab a suo figlio Teodosio* (1521)⁷, a cui farò riferimento soprattutto nei termini di una *genealogia della sovranità*⁸, per cercare risposta alle domande summenzionate.

Nella letteratura parenetica medievale e rinascimentale, la genealogia è una dominante implicita, se non addirittura esplicita. Contrariamente alla cronaca, la parenesi (libro di insegnamento) non cerca di stabilire l'origine di

² Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire*, in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, Presses Universitaires de France, coll. "Épiméthée", Paris, 1971, a cura di Suzanne Bachelard et alii, p. 145-172.

³ Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as critique. Foucault and the Problems of Modernity*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2013.

⁴ Jocelyn Benoit, *Toward a Contextual Realism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2021, p. 168-189.

⁵ *New Realism: Problems and Perspectives*, St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, Sofia, 2019, a cura di Alexander Kanev.

⁶ Neagoe Basarab, voivoda di Valacchia dal 1512 al 1521, munifico mecenate della chiesa, promosse l'erigenda di monasteri e chiese e per sua iniziativa il Vangelo venne stampato per la prima volta a Târgoviște. Dal 2008 è venerato dalla chiesa ortodossa romena.

⁷ *Învățările lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie*, Academia Română și Fundația Națională de Știință și Artă, București, 2020, a cura di Dan Zamfirescu ed Ileana Mihăilă, con uno studio introduttivo di Eugen Simion.

⁸ Jens Bartelson, *op. cit.*, p. 53-87.

una stirpe né di dimostrare la teleologia della sua azione, bensì di valorizzare la frattura, il caso, l'apofatico, per restituire il mosaico dei vizi e delle virtù e per promuovere nel modo più concreto l'esercizio saggio e sicuro del potere. Nel caso degli "specchi dei principi", il ritratto regale non è il riflesso nello specchio di una sequenza di volti di antenati consanguinei, bensì il riflesso esatto e pragmatico del connubio tra una quantità di insegnamenti e la realtà. Ecco perché il metodo della genealogia funziona criticamente tanto nella composizione di un testo del genere quanto in quella di un simile ritratto principesco.

Il libro di insegnamento per principi è esso stesso, prima di tutto, un testo genealogico. L'immagine esemplare o pragmatica (perciò imperfetta), che l'autore presenta nel modo più persuasivo possibile, può essere composta con l'ausilio sia di esempi religiosi (tratti dall'Antico e dal Nuovo Testamento) che storici; ma il più delle volte l'intenzione è quella di creare una nuova trama di parabole, che diventano perciò occorrenze estremamente frequenti in testi di questo genere per quanto alcune di esse siano pur sempre suscettibili di variare. Anche se operano con categorie e aspetti quali "l'identico" o "il simile", i libri di insegnamento per principi conoscono all'interno del loro mondo categorie e differenze assai specifiche – a seconda della cultura dell'autore e delle culture di riferimento, dei committenti, dei contesti, delle condizioni politiche, e perfino di quelle finanziarie. Somigliano ai florilegi (libri dei vizi e delle virtù), alcuni più vicini alla filosofia politica, altri alla storiografia o alla morale. Indipendentemente da dove cada e quanto forte sia l'accento, il fulcro di questi "specchi" è il tema del principe ideale. "Ideale" non sta ad indicare tuttavia una misura universale; proprio per questo il ritratto può ancorarsi alla realtà del tempo e alle condizioni politiche che appartengono alla struttura del regime di potere ereditato dal principe.

Affrontato dunque nello spirito dell'ontologia critica, del realismo contestuale e della necessaria ridefinizione del rapporto tra oggetto, contesto e significato⁹, il metodo della genealogia può, da un lato, essere legittimamente utilizzato nell'analisi di un testo architettonico (come quello a cui faccio riferimento qui), ma può essere riconosciuto anche al suo interno, come prassi e critica del presente, come manifestazione della coscienza storica del suo autore. Nella parenesi dedicata al principe Teodosio, ad esempio, il metodo critico della genealogia aiuta a definire, ma anche a comprendere, il ruolo politico, e insieme educativo, del figurativo apofatico (per illustrare i vizi); così come della mappatura temporalmente indeterminata del suo spazio, e per converso, delle soglie storiche e delle convenzioni quotidiane. Infatti, comprimendo le distanze spazio-temporali, il metodo critico della genealogia non attualizza, ma fa sì che *quel* passato –

⁹ Jocelyn Benoist, *Toward a Contextual Realism*, p. 178-187.

per esempio, la fondazione dello stato cristiano –, diventi contemporaneo¹⁰ alla costruzione del mondo del principe di 500 anni fa, e il suo presente, a questo presente, il nostro, attraverso le quattro dimensioni del discorso critico del trattato: l'esemplarità, la forza morale, l'istituzione e l'esercizio del potere¹¹.

In questo trattato di parenetica, la genealogia della sovranità è costruita accuratamente e criticamente, sebbene, com'è naturale che sia, nel rispetto del paradigma di composizione dei testi (per compilazione), eppure in modo selettivo e contrastivo – dissimulando così strategie politiche concrete; camuffando significati e messaggi eversivi, raccogliendo corpi di testi con evidenti intenti dimostrativi – che gli conferiscono rilievo, coloritura e dinamicità –; sfruttando la nozione di *corpo*, segnato da fatti, scelte, malattie. La genealogia critica della sovranità articola così macro e micro storia, religione e morale, la storia e il corpo, le forze emergenti della scena politica, le istituzioni e i rappresentanti del potere, lasciando così spazio a molteplici generi di discorso e a molteplici voci.

II. *Gli insegnamenti di Neagoe Basarab a suo figlio Teodosio*¹² – summa della paretica ortodossa

Mi soffermerò nelle pagine che seguono sulla struttura dello "specchio principesco", come spazio che permette la costruzione e la

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è il contemporaneo*, nottetempo srl, Milano, 2008 – lezione inaugurale del corso di filosofia teoretica, 2006-2007, tenuto presso la Facoltà di Arte e Design, Università Iuav di Venezia.

¹¹ Einar Már Jónsson, *La situation du Speculum regale dans la littérature occidentale*, in *Études germaniques*, nr. XLII, 1987, p. 391-408.

¹² In occasione del cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte del principe, l'Accademia di Romania e la Fondazione Nazionale per la Scienza e l'Arte hanno pubblicato nella raccolta "Opere fondamentali" *Gli insegnamenti di Neagoe Basarab a suo figlio Teodosio*, a cura di Dan Zamfirescu e Ileana Mihăilă, studio introduttivo di Eugen Simion, nella collana "Opere fondamentale", Bucarest 2020. Il "dossier" dei manoscritti, delle edizioni, degli attacchi e contrattacchi alla paternità del testo, la risoluzione filologica delle polemiche internazionali, accuratamente contestualizzati (si veda il capitolo "Note e commenti", p. 501-672) è accompagnata da un'ampia cronologia del regno, illustrata con numerosi frammenti storici e commenti, nonché da un'altra ricca scheda di riferimenti critici (interessante proprio perché presenta un rilievo variegato e copre quasi 150 anni di note a margine degli *Insegnamenti*). Oltre al testo parenetico, la versione romena del XVII secolo (l'edizione del 1970, predisposta da Florica Moisil e Dan Zamfirescu e qui riprodotta) include la traduzione in slavo dei frammenti del XVI secolo (conservati a Sofia) da parte di Gheorghe Mihăilă nonché un addendum contenente la *Vita di San Nifone* e il testo delle scritture della Corte di Argeș (importante per la comprensione dell'epoca). Si fa riferimento alle edizioni precedenti, rispettivamente quelle del 1970, del 1996 e del 2010, da cui sono stati tratti i testi antichi e gli studi critici, ben noti agli specialisti e largamente accettati da questi, filologi *in primis*. L'edizione (come quella del 2010) ha il pregio di evidenziare in corsivo i prestiti da altri autori e di citare in nota le fonti della parenesi.

rappresentazione dell’(auto)ritratto neagoeano, ma anche come architettura testuale che conferisce coerenza alla coscienza storica del sovrano romeno.

La prima parte, una guida morale, consta di un testo stratificato, incentrato sull’edificazione di sé; dapprima, sagomando con la perizia di un calligrafo tanto i modelli quanto il figurativo apofatico; poi, meditando con profondità esicastica sui vizi e le virtù. Le voci autorevoli, selezionate per supportare l’opinione dell’autore in merito alle qualità necessarie al principe in vista del miglior governo possibile, sono rappresentative dello spazio ortodosso, come le statue in una galleria di antenati nobili. I loro ritratti si alternano a parabole, a narrazioni storiche o leggendarie, ad appelli all’autorità sacra. L’autore-costruttore, tuttavia, dispone il suo mondo come un architetto, lo dinamizza, lo popola di figure umane e animali, leggendarie o reali, in una sorta di immaginario vivente del potere e in un discorso di teologia politica particolare, polifonico e incontestabile quanto ad autorità.

La seconda parte della parenesi consiste in un manuale di comportamento istituzionale, una guida alla diplomazia, pratica, finanche pragmatica, severa quanto si conviene, affinché il regno non sfugga al controllo del principe. I quadri e le scene sono del tutto verosimili, le virtù e i vizi passano dai florilegi alla vita sociale e politica, l’allegoria spirituale e storica riceve qui un carattere morale. Alla polifonia iniziale risponde ora la voce dell’autore-principe, legittimata e legittimatrice.

Originale nella sua costruzione, nella sua strategia argomentativa e tematica, la parenesi è teatrale, visiva, intensamente drammatica, multiprospettica, condotta con molta cura ed erudizione. Questa volta la parola proietta e costruisce se stessa su spazi indeterminati. Il testo è come un corpo in scena, è un’articolazione tra il corpo-impero (cristiano ortodosso), il corpo-regno (post-bizantino) e il corpo reale (il principe locale). "Lo specchio del principe" è originale anche a motivo della sostituzione della figura del padre con un modello storico, ma di assoluto riferimento, quello dell’imperatore Costantino I, affinché il regno sia pienamente legittimo e al tempo stesso tutelato, anche in assenza dell’autorità terrena.

Riscontriamo qui, dunque, soluzioni di rappresentazione e costruzione *sui generis* sia per quanto riguarda il ritratto del principe – non ideale, ma perfettibile, grazie alla conoscenza, alla comprensione e al rispetto dei comportamenti virtuosi –, sia per quanto riguarda lo spazio della sua signoria e la relativa genealogia della sovranità –; spazio che genera potenza, nella prima parte, spazio che consuma potenza, nella seconda. La grande epopea veterotestamentaria e cristiana sfocia nella piccola epopea della giusta signoria. L’impero perduto si perpetua col proprio territorio, che deve essere difeso a tutti i costi. La somma delle figure assiologiche genera una "ragione d’essere" per un *signore cristiano*. Il regime di rappresentazione del potere acquista *senso storico*, si adatta alle realtà politica post-bizantina, diventa *critico ed eversivo*. Si trova qui, a mio giudizio, la fine del medievalismo

romeno e l'inizio di un Rinascimento post-bizantino locale, ma con ambizioni e attività internazionali, espresse filosoficamente e politicamente in questa installazione testuale performativa, *specchio-biblioteca* e *specchio-realità*.

III. La genealogia della sovranità, al tempo presente: la coscienza storica del principe Neagoe Basarab

Il trattato parenetico è però anche uno specchio a due pannelli, uno spazio per due reali presenze principesche. In quanto statista, fondatore e persona di cultura elevata, il principe fa sentire la sua voce non solo per educare, ma anche per edificare una coscienza storica, riflettendo al tempo stesso anche la propria. Con questa intenzione, proietta in chiave politica il piano della storia e contribuisce così alla storicità dell'immaginario identitario collettivo; allo stesso modo, la struttura e la sostanza del suo lavoro restituiscono i significati simbolici e le ideologie propri della "corona" e del suo tempo. La sua coscienza storica traspare nel testo anche dalla necessità di dover conferire un senso, una direzione, ma anche un significato al fatto storico (a livello spirituale, istituzionale, identitario o di civiltà); al contempo, di mantenere l'equilibrio tra tradizione (attraverso bibliografie canoniche o storiche) e libertà autoriale, da principe-scrittore, tra modelli e strategie culturali e politiche (nello spirito della signoria ortodossa post-bizantina).

Trascrivere la storia del passato (scrivere a partire dalle fonti una storia dell'esemplarità) e *scrivere la storia del presente* convergono qui in una personale filosofia di governo. Proiettarla visionariamente e metterla in forma, in "opera", rappresenta proprio il piano di governo, rigorosamente politico e storico, esemplare per l'ideologia dell'autocrazia valacca nell'arco di tempo compreso tra il Medioevo romeno e il Rinascimento locale post-bizantino.

Far convergere le due diverse direzioni – di *faire de l'histoire* e *faire l'histoire*¹³ – in un solo punto rappresenta, a mio avviso, l'obiettivo finale dello sforzo di traduzione e interpretazione del piano storico e ideologico locale posto in essere dal principe nella sua opera (di carattere testamentario). Al di là delle motivazioni politiche (di autolegitimazione) legate alla propria signoria, la parenesi contribuisce in misura decisiva a *consolidare l'identità statale ed etnica*.

Gli insegnamenti si basano sul binomio concettuale fondante di ogni governo, *politeia* e *paideia*. Ravvisiamo in ciò l'ostinata preoccupazione del principe esicasta di dimostrare il carattere professionale del governo locale

¹³ Jacques Le Goff, Pierre Nora (coord.), *Faire de l'histoire. Nouveaux problèmes, nouvelles approches, nouveaux objets*, 3 vol., Gallimard, Paris, 1974.

(politica interna e regionale), l'impegno e il riconoscimento del suo ruolo nella tutela del cristianesimo post-bizantino (politica anti-ottomana).

Come opera didattica per i principi post-bizantini, la parenesi pone la *politeia* e *paideia* locali sulla scia dell'Impero bizantino (quasi 70 anni dopo la caduta di Costantinopoli e circa 160 anni dopo la fondazione degli stati romeni medievali) e inquadra spiritualmente il potere autocratico (cristiano-ortodosso), ancorando stabilmente e una volta per tutte l'etnia e la civiltà dei romeni alla storia antica del continente, da cui poi è emerso poi l'impero di Costantino I – punto di riferimento e garante simbolico di Neagoe Basarab in tutta la sua opera.

IV. La genealogia della sovranità cristiana romena: temi e idee politiche

Nella *Storia delle idee politiche romene (1369-1878)*, Vlad Georgescu¹⁴ propone la nozione di "politogramma", definita come una sequenza di testo o un testo contenente un'idea; una nozione politica, quindi; un'unità ricorrente, che può attestare il divenire storico, ma può aiutare anche nell'analisi e nell'interpretazione della storiografia e del pensiero politico (individuale o istituzionale) o dell'immaginario collettivo.

La ricerca quantitativa (di ordine statistico) si è basata su un corpus di 2049 testi romeni (firmati da 302 autori) in un intervallo di oltre 500 anni – dalla fondazione degli stati medievali (1369), all'indipendenza del Regno moderno (ottenuta nel 1878). Da questi testi sono stati ricavati 172 argomenti che, ordinati, hanno determinato sei campi principali del pensiero politico romeno, segnatamente: il senso della storia, la società, lo stato, la politica interna, le relazioni internazionali, la coscienza nazionale.

Tutti e sei i campi tematici sono rappresentati in modo esemplare da *Gli insegnamenti per Teodosio*. Di tutti, Vlad Georgescu osserva in più luoghi della sua analisi che l'opera attribuita a Neagoe Basarab li istituisce sul piano teorico e li fonda sul piano delle contestualizzazioni (volte a insegnare e guidare direttamente e praticamente il principe ereditario nell'attività di governo).

Tra i concetti politici sub-sequenziali dei sei campi tematici, che risultano prevalenti nelle opere summenzionate e che costituiscono la *genealogia della sovranità romena*, vi sono (le denominazioni appartengono a Vlad Georgescu e sono qui riportate nell'ordine in cui appaiono nell'intera opera): *Il senso della storia romena* – la decadenza della civiltà, le spiegazioni teoriche, le cause della decadenza, la posizione geografica, elementi allogenici non assimilabili, la coscienza della decadenza politica ed economica; il valore storico, i signori militari, i diplomatici e gli studiosi, la

¹⁴ Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria ideilor politice românești (1369-1878)*, Colecția istorică Jon Dumitru Verlag, München, 1987.

critica severa delle condizioni di esistenza; *Il Rinascimento e il sentimento europeo; i modelli di modernizzazione* – la missione europea dei romeni (la *stavroforia*, l’idea di una “barriera” contro i pagani, la critica all’Europa cristiana per non aver sostenuto a sufficienza il bastione danubiano), il modello romeno; *Lo Stato e le strutture politiche* – l’assolutismo monarchico, lo stato boiardo, la natura del potere, l’origine etnica del signore – signore terriero, signore fanariota, signore europeo –, la durata della signoria, l’immagine del signore, il potere giudiziario, l’adozione di leggi; *La politica interna* – lo scopo del governare, la critica della situazione, lo sfruttamento economico straniero e la critica della stagnazione; *La politica culturale* – l’idea di illuminismo e la politica culturale, freni culturali esterni (slavonismo, ellenismo), gli strumenti della politica culturale, la lingua nazionale; *Stato e Chiesa – la politica religiosa* – la coscienza cristiana, il pan-ortodossismo, le relazioni politiche (gerarchiche) con il mondo esterno; *Le relazioni internazionali dei romeni* – il diritto storico, lo status internazionale e le relazioni con la Sublime Porta, l’immagine dell’Impero ottomano, la teoria delle capitolazioni, la limitazione dei diritti ottomani e il rispetto dei privilegi, il territorio, l’esercito e la guerra, l’idea di indipendenza, le richieste di aiuto e protezione, le grandi potenze e la sovranità nazionale, la cooperazione e la confederazione balcanica; *La coscienza nazionale* – i problemi teorici, la coscienza etnica e il problema dell’unità di origine, il pan-romenismo, la collaborazione politica infra-romena, patria-patriottismo¹⁵.

Metterò di seguito in evidenza alcuni aspetti generali relativi a questi concetti, rappresentati in maniera esemplare nella parenesi e che restituiscono il profilo della coscienza storica del principe rinascimentale¹⁶ e l’articolata genealogia della sovranità, dal suo punto di vista.

Il politogramma della *monarchia assoluta*, come notato anche da Vlad Georgescu, è consacrato, argomentato e ampiamente esemplificato ne *Gli insegnamenti*:

Il passaggio all’espressione teorica si è compiuto con *Gli insegnamenti di Neagoe Basarab a suo figlio, Teodosio* (1521), meditazione di un voivoda con vocazione di studioso, ambizioni autocratiche e, purtroppo, con mezzi troppo poveri per i grandi sogni imperiali. Il suo scritto parenetico giustifica la signoria assoluta sulla base della sua origine divina; i sudditi non hanno altra scelta che obbedire [...]. È vero che Neagoe si è preoccupato di costruire l’immagine di un autocrate che

¹⁵ *Ibidem, passim.*

¹⁶ Alcuni aspetti di ciò quanto viene commentato di seguito sono stati discussi più diffusamente in: Laura Mesina, *Conștiință istorică la principii-autori. Neagoe Basarab și Dimitrie Cantemir*, in *Caietele Sextil Pușcariu III*, Institutul de Lingvistică "Sextil Pușcariu" al Academiei Române, Ed. Scriptor – Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca 2017, p. 503–517.

non avrebbe avuto motivo di suscitare l'opposizione dei suoi sudditi: giustizia, saggezza, coraggio, fede, amor di patria [...]¹⁷.

Il diritto del signore al giudizio è supremo, e *Gli insegnamenti* lo sanciscono con spirito cristiano, definendone al tempo stesso la cornice morale ed etica, quindi le regole e i limiti: il giudizio deve basarsi su delle prove e tradursi in eque decisioni; deve instaurare la giustizia, avere un fondamento giuridico attentamente elaborato, essere equilibrato e allo stesso tempo sensibile a quegli aspetti della vita di cui la legge non fa menzione, ma che nemmeno esclude.

Il modello di governo è caratterizzato nella parenesi dai seguenti attributi: saggezza; rigore, ma anche senso della giustizia; temperanza, ma anche misericordia; devozione alla patria e all'ortodossia, il loro paladino è prudente ma anche risoluto. Per questo il modello realizzato da Neagoe è anche militante, attento persino alla componente guerriera della signoria, alla *stavroforia* – per quanto proprio lui sia riuscito a evitare gli scontri armati e a governare in pace. Eppure fu sempre lui a teorizzare la guerra di resistenza, la guerra "partigiana"¹⁸, nel caso in cui il signore perda il trono: si consiglia al principe di non rassegnarsi, di non andare in esilio, ma di mettersi al sicuro e tenersi pronto a ripristinare la sua posizione di potere. Questo perché, in realtà, nonostante la sua calma apparente, la signoria di Neagoe Basarab dovette affrontare una prima opposizione da parte del partito dei boiardi (concretizzata nel memoriale indirizzato agli ottomani, intitolato da questi ultimi *La richiesta degli infedeli di Valacchia*), un confronto politico che si acuì nel tempo, fino all'Illuminismo – quando entrambi gli schieramenti, principesco e aristocratico, persero contro l'assolutismo fanariota.

L'idea di "patria" è esplicitamente presente ne *Gli insegnamenti* come politogramma, data la loro militanza cristiana, nonché la dedizione dell'autocrate al paese governato, il modo in cui egli onora il suo dovere di sovrano cristiano, e persino il sacrificio che è disposto a fare per mantenere la sua autonomia spirituale e politica. Proprio l'esortazione rivolta al principe a non abbattersi alla perdita del potere, a non smarrirsi, attesta la preoccupazione per la patria e la responsabilità non negoziabile di difenderla e riconquistarla.

D'altra parte, Neagoe Basarab portò avanti una rischiosa corrispondenza diplomatica per rafforzare *la resistenza anti-ottomana* (l'alleanza anti-ottomana con Stefano IV e la loro ambasciata congiunta a Roma, nel 1519), cristiana e post-bizantina (questa volta l'accento è politico), che denota una certa dote diplomatica, da politico di respiro internazionale, con visione e ambizioni maggiori di quanto lasci intravedere il corso della sua signoria.

¹⁷ Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria ideilor politice românești (1369-1878)*, p. 136.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 298.

L’analisi della situazione della Valacchia, sulla scorta di una indagine statistica dei testi, dimostra anche che l’indice di *repressione ottomana* (e non solo) sui sovrani e gli alti dignitari romeni, laici e chierici, politologi, aumentò notevolmente fino alla fine del XVII secolo, estendendosi rispetto ai secoli precedenti dagli autocrati ai loro sudditi¹⁹, divenendo spesso un fenomeno estremamente crudele (il caso del principe romeno Constantin Brâncoveanu e dei suoi figli, decapitati a Istanbul per ordine del sultano), percepito come particolarmente oppressivo nei tempi a venire, all’inizio del XVIII secolo, con l’instaurazione del regime fanariota (all’incirca un terzo dei politografi, ad esempio, sono costretti a emigrare).

V. L’originalità del trattato principesco

Vlad Georgescu dimostra, sulla base di analisi statistiche, che lo scritto attribuito a Neagoe Basarab è anche il più ricco di temi e idee politiche medievali che si ritrovano in testi romeni di epoche successive. I politogrammi contenuti, elencati in precedenza, lo classificherebbero anzi tra le opere di teoria del potere cristiano. La prima parte, ampia raccolta di testi sacri ed esegesi dogmatica, lo collocherebbe accanto a opere di spiritualità religiosa, mentre la seconda parte, di taglio pratico (e alquanto pragmatico) per il giovane principe Teodosio (il primogenito e l’unico figlio maschio rimasto in vita), lo ricondurrebbe, fatto salvo un certo grado di originalità qui presente, tra i manuali di governo (sia che ci si riferisca alla prassi occidentale sia a quella bizantina). Ritengo che la complessa situazione dell’opera, da attribuirsi anche alla sua architettura modulare e composita, non sia irrilevante, per questo vi farò riferimento di seguito. E in particolare all’*originalità*, perché, una volta svelata, permette di riconoscere al principe medievale una coscienza storica, operante nella costruzione della genealogia della sovranità romena.

Gli autori e i commentatori dell’edizione critica di riferimento, Florica Moisil, Dan Zamfirescu e Gheorghe Mihăilă, rivelano a più riprese un fatto sorprendente, e cioè che non è possibile identificare lo scritto sul modello del quale l’autore locale ha lavorato. Neagoe Basarab, a cui si attribuisce la parenesi, poteva orientarsi solamente seguendo le convenzioni formali e generali richieste a una simile impresa, senza disporre di un modello vero e proprio. A quel tempo il genere *medievale* non si era affermato nello spazio *post-bizantino* (a differenza di quello occidentale²⁰),

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 20-21.

²⁰ Nicolas Michel, *Pour une redéfinition du « genre » des miroirs aux princes. Bilan et perspectives de recherches*, in *Les Miroirs aux princes aux frontières des genres (VIII^e-XV^e siècles)*, Classiques Garnier, Paris, 2022, a cura di N. Michel, p. 7-68; Noëlle-Laetitia Perret, Stéphane Péquignot, *Introduction*, in *A Critical Companion to the ‘Mirrors for Princes’ Literature*, S. Péquignot, Brill, Leiden, 2023, a cura di N-L Perret, p. 1-21.

ma si basava su testi ereditati dal periodo degli antichi re (risalenti, quindi, a prima del 1453), a loro volta debitori alla storia antica del genere²¹. Alcuni testi sono stati ritrovati in copia o in diverse raccolte anche presso la biblioteca del Monastero di Bistrița – fondato e sostenuto economicamente dalla nobile famiglia dei Craiovești (dalle cui fila proveniva anche Neagoe, sebbene per via adottiva) –, da dove l'autore poteva prenderli in prestito, per ricavarne di volta in volta i commenti e le parabole trascritti ne *Gli insegnamenti*; non è stato possibile, invece, identificare alcuna copia manoscritta di alcun manuale di educazione principesca a cui si sia direttamente ispirato.

Su questa falsariga, mi propongo qui di focalizzarmi, sommariamente²², sugli aspetti da cui traspare l'originalità della parenesi, attribuibile alla concezione, alla modalità di lavorare con le fonti, alla costruzione dell'opera e della sua articolazione tematica, aspetti che, considerati nel loro insieme, rivelano il profilo esperto della coscienza storica con cui l'autore ha operato nel tracciare la propria genealogia della sovranità cristiana romena.

Il primo aspetto dell'originalità di questa parenesi riguarda il fatto che il principe-scrittore costruisce il suo *piano di lavoro e la sua strategia dimostrativa* dall'universale al particolare, dal paradigma alla tipologia (come attesta il contenuto della parenesi), senza avere uno scritto-modello come base, seguendo solo il fine educativo di tale iniziativa.

Un secondo aspetto di originalità dell'opera è garantito dalla *modalità di costruzione della struttura tematica del testo*, che non si riduce a una semplice giustapposizione di frammenti tratti da fonti canoniche. Pur non rinunciando all'autorità del testo sacro (assecondando in ciò l'uso del suo tempo), il principe-autore traccia un'architettura complessa e ben articolata, che sostiene una visione chiara, politica e storica, e mette in luce alcuni degli aspetti principali della signoria, avvalendosi anche di frammenti ricavati dalla bibliografia con cui ha potuto lavorare.

Un terzo aspetto di originalità di quest'opera può essere individuato nella *strategia identitaria dell'autorialità*, basata sul rapporto tra le voci testuali; una strategia colta, del logos che crea e dei suoi gradi di legittimità, per la quale gli autori citati (compresi anche i frammenti biblici), inconfondibili, svolgono un ruolo di primo piano, analogo a quello della divinità nel cosmo creato e del signore nella sua città; l'autore della parenesi, che esercita e regge l'autorità, è rappresentato o nella posa dell'imperatore

²¹ Simona Nicolae, *Oglinzi ale principilor în Bizanț*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, p. 147-152.

²² Laura Mesina, *Lo specchio del principe, lo specchio della memoria: Gli insegnamenti di Neagoe Basarab a suo figlio Teodosio, 1521*, in *Questiones Romanicae*, IX, tomo 3, 2022, coord. Valy Ceia, p. 42-50.

eletto e delegato a giudice provvisorio, o in quella del suddito rispetto al suo signore divino.

Anche il modello supremo dell'imperatore cristiano, Costantino I, viene messo del resto in rapporto diretto con il potere dei Basarabi, per rafforzare in Teodosio la consapevolezza che, anche in assenza del padre-consigliere, la sua signoria entrerà nel divino piano, sarà custodita e protetta (solo a determinate condizioni, però), ammantata e rafforzata dalle grandi esperienze che l'hanno preceduto. È questo il *quarto grande aspetto di originalità* di questo testo: *la surrogazione del vero padre con il modello-adottivo costantiniano*. La mossa della sostituzione può avere ragioni non solo educative, politiche (nell'area post-bizantina) o di legittimazione della sua dinastia, ma anche particolari (l'aggravarsi della malattia del sovrano).

Allo stesso tempo, però, il ruolo centrale riconosciuto al primo imperatore cristiano esprime anche un altro problema (come pure il progetto della crociata anti-ottomana, citato allegoricamente negli *Insegnamenti*): quello di mantenere lo stato con l'aiuto della fede cristiana di orientamento costantinopolitano, cioè ortodosso. La progettazione della parenesi per cerchi concentrici, dalla creazione del mondo alle realtà concrete proprie del tempo a cui risale lo scritto, genera diversi effetti politici e attesta la coscienza storica e critica del principe-autore: la discendenza diretta della signoria romena dal regno cristiano; la derivazione del diritto implicito a possederla per via ereditaria (vagamente legittima per questo Basarab, stando alle consuetudini del tempo), supportata anche dal valore personale (vale lo stesso esempio); l'obbligo di difendere la religione e le forme statali che tutelano *l'oikouménè* e *l'oikonomia* cristiana (la comunità ortodossa e la sua gestione); l'obbligo di sostenere finanziariamente il mondo monastico athonita (Neagoe si impegna anche in Serbia, a Krušedol, per l'ex metropolita dell'Ungro-valacchia, Maxim Brancovici, parente acquisito attraverso sua moglie, la principessa Despina).

Gli insegnamenti offrono nella prima parte un modello di qualcosa che preesiste al potere reale, un dato *a priori* – un *Vorbild* – un modello in sé, uno strumento di osservazione, di analisi, la simulazione di qualcosa che può accadere; nella seconda parte, invece, la particolare configurazione di una teoria, di una struttura profonda o di una sovrastruttura generativa, latente, con efficacia esemplare e numerosi nuclei di teoria dottrinale – un *Modell*²³. La parenesi pratica, essendo scritta per qualcuno in particolare (una persona, un ruolo), è un modello per qualcosa di non preesistente, per uno stato di cose osservabile; normativo (per qualcosa che accade), è un esempio da riprendere e riprodurre, per una genealogia vivente della sovranità cristiana romena.

²³ Pietro di Marco, *Riflessioni sui modelli*, in *Modelli nella storia del pensiero politico*, V.I. Comparato, Casa editrice Leo S. Olschki, Firenze, 1987, p. 25–48. Di Marco assume i due concetti, di *Vorbilder* e *Modell*, da Max Scheler, *Vorbilder und Führer*, f. ed., Berlin, 1933, e li analizza in parallelo.

Ciò che Neagoe costruisce attraverso la tecnica della citazione, nella parenesi spirituale, non è solo un paradigma, una matrice riconducibile a una preferenza storica del compilatore, che prende le mosse da frammenti canonici e compone una trama per legittimare il proprio ruolo, il proprio luogo e la propria visione del potere e del suo esercizio; è piuttosto una *summa* di figure assiologiche, diventate impersonali (modelli e istituzioni), che fanno parte di una *Wertgefühle*, di una "ragione di essere". Ad esse corrisponde, tuttavia, un mondo locale, vivo, con le sue virtù e i suoi vizi, una genealogia di valori di riferimento, che rafforza l'identità del potere locale.

Un modello assiologico si specchia così in un modello operativo e restituisce la visione del potere del principe, in uno stato cristiano del mondo post-bizantino. Il testo offre uno "specchio" a suo figlio, con quadri e scene del ceremoniale di corte composte in un caleidoscopio figurale; gli offre, da ultimo, un'originale genealogia della sovranità cristiana, che contiene il ritratto stesso del principe-autore del Rinascimento post-bizantino.

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Une rétractation qui ne convainc pas. Guerric de Saint-Quentin et la vision de l'essence divine *

Cristian Moisuc **

An unconvincing retraction. Guerric de Saint-Quentin and the vision of the divine essence

Abstract: The aim of this article is to reassess Guerric's retraction (i.e. the changes he made to the thesis of the vision of God between *Quaestio I* and *Quaestio III*) and to provide some considerations that could, perhaps, contribute to a better understanding of how the condemnations of 1241 forced an author to abruptly contradict his own teaching. We want to shed new light on the difficult repositioning of theologians writing before and after the 1241 moment, who were obliged to openly overturn not only what they had upheld, but also many of the patristic authorities who defended the invisibility of the divine essence.

Keywords: Guerric of Saint-Quentin, divine essence, vision, infinity, condemnations of 1241

On le sait bien, depuis l'étude fondatrice de M.-D. Chenu¹, les condamnations de 1241-1244² marquent un point de non-retour dans la

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¹ Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., « Le dernier avatar de la théologie orientale en Occident au XIII^e siècle », dans *Mélangés Auguste Pelzer: Études d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale de la Scolastique médiévale offertes à Monseigneur August Pelzer à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, Louvain, 1947, p. 159-181

² La bibliographie sur ce sujet est vaste, bien qu'elle ne puisse concurrencer celle qui traite des condamnations d'Etienne Tempier de 1277, plus célèbres et plus discutées dans le cadre des études médiévales. Nous mentionnons uniquement ce qui nous paraît incontournable pour ce sujet : Deborah Grice, *Church, Society and University. The Paris Condemnation of 1241/4*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2020 ; Antoine Côté, *L'infinié divine dans la théologie médiévale* (1220-1255), Paris, J. Vrin, 2002; B.-G. Guyot et H.-F. Dondaine, « Guerric de Saint-Quentin et la condamnation de 1241 », *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 44 (1960), p. 232–242 ; L. Bianchi, « Gli articoli censurati nel 1241/1244 e la loro influenza da Bonaventura à Gerson », dans F. Morenzoni et J.-Y. Tilliette (éd.), *Autour de Guillaume d'Auvergne* (m. 1249), Turnhout, 2005, p. 155-171 ; Christian Trottmann, *La*

théologie médiévale et, plus généralement, dans le rapport entre la théologie latine et l'héritage patristique grec.

Bien que l'évaluation de Chenu semble aujourd'hui inexacte sur le plan doctrinal (« des *syncrétismes* assez misérables, quoique très suggestifs »³ entre des thèmes de la théologie grecque et divers éléments de philosophie néoplatonicienne : « conception physique de la grâce, engagement de l'économie de salut dans l'ordre de l'univers, personnalisme trinitaire, théorie de la participation ménageant la transcendence inviolable du Dieu-Un et rendant compte de la multiplicité des formes créées par les énergies éternelles incrées »⁴), elle a au moins le mérite de rechercher une explication du moment 1241-1244⁵. Et bien qu'aujourd'hui il puisse paraître superflu de reprendre et de résumer l'intégralité du dossier (d'autres chercheurs récents reconnaissent ouvertement la difficulté de la tâche⁶), nous risquons une reprise des principaux repères, afin de mieux comprendre l'effet que les condamnations ont eus sur Guerric de Saint-Quentin (un des rares auteurs à avoir été contemporain de l'événement et dont la trace est visible dans ses œuvres).

La position des exégètes consacrés sur le sujet est déjà bien connue : pour Chenu, la réaction de l'Église catholique condamnant les 10 thèses supposées erronées⁷ était justifiée par la nécessité de faire barrage au « syncrétisme doctrinal⁸ », qui se développait autour des thèmes néoplatoniciens (Étienne Gilson avait avancé, quelques années auparavant, le syntagme « platonismes communicants »⁹), joints aux thèses de la patristique

Vision beatificae, des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII, Rome, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1995, p. 115-117 et 175-186 ; W. J. Courtenay, « Dominicans and Suspect Opinion in the Thirteenth Century : the Cases of Stephen of Venizy, Peter of Tarentaise, and the Articles of 1270 and 1271 », dans *Vivarium*, 32/2 (1994), p. 186-195 ; P.-M. de Contenson, « La théologie de la vision de Dieu au début du XIII^e siècle. Le *De retributionibus sanctorum* de Guillaume d'Auvergne et la condamnation de 1241 », dans *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 46 (1962), p. 409-444.

³ M.-D. Chenu, *op. cit.*, p. 180 (c'est nous qui soulignons).

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

⁵ Nous rappelons que la condamnation a eu lieu en deux moments : le 13 janvier 1241 et puis la reprise, le 5 décembre 1244.

⁶ Ayelet Even-Ezra, « Can a soul see God or itself without intermediaries? The self as distinct from its habits and actions: Theology between experience and observation », dans *Ecstasy in The Classroom: Trance, Self, and The Academic Profession in Medieval Paris*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2018, p. 82 : « The doctrinal aspects of the condemnation have attracted intensive scholarly attention, especially the first opinion that neither man nor angel will see the divine essence in itself ("quod divina essentia in se nec ab homine nec ab angelo videbitur"). It would be superfluous to summarize all of these studies at length here, but some remarks are necessary ».

⁷ On trouve ces thèses dans l'article de M.-D Chenu de 1947, qui les extrait lui-même du *Cartularium Universitatis Parisiensis I*, édité par H. Denifle et E. Châtelain en 1889 à Paris).

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 167.

⁹ E. Gilson, *Le thomisme*, 4^e édition, Paris, J. Vrin, 1942, p. 129.

grecque (surtout la parfaite transcendence et invisibilité de l'essence divine).

Ce fut, cependant, la réaction (trop) sensible d'un esprit théologique « tout nourri du *De videndo Deo* d'Augustin et de son aspiration à une communion immédiate avec Dieu »¹⁰ qui se voyait ébranlé dans le confort de sa théologie de la vision de Dieu, une théologie que P.-M. de Contenson décrivait comme une « possession tranquille des formules néotestamentaires sur la vision béatifique, telles que les avait interprétées saint Augustin : Dieu sera vu *sicuti est, in specie non in aenigmate* »¹¹.

La thèse du « syncrétisme » était donc reprise par de Contenson (qui parlait d'une « influence érigéno-dionysienne [qui] se conjugue avec celles des doctrines porrétaines. La *Summa Quoniam homines* constitue un exemple privilégié d'une tel syncrétisme »¹²), pour souligner que la condamnation de 1241 fut, d'une part, la « réaction contre les conclusions excessives » d'une théologie de la béatitude qui avait essayé de penser la vision de Dieu grâce aux instruments aristotéliciens¹³ et, d'autre part, un rejet implicite des sources patristiques grecques (« un certain érigénisme » ou « des formules des Pères Orientaux », selon de Contenson¹⁴).

Quoi qu'il en soit, ces deux études inaugurales (auxquelles il faut ajouter deux autres études¹⁵ qui ont déblayé le chemin vers une réévaluation du moment 1241) ont permis aux chercheurs de voir aujourd'hui d'une manière plus nuancée. On ne peut plus soutenir qu'avant l'entrée de l'aristotélisme et de l'*avicennisme* (terme à prendre avec précaution, étant donné le danger d'une étiquette trop facile) dans la théologie catholique, celle-ci était uniquement « augustinienne » et que les influences grecques étaient insignifiantes. Deborah Grice parle d'une « fluidité » de la théologie latine au XII^e siècle¹⁶, tandis que Simon Tugwell soutient même que la théologie du XII^e siècle « avait intégré Denys dans une tradition essentiellement augustinienne, selon laquelle nous connaissons Dieu pour la seule raison que nous l'aimons »¹⁷.

¹⁰ M.-D. Chenu, *op. cit.*, p.171.

¹¹ P.-M. de Contenson, « Avicennisme latin et vision de Dieu au début du XIII^e siècle », AHDLMA, 26/1959, p. 34.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 72 (c'est nous qui soulignons).

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 82

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 84

¹⁵ Il faut aussi mentionner deux autres articles de la même période qui ont circonscrit le problème de la vision de Dieu au début du XIII^e siècle et ont contribué à l'éveil de l'intérêt des exégètes pour la période 1210 – 1240 : H.-F. Dondaine, « L'objet et le 'média' de la vision béatifique », dans *Recherche de Théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 19/1952, p. 60–99, et toujours P.-M. de Contenson, « La théologie de la vision de Dieu au début du XIII^e siècle. Le *De retributionibus sanctorum* de Guillaume d'Auvergne et la condamnation de 1241 », dans *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 46 (1962), p. 409–444.

¹⁶ « Catholic doctrine was fluid before the condemnation, although increasingly the position that Augustine seems to have held finally – that God's essence could be seen in heaven though not on earth – was accepted. », Deborah Grice, *op. cit.*, p.111, n. 152.

¹⁷ S. Tugwell, *Albert and Thomas*, Paulist Press, New York, 1988, p. 53 : « ... absorbed

Or, selon une hypothèse avancée par de Contenson et acceptée par Tugwell, *le moment 1241* ne serait que l'effet visible d'une crise qui n'a pas été précipitée par la prise de conscience des théologiens latins ayant soudainement observé l'influence grecque (ce qu'avait suggéré à demi-mot Chenu, parlant des *syncrétismes* et pointant vers les théologiens grecs, plus ou moins *néoplatoniciens* : Denys Aréopagite, Maxime le Confesseur traduit par Jean Scot Erigène, Grégoire de Nazianze), mais plutôt par les tentatives d'application de l'épistémologie aristotélicienne au problème non-résolu par le XII^e siècle : comment notre âme (ou notre intellect) connaît Dieu¹⁸. Nous souscrivons à cette hypothèse et, à cet effet, nous examinerons deux questions de Guerric de Saint-Quentin pour la vérifier.

Il est vrai que la théologie négative était déjà bien connue dans l'Occident latin depuis les traductions faites par Erigène (aux alentours de 840) et de Jean Sarazin, en 1167. Le prestige de Denys l'Aréopagite même au XII^e siècle était tellement grand que, pour saint Thomas, ce dernier sera l'auteur le plus cité après Aristote ; on dénombre pas moins de 1272 références dionysiennes dans son œuvre¹⁹. Toutefois, pendant plus de trois siècles, la tension entre l'invisibilité divine dont parlait Jean Scot Erigène²⁰

Dionysius into an essentially Augustinian tradition, according to which we know God precisely by loving him ». Il y a plusieurs autres études qui détaillent l'usage des sources patristiques grecques dans la théologie latine du XII^e siècle. Mentionnons-en quelques-unes : J.-G. Bougerol, « The Fathers and The Sentences of Peter Lombard », in I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in The West*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, vol. I, p. 113–64; E.A. Matter, « The Church Fathers and The *Glossa Ordinaria* », in I. Backus (éd), *op. cit.*, p. 83–111; J. Werckmeister, « The Reception of The Church Fathers in Canon Law », in I. Backus (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 51–83; B. Pranger, « *Sic et Non*: Patristic Authority between Refusal and Acceptance », in I. Backus (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 165–193; A. J. Minnis and A.B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100-c.1375*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 87–105.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 50-51.

¹⁹ Jean Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis*, Paris, Librairie Felix Alcan, 1919, p. 60.

²⁰ « Nous ne verrons donc pas Dieu Lui-même tel qu'il subsiste en Lui-même, puisque même les anges ne le voient pas – une telle vision est un effet interdit à toute créature car « lui seul, comme dit l'apôtre, possède l'immortalité, et habite une lumière inaccessible » - mais nous contemplerons certaines théophanies créées par Lui en nous », Jean Scot Erigene, *De la division de la nature*, trad. F. Bertin, Paris, PUF, 1995, p. 75 (pour la référence précise = *Periphyseon* I, éd. E. Jeauneau, Turnhout, Brepols, p. 12, ligne 265-269, PL 122, 448C). Voir aussi l'excellent article d'Emmanuel Falque, « Jean Scot Érigène : la théophanie comme mode de la phénoménalité », dans la *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 2002/3 , tome 86, p. 387 à 421 qui, à part l'indéniable intérêt théologique, a le mérite de souligner l'inouïe percée quasi-phénoménologique du concept de *théophanie* chez Erigène. Citons uniquement un fragment de l'analyse d'E. Falque : « Mieux, et c'est là où Jean Scot Érigène non seulement retrouve le spécifique chrétien de l'Écriture sainte, mais annonce aussi les requêtes phénoménologiques les plus contemporaines, la théophanie (*theophania*) devient elle-même le leitmotive d'un travail étymologique sur la langue probablement capable de concurrencer, ou à tout le moins d'augurer, d'autres travaux ultérieurs qui pourraient bien secrètement en dépendre (Heidegger) [...] "Tout ce qui apparaît huit (*omne quod appetet lucet*) et est dérivé du verbe *phainô* (*et a verbo phainô derivatur*), c'est-à-dire je suis ou j'apparaîs

en s'appuyant sur l'apophatisme grec et le désir augustinien de voir Dieu n'avait pas éclaté (chose surprenante, car cette tension n'était pas marginale, mais consubstantielle aux deux visées différentes qui caractérisaient Augustin et les Pères grecs, selon H.-F. Dondaine)²¹.

Malgré le refoulement de cette tension²², le problème épistémologique (*comment obtenir la vision de Dieu dans le ciel, alors qu'aucun intellect créé ne peut atteindre Dieu incompréhensible ?*) subsistait toujours.

Plusieurs auteurs médiévaux comme Alexandre de Halès et Hugues de Saint-Cher avaient essayé d'évacuer le problème en reprenant dans leurs œuvres la solution grecque au problème de la connaissance de Dieu : le premier se replie sur les théophanies divines qui, tout en manifestant Dieu dans le monde, cachent son essence incompréhensible²³, alors que le suivant assimile la connaissance de Dieu à la bonté des saints²⁴. Mais ce fut un équilibre assez fragile entre deux traditions dont les chemins étaient parallèles : « les deux traditions cheminent côte à côte et des essais paisibles d'assimilation se montrent ça et là jusqu'après 1230 »²⁵.

(*id est luceo vel appareo*)“ (Scot Érigène). Le lecteur averti croit lire la plus exacte définition du « phénomène » chez Heidegger ici, pourtant consignée au paragraphe sept de *Sein und Zeit* comme « ce qui se montre lui-même, le manifeste » – lui aussi dérivé du grec « *phainesthai* » (« se montrer ») et de sa racine « *phainô* » (« mettre au jour, à la lumière »). Peut-être serait-ce précisément que la théologie aurait quelque chose à dire à la phénoménologie en matière de visibilité ou de manifestation (la théophanie comme mode de la phénoménalité), sinon l'inverse », E. Falque, art. cit., p. 389.

²¹ « Avec saint Augustin, l'Occident pose en principe la vocation de l'homme de voir Dieu, et c'est dans cette perspective qu'il envisagera « l'invisibilité » de Dieu ; par contre, dès le IV^e siècle, en réaction contre Eunome, les Pères grecs posent en principe que Dieu est invisible, et ils prennent bien garde d'y déroger quand il leur arrive de parler de la vision face à face », H.-F. Dondaine, « L'objet et le 'média' ... », p. 61-62.

²² S. Tugwell, *Albert and Thomas*, p. 50

²³ Cf. S. Tugwell, *op. cit.*, p. 51. Chez Érigène comme chez les Pères grecs, la théophanie à cette double fonction, de montrer Dieu, tout en cachant son essence invisible : Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae *Expositiones in Hierarchiam caelestem*, édité par J. Barbet, CCCM, 31 (1975), V, 88.40-42 : « [intellectualis creatura] inveniat quidem ipsius theophaniam, non inveniat ipsius substantiam »; VIII, 133.555-559: “Imagines vocat, ut arbitratur, *theophanias*, in quibus et ipsi angeli et homines in equalem eis beatitudinem glorificati ipsum Deum videbunt, quoniam *per seipsum invisibilis est et erit omni intellectui* ». Pour ce qui est des théophanies et de leur interprétation différente dans les deux traditions, voir, entre autres, John D. Jones, « Filled with The Visible Theophany of The Lord : Reading Dionysius East and West », in *Logos : A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 53, no. 1-2 / 2012, p. 13-41 ; Paul Rorem, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy*, Brepols, 2005, p. 128 et Wayne J. Hankey, « Dionysius Becomes an Augustinian. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium VI* », in *Studia Patristica*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, vol. XXIX, Leuven, Peeters, 1997, p. 251-59 ; Bogdan G. Bucur, « Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective », *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 52/1 (2008), p. 67-93; J. M. Alonso, « Teofanía y vision beata en Scoto Eriugena », dans *Revista española de Teología*, 10/1950, p. 75-91

²⁴ L.-B. Gillon, « Béatitude et désir de voir Dieu au Moyen-Age », dans *Angelicum*, Vol. 26, No. 2 / 1949, p. 115-142, surtout les pages 129-131.

²⁵ H. -F. Donadaine, art. cit., p.75

En même temps, l'entrée d'Aristote et d'Avicenne dans le discours théologique n'a fait que préparer les conditions de l'irruption du problème²⁶.

Après la condamnation de David de Dînant en 1210 (qui, cherchant à appliquer la noétique aristotélicienne à la connaissance de Dieu, frôlait dangereusement l'identification de l'intellect humain avec Dieu²⁷ - et ce fut là la première irruption du problème patent²⁸), les théologiens qui se sont déplacés à l'autre extrême (afin d'éviter l'écueil panthéiste), comme Alexandre de Hales, ont naturellement rencontré la solution érigénienne des théophanies, qui était contraire à l'idéal augustinien de la vision divine sans intermédiaire²⁹.

Dans le problème d'un *intermédiaire* entre l'homme et Dieu, qui fut l'autre cause de l'irruption du problème patent, se conjuguent, en effet, deux questions opposées : la première, déjà classique, celle des théophanies (qui s'interposent entre l'homme et Dieu afin d'*interdire* l'accès à la vision plénière de Dieu) et la deuxième, nouvelle, qui provenait de l'application de la noétique avicennienne à la vision de Dieu et qui exige un « médium », un « intermédiaire » afin de permettre la vision de Dieu³⁰.

Si la question sur l'*origine* du problème de l'« intermédiaire » requiert une réponse qui indique la greffe de l'avicennisme sur le tronc de l'augustinisme, à en croire P.-M. de Contenson³¹, cela n'influence en rien le *développement* ultérieur du problème.

²⁶ Pour une description plus détaillée de cette période (1210 – 1241), y compris de l'effort de l'assimilation des traditions augustinienne et dionysienne, l'article antérieurement cité de H.-F. Dondaine reste encore aujourd'hui incontournable, p. 74 *sq*. On en ajoutera, avec profit, A. Côté, *L'infinie divine dans la Théologie médiévale (1220-1255)*, Paris, Vrin, 2002, le chapitre II (*Vision bénigne et infinité divine*)

²⁷ Tristan Dagron, « David de Dînant. Sur le fragment <Hyle, Mens, Deus> des Quaternuli », dans *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 2003/4, no.40, p. 419-436 : « La thèse de l'identité de l'intellect agent et de l'intelligible vient ainsi fonder l'identité de la *mens* et de la matière première qui ne constituent qu'une seule et unique substance. Et David choisit naturellement d'appeler « Dieu » cette substance unique », p. 29.

²⁸ « De l'aveu de saint Albert, c'est une application grossière de la thèse aristotélicienne selon laquelle la science en acte est identique à la chose sue qui conduisit David de Dînant à interpréter la doctrine de la vision faciale dans le sens d'une déification de l'homme », A. Côté, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

²⁹ Voir aussi V. Lossky, « Le problème de la « Vision face à face » et la tradition patristique de Byzance », dans *Studia Patristica II*, K. Allard et F.L. Cross (directeurs), Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1957, p.p.512-537. Selon H.-F. Dondaine, Alexandre de Halès est le dernier à citer le *Periphyseon* d'Erigène en 1225.

³⁰ « Transposée à problème de la bénédiction, cette thèse revenait à dire que l'objet de la vision n'était autre que l'espèce émanée de la Déité. Or, si cette doctrine offrait l'avantage de conjurer le risque du panthéisme, c'était au risque de compromettre la vision directe, puisqu'une espèce s'interposait désormais entre le bienheureux et son objet », A. Côté, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

³¹ « Et, chose curieuse, les réponses des théologiens se partagent entre le oui et le non, dès le début de la controverse : la *Summa aurea* et la *Question 454* de Douai refusent tout médium dans la vision de Dieu, tandis que notre *Question 9* admet un médium subjectif et se construit

Ceux qui continuaient, aux alentours de 1230-1235, de lire les Pères grecs tels Alexandre de Halès, Hugues de Saint-Cher et surtout les rédacteurs de la célèbre *Question* de Douai « essaient tranquillement d'assimiler des éléments de la tradition “grecque” touchant l'invisibilité de l'Ousie »³², sans savoir que, du côté de la tradition latine, un Guillaume d'Auvergne travaillait déjà, dans son *De anima*, au dispositif théologique qui, à terme, permettra de contourner l'interdit grec de la vision de Dieu³³. Nous n'insistons pas sur le rôle déterminant de l'évêque de Paris dans les condamnations de 1241-1244.

Or, la condamnation de 1241, surtout la première thèse, vient mettre brutalement fin à cette cohabitation des deux traditions.

En énonçant « Primus (error) quod divine essentia in se nec ab homine nec ab angelo videbitur » (*La première erreur est que l'essence divine ne sera pas vue en elle-même ni par l'homme ni par l'ange*)³⁴, les autorités ecclésiastiques non seulement mettent un terme à l'apophatisme grec et aux tentatives d'assimilation de ce legs dans le cadre général de la théologie latine, mais aussi constatent que le problème longuement patent était devenu manifeste, et que, une fois éliminées les théophanies (étant contraires à la vision augustinienne de Dieu *sicuti est*), il fallait trouver une double solution :

- premièrement, au problème théologique de la proportion entre l'homme et Dieu, entre le fini et l'infini ;
- deuxièmement, au problème épistémologique de la connaissance de Dieu, plus précisément « la possibilité d'une saisie effective non exhaustive de l'essence [divine] »³⁵. Les lignes du dossier ont été déjà analysées par Antoine Côté³⁶, nous ne revenons plus là-dessus.

Reprendons toutefois un fragment qui nous servira de prétexte pour lancer notre analyse concernant les effets de la condamnation officielle sur Guerrier de Saint-Quentin : « Cette décision aura pour conséquence d'obliger les plus audacieux à battre en retraite : un Guerrier de Saint-Quentin, négateur de la vision *sicuti est* dans une *quaestio* consacrée explicitement à ce

tout entière sur cette réponse. Or ces réponses ne sont pas contradictoires : les premiers refusent un intermédiaire entre l'âme et Dieu, les seconds admettent un moyen habilitant l'âme à voir Dieu. Ces flottements décèlent peut-être là une question posée de travers et non suscitée par le développement nécessaire de la doctrine : *une question posée du dehors par une culture ou une philosophie insatisfaite de la noétique augustinienne* » (P.-M. de Contenson, *L'objet et le 'medium'* p. 85, c'est nous qui soulignons).

³² *Ibidem*, p. 88.

³³ « Guillaume n'a que faire des précautions contre Eunome, ou des lemmes sur l'invisibilité de l'ousie. Il affirme en témoin ; comme il sied ici, il va jusqu'au bout de l'affirmation traditionnelle : *visio lucidissima et immediata, absque medio ; [Deus] apprehensibilis per se, per essentiam suam*. Nous voilà bien près de la formule de 1241 » – *Ibidem*, p.92.

³⁴ M.-D. Chenu, art. cit., p.170, qui reprend toutes les 10 propositions condamnées.

³⁵ A. Côté., *op.cit.*, p. 52.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p.p. 51-70.

problème, rédige rapidement une rétractation embarrassée. Désormais, l'essence divine sera bel et bien vue *sicuti est* par les bienheureux, et les maîtres auront à charge – comme le Guerric seconde façon – d'en fournir la justification théorique ! »³⁷.

Pour ce qui est de la visée des condamnations (Deborah Grice reprend et traduit en anglais, dans l'*Appendix B* de son volume, non seulement les propositions condamnées, mais aussi les thèses « correctes » théologiquement), on sait aujourd’hui qu’elles ont été faites par le chancelier de l’Université de Paris, Eudes de Châteauroux et les maîtres en théologie, les rendant officielles et incontournables, sous la menace d’excommunication faite au nom de l’évêque de Paris, Guillaume d’Auvergne. Les thèses condamnées et les thèses correctes se retrouvent donc jointes (théologiquement): « Primus [error], quod divina essentia in se nec ab homine nec ab angelo videbitur. Hunc errorem reprobamus et assertores et defensores auctoritate Wilhelmi episcopi excommunicamus. Firmiter autem credimus et asserimus, quo Deus in sua essentia vel substantia videbitur ab angelis et omnibus sanctis et videtur ab animabus glorificatis »³⁸.

La manière dont la condamnation et la position correcte étaient formulées ne laissait aucune marge de manœuvre herméneutique aux théologiens qui soutenaient à l’époque ou qui avaient soutenu l’invisibilité de l’essence divine : « Dieu, en son essence ou substance, sera vu par les anges et par tous les saints et est vu par les âmes glorifiées ». Cette restriction totale de la liberté de citer les Pères qui défendaient l’incompréhensibilité divine n’est pas survenue brusquement, explique Deborah Grice, qui décrit la période précédant les condamnations comme *la clôture d’une époque plus permissive au niveau doctrinal*³⁹.

Ce fut donc moins contre « les syncrétismes » dont parlait Chenu, que plutôt contre des thèses *individuelles* que les condamnations se dressent.

À notre avis, les autorités ecclésiastiques ne pensaient pas condamner des « syncrétismes » (ce terme semble plutôt une reconstruction herméneutique *a posteriori* de l’exégèse), mais des positions théologiques individuelles ramassées à tour de bras sans une grande cohérence interne, dont on reconnaissait cependant l’incompatibilité avec une théologie de facture augustinienne. Toutefois, les autorités savaient bien que, à travers la première et la troisième proposition, elles condamnaient comme erronées des thèses « grecques » (la troisième condamnation est claire là-dessus et se

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

³⁸ Deborah Grice, *op. cit.*, p.203: « a closing down of what appears to have been à more permissive era of debate within the university – not freedom of views, but of a certain licence in more fluid areas of theology. [...] the latitude given to The exact content of conclusions being drawn by theologians appears to have been shrinking, or subject to more rigorous scrutiny ».

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 196-179.

réfère à la question du *Filioque* : « Tertius, quod Spiritus Sanctus, prout est nexus vel amor, non procedit a Filio, sed tamen a Patre »).

Nous nous rallions donc à la position de Bogdan Bucur qui décrivait ce repli doctrinal des autorités ecclésiastiques non pas comme une réaction contre la « redécouverte » de la théologie grecque, mais comme une prise de position contre les *réminiscences* grecques qui avaient survécu à un augustinisme de plus en plus assertif⁴⁰.

Or, cette prise de position qui ne laissait plus de place pour un accommodement herméneutique (bon gré, mal gré) entre les deux traditions⁴¹ surprend Guerric de Saint-Quentin (qui avait ouvertement professé une position « grecque » avant le moment 1241) totalement à contre-pied et l'oblige à faire volte-face.

Le fait qu'il y a eu un changement clair dans sa doctrine est remarqué dans le manuscrit de Prague (*Univ. 667*, fol. 232 ra-va)⁴², qui contient les trois *Quaestiones*, par un commentaire postérieur qui signale : *questio ista retractata est et reprobata a fratre Guerrico*. Dès lors, les questions I et II (dont nous allons examiner uniquement la première) sont antérieures à la condamnation et la question III est postérieure.

Signalons, avant de commencer l'analyse, que l'*Appendix B* (intitulé *Problematic thirteenth-century texts*) du livre de Deborah Grice⁴³ surprend, à part Guerric, encore trois auteurs dont les positions théologiques ont manifestement changé après la condamnation, passant d'une position favorable à la théologie « grecque » à une position de stricte obédience à l'autorité ecclésiastique : Alexandre de Hales⁴⁴, Hugues de Saint-Cher⁴⁵ et (de manière très surprenante) Guillaume d'Auvergne lui-même, le même

⁴⁰ « Consequently, the condemnation of 1241 can be seen as directed not only against ‘rediscovered’ elements of the Greek fathers, but also against surviving elements of the same. What remains certain, however, is that the surviving-and-retrieved elements of ‘Greek’ theology are being supplanted by a different theological tradition that can be traced back to Augustine », Bogdan G. Bucur, « The Reception of Dionysian Apophatism in the Christian East and West : Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas », *The Downside Review*, 125 (439), p. 135.

⁴¹ Deborah Grice considère qu'Albert le Grand fut un des seuls à avoir essayé au moins de laisser l'impression que les Pères grecs n'étaient pas directement visés par la condamnation de 1241 et : « Albertus argued John Chrysostom's concerns about the unknowability of God could be resolved through his own words: Chrysostom said that we all know God; but only the one begotten from him knows also what he is ('quid est'); so Chrysostom did not deny God's substance was seen, but only stated that it was not seen as perfectly by created intellects as by itself », *op. cit.*, p. 133.

⁴² B.-G. Guyot et H.-F. Dondaine, « Guerric de Saint-Quentin et la condamnation de 1241 », *RSPT*, 44 (1962), p. 225–242.

⁴³ Deborah Grice, *op. cit.*, p. 209-226.

⁴⁴ Alexandre de Hales, *Quaestiones disputatae quae ad rerum universitatem pertinent*, ed. H.M. Wierzbicki, Rome, 2013, vol I, p.301.

⁴⁵ Hugues de Saint-Cher, *In evangelia secundum Joannem* (Opera omnia in universum Vetus et Novum Testamentum , 8 vols., Venise, 1703), vi, p. 286–287.

évêque parisien ayant garanti en 1241 la correctitude théologique de l'acte de condamnation mais coquetant, dans ses œuvres de jeunesse (écrites avant 1230), avec une position plus proche de la patristique grecque⁴⁶. Rien que ces quatre auteurs (Guerric inclus) suffisent à prouver que le moment 1241 fut une décision qui n'est pas survenue de manière « naturelle » et que l'on peut parler d'une *réaction* (théologique mais aussi institutionnelle) de la part de l'université de Paris par laquelle l'orthodoxie théologique fut proclamée de manière abrupte, ce qui obligea plusieurs maîtres théologiens (et non des moindres !) à procéder à un remaniement de leur doctrine.

Revenons donc à la *Quaestio I* de Guerric⁴⁷, qui se propose de répondre aux problèmes suivants : « Quaerebatur primo si videbatur divina essentia; secundo, supposito quod videbitur, utrum sicut essentia vel alio modo; tertio si très personae viderentur sub una similitudine vel sub diversis ». Nous nous intéressons uniquement aux deux premières questions : si l'essence divine est vue et, supposé qu'elle sera vue, si elle est vue en tant qu'essence ou sous un autre aspect.

Pour la première partie de la *Quaestio I*, où l'on soutient la possibilité de la vision de Dieu, celui qui objecte utilise cinq citations tirées de saint Jean Chrysostome, de saint Denys, de saint Grégoire (des autorités patristiques grecques et latines) pour montrer que « Deus non solum prophetae, sed nec angeli, nec archangeli viderunt ». Il s'agit donc d'un interdit qui ne vise pas uniquement les créatures célestes (la vision de l'essence est interdite même aux chérubins et séraphins, placés plus haut dans la hiérarchie céleste que les anges et les archanges), mais aussi les hommes ayant eu des révélations (les prophètes). L'interdit vise donc tous les êtres doués d'intelligence (sur la terre et aux cieux) de par leur statut même d'êtres créés : « Quod creabilis naturae est, qualiter potuerit videre quod est increabile ? » quasi dicant : « nullo modo » (230, 11-15). On le voit bien, ce qui empêche la vision de l'essence n'est pas un manque ou un défaut qui pourrait être comblé, mais le statut ontologique de celui qui veut voir. L'essence divine est incréée et ne peut être saisie par un être créé. La même distinction est reprise plus loin, dans le *item* qui marque la double hypothèse d'une vision de l'essence (« aut per condescensionem superiorem, aut per ascensionem inferiorum ») : « et creati et increati non est proportio » (230, 26-27).

La réfutation de la thèse qui soutient la vision de l'essence divine se fait ainsi par l'appel aux autorités patristiques grecques *et* latines (il n'y a

⁴⁶ Guillaume d'Auvergne, *De retributionibus sanctorum* (*Opera Omnia*, I) p. 315–28, plus particulièrement, p. 317, 1A-C et p. 318, 1G-2^E.

⁴⁷ Nous citons le texte, tel qu'il est édité par B.-G. Guyot and H.-F. Dondaine, *RSPT*, 44 / 1962, p. 230, 1-3. Après le chiffre indiquant la page, nous indiquons la ligne. Pour la facilité de la lecture, nous citons dans le texte entre parenthèses.

donc pas de rupture entre les deux traditions) et par la mise en œuvre d'un dispositif théologique qui opère avec deux concepts entre lesquels il n'y a aucun terme moyen : *creabilis / increabile* ou *creati / increati*.

La conclusion partielle de cette séquence de la *Question I* s'appuie sur une distinction reprise à Alexandre de Hales, celle entre trois types de vision (« *Triplex est videre : in essentia, in specie, in imaginatione* », 231, 35), distinction qui réserve à Dieu seul la vision de son essence (« *In essentia solus Deus videt seipsum* », 231, 35-36), alors que même la connaissance des bienheureux dans la patrie céleste nécessite une espèce (ce qui exclut l'immédiateté, réservée à Dieu lui-même). Pour l'homme qui se trouve encore *in via*, la connaissance se fait par l'imagination, qui ressemble aux *similitudes* grâce auxquelles on reconnaît Dieu dans ses créatures.

Après ce premier moment, une seconde reprise de la thèse de la vision (qui s'appuie sur *1 Jean 3,2* : « *Videbimus eum sicut erit* », sur une citation de saint Augustin et sur saint Bernand) donne lieu à une nouvelle charge d'objections. Le réfutateur ne cède pas et conteste que la vision « *in specie* » (qui est propre aux bienheureux) serait suffisante pour accéder à l'essence divine. Car, même dans la vision « *in specie* » (définie comme « *videre in fonte hominis* », 231, 52), il s'agit toujours d'une vision humaine, qui ne perce pas le « *lumen innacessibile* » (231,53). Pour ce qui est de la vision « *par espèce* », *Glossa Halensis*⁴⁸ explique ce qu'il faut comprendre par cette expression : la gloire divine, qui resplendit sur les bienheureux comme le soleil resplendit sur les objets. Les bienheureux voient la *species* dans leur intellect (donc ils la voient « *in fonte hominis* »), ce qui laisse l'essence divine hors de toute intellection.

« *Tripliciter est videre essentiam : per se, per speciem, per similitudinem.*
Primo modo videt solum Deus essentiam divinam : est enim lux inaccessibilis.
*Lux autem dupliciter sumi potest : ut est in aëre, vel ut est in sole. Ut est in sole, invisibilis est ; ut est in aëre, pati potest oculus eius aspectum. Sic divina essentia in se est invisibilis ; ut autem in unoquoque nostrum *per gloriam* est, sic est visibilis, et hoc appellatur *species*. Vel potest videri per similitudinem quae est creatura* »⁴⁹.

Si l'homme ne voit pas l'essence dans sa plénitude (« *plena essentia* », 231, 54), cela ne signifie pas que Dieu restera inconnu. La plénitude de la connaissance qu'auront les bienheureux n'est en aucun cas une garantie de l'accès à la plénitude de l'essence divine, mais l'accomplissement de *notre* pouvoir de connaître : « *Cognoscemus plene secundum modum nostrae plenitudinis* » (231, 56-57) ; « *cognoscamus modo secundum plenum nostrum patet* » (232, 60-61). Dans cette vie, toute

⁴⁸ Alexandre de Hales, *Glossa in quatuor libros Sententiarum*, 4 vol., Quaracchi 1951-1957 (Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi, 12-15).

⁴⁹ *Glossa in I Sent., d. I, n. 18.* (c'est nous qui soulignons)

connaissance de Dieu reste imparfaite, mais dans la patrie, la connaissance Dieu sera parfaite (dans le sens d'une intensité et d'une étendue qui porteront jusqu'à leur limite ultime les capacités *humaines*). Notre désir et pouvoir de connaître trouvera là-bas, dans la patrie, son assouvissement, et c'est dans ce sens que la connaissance de Dieu sera sans reste. Comme le dira Guer ric au *secundum* de la question citant Pierre Lombard, de manière assez approximative, « dicendum quod videbimus secundum plenitudinem acceptientis, non accepti » (on dit que l'on voit selon la plénitude de celui qui reçoit <la connaissance>, non de ce qui est reçu », 232, 111-112).

La première partie finit sur une réaffirmation de l'incompréhensibilité divine, cette fois-ci défendue par le concept d'infini (« Deus secundum quodlibet sui est infinitus. Infinitum, incomprehensibile ; igitur Deus secundum quodlibet sui est incomprehensibilis, ergo plene nec semiplene », 231, 63-65). L'essence divine, étant incrée (au début du *ad primum*) et Dieu étant infini (à la fin du *ad primum*), on ne peut même pas soutenir qu'Il puisse être compris : « nec plene, nec semiplene este comprehensibilis » (231, 66). Le caractère *incrément* et *infini* de Dieu érige donc un double barrage contre la prétendue *visibilité* et *compréhensibilité* de l'essence divine.

Mais il ne faut cependant pas croire que Guer ric arrête l'examen du problème de la visibilité par un mouvement de reprise de la théologie grecque, puisqu'il examine dans la deuxième partie (*ad secundum*) de quelle manière on peut connaître Dieu (si l'accès à son essence en tant que telle est interdit), puisqu'on ne saurait renoncer à la définition augustinienne de la bénédiction comme vision de Dieu, but suprême de la vie de l'homme⁵⁰.

La partie *ad secundum* de la *Question I* essaie d'ouvrir une possibilité théologique de la vision divine, grâce au concept de *potentia*. L'intellect de l'homme, en tant que puissance (*potentia*), peut voir l'essence divine en tant que puissance : « intellectus quaedam potentia est ; ergo magis est ei immediata et coniuncta divina essentia in quantum potentia quam in quantum essentia » (231, 68-70).

Cette thèse fait état de la limite actuelle de l'intellect humain, qui ne possède pas *actuellement* toutes les connaissances, mais les détient *potentiellement*. L'essence divine pourrait être connue, *in patria*, même si elle n'est pas connue ici, *in via*. Elle est visible non dans le sens d'une vision actuelle, mais dans le sens qu'elle est l'objet d'une vision potentielle (« visibile est potens videri », 231, 72). On peut donc dire, en forçant un peu le langage, que la vision potentielle reste toutefois une *vision* (même si elle n'est pas actuelle, atteignant l'essence), puisque saint Denys lui-même admet un triple régime intellectuel des bienheureux (« Dionysius : Omnes supermundani intellectus dividuntur in tris : in essentiam, virtutem et

⁵⁰ Saint Augustin avait écrit : « Ipse erit portus laborum nostrorum, videre Deum et laudare Deum » (*Sermo XXXVII*, c. 20, n. 30, PL 38, 235).

operationem », 231-232, 74-75). Cela permet le passage de la puissance à l'essence, moyennant la *virtus*: « per potentiam ibi cognoscitur virtus et per hanc essentiam » (232, 78). L'essence divine, potentiellement connaissable par l'homme encore *viator*, sera actuellement connue *in patria* par tous les êtres célestes (*omnes supermundani intellectus*) non pas en tant qu'essence, mais en tant que *virtus* de l'intellect supra-mondain.

Toutefois, cette solution ne touche pas le fond du problème. Ainsi s'emploie Guerric à étayer sa solution sur des arguments tirés de la théologie grecque (invoquant saint Denys, saint Jean Damascène) mais aussi de la théologie latine (Pierre Lombard et Hugues de Saint-Victor), arguments qui mettent en avant la visibilité de l'essence en tant que *puissance*. Il commence par concéder lexicalement que l'essence sera vue (« *Essentia videbitur, sicut dicit Glossa...* » 232, 83), mais non en tant qu'essence : « *sed non videbitur ut essentia, quia essentia non erit ratio intelligendi, sed potentia* » (232, 84-85). Plus loin dans la *solutio*, une autre réponse explique la raison théologique redoutable pour laquelle l'essence ne peut pas être vue en tant que telle : « *Si videretur ut essentia, quia essentia simplicissima est, videretur plene ; unde à quibus videretur ut essentia, videretur plene sicut à Patre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto. Sed dico ab humano intellectu videtur ut virtus* » (232, 104-108).

L'essence divine étant *simple*, la vision de l'essence serait une vision totale (*videtur plene*), puisqu'on ne saurait voir ou *intelliger* une « partie » de l'essence. Il n'y a pas de « partie » d'une chose simple. Dans ce cas, si l'essence simple était vue en tant que telle, il n'y aurait aucune différence entre la vision intra-trinitaire et la vision du bienheureux, ce que Guerric ne peut pas accepter. Tout au plus, il accepte que l'intellect humain puisse saisir l'essence divine en tant que *virtus*. Le terme central de la solution est « *plene* ». Guerric admet une vision, mais celle-ci n'est pas plénier. Même lorsqu'il convoque l'autorité de Hugues de Saint-Victor pour parler d'une connaissance « parfaite », il prend soin de souligner que « *Univeraliter perfectus est solus Deus* » (233, 18-19). Si les anges et les bienheureux adviennent à une connaissance « parfaite », cela ne signifie pas qu'ils auront une connaissance parfaite de l'essence divine, mais qu'ils atteindront, *in patria*, la perfection initiale de leur être (*sic angeli in principio perfecte cognosebant et perfecti fuerunt angeli et homines et perfecti erunt in patria*, 233, 17-18).

Dans la *Quaestio I*, l'héritage patristique est sauvé (l'absolute transcendance de l'essence divine en tant qu'essence), moyennant quelques aménagements conceptuels qui permettent de concéder lexicalement la vision de l'essence, mais sous un autre aspect (*potentia ou virtus*) et de manière partielle (*non plene*). On a donc affaire à une tentative de conciliation entre la théologie latine, telle qu'elle était compilée dans la *Glossa Ordinaria* (environ 1150) et la patristique grecque (saint Jean Chrysostome, saint

Denys), tentative qui se traduit par une concession lexicale jointe à une double mise en garde théologique. La solution semble, cependant, tendue et tiraillée entre la concession logique et l'artifice rhétorique, comme le remarque un exégète contemporain⁵¹.

Maintenant, qu'en est-il de la *Quaestio III*, celle qui semble écrite après la condamnation de 1241 ? Serait-elle écrite pour « faire amende honorable auprès des autorités » ecclésiastiques, comme le soutient Antoine Côté⁵² ou bien Guerric avait-il pris tardivement conscience, sous la pression des condamnations, de son apophatisme excessif⁵³, comme le soutient Jean-Pierre Torell ? Quelle que fût sa motivation, il est certain que dans la *Quaestio III*, Guerric fait volte-face par rapport à ses considérations antérieures sur la vision de l'essence divine. Le sujet de la question est clairement formulé afin de rendre manifeste un retournement théologique survenu après les condamnations de 1241 : « Et primo queritur si sivina essentia in se videbitur ipsa ; secundo, dato quod videbitur, utrum essentia ut essentia tota videbitur ; tertio, utrum essentia ut essentia videbitur in creaturis (238, 2-4). Mais entre la première *Quaestio* et la troisième, Antoine Côté soutient qu'un élément nouveau est apparu : « un contemporain s'était également attaché à élaborer une solution au problème soulevé par la vision beatifique, en faisant intervenir dans sa solution le concept d'infini. Dondaine a identifié cet auteur avec celui de la *question halesiene* 151... »⁵⁴. Le concept d'infini est venu s'immiscer dans les discussions sur la vision de l'essence divine.

Ad primum, un premier intervenant dresse une brève liste formée de 4 citations d'autorité et d'un argument, qui plaident pour une vision de l'essence en tant que telle (« essentia nuda », 238, 7), tandis que le deuxième, qui soutient la position défendue dans la *Quaestio I*, invoque des autorités grecques (saint Jean Damascène et saint Jean Chrysostome) et latines (*Glossa*

⁵¹ Guglielmo De Maria, *Il laboratorio della nuova sapienza nella prima scuola domenicana: opere e pensiero di Guerrico di Saint-Quentin*, tesi di dottorato, Università degli studi di Salerno, 2010-2011 : « L'insistenza sulla visibilità dell'essenza divina, benché non in se, non sembra piuttosto un tentative logicamente artificioso di preservare, almeno formalmente, l'oggetto della visio beatifica? E la visione dell'essenza divina come potenza non è un artificio retorico e teoretico per negare velatamente la visione di Dio in se stesso? », p. 237 (nous soulignons, C.M)

⁵² Antoine Côté, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁵³ « On sait aussi que Guerric pourrait être un des théologiens visés par la condamnation de l'évêque Guillaume d'Auvergne, en 1241, pour avoir soutenu une forme excessive d'*apophatisme* », Jean-Pierre Torell, dans Guerric of Saint-Quentin, *Quaestiones de Quodlibet*, A critical edition by Walter H. Principe, C.S.B, Introduction by Jean-Pierre Torell, O.P, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002, p.147-148 (c'est nous qui soulignons).

⁵⁴ Antoine Côté, « Les grandes étapes de la découverte de l'infinité divine au XIIIe siècle », dans Jacques Follon, James McEvoy, *Actualité de la pensée médiévale. Recueil d'articles*, Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, Louvain-la-Neuve et Peeters, Paris, 1994, p. 226.

Ordinaria, saint Augustin) qui soutiennent la même thèse, à savoir l'invisibilité de la substance divine (« non videbunt substantiam » 239, 21) ou l'incompréhensibilité de cette même substance (« Quid est Deus secundum substantiam, incomprehensibile est omnino », 239, 26-27).

Un des arguments contre la vision de Dieu que Guerric cite mais sans en nommer l'auteur⁵⁵ (« dicebat ») présente une solution plus ingénieuse : accepter que Dieu puisse être dit « fini » et vu « totus », si l'on se place dans la perspective du connaisseur qui se lie à l'objet connu pour le voir en entier (« finitus est in suspicente quia coaptat se suspiciens et sic videtur in isto totus », 239, 38-39). Toutefois, si l'on se place dans la perspective du Dieu infini, il ne peut pas être vu entièrement (« infinitus est in seipso, et sic non videtur totus », 239, 40).

Cet auteur de la *question 151* auquel Guerric répond (comme l'a déjà montré Antoine Côté) avait le mérite de proposer une solution ingénieuse et hardie, qui peut être résumée ainsi: « La grande originalité de T [la *question halesiene 151*], avons-nous dit, consiste à avoir postulé une nouvelle acception de l'infini susceptible de fonder la vision non exhaustive de Dieu. Techniquement, il s'agissait de sauver la vision *sicuti est* sans accorder la *comprehensio* »⁵⁶.

Pour l'auteur anonyme de la *question 151*, la solution ingénieuse repose sur la *co-predicabilité* de ces deux attributs qui décrivent l'essence divine (la simplicité et l'infini⁵⁷). La solution est hardie, parce que, selon la pensée de l'époque (exprimée par Richard Fischacre), la simplicité décrit quelque chose de fini : « si est simplex est finis, ut punctus linea » (si quelque chose est simple, cela est également fini, comme l'est le point par rapport à la ligne). Pour Fischacre « finis non potest esse infinitus. Ergo nec simplex esse infinitum » (quelque chose de fini ne peut être infini. Or, ni quelque chose de simple ne peut être infini »⁵⁸).

Pour l'auteur de la *question 151*, l'essence est en même temps simple et infinie, ce qui permet une saisie de celle-ci dans la vision, *mais sans l'épuiser* (« l'essence de Dieu peut être l'objet d'une vision directe, sans être englobée par l'acte de la vision, puisque l'angle sous lequel l'essence apparaît comme simple n'est pas autre que celui sous lequel elle est infinie », commente A. Côté⁵⁹).

⁵⁵ Antoine Côté identifie cet auteur à un franciscain (selon toute vraisemblance, Alexandre de Hales) ayant écrit la *Quaestio Halesiana* ou la *question 151* (voir A. Coté, *L'infini divine dans la théologie médiévale*, p.70 sq). L'influence de cette question (rédigée entre 1240 et 1245, selon H.-F. Dondaine) sur les successeurs sera indéniable.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 76. Le texte de la *question 151* le dit : « In Deo enim simplicitas et infinitas circa idem radicatur et ideo licet Deus sit simplex non tamen oportet si cognoscatur quod cognoscatur et quidlibet sui ex eam parte qua est simplex sit infinitum » (*apud* Côté, *ibidem*, p. 76).

Ayant écrit après les condamnations de 1241, l'auteur de la *question 151* a soutenu la connaissance de l'essence divine (simple), mais y a glissé une réserve théologique : la transformation de l'infini en un concept *qualitatif* (selon A. Côté), qui justifie une certaine forme « faible » d'apophatisme.

L'impossibilité de la vision de l'essence ne peut plus être affirmée (comme avant les condamnations) et doit être concédée. L'essence est vue, en tant que simple (concession obligatoire), mais elle reste aussi infinie *qualitativement* (solution innovatrice, car les auteurs de l'époque sont tous convaincus par la définition « quantitativiste » de l'infini, suivant Aristote⁶⁰), ce qui ne permet pas la saturation de l'intellect contemplatif.

Cela sauve, d'une certaine manière (répétons-le : faible, mais réelle) l'interdit patristique. Lexicalement, la *question 151* se conforme à l'autorité ; théologiquement, l'auteur essaie de trouver un autre attribut (la *simplicité* de l'essence n'étant plus suffisante) qui « sauve » la transcendance divine (à savoir *l'infinité*, redéfinie de manière qualitative).

Or, dans la *Question III* de Guérard, celui-ci rejette ouvertement la solution de la *question 151*, affirmant que l'essence reste simple et que la connaissance du simple permet la connaissance entière, sans qu'aucun attribut (l'infinité) vienne s'y opposer : « Contra : in se simplex est ; ergo videbitur totus si in se videbitur » (239, 41). Dans cette question écrite après les condamnations, Guérard renonce tout court à son propre argument avancé dans la *Question I* : « Si videretur ut essentia, quia essentia simplicissima est, videretur plene ; unde à quibus videretur ut essentia, videretur plene sicut à Pâtre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto » (232, 104-108). La vision de l'essence simple, interdite dans la *Question I* (car instaurant une égalité de connaissance entre la vision humaine et celle intra-trinitaire) devient légitime dans la *Question III* : « sed apprehensio est perfecta visio et totalis » (239, 43).

Pour Guérard, la simplicité de l'essence divine se convertit, dans la *Question III*, en une raison théologique de la vision totale (car on ne saurait voir une « partie » du simple, cela serait absurde) : « Cum sit simplex et imparibilis, quomodo aliquid eius videbitur, quin totum ? », puisqu'il est simple et indivisible, comment quelqu'un pourra-t-il le voir, si ce n'est en tant que tout ? 239, 46-47).

⁶⁰ « Infinitum enim in quantitate est...infiniti autem ratio quantitati congruit, sed non substantie neque calitati » (Aristoteles Latinus, *Physica* I, 2, 185a 33-34 et 185b 2-3). Le fragment dans la traduction moderne : « Or Mélissus dit que l'être est infini ; l'être est donc une quantité ; car l'infini est dans la quantité ; mais la substance ne peut être infinie, ni la qualité, ni l'affection, si ce n'est par accident, existant à titre de telle ou telle quantité ; car, dans la définition de l'infini, la quantité intervient ; mais non la substance ni la qualité. Et alors s'il est substance et quantité à la fois, l'être est deux et non un ; s'il est seulement substance, il n'est pas infini ni n'a aucune grandeur ; car il serait alors une quantité » (Aristote, *Physique*, traduction par Henri Carteron, Paris, Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1966, p. 5).

Mais la partie la plus intéressante de son argumentation se trouve dans la réfutation de la solution proposée par l'auteur de la *question 151*, qu'il reformule ainsi : « Dicebat quod simplex et infinitum, infinitas enim radicata est in simplicitate ; nam hoc sequeretur si solum esset ibi simplicitas », On a dit qu'Il [Dieu] est simple et infini, puisque l'infinité est enracinée dans la l'essence simple ; cela en découlerait uniquement s'il y avait en Dieu une essence simple, 239, 49-50).

Nul doute, Guerri a bien saisi l'originalité de la *question 151*, à savoir la co-prédication (à propos de Dieu) des deux attributs, placés sur le même plan par l'auteur anonyme, qui avait écrit : « In Deo enim simplicitas et infinitas circa idem radicatur ».

Toutefois, ce qui échappe à Guerri, c'est le fait que l'auteur de la *question 151* n'accorde pas une primauté à la simplicité divine, affirmant que les deux attributs (simplicité et infinité) s'enracinent tous les deux dans la même chose, à savoir l'essence (« circa idem »), alors que Guerri reformule la question en pensant que l'infinité s'enracine dans la simplicité (« infinitas enim radicata est in simplicitate »). Pour le maître anonyme, l'essence est *simultanément* simple *et* infinie (selon la perspective sous laquelle on l'appréhende, mais sans que l'un des deux attributs puissent réclamer une primauté par rapport à l'autre), alors que pour Guerri l'essence est *originairement simple* et l'infinité ne peut venir la concurrencer.

Mais il y a aussi un argument de taille suivant lequel Guerri ne peut pas accepter la solution de la *question 151* : il s'agit de l'*interdiction aristotélicienne de la confusion des genres*, qui ne permet pas à l'*infinité* (terme quantitatif) de décrire l'*essence* (terme qualitatif)⁶¹. Il conteste donc l'enracinement des deux notions *sous la même raison* en Dieu, puisqu'il s'agit de deux genres *differents* : « Simplicitas et infinitas non sunt in ipso ex eadem ratione quia simplicitas privat divisionem, infinitas divisionem ponit, cum dicant rationem quanti », La simplicité et l'infini ne sont pas en Dieu selon la même raison, parce que la simplicité enlève la division, et l'infinité introduit la division, parce qu'elle est une raison de la quantité, 239, 49-51). Étant liée à la quantité (« infinitum dicat rationem quanti, essentia non »), elle ne peut pas décrire l'essence.

Or, dans la *Question III*, Guerri lie l'infinité à la puissance ou à l'éternité de Dieu, tandis qu'il réserve l'attribut de la simplicité à l'essence (« Infinitas est virtus vel durationis, simplicitas autem naturae vel essentiae », 239-52-53). L'infinité décrit la puissance de Dieu en tant que celle-ci est

⁶¹ « La doctrine de Guerri est donc fondée sur l'*interdiction de la confusion des genres* ; elle oppose à la nouvelle doctrine de l'infini des arguments tirés d'une lecture attentive d'Aristote ; Guerri suit en effet le Stagirite et Averroès pour qui le fini et l'infini relèvent du genre de la quantité, et il suit toute la tradition philosophique chrétienne (et païenne) pour qui le simple est un attribut de l'immatériel, quand il ne désigne pas le point géométrique. La question « l'essence divine est-elle infinie » se voit donc d'emblée disqualifiée pour cause de confusion des genres », A. Côté, *L'infinité divine dans la théologie médiévale*, p. 84.

déterminée par « le mouvement vers les créatures » (« unde infinitas determinatur in Deo secundum fluxum ad creaturas », 239, 58-59). Dès lors, l’infinité n’est plus une raison ou un aspect de l’essence (« ergo infinitas ibi non est ex parte essentiae », 239, 59-60) et ne peut pas empêcher la vision totale de l’essence divine (« non impendit totum videre », 239, 60).

On est bien loin de la solution présentée dans la *Question I*, où l’essence était connue en tant que *potentia*: « sed non videbitur ut essentia, quia essentia non erit ratio intelligendi, sed potentia » (232, 84-85). Cette fois-ci, la puissance infinie ne saurait interdire *la vision de l’essence dans sa totalité* : « ergo infinitas ibi non impendit visionem essentiae secundum sui totalitatem », 239, 53-54)

À la restriction de la *Question I* (« non plene ») répond dans la *Question III* une affirmation de la connaissance totale de l’essence divine : « totum videre », « secundum sui totalitatem ». À la lumière de la *Question III*, on a du mal à comprendre pourquoi la distinction entre « essentia ut essentia » et « essentia ut potentia » était intervenue dans la *Question I*, du moment qu’elle semble s’écrouler sous le poids de la distinction aristotélicienne des genres (selon laquelle l’essence relève de la qualité et l’infini de la quantité).

Guerric connaissait déjà, l’époque de la *Question I*, que l’infini relève de la quantité (selon Aristote). Pourquoi alors proposer un argument comme « infinitum, incomprehensibile [est] » (231, 64-65) et puis le renverser au nom de la distinction des genres ? Ou bien pourquoi établir dans la *Question I* que l’essence de Dieu « nec plene, nec semiplene est comprehensibilis » (239, 65-66) ou « non videbitur plene » (232, 100) si dans la *Question III* la vision de l’essence allait être dite *totale* ?

On pourrait expliquer ce retournement doctrinal par le souci du respect pour l’autorité théologique et par une sorte de *surenchère* qui trahit son inconfort intellectuel : c’est la thèse de Deborah Grice⁶². On peut aussi souligner l’incohérence logique et l’inutilité de la distinction entre l’essence *en tant qu’essence* (invisible) et l’essence *en tant que puissance* (visible) – c’est la thèse de Guigielmo de Maria⁶³. On peut même supposer qu’il veuille s’en prendre à la solution ingénieuse et hardie suivie par l’auteur de la *question 151* (la dimension *qualitative* de l’infini, ee tant que dernier rempart

⁶² « Guerric therefore apparently rewrote the question in a third version, which goes as far as renouncing infinity as an attribute of the essence, *albeit implying his uneasiness* – he added the reservation ‘without prejudice (*sine praediicio*)’, i.e. without prejudicing the truth » ,Deborah Grice, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

⁶³ « Ma allora, perché preoccuparsi di scindere logicamente la semplicità e l’infinità, l’essenza e la potenza? Se anche l’infinità di Dio è visibile all’intelletto finito dell’uomo, perché negare l’infinità all’essenza nel tentativo di renderla totalmente visibile? Non sarebbe stato sufficiente proporre gli argomenti sulla visibilità dell’infinito, senza adoperarsi di riservarla alla potenza? Il senso di tale operazione speculativa cisfugge », Guigielmo De Maria, *op. cit.*, p. 262 (c’est nous qui soulignons).

contre une vision totale et saturante de l'essence divine), dans un excès de zèle qui n'est soutenu par aucun argument plus subtil dans la *Question III* - c'est la position d'Antoine Côté⁶⁴. Mais quoi qu'il en soit, une chose est certaine : sa *retractatio* ne convainc pas. Son incohérence atteint le degré maximal lorsqu'il cite saint Jean Damascène et son jeu de mots (« Hoc solum comprehensibile est de Deo quia incomprehensibilis », On comprend seulement de Dieu qu'il est incompréhensible, 240, 68-69) pour conclure que ce Père grec se range du côté de ceux qui soutiennent...la compréhensibilité de l'infini (« ergo infinitatem eius comprehendemus », 239, 68) !

On a l'impression, à lire cette première partie de la *Question III*, que Guerrier affronte et critique la solution de la *question 151* rien que pour avoir un prétexte de faire amende honorable auprès des autorités (mais sans y croire lui-même !), comme si la critique infligée à un auteur ayant tenté (par une distinction anti-aristotélicienne) de sauvegarder l'incompréhensibilité de l'essence divine⁶⁵ l'exonérait pour ce qu'il avait soutenu dans la *Questio I*.

Car, à vrai dire, outre l'argument tiré de la *Physique* d'Aristote qui considère l'infini comme relevant de la quantité, il n'apporte aucune preuve que les arguments patristiques contre la vision de Dieu ne peuvent plus fonctionner. Ni la disproportion entre le Créateur et la créature (230, 20-22), ni la distinction augustinienne entre *intelligere* et *comprehendere* (232, 80), ni la mise en garde contre l'assimilation de la connaissance plénière de l'essence divine à la connaissance intra-trinitaire (232, 105-107), arguments qui sont présentés dans la *Quaestio I*, ne jouent un rôle dans la *Quaestio III*.

⁶⁴ « Cette raison est que, échaudé par la condamnation de 1241 et résolu à se mettre en accord avec le magistère sur la question de la vision béatifique, Guerrier a peut-être estimé que la solution d'Alexandre n'allait pas assez loin dans la bonne direction. On ne saurait sous-estimer l'importance de ces facteurs extra-philosophiques. On n'expliquerait pas autrement que l'objection qui avait paru si redoutable à Guerrier en G1 (vision d'essence = vision exhaustive) ne semble plus faire problème en G3. À tel point que, dans sa *solutio*, Guerrier déclare, sans détour, « infinitas non impedit quin essentia in ratione tota videatur ». Étrange retournement, qu'aucun nouvel élément de la doctrine (en G3), aucun argument ne vient appuyer », Antoine Côté, *Les grandes étapes de la découverte de l'infini*, p. 228 (nous soulignons). Pour Antoine Côté, G1 se réfère à la *Question I* et G3 à la *Question III*.

⁶⁵ Christian Trottmann soutient une thèse différente de celle défendue par Antoine Côté: « L'impossibilité pour une créature finie d'atteindre une connaissance exhaustive de Dieu qui lui est réservée, n'exclut pas, précise Guerrier, la vision (intuitive) de son essence. Les bienheureux voient bien l'essence de Dieu et connaissent sa quiddité, sans pour autant partager la connaissance exhaustive qu'il a de lui-même », Christian Trottmann, *Psycho-somatique de la vision béatifique selon Guerrier de Saint-Quentin*, dans *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* vol. 78 (1994) p. 219. Nous ne demandons, cependant, quel est l'élément qui interdit au bienheureux une vision exhaustive de l'essence divine si l'infini ne peut pas qualifier l'essence, dans la Question III. Si l'on s'en tient aux limites tracées par l'aristotélisme, l'infini ne peut pas remplir la fonction de barrière transcendante gardant l'essence divine non-épuisée par la saisie intuitive du bienheureux, puisque l'infini est un concept relevant de la quantité. On comprend donc que c'est plutôt à l'auteur de la *quaestio halesiana* que cette description de Trottmann conviendrait, et non à Guerrier, qui oublie toute précaution théologique dans la *Question III* (mais pouvait-il en faire autrement ?).

Mais Guerric ne se contente pas de critiquer l'auteur de la *question 151*. Dans la seconde partie de la *Quaestio III*, il se demande « si essentia ut essentia videbitur in rebus », et la réponse ne peut être que négative. Mais il va plus loin dans la solution, invoquant le commentaire peu favorable de Hugues de Saint-Victor à l'adresse des *théophanies*⁶⁶, soutenant que l'essence de Dieu ne peut être vue que « in sua substantia nuda, non in lumine sparso, non in simulacris » (240, 83). Tout comme chez Hugues de Saint-Victor, pour lequel les théophanies dionysiennes et érigéniques⁶⁷ jouent le rôle d'une image obnubilant la vision directe de Dieu, chez Guerric les théophanies sont des simulacres (il reprend le terme à Hugues)⁶⁸ qui offrent à l'intellect une *image* de Dieu, mais qui n'est pas *la vérité* (l'essence divine elle-même) : « Si enim in his, idest theophaniis, idest simulacris, semper videtur, imago semper videtur ; et si imago semper videtur, nunquam videtur, quoniam imago non est veritas » (240, 86-88). Or, voir la théophanie en tant que lumière éparsse ou en tant qu'image de Dieu n'est pas voir Dieu lui-même (« Si solum videretur in lumine sparso vel in simulacris et non aliter videre Deum esset... », 240, 93-94). Du coup, une conséquence théologique dangereuse pour la fin de l'homme ne pourrait plus être évitée : « ergo creatura est terminus rationalis creature » (240, 95). L'homme contemplerait ainsi la théophanie (un être créé) en tant que finalité suprême, ce qui ne pourrait être accepté : « Deus non esset vere finis omnium » (240, 98). Il n'est donc pas nécessaire de recourir aux théophanies ou à un autre *médium* interposé entre l'intellect et l'essence divine : « Videbitur autem Deus sine medio déférante » (240, 100), « Videbimus etiam sine medio obnubilante » (240, 103-104), « sine medio obnubilante » (240, 110).

⁶⁶ Voir Hugues de Saint-Victor, *In Hier. III* : « Tamen divina Scriptura manifestationes illas, quibus Deus mentibus humanis se revelat, *theophanias*, id est divinas apparitiones vocare consuevit; quoniam, *etsi natura Deus non est*, quod cernitur, secundum demonstrationem est, quia tamen per ipsum, et in ipso Deus manifestatur. » PL 175, 1012D-1013A. Un auteur contemporain souligne tout l'enjeu de la critique faite par Hugues à l'adresse de Jean Scot Eriogène. Il s'agit de dénoncer les théophanies comment étant une entrave à la vision directe de l'essence de Dieu : « His point is that whatever one may learn from theophanies (that is, revelations) in this life, that cannot be an adequate cognition of God: these appearances (*apparitiones*) of God only reveal something about God but not God himself. In this way Hugh equates the Areopagitic theophany with the things “below God” of Gregory. This interpretation of theophany, as an image of God set between the mind and God during this life, reappears in Hugh’s criticism against the Eriugenian interpretation of the term » - Csaba Németh, *Contemplation and the Cognition of God. Victorine Theological Anthropology and its Decline*, Doctoral Dissertation, Budapest, Hungary, 2013, p.53.

⁶⁷ Voir C. Németh, *op. cit.*, p.54-59

⁶⁸ Hugues de Saint-Victor avait séchement défini les théophanies : « Haec vero simulacula sunt eorum, et phantasmata vanitatis ») parce qu'il n'acceptait pas leur rôle de *médium* entre l'intellect humain et l'essence inaccessible de Dieu : « Ipsa autem quasi quaedam simulacula absconditae Divinitatis inter rationales animos ac Deum média ponunt, altiora quidem mente, inferiora autem Divinitate. Et hoc quidem solum de Deo videri, et in hoc solo Deum videri, utpote qui in ipso a nulla mente vel animo videri possit » (PL 175, 954D).

Dans la partie finale de la *Question III*, Guéréric s'efforce de libérer la voie vers la vision directe de l'essence divine, utilisant la distinction *in via / in patria* comme un levier qui fait sauter tout obstacle théologique à une vision plénire. Ainsi, les fragments d'autorité qui font état de l'inaccessibilité de Dieu (« *lumen innaccesibile* », disait-il dans la *Question I*, 231, 53) ne sont plus vus comme instaurant un rempart épistémologique infranchissable pour la créature, mais inaugurant un régime *graduel* de la connaissance, qui va de la connaissance partielle, voilée (« *non enim possumus in via cognoscere quid est, quia videmus in speculo* », 241, 146-147) à une connaissance plénire de l'essence *in patria*, ou « *per gratiam videatur in sua substantia* » (241, 153-154).

Le point d'orgue final de la *Question III* se trouve dans les deux derniers paragraphes, où Guéréric reprend l'idée que l'infinié ne peut empêcher la connaissance de l'essence simple (« *et ideo infinitas non impedit quin essentia in ratione essentiae tota videatur* », 242, 169-170), parce que l'infinié et la simplicité ne se comprennent pas selon la même raison (« *non ex eadem ratione est infinitas et simplicitas, ut visum est* », 242, 167-168). Fermement aristotélicien dans sa conception de l'infini qui se pense selon un modèle géométrique ou numérique, il s'oppose résolument à la solution originale⁶⁹ de la *question 151*, ne pouvant pas concevoir la prédication sous le même rapport à l'essence de ces deux attributs (de la simplicité et de l'infinié) : « *Unde cum simplicitate sit ex parte essentiae, ex parte illa non erit infinitas* » (242, 168-169).

La compréhension de l'essence divine *en tant qu'essence* et non en tant que *virtus* (« *totam essentiam in ratione essentiae, non tamen in ratione virtutis* », 242, 172) est finalement soutenue de manière claire, toutes les objections contre la position initiale de la *Question I* étant reconnues comme justifiées : « *Secundum hoc concedo omnes obiections quae facta sunt ad hoc* » (242, 172-173).

Peut-on dire, en guise de conclusion, que la *Question III* fait suffisamment amende honorable par rapport à l'opinion soutenue dans la *Question I*? Lexicalement et sur le plan doctrinal, Guéréric emploie des termes et des expressions qui ne laissent planer aucun doute sur son orthodoxie théologique après 1241. Théologiquement, sa position est une

⁶⁹ « L'argument d'un Guéréric consiste à conclure de ce que le simple et l'infini ne sont jamais co-prédictables *in naturalibus* qu'ils ne le sont pas non plus en Dieu. Cette inférence est illicite aux yeux de l'Anonyme qui distingue, et c'est là sa grande originalité, entre les genres ou l'infini et le simple se prédisent des sujets différents, et ceux où ils sont co-prédictables du même [...] Ce que l'auteur nous invite donc à penser dans sa *responsio* c'est l'existence d'un infini dématérialisé, d'un infini non-quantitatif. Or c'est de ce type justement que serait l'infini de puissance (*virtute*) qui convient en propre à Dieu [...] nous sommes bien en présence d'une acception foncièrement nouvelle de ce concept, celui-ci étant désormais à concevoir comme un *attribut affectant l'essence même de Dieu* », Antoine Côté, *L'infinié divine...*, p. 75-76 (c'est l'auteur qui souligne).

rétractation qui ne convainc pas, un simple repli sur un rocher aristotélicien (la thèse de l'infini quantitatif) que d'autres ont su intelligemment contourner (l'auteur de la *question 151*). La soumission à l'autorité ecclésiale se fait moyennant un abandon total de l'héritage patristique grec (l'inaccessibilité de l'essence divine, les *théophanies* en tant que *médium* entre l'intellect humain et l'essence divine, la disproportion entre le Créateur et la créature). On ne saurait trop lui reprocher le retournement doctrinal, mais une chose est claire : privé des subtilités de la théologie apophatique (que les condamnations de 1241 prenaient pour thèses erronées), il ne s'est pas rendu compte que l'aristotélisme était en train d'investir le discours théologique sur la béatitude, feignant être *une solution* alors qu'il était *le problème déclencheur* de ces discussions au XII^e siècle.

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Paths of Devotion, Art, and Liturgy throughout the Palaiologan Era

The Enthroned Virgin with the Child, Holy Patrons, and Archangels, in the Semi-dome of the Main Apse of the Wallachian Church Dedicated to Saint Nicholas in Curtea de Argeș*

Lucian Lechințan **

Abstract: *The present paper has as its focus the decoration of the Princely Church's semi-dome; an iconographic context which offers a display of the enthroned ever-Virgin holding Jesus in her arms. Such a decoration is not normally problematic if it were not for the adjunction of two holy figures on the sides. This original screen captures familiar devotional practices, as well as bringing together both the patronal aspect, linked directly to St. Nicholas to whom the church is dedicated, and the liturgical one, related to St. John Chrysostom, in his quality as the author of a Liturgy. The foundation of the Wallachian Ecclesiastical Metropolis in 1359 was the occasion for this innovative display. It is stated that Constantinopolitan norms were observed in the choice of the iconography yet its affiliation to a precise monument remains unresolved. The painters intended, in this case, to portray not merely an ordinary Virgin and Child, but to portray what is to be considered a local identity pattern. The last part of the article is dedicated to the liturgical inscription under the semi-dome. In author's opinion, its presence reflects a debate aroused at the Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos. An analysis of the historical context suggests the years for the completion of the wall-paintings at an already advanced date, most likely, 1364/5.*

Keywords: Virgin holding Jesus, Kyriotissa, Holy patrons, Apse decoration, Great Lavra, Palaiologan art, Wallachia, Curtea de Argeș, Kyiv, Pecherskaja

In Romania, in the historical province of Wallachia, more precisely south of the Carpathians, on the banks of the River Argeș, a church dedicated to St. Nicholas was built between the fourth and sixth decades of the 14th

* Dedicated to scholar Ioana Iancovescu (nun Ignatia), with whom the author first discovered the church. Many thanks on behalf of the reviewer Thomas J. Carroll, S.J..

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century. Lying on a small promontory, the church is oriented west-east and is of a cross-in-square plan of medium size (fig. 1). If we choose to approach our monument through historical sources, the first notable mentions of the Princely Church date back to the mid-17th century. The religious edifice never had the status of a monastery but always that of a Princely Church (*Biserica Domnească*) linked to the function of being a palatine chapel and a necropolis for the rulers. It must be admitted, however, that for a brief period the Seat of the new Wallachian Ecclesiastical Metropolis, founded in 1359, was probably also located here. Therefore the foundation of the church played a most important role in enshrining in these territories a new order both political and religious. After the Hungarian Kingdom's pacification and the Angevin dynasty's ascension to the throne (1307), simultaneously with the weakening of the Bulgarian state due to the Turkish advancing, the new Basarab lineage established their dominion as lords of the Argeș and Câmpulung lands.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

Originally the church was part of a building ensemble that included a mansion house and several attached buildings grouped within a four-sided stone wall to the southwest of the church. Shortly after its construction in the second half of the 14th century, the church was completely covered, top to bottom, inside the sanctuary, the naos, and the narthex, with highly valuable artistic wall paintings. Passing through a narrow narthex and a portal carved out of a thick wall with no trace of sculptural decoration, one arrives in the naos, a unified area that rewards the eye by its opening at the top of a very wide and flooded with warm light. Of the sanctuary's apse, due to a stone iconostasis integrated in the mid-18th century, only the upper half is visible, precisely the monumental composition with the enthroned Virgin holding Jesus in her arms, here a classical *Kyriotissa* or, even better, a Constantinopolitan *Nikopeia* (fig. 2). The child has a folded scroll in his left hand, while he gives the blessing with his right hand, being framed by two bishops and two archangels. The decoration of this main apse features habitual scenes such as *The Communion of the Apostles* and *The Liturgy of the Fathers*, to which is added a spectacular *Ark of Covenant* and a vast *Cycle of Resurrection*, together with *Parables* and other *Evangelical scenes*.

In a good state of conservation, the semi-dome of the apse was painted in only four *giornate*: the first concerned the profile of the Virgin, two others the bishops and the archangels, and the last one the body of the Virgin and the child¹. The original iconography has long aroused the interests of important scholars². The throne on which the Virgin is seated is simple,

¹ The restorer Dan Mohanu states that the original background was painted using a precious lapis lazuli pigment and that, as early as the 18th century, what was left of this colour was covered with an enamelled blue. Finishing touches affected not only the background but also the dress of the Archangel Michael. Between 1827-1837 there was the keying of the semi-dome in preparation for a new layer of frescoes, followed by several other repaintings. In 1914, the painter D. Norocea “covered with dry retouchings the entire scene.” These were removed only during the last restoration of the entire semi-dome starting from 1980. The operation was carried out on a meticulous scientific basis and in various stages, but the restoration of the entire church building was never fully accomplished. Dan Mohanu is of the opinion that this fresco is the work of two major masters, one “static” and the other “dynamic”. Dan Mohanu, *Arheologia picturilor murale de la biserică Sf. Nicolae Domnesc din Curtea de Argeș*, Ed. A.R.A. – Arhitectură, Restaurare, Arheologie, Bucharest 2011, 174-182; Id., “O nouă etapă în conservarea picturilor murale din secolul XIV de la Argeș: absida altarului”, *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor - Monuments Istorice și de Artă* (1989) 48-62, here pp. 54-57, and p. 49, fig. 3 (for the graphic showing the different stages of achievement).

² Ion Mihail, “Pictura Bisericii Domnești din Curtea de Argeș”, *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*, 10-14 (1923) 180, plate IIIa, ill. 196, 202a,b,c; Ioan D. Ștefănescu, *Contribution à l'étude des peintures murales valaques (Transylvanie, district de Vâlcea, Târgoviște et région de București)*, Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1928, 10, 14; Orest Tafrali, *Monuments Byzantins de Curtea de Arges*, Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1931, 52-56, II. Album, plates XXV/2/bis/, XXVI-XXVII, CXXIV2; Ioan D. Ștefănescu, *La peinture religieuse en Valachie et en Transylvanie: depuis les origines jusqu'au XIX^e siècle*, I. Texte., II. Album, Orient et Byzance 6, Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1932, 34-36; Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria Artei Feudale în Țările Române. Arta în perioada de*

backless, and decorated with a mask on the right foot, an aspect that reveals the metropolitan character of the decoration³. Two cushions, one red in front, the other blue-green behind, recall the identical choice of colours in the apse mosaic of St. Sophia, Thessaloniki, and in the wall painting in St. Sophia, Ohrid (ca. 1037-1056). The Virgin is framed on the right side by St. Nicholas, the church's patron, while on the left stands St. John Chrysostom, in his role of author of the homonymous liturgy celebrated in this area. The two bishops are depicted in three-quarter profiles, wearing *omophoria* and *phelonia polystauria* as distinctive marks of their episcopal rank, while in their hands they hold closed codices. They are followed by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, taller than the bishops, with their hands veiled and introducing the clergymen to the Virgin and child. The Archangels do not wear liturgical or imperial robes. The one behind St. Nicholas wears a simple tunic over which a long *chiton* is clasped, while the Archangel on the left, behind St. John Chrysostom, wears a blue tunic and a red overcoat fitted with sleeves.

dezvoltare a feudalismului, vol. I, Ed. Academiei, Bucharest, 1959, 341-342, figg. 295-296; Maria Ana Musicescu, "Arta în Țara Românească din secolul al XIV-lea până la mijlocul secolului al XV-lea. Pictura", în George Oprescu, ed., *Istoria Artelor Plastice în România*, Ed. Meridiane, Bucharest, 1968, 164, fig. 139; Grigore Ionescu – Ana Maria Musicescu, *Biserica Domnească din Curtea de Argeș*, Ed. Meridiane, Bucharest, 1976, 22, 28, draw II, ill. IV-VII; Carmen Laura Dumitrescu, "Anciennes et nouvelles hypothèses sur un monument roumain du XIV siècle, l'église Saint-Nicolae-Domnesc de Curtea de Arges", *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art, Série beaux-arts* 16 (1979) 26, fig. 8; Corina Popa, *Christian art in Romania, the 14th century*, vol. III, Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1983, 50, plate 11; Daniel Barbu, *Pictura murală din Tara Românească în secolul al XIV-lea*, Editura Meridiane, Bucharest, 1986, 38-39, 41-42, 52, 97, rep. I, ill. 13-14; Maria Grazia Tolfo, *La chiesa di San Nicola Domnesc a Curtea de Argeș. Problemi storici e restituzione dell'originario progetto narrativo delle pitture trecentesche*, vol. I Testo, vol. II Tavole (typed, unpublished PhD thesis), Università degli Studi di Parma, 1987-1988, 181-182, plates 33-34; EAD., *Arte e spiritualità nella Valacchia del Trecento. Il programma decorativo della chiesa di S. Nicolae Domnesc a Curtea de Argeș*, Milan – Brescia, 1989, 16; Ana Dumitrescu, "Une nouvelle datation des peintures murales de Curtea de Argeș. Origine de leur iconographie", *Cahiers archéologiques* 37 (1989) 152, fig. 25-26; Tania Velmans, "Le décor du sanctuaire de l'église de Calendzhikha. Quelques schémas rares: la Vierge entre Pierre et Paul, la Procession des anges et le Christ de Pitié", in *L'art médiéval de l'Orient chrétien: recueil d'études*, Éditions LIK Distributeur - Éditions Picard, Sofia, 2002, 228; Dan Mohanu, *Arheologia*, cit., 174-182, fig. 60-64, plates 14-20; Constantin Ciobanu, "Pictura murală din Tara Românească în secolele XIV-XV", în Răzvan Theodorescu – Marius Porumb, ed., *Arta din România. Din Preistorie în contemporaneitate*, vol I., Ed. Mega, Bucharest – Cluj Napoca, 2018, 149, fig. 232.

³ Doula Mouriki considers: "The fact that mask and classical details of this kind are lacking in provincial works assigns to these motifs a special importance in terms of their cultural implications". Doula Mouriki, "The Mask Motif in the Wall Paintings of Mistra. Cultural Implications of a Classical Feature in Late Byzantine Painting", in *Studies in Late Byzantine Painting*, The Pindar Press, London, 1995, 96.

1. Constantinopolitan Stylistic Legacy in Wallachia

From the very beginning it is important to stress the painters' ability of representing multiple figures on a concave surface. This fact makes evident not only the excellent skills of the masters but also the importance accorded to this iconographic screen, given that it required considerable perspectival efforts in relation to a surface not generous in size. A hierarchical perspective is observed, with the Virgin in the foreground, while the other profiles gradually assume different proportions. The painters here do not rely on a logic of linear construction, but attempt to overcome frontality. In fact, an axial display is dictated by the figures disposed on the sides. In the same vein, as a response to the figures depicted in three-quarter view, one might also consider the choice of representing the throne in a lateral diametrical axonometry. Seen from the centre of the church, the perspectival lines affecting the semi-dome are remarkably well executed.

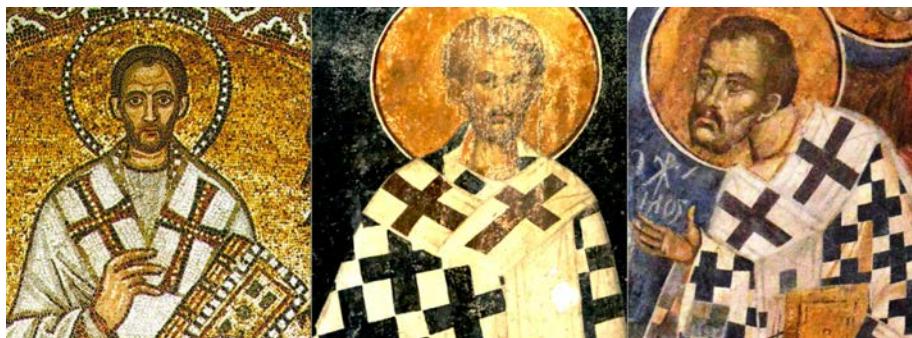


Fig. 3.

It might be mentioned that, for the expressions, the painters have used an elongated module that draws its origin from the late-Comnenian art, similar to the examples of Studenica, Virgin's Church (ca. 1208-1209), revisited in Palaiologan times for the decoration of King's Church (1313-1314). The only exception is that of the figure of John Chrysostom, which is precisely a citation of a Constantinopolitan pattern, like the one of Kariye Camii (1315-1321) to which it is related, and is significantly different from the one in St. Sophia in Constantinople (last quarter of 10th century, north tympanum of the nave) (fig. 3). The painters are remarkable for their smooth modelling aimed at showing radiant facial values rather than contrasts, a refined style that Doula Mouriki recognizes as the hallmark of the painters of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki (ca. 1313-1314)⁴. In fact, in Argeș the

⁴ Doula Mouriki, "Stylistic trends in Monumental Painting of Greece at the beginning of the XIVth century", in *Studies in Late Byzantine*, cit., 9.

painters have dressed the two Archangels identically to those of Thessaloniki and of Verria, Christ's Church (ca. 1315), the only difference being in chromatic choices and in the fact that in our church the contours of the profiles are more elongated. The figures have not yet undergone that tendency toward deformation that V. Djurić noted in the Chilandar parekklesion dedicated to the Synaxis of the Holy Archangels. There the search for expressiveness seems to be the first concern of the painters, as also in the Macedonian churches of the last forty years of the 14th century (Zaum, St. Nicholas Šiševski, Zrze), to the detriment of the lightness and the lack of all tension that we find in our fresco⁵. For Jesus' figure, the painters were first and foremost interested in showing lifelike appearance, and the hair of the child's small head does not seem to be inspired by Byzantine patterns but rather by thirteenth-century Italian paintings. Attention must be paid also to the sharpness of the folds of the angel's garments, their sculptural character, and the refined interplay of shadows and light for the Virgin's mantle. All these elements indicate that the painters considered anatomical likeness to be important and that modelling was a constant concern on their part.

These considerations point to a style related to a 14th-century painter, Kalliergis, the "best painter in Thessaly", as he presents himself in the dedicatory inscription from Verria (1314-1315), although this connection is not clearly supported by circumstances⁶. To the same family of images,

⁵ Vojislav J. Djurić, "Fresques Médiévales à Chilandar. Contribution au catalogue des fresques du Mont Athos", in *Actes du XIIe Congrès international d'études byzantines: Ochride, 10-16 septembre 1961*, Comité Yougoslave des études byzantines, Beograd, 1964, 89.

⁶ The painter was living in Thessaloniki when the mosaics of the Holy Apostles were finished (ca. 1313-1314) and, as Doula Mouriki mentions, here he became acquainted with the designing of a genuine Constantinopolitan iconographic program. Later, his presumable works on Mount Athos in the katholikon of the Hilandar Monastery (1321-1322, repaintings in 1803-1804) show only the actualization of the principles learned in Thessaloniki, to which the painter added, as a personal mark, the elongated shape of the figures and the manner of modelling without contrasts. A turning point in the studies on Kalliergi's workshop belongs to S. Pelekanidē, who in 1973 came to the conclusion that the Hilandar frescoes belong to a different workshop, in any case not to the Thessalonian one of Kalliergis. This affirmation would have required a more detailed iconographic discussion. The argument of M. Marković orienting the attribution of the Hilandar frescoes to the workshop of Michael and Eutychius is not well-founded. The artistic workshop in Staro Nagorichino shows a different stylistic horizon from the one of Hilandar. Consider here the stylistic arguments advanced by D. Mouriki on the wall-paintings of Hilandar and on the main role of Thessaloniki in relation to Serbia and Macedonia. Cf. Stylianos M. Pelekanidēs, *Kalliergēs: holēs Thētalias aristos zōgraphos*, Ed. Archaiologikē Hetaireia, Athēnais, 1973, 126-127; M. Marković, "Probitni zhivopis glavne manastirske cerkve", in Gojko Subotić, ed., *Manastir Hilandar*, Galerija Srpske Akademije Nauka i Umetnosti, Beograd, 1998, 241-242; Doula Mouriki, "Stylistic trends", cit., 12-13, 27-28; Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, "Painter's Information on Themselves in Late Byzantine Church Inscriptions", in Michele Bacci, ed., *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale, Giornate di studio, Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore, 21-22 novembre 2003*, Seminari e Convegni 12, Edizioni della Normale, Pisa, 2007, 64-66; Euthymios.

related to a workshop in Constantinople, might be included also the “Madonna of Ciambretta”, a mosaic of the Virgin and Child, dated to the early fourteenth century, now in Messina at the Regional Museum and previously attributed to a regional workshop⁷ (fig. 4). It seems to have become quite fashionable at that time for the painters to look at archaic patterns such as when representing frontality in a lack of a strict symmetry. The vividness of Virgin's expressive figure is achieved by gently emphasizing her left eyebrow, as in the 6th-century Sinai's encaustic icons, including the famous bust of the *Pantokrator*.



Fig. 4.

As for the artists who painted in the semi-dome, one of them is definitely the “red *phelonia*” painter. In the semi-dome he is recognizable via the inward-turned part of St. Nicholas’s *phelonion*, and he is the one who painted a bishop in the *Fathers’ Liturgy* (St. Gregory the Theologian, in the last register of the hemicycle, the second figure) and, more broadly, almost all the holy bishops depicted in the space of the *prothesis*.

N. Tsigaridas, *Toichografies tēs periodou tōn Palaïologōn se naous tēs Makedonias*, Ed. Pournaras P., Thessalonikē, 1999, 11-29, ill. 1-24; Dimitrije Bogdanović, - Vojislav J. Djurić, - Dejan Medaković, *Chilandar*, Ed. Monastery of Chilandar, The Holy Mountain – Belgrade, 1997, 81-96; Geōrgios G. Gounaris, *The Church of Christ in Verria*, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1991, 47-51; Vojislav J. Djurić, “Fresques Médiévales”, cit., 78-83.

⁷ Cf. Valentino Pace, “Pittura bizantina nell’Italia meridionale (secoli XI – XIV)”, in Gugliemo Cavallo – al., *I bizantini in Italia*, Ed. Libri Scheiwiller, Milan, 1982, 489-490, ill. 445; Maria Pia Di Dario Guida, *Icone di Calabria e altre icone meridionali*, Messina 1992, 205-207; EAD., “Gli effetti delle prescrizioni tridentine. La *Madonna della lettera*”, in Maria Katja Guida, ed., *La Madonna delle Vittorie a Piazza Armerina: dal Gran Conte Ruggero al Settecento*, Electa, Naples, 2009, 174-176.

2. Devotional Grounds and Spread of New Iconographies

From the beginning it must be noted that the painters of Argeș were deeply aware of what an apse decoration would require. To this effect, the iconography was not conceived regardless of the representation of *Christ's genealogy* that precedes it on the barrel vault and on the intrados of the middle arch⁸. These themes of the Old Testament, initially displayed in the narthex, gradually reached the area of the sanctuary, a trend which became more accentuated in the Palaiologan era⁹.

The screen of the *Enthroned Virgin with the Child and Saints* is distinguished by a number of details upon which we will dwell. Before starting, it is necessary to make reference to a notion suggested by Gordana Babić, who, examining various decorative programs of Georgian apses in the 13th century, has noted the existence of a number of discrepancies in the process of elaboration of a program with reference to a so-called "prototype". The scholar considered that subsequent developments of a "pattern" should be considered not direct copies but already transitional approaches¹⁰. Very often the features of the original "pattern" are not precisely duplicated, and attention must be turned to historical and social grounds contributing to this

⁸ At Mistra, in the metropolis of St. Demetrios (late 13th c., ca. 1270-1285), close to the triumphal arch, the prophet David appears on the south wall and Solomon on the north wall. The inscriptions on their scrolls link the sequence to the representation of the main semi-dome featuring the enthroned Virgin: she is the true gateway of salvation, and the texts of the Prophets give evidence to this fact. Cf. Suzy Dufrenne, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra*, *Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques* 4, Editions Klincksieck, Paris, 1970, 7, drawing 4. We could also include here the church of St. Sophia in Trebizond (ca. 1238- 1263), where on the extrados of the triumphal arch there is a representation in medallions of Christ's ancestors. David Talbot Rice, *The Church of Hagia Sophia at Trebizond*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1968, 106-108, 178-179, plates 31, 34, 35, 36; Antony Eastmond, *Art and Identity in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium: Hagia Sophia and the Empire of Trebizond*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 10, Aldershot - Ashgate, Hampshire - Burlington, 2004, 99-100, fig. 75.

⁹ Suzy Dufrenne, "Problèmes iconographiques dans la peinture monumentale du début du XIV siècle", in *L'art byzantin au début du XIV siècle. Symposium de Gračanica 1973*, Faculté de Philosophie - Departement de l'histoire de l'art, Beograd, 1978, 36. On the increasing number of Old Testament iconographies in the 13th century: cf. Suzy Dufrenne, "L'enrichissement du programme iconographique dans les églises byzantines du XIII^{ème} siècle", in Vojislav J. Djurić, ed., *L'art byzantin du XIII^e siècle. Symposium de Sopoćani 1965*, Faculté de Philosophie - Departement de l'histoire de l'art, Belgrade, 1967, 43-44.

¹⁰ The term "transitional solutions" translates G. Babić's "types transitoires". Essentially it means the overthrow of the standards in constructing an iconographical program. "Transitional solutions" are rarely encountered in the Balkans, more often in Greece, and especially in regions far away from Byzantium (Georgia, Abkhazia, Russia). The concept should be understood as a preference for archaic iconographic solutions. Gordana Babić, "Les programmes absidiaux en Géorgie et dans les Balkans entre le XI^e et le XIII^e siècle", in Maria Stella Caló Mariani, ed., *L'arte georgiana dal IX al XIV secolo: atti del terzo Simposio internazionale sull'arte georgiana, Bari-Lecce 14-18 ottobre 1980*, Congedo Editore, Galatina, 1986, 128.

process¹¹. Quite often the endowment of a patron carries significant weight in shaping an iconography by adding or removing features. Often, this also indicates a patron's connections with various cultural and religious environments.

2.1 Patterns of Patronage

Argeş's representation does not simply have a theological significance but validates the appearance of a new horizon of piety. Analogous iconographic solutions are those found at Sinai, where, in the katholikon of St. Catherine's Monastery, in the space of the *prothesis* dedicated to St. James, the bishops who were authors of liturgies are represented in a frontal view framing the *Virgin of the Bush*: John Chrysostom and St. James of Jerusalem (to the left of the Virgin), St. Basil the Great and the Prophet Moses holding with the tablets of the law in his hands, as the main Protector of the site (to the right of the Virgin.) The saints are shown as seen at Argeş, holding codices in their hands¹². Similar iconographic settings might be found in Cyprus¹³, Novgorod¹⁴, and in Trebizond¹⁵.

¹¹ Cf. G. BABIĆ, ibid., 128. On the selection criteria of the iconographic features in representing the enthroned Virgin from 9th-century to 11th century: cf. Robin Cormack, "The Apse Mosaic of S. Sophia Thessaloniki" in *The Byzantine Eye: Studies in Art and Patronage*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS 296, Variorum Reprints, London, 1989, [V, 1980-1981] 128-130; Vasiliy Putsko, "Pecherskij ktitorskij portret", *Zograf* 13 (1982) 45-46.

¹² This fresco, initially dated to the second half of the 15th century, seems to belong to an earlier period; some iconographic details, as well as stylistic ones, point in the direction of revising this dating by Manolés Chatzédakēs. First of all, we refer here to the frontal position of the bishops and to the fact that their *phelonia* are different from the *polystauria* types, generalized at the beginning of the 14th century. As Parpulov has shown, there is another reason in the fact that the bishops are painted against a star-shaped background, which recalls the 7th-century icon of the enthroned Christ preserved in the Monastery's Treasury, or even the much later Crucifixion of Studenica (Virgin's church, 1208-1209), etc. Based on these details and various stylistic aspects, the fresco can be attributed, as G.R. Parpulov suggests, following V.J. Djurić, to the so-called Master of St. James, who was active on Sinai in the first half of the 13th century. Other icons listed in Parpulov's catalogue are also attributed to him. Cf. Georgi R. Parpulov, "Mural and Icon Painting at Sinai in the Thirteenth Century", in Sharon Gerstel – Robert S. Nelson, ed., *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, Cursor mundi, v. 11, Brepols, Turnhout, 2010, 346-347, Catalogue at p. 388: XIII, 37-47; Vojislav J. Djurić, "La peinture murale byzantine: XII^e et XIII^e siècles", in *Actes du XVe Congrès international d'études byzantines, Athènes, septembre 1976*, Association internationale des études byzantines, Athens, 1979, 202-203; Manolés Chatzédakēs, *Études sur la peinture postbyzantine*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS52, Variorum Reprints, London, 1976, n. VIII, 206-232; Athanasios Palaiouras, "Wall Paintings", in Konstantinos A. Manafis, ed., *Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, Ekdotikē Athēnōn S.A., Athens, 1990, 70-71.

¹³ In the apse of the Church of the Holy Apostles, Perachorio (1160-1180), St. Peter and St. Paul frame the Virgin Platytera.

¹⁴ In Nereditsa, Christ's Church (1199, lost) in the semi-dome of the *prothesis* the *Virgin Znamenie* (*Platytera*) with the child is framed by two Saints. The one on the left side was



Fig. 5.

A specific category of icons has developed the patronal pattern, namely, the group of icons painted in the Sinai-Palestinian style and intended for pilgrims to remember the “loca sancta”¹⁶. A series of this kind of icons belonging to various periods, with saints framing the standing Virgin, are preserved on Mount Sinai¹⁷. In them, the *Virgin of the Burning Bush* or

identified by the inscription: Al’kosa (Alexius of Rome?). Tat’jana Sergeevna Shcherbatova – Shevjakova, *Nereditsa*, Galart, Moscow, 2004, 231, fig. 232.

¹⁵ In the church of Hagia Sophia (ca. 1238-1263) in Trebizond, in the semi-dome of the *diakonikon*, the enthroned Virgin and child are framed by Saints Joachim and Anne.

¹⁶ Kurt Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta*, and the representational arts of Palestine”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974) 52-54, fig. 47-51; Cfr. Id., “A group of early twelfth-century Sinai Icons attributed to Cyprus”, in Giles Robertson - George Henderson, ed., *Studies in Memory of David Talbot Rice*, Collected Studies Series, CS37, Variorum Reprints, Edinburgh, 1975, 245-261. Consider also: Geōrgios Sôtériou, *Eikones tēs Monēs Sina = Icônes du Mont Sinaï*, Institut français, Athens, 1956, vol I, 135-139, 143-144, 164-165, 179-180, vol. II, figg. 155-158, 163-164, 177, 197.

¹⁷ K. Weitzmann groups the icons with standing holy intercessors to the sides of the Virgin, attributing them to the 10th century. For their production he presumes a contact between the Sinai Monastery and Levantine artistic centres. Cf. Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: the Icons. From the 6th-10th century*, vol. 1, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, 8, Cat. B53, B54, 85-88, plates XXXIII, CIX. In relation to the 13th-century icons with the *Virgin of the Burning Bush* with holy intercessors, according to K.M. Collins the typology “allows the hypothesis that this imagery responded to the monastery’s increased contact with Latin audiences.” Cf. Kristen M. Collins, “Visual Piety and Institutional Identity in Sinai”, in Robert S. Nelson – Kristen M. Collins, ed., *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2006, 96.

the *Virgin Kyriotissa*, flanked initially by powerful intercessors such as St. Nicholas or thaumaturgic saints, are gradually replaced by local protectors: Moses, the Prophet Elijah, and St. Euthymius, bishop of Jerusalem¹⁸ (fig. 5). The iconographies were able to reach the metropolitan centres of the Byzantine Empire at the time of the Crusades and the Latin Occupation of Constantinople.

The spread of a patronal iconography is self-evident, for instance, in Cyprus, which kept relations with Sinai through the *metochia* located on the island: here an iconographic formula similar to that of Argeş enjoyed a relative prestige in the 13th century. An icon from Panagia Angeloktistēs church in Kiti (13th century, repaintings in the 17th and 19th centuries), shows the Theotokos with the child seated on a throne without backrest, like that of Argeş, having on the sides St. Luke and St. Lazarus, the latter being dressed as a Bishop in his role of first protector of Cyprus¹⁹. As we will see, the aspect that proves of real interest is the relevance of this typology in areas far from Constantinople, as in the case of the icon from Lavra Pecherskaja in Kyiv, now in the Collections of Tretjakov Gallery (Moscow), presenting *The Virgin Pecherskaja (Svenskaja) with saints Antonij and Feodosij* (ca. 1288). In a similar vein, a Novgorodian icon of St. Blasius with the Virgin, dating back to the first quarter of the 15th century, presents an iconographic formula similar to the 13th century “loca sancta”²⁰. Such contacts with Sinai were constant in the Balkans, and in the 14th century a revival of these relations included Walachia as well²¹.

¹⁸ According to Kurt Weitzmann, the small icons belonging to this category were intended as souvenirs for pilgrims who visited the holy places or as a kind of *ex-voto* for the Monastery. Cf. Kurt Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta*”, cit., 53. Doula Mouriki suggests instead that they served for liturgical and devotional purposes and could also have been gifts for distinguished guests. Cf. Doula Mouriki, “Icons from the 12th to the 15th century”, in Kōnstantinos A. Manafès, ed., *Sinai: treasures of the monastery of Saint Catherine*, Athens, 1990, 109; EAD., “Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons by the Painter Peter”, in Vojislav Korać, ed., *Studenica et l'art byzantin*, Acad. Serbe des Sciences et des Arts, Belgrade, 1988, 3. And there are still some who claim that these types of icons served for private devotion, finding their place in monks’ cells. Cf. Kristen M. Collins, “Visual Piety”, cit., 100, 257. While the first two scholars argue that the centre of production was most likely Levantine (Acre or Tripoli), Kristen M. Collins is of the opinion that the workshops were definitely local.

¹⁹ Another similar Cypriot icon is that of St. Athanasius and St. Cyril and the enthroned Virgin, in St. George’s Church, Aradhippou (before the first quarter of the 15th century), and other later examples could be added. David Talbot Rice, *The Icons of Cyprus*, Courtauld Institute Publications of Near Eastern Art, 2, Allen & Unwin, London 1937, 194-195, fig. 5, plate VIII. For Sinai-Cyprus connections: Cf. Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Sinai and Cyprus: Holy Mountain, Holy Isle”, in Sharon Gerstel – Robert S. Nelson, ed., *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, cit., 449-478.

²⁰ The saint’s relics were brought from Constantinople to Novgorod. Engelina Sergeevna Smirnova, *Zhivopis’ velikogo Novgoroda, seredina XIII – nachalo XV veka*, Nauka, Moscow, 1976, 258-261, Cat. 38.

²¹ Sinai’s connections with Wallachian soil arise in relation to the disciples of Gregory of Sinai (1275- ca.1346), a monk who lived for some years on Mount Athos and later founded his own

In the field of monumental painting, an intermediary stage in the spread of Holy Patrons' iconographies is found in the katholikon of the Monastery of the Beheading of John the Baptist, in Serres (ca. 1319). In the inner narthex, two representations of the Virgin and Child enthroned and flanked by holy protectors of the monastery are found. They are believed to be contemporary, as latest researches of Angelikê Stratê have shown, but more examples could be added²². Another example might be that of Volotovo (Novgorod, lost, ca. 1363) where, inside the naos, on the south wall, used to lie a depiction of the enthroned Virgin with the Child, flanked by two Archbishops of Novgorod, Moses and Alexius²³ (fig. 6). These iconographic displays are indicative of the gradual migration of the pattern towards the sanctuary area²⁴. A much later achievement is found in Georgia, in

monastery. During his stay in Paroria (1331-1334), near Bosnia's mountain border with Greece, Gregory gathered around him an international group of monks. As Dan Ioan Mureşan has shown, there are records of an epistolary relationship between the Wallachian prince Nicholas Alexander and Gregory the Sinaite during this period. After his death, his disciples founded a monastery in Bulgaria, at Kelifarevo, near Veliko Târnovo, where written sources attest that a large group of Wallachian monks resided. These circles must have played a leading role in maintaining and disseminating not only Sinai's ascetic spirituality but also specific cultural and artistic expressions. Cf. Antonio Rigo, "Gregorio il Sinaita", in Carmello Giuseppe Conticello - Vassa Conticello, ed., *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition, II: XIII^e-XIX^e s.*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2002, 77-83; Adrian Marinescu, *Mănăstirea Sf. Ecaterina de la Muntele Sinai și legăturile ei cu Țările Române: perspectivă istorico-patristică*, Sophia, Bucharest, 2009, 147-156, 166-175. Dan Ioan Mureşan, "Philothée I^{er} Kokkinos, la métropole de Hongrovalachie et les empereurs de la terre", in Emilian Popescu – Mihai Ovidiu Cătoi, ed., *Crestinismul românesc și organizarea bisericăescă în secolele XIII-XIV*, Galați, 2010, 364-368.

²² In Serres, the enthroned Virgin and Child is flanked once by John the Baptist and the Archangel Michael, with a kneeling monk underneath (probably Joachim, the second abbot of the monastery, who was responsible for the endowment of the funerary arcosolium), the other with John the Theologian and John the Baptist and again a kneeling monk (Theodosius?). Cf. Angeliki Stratê, "Hoi palaioteres toichografies tês Enatês tou katholikou", in *He zografikē sténe Hiera Monē Timiou Prodromou Serrón. Meletes kai arthra*, Ekdotikê Paragôge, Thessaloniki, 2007, 25, 27-29, ill. 2, 10-13, dis. 1-2; EAD., "Paratérēseis stê Zografikē tōn palaiologeîon chronôn tês monês", *ibid.*, 53-64; EAD., *The monastery of Timios Prodromos*, Ministry of Culture, Archaeological Receipts Fund, Athens, 1989. Similar in conception is the *Deisis* of Ljuboten (1343-1345). It presents the church's holy protectors and donors flanking the enthroned Virgin with the Child. Milan Radujko, "Zhivotopis prochelja i linete juzhnog ulaza Svetog Nikole u Ljubotenu", *Zograf* 32 (2008), 101-116. Note also the representation of Peć, church of Bogorodica Odigtrija (ca. 1335-1337), second layer of painting, late 14th century, with St. Nicholas and St. Danilo. Cf. Andela Gavrilović, *Crkva Bogorodice Odigitrije u Pechkoj Patrijaršiji*, Stavropigijalna Lavra Manastir Pečka Patrijaršiji, Belgrade, 2018, 211-212, ill. 133, dis. V.

²³ Cfr. Gerol'd Ivanovich Vzdrnov, *Volotovo, freski cerkvi Uspenija na Volotovom pole bliz Novgoroda*, Iskusstvo, Moscow, 1989, 68-74, Cat. §169.

²⁴ We might also mention here the fresco fragment located in the semi-dome of the *Prothesis* space in the Kariye Camii Katholikon, where the depiction of a bishop wearing a *phelonion polystaurion* is preserved. Paul Underwood is of the opinion that the fragment is indicative of a lost *Fathers' Liturgy*, although that scene is never represented in the semi-dome, a place

Ts'alenžixe's main apse fresco (ca. 1384-1396) which displays Saints Peter and Paul, each followed by an Archangel, framing the Virgin Orans without the Child, a representation somehow related to ours from the perspective of the iconography, even if, from the point of view of the style and in terms of chronology, it partakes of different horizons²⁵.



Fig. 6.

2.2 Piety and Politics

The innovative display of the saints on the sides of the enthroned Virgin might be regarded as an overcoming of the Constantinopolitan norm which, without exception, proposed for the main semi-dome of the apse either the simple image of the Virgin and Child framed by the Archangels, or the Virgin alone. First, it should be noted that the two bishops, St. Nicholas and St. John Chrysostom, appear three-quarter-length in a reclining position, precisely that of the concelebrants of the *Liturgy of the Fathers (Melismos)*, where the *omophorion*, instead of falling straight, is draped over the arm. This iconography combines the patronal aspect, linked directly to St.

reserved for representations of the Virgin alone or with the Child. Paul A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York – Princeton, 1966, vol. I, *Historical Introduction and Description of the Mosaics and Frescoes*, 263-264, vol. III Plates 335-553: *The frescoes*, 524.

²⁵ Arthur Megaw,– Ernest J.W. Hawkins, “The Church of the Holy Apostles at Perachorio, Cyprus, and Its Frescoes”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962) 297-300, fig. 12-20; Tania Velmans, “Le décor du sanctuaire”, cit., 228. For the church of St. Sophia in Trebizon: Cf. David Talbot Rice, *The church of Hagia*, cit., 104, plates 29b; Antony Eastmond, *Art and Identity*, cit., 99, fig. 76. With regard to Georgian wall-paintings: Cf. Inga Lordkipanidze, *Rospis’ v Calendzhixa, xudozhnik Kir Manuil Evgenikos i ego mesto v gruzinskoy srednevekovoymonumental’noy zhivopisi*, Mecniereba, Tbilisi, 1992, 36-39. For the relations between Curtea de Argeş and C’alenžixe: Cf. Daniel Barbu, *Pictura murală*, cit., 38-39.

Nicholas, to whom the church is dedicated, with the representation of St. John Chrysostom, the author of the main Eucharistic Liturgy.

Besides, St. Nicholas' presence in the semi-dome should also be comprehended in the perspective of the renewal of devotional practices in Wallachia. In this respect the saint stands for a spiritual commitment between the Basarab family, notably Prince Nicholas Alexander (1351/2-1364) himself as the first donor of the decoration, and the protector saint. In the exchange of the endowments, St. Nicholas is asked to intercede in order to enhance the prestige of the family's princely lineage. As has been shown, the veneration of a patron began to be associated in late Byzantium with a private idea of salvation²⁶.

It remains, also, that the presence of the image of John Chrysostom in Argeș, in addition to that of St. Nicholas, the Patron of the church and protector of Prince Nicholas Alexander, is indicative of the fact that a Constantinopolitan iconographic norm has been observed in the decoration. The representation has to be linked to the revival of the saint's cult in the Palaiologan era. The place for the veneration of his relics in Constantinople was in the church of the Holy Apostles, where his tomb was located at the left of the altar²⁷. However, there are sources reporting their transfer in the late 14th or early 15th century to St. Sophia, where already representations, together with the saint's episcopal staff, pre-existed²⁸. In *Offices and Ceremonies* by Pseudo-Kodinos the celebration of Chrysostom's feast in the presence of the Emperor is recorded, a rare occasion (for a total of three times a year) when he would present himself at St. Sophia²⁹. In regard to the

²⁶ Natalia B. Teteriatnikova, "The New Image of Byzantine Noblemen in Paleologan Art", *Quaderni Utinensi* 15-16 (1996) 309-319.

²⁷ Raymond Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire Byzantin. Le Siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat œcuménique. Tome III. Les églises et les monastères*, Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, Paris, 1969, 45.

²⁸ "The tomb of St. John Chrysostom, however, is at the high altar in the sanctuary of St. Sophia and is covered with a slab worked in gold and precious stones. [His body] was still whole, and reposes there as if [he were] alive. There is nothing dismal about his vestments or hair, but to this day [the body] exudes a strong sweet fragrance. A large concourse gathers on his festival, not only Christians, but Franks and Latins too, and much healing and forgiveness comes". The text is considered a 15th century interpolation into the description of the Anonymous Pilgrim of Novgorod, who mentions that the relics were in the church of the Apostles. George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 19, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C., 1984, 134 (note 25), 213, 219-220, 302-303.

²⁹ Ruth Macrides – Joseph A. Munitiz – Dimiter Angelov, *Pseudo-Kodinos and the Constantinopolitan Court. Offices and Ceremonies*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies 15, Surrey - Ashgate, Birmingham - Burlington, 2013, 187 (note 533), 197. In the Palaiologan era the ecclesiastical life took place between the Imperial Palace and the nearby church of Blacherne. Cf. Andrea Paribeni, «Separati in casa: i destini paralleli della chiesa e del palazzo delle Blacherne a Costantinopoli», in Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, ed., *Medioevo: la chiesa e il Palazzo, Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi Parma, 20-24 settembre 2005*, I convegni di Parma 8, Electa, Milan, 2007, 357-368.

development of an iconography referring to the saint Patriarch, Leslie Brubaker recently discussed an illuminated scroll, with private prayers for communion and with portraits of the saint, dated probably to the second quarter of the 14th century³⁰, and one might also recall the development of his iconography as *Fountain of Life*³¹. In any case, Chrysostom's presence in the sanctuary of Argeș not only demonstrates a revival of the holy patriarch's cult but is also connected with the liturgical renewal of the epoch. This might be seen in the inscription under the semi-dome of the hymn Ἄξιόν ἐστιν (*It is truly meet*), part of Chrysostom's anaphora³². Such a Constantinopolitan imprint in our apse is to be understood in relation to the foundation of the Wallachian Ecclesiastical Metropolis in 1359 in close dependence on the capital of the Empire.

2.3 Changing iconographies

The aim of this part is to delve into the reasons having led to the enrichment of the apse's iconographic setting when a classical display in itself was not expected to be problematic. In our opinion, these aspects can be explained in relation to the Pecherskaja (Svenskaja) icon, which is most likely a second-grade copy of a Constantinopolitan prototype³³ (fig. 7). According to a series of historical accounts, a so-called "namestnaja" icon was transported to Kyiv to adorn the Dormition Cathedral of the Caves Monastery in ca. 1072-1073³⁴. It can be assumed that the copy, which probably disappeared shortly after its arrival in Kiev, followed the

³⁰ The lecture, awaiting publication, was entitled "A Byzantine princess and her private prayer scroll" and was presented at the Romanian Society for Byzantine Studies, on 06/21/2022.

³¹ Cf. Tania Velmans, "L'iconographie de la «Fontaine de vie» dans la tradition byzantine à la fin du Moyen Age", in *Synthonon, Art et Archéologie de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age*, Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques 2, Klincksieck, Paris, 1968, 119-134. On the monumental representation of this iconography in the narthex of the Lesnovo Monastery (1349), cf. Smiljka Gabelić, *Manastir Lesnovo, istorija i slikarstvo*, Stubovi kulture, Belgrade, 1998, 162-167, 279.

³² See also the theological interpretation of Daniel Barbu: Cf. Daniel Barbu, *Pictura murală*, cit., 39.

³³ Andrej Krekshin, "Svenskaja ikona Bozhej Materi. K 700-letiju so vremenii proslavenija", *Zhurnal Moskovskoj patriarxii* 5 (1988) 14-16; Jakov V. Bruk, ed., *Gosudarstvennaja Tretjakovskaja galereja: katalog sobranija. Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo X - nachala XV veka*, Krasnaja ploshchad', Moscow, 1995, Cat. 16, 70-72; Aleksej Michajlovich Lidov – Galina V. Sidorenko, ed., *Chudotvornij obraz ikony Bogomateri v Tretjakovskoj galeree = The Miraculous Image: the Icons of Our Lady in the Tretjakov Gallery*, Radunitsa, Moscow, 1999, 16, Cat. 6; Engelina Sergeevna Smirnova, "Il XIII secolo: devastazione dei tartari e rinascita della cultura", in EAD., ed., *La pittura in Europa. La pittura russa*, Electa, Milan, 2001, 182, fig. 150-152;

³⁴ Muriel Heppell, transl., *The Patterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature 1, Ukrainian Research Institute - Harvard University, Cambridge, 1989, 6-8.

Constantinopolitan original in all respects³⁵. The devotional pathways led to the circulation of new copies of the “namestnaja”. One of them is the Pecherskaja (Svenskaja) icon, now in the Tretjakov Gallery in Moscow, painted in Kyiv in 1288 in order to heal Prince Mikhail Chernigov afflicted by blindness. In relation to the original, this version adds, on either side of the central representation, Saints Antonij and Feodosij as founders of the Pecherskaja³⁶. We are here concerned with the arising of a new recension, where the original layout, initially limited to the Mother and to the Son, is enhanced to include a wider representation in the screen³⁷.

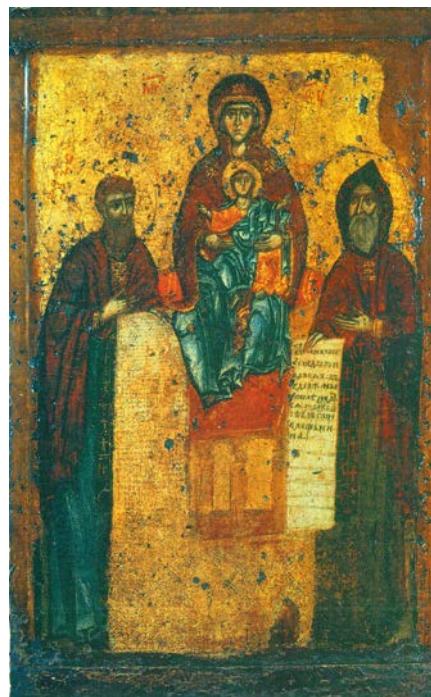


Fig. 7.

³⁵ Putsko relates the episode to the Polovtsy invasion of 1096. Cf. Vasiliy Putsko, “Pecherskij ktitorskij”, cit., 44. The current icon venerated as Pecherskaja in Caves Monastery is improperly named. Cf. Ivan Karabinov, “«Namestnaja ikona» drevnego Kievo-Pecherskogo monastyrja” *Izvestija Gosudarstvennoj Akademii Istorii Material'noj Kultury*, 5 (1927) 110-111.

³⁶ The uplifted rendering of the Virgin's throne draws inspiration from the “namestnaja” icon placement in the church. According to historical sources, this was “towards the centre and at a certain height”. Cf. A PUTSKO, “Pecherskij ktitorskij”, cit., 44.

³⁷ The success of this new recension can be measured in relation to other icons, such as those from Vologda: Levon V. Nersesjan, ed. *Ikony Vologdy kontsa XVI - XVII veka = Vologda Icons, late 16th - 17th centuries*, Drevnosti Severa - Moskva Severnyj palomnik, Moscow, 2007, 124- 129, 702-707, Cat. 2 (E.S. Smirnova) and Cat. 113 (A.S. Preobrazhenskij).

In the icon of 1288, copied at the Lavra Pecherskaja and later also in the representation of the Argeş semi-dome, the performative aspect becomes central. The intercessors flanking the Virgin are three-quarter turned, as in most of the “*loca sancta*” of Sinai, in an overcoming of the frontal usage of rendering (fig. 5)³⁸. In both cases, that of the Argeş’ fresco and that of the Svenskaja icon, in the central section representing the enthroned Virgin with Child a reference to a Constantinopolitan artwork figures out³⁹. The topographical reference meant to support their recognition is lost⁴⁰. If a striking analogy with the miniature from Gertruda’s Codex (*Cividale del Friuli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, codex CXXXVI, fol. 41r, Book of Prayers*) (fig. 8) has been proposed for the identification of “*namestnaja*” prototype⁴¹, for Argeş, reference must be made to a generic iconography identifiable as early as late antiquity⁴². This “classicizing” version, with the

³⁸ Cf. Anna Zakharova, “The Choir of Saints in the Middle Byzantine Monumental Decoration. The Evidence of the 9th-11th Century Wall-Paintings in Cappadocia” in Basilēs Katsaros - Anastasia Turta, edd., *Aphierōma ston akadēmaiko Panagiōtē L. Vokotopoulo*, Ekdóseis Kapón, Athens, 2015, 341-346.

³⁹ The one that a pilgrim from Novgorod who arrived in Constantinople at the beginning of 15th century could identify in the north aisle of the cathedral of Hagia Sophia: “дале поида мало по лъвом стороне есть теремець, а в теремеци икона святаа Богородица; таа икона посыпала мастеры на Киев ставити церкви Печерьськиа во имя святыя Богородица” (As you go a little farther, on the left side is a canopy, and under this canopy is an icon of the Holy Mother of God. It was this icon which sent the architects to Kiev [var. add.: to SS Anthony and Theodosius] to build the Caves [Monastery] churches in honor of the Holy Mother of God [var.: a church in the Cave] tr. G.P. Majeska). If, according to the Paterik of the Cave’s Monastery, the prototype of the icon sent to Kiev must be related to the Blacherne church, the finding of an analogous typology in St. Sophia must be an indication of the generic nature of that specific representation. George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, cit., 119-120, 133, 212-213; Nikodim P. Kondakov, *Ikonografija Bogomateri*, vol. I - II, Otdelenie russkogo jazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk, Sankt Petersburg, 1914, vol. I, 326; A PUTSKO, “Pecherskij ktitorskij”, cit., 44.

⁴⁰ According to Gordana Babić these references, even if rare, are of great importance for specifying the patron’s desire to have a precise copy of a particular icon instead of another. Unusually, at Argeş church any indication referring to the Virgin or to the Child is missing, while for other figures the inscriptions are carefully designed. Cf. Gordana Babić, “Les images byzantines et leurs degrés de signification : l’exemple de l’Hodigitria”, in André Guillou - Jannic Durand, *Byzance et les images. Cycle de conférences organisé au musée du Louvre par le Service culturel du 5 octobre au 7 décembre 1992*, La Documentation française, Paris, 1994, 203.

⁴¹ Engelina Sergeevna Smirnova, «Le miniature del Libro di preghiere della principessa Gertrude», in Claudia Barberi, ed., *Psalterium Egberti. Facsimile del ms. CXXXVI del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Cividale del Friuli*, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Trieste, 2000, vol. Text, 101-102; Małgorzata Smorag Różyc, *Bizantyńsko-ruskie miniatury Kodeksu Gertrudy*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Cracow, 2003, 183-184. The miniatures can be consulted here: <https://www.librideipatriachi.it/libri/salterio-di-egberto-codex-gertrudianus/>

⁴² We refer here to representations dating back to the 6th century: the encaustic icon of the Virgin Mary between Saints Theodore and George from Sinai and the wall painting showing the widow Turtura together with Virgin Mary enthroned with the child Jesus and saints Felix

seated Child in a “reclining position”, differs from the later post-iconoclastic iconographies presenting the Child in the process of adopting an upright position, prosaically called, for this reason, “flaterring” or “levitating”⁴³. However, one can observe that the dialogue shares a pattern with the model, rather than being a direct copy of it. Some details, such as the Child’s gestures, his hands slightly outstretched and not receding back as in the older examples, speak in favour of an affiliation with a post-iconoclastic pattern. In addition, it will be observed that, as in Serres’s frescoes, the Child stretches out only one hand and addresses exclusively the holy protector of the church⁴⁴, an outstanding difference compared to the Svenskaja icon⁴⁵. These adjustments lead back toward a Constantinopolitan-style Madonna copied in the Argeş’ semi-dome, similar to the one in the apse of St. Sophia in Constantinople, redesigned into a local iconographical variant by painters who were familiar with the pattern. Through placing at the sides of the intercessors what lies beneath a generic typology, the iconography of the Virgin and Child is brought towards concreteness and particular efficiency⁴⁶.

and *Adauctus* in the catacomb of Commodilla, Rome, ca. 527-528. For the Sinai icon: cf. Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery*, cit., 8, Cat. B3, 18-21, plates IV-VI; Geōrgios Sôtēriou, *Eikones tēs Monēs*, vol. I, 21-22, vol. II, plate IV, fig. 5-7. For the fresco in Rome: cf. Eugenio Russo, “L'affresco di Turtura nel cimitero di Commodilla, l'icona di S. Maria in Trastevere e le più antiche feste della Madonna a Roma”, in *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano*, 88-89 (1979, 1980-1981) 1-85, 71-150; N. KONDAKOV, *Ikonografija Bogomateri*, cit., vol. I, 181-184, 914. More generally on the iconography of the Virgin *Kyriotissa* and on the so-called *Virgin of Cyprus*: cf. ibid., vol. II, 124-151, 316-356.

⁴³ R. CORMACK, “The Apse Mosaic”, cit., 129-130.

⁴⁴ Consider in this regard the following monumental Constantinopolitan representations: in the Monastery of Christ Akataleptos (Kalenderhane Camii, Istanbul), where, in the apse of the earlier building (the Bema Church), there is a *Kyriotissa* with donor dated to the early 12th century; and also the mosaic of St. Sophia (south gallery, last bay) from 1118 representing *The Virgin and Child, the Emperor John II Komnenos and Empress Irene*. To these examples could also be added the mosaic in the apse of S. Sophia, Thessaloniki (second quarter of the 11th century), the fresco in the main apse of S. Sophia, Ohrid (ca. 1037-1056), the apse fresco in the church of Veljusa (ca. 1080), the miniature in Vienna: Vindob. cod. theol. gr. 336, fol. 17v, *Psalter*, 1077; the mosaic featuring Messina’s Madonna of Ciambretta (beginning of 14th century), etc. A discussion on some of these examples is found here: cf. Robin Cormack, “The apse mosaic”, cit., 127-134; Małgorzata Smorąg Rózyca, *Bizantyńsko-ruskie*, cit., 168-169.

⁴⁵ As in the case of the Svenskaja icon, in the icon from Kiti (Cyprus), and in the fresco from Volotovo previously mentioned. Unlike V. Putsko, in regard to the Pecherskaja (Svenskaja) icon, it seems to us improper to designate this iconography as embodying specifically a “donor” (*ktetor*). In the present paper we have brought forward enough arguments for the discussion of the typology in terms of devotion and patronage. Moreover, a donor’s representation cannot be separated from concrete references to the gifts in terms of iconography or epigraphy.

⁴⁶ In this regard, note Sixten Ringbom’s remarks on the byname constituted on the one hand by the “vision” and on the other hand by the “conversation”: “la tendance à l’hypostase du contenu des rêves, des apparitions, des visions et autres” where “hypostase” must be understood as subjective transformation of a concept or a term into something real and concrete. Cf. Sixten Ringbom, “Vision et conversation chez les primitifs flamands: la sainte

It remains a question without an easy answer whether the central image in the semi-dome may refer to a Constantinopolitan image venerated in the early church of Argeș I, the very building that was replaced by the present church. What supports this direction of research is the artists' choice of flanking the image of the enthroned Virgin with those of holy intercessors. The painters intended, in this case, to portray not a common representation of the Virgin and Child but a precise image being venerated by the saints, a kind of "namestnaja" referring to the Wallachian soil. The screen of our semi-dome, given its iconography, suggests the assignation of a geographic extension to the pattern. Along Curtea de Argeș, these coordinates would include Constantinople, Thessaloniki, and Ohrid.

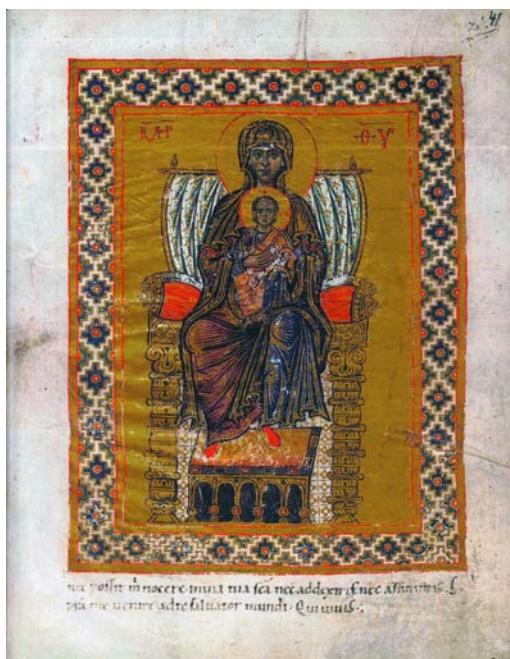


Fig. 8.

3. A Liturgical Hymn and its Resonances

The presence of a liturgical inscription under the main semi-dome of the sanctuary, on the border dividing the upper part from the rest of the hemicycle, requires closer examination (fig. 9). First, it should be noted that its content is related to the representation depicted in the semi-dome. Another inscription, probably related to the patronage, was presented on the

famille du maître de Delft", in *Les images de dévotion, XIIe – XVe siècle*, Gérard Monfort, Paris, 1995, 109-110.

arcosolium in the apse, but it remains indecipherable. The first inscription bears a *troparion* we have transcribed in the *Appendix*, the Ἄξιόν ἐστιν (*It is truly meet*), in honour of the Virgin Mary⁴⁷. This hymn is a feature not only pertaining to the Liturgy of the Hours in the Byzantine rite, but is also part of the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom. Gabriel Millet has found the same *troparion* in Trebizond, in the semi-dome of the rock church of *Panagia Theoskepastos* Monastery [Kizlar Monastiri] (ca. 14th century). Here the *Virgin Platytera with the Child* had a fragmentary inscription of Ἄξιόν ἐστιν around the medallion on her breast⁴⁸.



Fig. 9.

The inscription, therefore, is rarely recorded, and its presence should be interpreted in relation to the integration of the hymn as a fixed part of Chrysostom's liturgy in the *diataxis* of Demetrios Gemistos (1386)⁴⁹. This was preceded by liturgical discussions in the mid-14th century, when the *troparion* was subject to intense debate at the Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos. The controversy involved two figures of the Patriarchs of Constantinople: Philotheos Kokkinos (1353-1354, 1364-1376) and his predecessor Kallistos I (1350-1353, 1355-1363). Multiple sources, the most complete being the one of John Nathanael (1574), indicate that, during the first *hygumenate* of James Trikanas at the Lavra, most probably around 1352-1353, a controversy regarded the *troparion* which ought to be chanted after the Epiclesis, mainly for Lenten Functions, when the Divine Liturgy of St.

⁴⁷ In the category of liturgical inscriptions found in churches, one of uncertain date, to be found in the church of the Gelati monastery (Georgia), might be mentioned. Here the *Cherubic Hymn* has been copied under the mosaic of the apse semi-dome (1125-1130), certainly in reference to the Celestial Liturgy depicted immediately below, while in the *arcosolium* there is an inscription in the Georgian language of patronal meaning, disposed as is the one in Arges.

⁴⁸ The inscription is preserved only fragmentarily: Τὴν τιμιωτέραν τῶν Χερουβίεων καὶ ἐνδοξοτέραν / ἀσυγκρίτως τῶν Σεραφίμ· τὴν ἀδιαφθόρως / [Θεὸν Λόγον τεκοῦσαν, τὴν ὄντως Θεοτόκον, σὲ μεγαλύνομεν]. Gabriel Millet, - David Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Painting at Trebizond*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1936, 40.

⁴⁹ I thank Professor Stefano Parenti for the precious updating I benefited on this point, owing his latest researches. Cf. Stefano Parenti, *L'anafora di Crisostomo. Testo e contesti*, Aschendorff, Jerusalemer Theologisches Forum (JThF), 36, Münster, 2020, 359-366, 370.

Basil was to be celebrated⁵⁰. Patriarch Philotheos stipulated that the monks of Lavra should perform after the Epiclesis, for all liturgical occurrences, a single troparion: Ἀξιόν ἐστιν. This decision, dictated by convenience, went against the instructions of Kallistos I, who asked that, for St. Basil's Divine Liturgy, a much longer hymn Ἐπί σοὶ χαίρει (*In you rejoices*) be employed. The monks of Lavra did not unanimously welcome the provisions of Philoteos, and, during the stay of the Patriarch Gregory III of Alexandria (1354-1366) at the monastery, a fraction of them seized the opportunity to show their allegiance to the old line⁵¹. The *domestikos* inquired Patriarch Gregory III which hymn should be chanted during the Eucharistic celebration, that is, whether to adhere to the new provisions or to remain faithful to the old ones. Patriarch Gregory III asked the monks to perform Ἐπί σοὶ χαίρει. Confirmation was not long to come, and, at the end of the Vigilia, the head of the choir received it in a dream: the *Theotokos* herself appeared to the Choir Master granting him a golden coin, an appreciation for remaining faithful to the line of Kallistos I.

In the Argeş church, the presence of the inscription with the hymn Ἀξιόν ἐστιν is therefore not an accident. Most likely this is an imprint given to the iconographic program by the discussions we have reported, transmitted directly or indirectly through the circle that followed on Mount Athos a line such as the one of Philotheos Kokkinos. Before the integration of the *troparion* in the *diataxis* of Demetrios Gemistos, a practice of the Great Church to perform Ἀξιόν ἐστιν within the Eucharistic Liturgy is reflected⁵². More precisely, the inscription reflects the phase when this *troparion*

⁵⁰ ANTONIO RIGO, "Il monte Athos e la controversia palamitica dal concilio del 1351 al tomo sinodale del 1368: Giacomo Trikanas, Procoro Cidone e Filoteo Kokkinos", in ID., ed., *Gregorio Palamas e oltre: studi e documenti sulle controversie teologiche del XIV secolo bizantino*, Leo S. Olschki, Firenze, 2004, 6-18, and 10-11 for this history; Marie-Hélène Congourdeau, "Deux Patriarches Palamites en rivalité Kallistos et Philothée", in *Le Patriarcat œcuménique de Constantinople aux XIVe-XVI siècles: rupture et continuité. Actes du colloque international, Rome, 5-7 décembre 2005*, Centre d'études byzantines, néohelléniques et sud-est européennes - École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 2007, 48-49; Stefano Parenti mentions the controversy, although he dated the debate to the 15th century. The sources on which he relies for his arguments are N. Boulgaris' Catecheses of 1681. Rigo, however, has shown sources even further back in time, the main one by Giovanni Nathanel from 1574, along with other important evidences that make it plausible that this problem existed at Lavra in the mid-14th century (Cf. A. RIGO, ibid., 11-14). Cf. Stefano Parenti, *L'anafora di Crisostomo*, cit., 365-366.

⁵¹ Cf. Antonio Rigo, ibid., 11-14.

⁵² As Stefano Parenti observes, according to *Grottaserrata Γ.β. 3* (post 1357), after the Epiclesis, when the censing of the sanctuary took place, on behalf of a *kastrisos*, the troparion Ἀξιόν ἐστιν was recited in low voice by the cleric, while the singers performed it aloud. At least in the Great Church, more than thirty years before the *diataxis* of Gemistos the hymn had already entered the Eucharistic Liturgy. Very important are also the commentaries of Nicholas Kabasilas on the hymn at mid-14th century. Stefano Parenti, *L'anafora di Crisostomo*, cit., 534, 363-364.

gradually shifted from the Ordinary of the Hours to the Divine Liturgy⁵³. The absence of the hymn in the Athonite *diataxis* of Philotheos Kokkinos (ca. 1334-1341) does not mean that the *troparion* had no place in the Constantinopolitan Eucharistic liturgy. The mid-14th century Athonite dispute itself proves precisely the difficulty of acculturating in some traditional byzantine “foyers” the Constantinopolitan *taxis*⁵⁴.

The presence of this liturgical hymn in a wider iconographic context related to the Eucharistic themes specific to of the Sanctuary shows valuable evidence regarding the evolution of the Liturgy. Its presence offers also an indication for the dating of the frescoes to the second half of the 14th century, most likely to the date advanced by Daniel Barbu, at about 1364/5, in coincidence with the beginning of the second Patriarchate of Philotheos Kokkinos (1364-1376)⁵⁵. In this case, the first patron would have been the prince Nicholas Alexander (1351/2-1364), even if the church’s decoration had been accomplished, as is commonly asserted, by Vladislav Vlaicu (1364 - 1376/7) before 1369⁵⁶. The inscription shows evidence of the ancientness of the Wallachian connections with the monastic communities on Mount Athos. In particular, the relations with the Monastery of Lavra are witnessed a few years later by an Icon of St. Athanasius of Mount Athos offered to the monastic community. On it, precisely on the silver edges of the framework, is found the portrait of the Wallachian rulers Vladislaus and his wife Anna⁵⁷.

Appendix

All figures are indicated with well-preserved inscriptions in Greek. The border below the representation bears the words of the *troparion* Ἐστίν (*It is truly meet*), in honour of the Virgin Mary. The text is a part of Chrysostom's Anaphora: it follows the Epiclesis and is found in the section of Intercessions referring to various categories of Saints. We also transcribe it with various corrections made to the previous readings of P.P. Panaiteescu and O. Tafrali⁵⁸:

⁵³ Stefano Parenti, *ibid.*, 359-364, qui 360-361.

⁵⁴ Consider in this regard also the history of the icon of the Virgin Axion Estin in Mount Athos, Protaton Monastery. Cf. Euthymios N. Tsigaridas, “L’icône de la Vierge Axion Estin du Protaton et ses copies”, in *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog instituta* 44 (2007) 341-352.

⁵⁵ D. BARBU, *Pictura murală*, cit., 37-38.

⁵⁶ Pavel Chihaia, “Despre Biserică Domnească din Curtea de Argeș și confesiunea primilor voievozi ai Țării Românești”, in *Tradiții răsăritene și influențe occidentale în Tara Românească*”, Editura Sfintei Arhiepiscopii a Bucureștilor, Bucharest, 1993, 28.

⁵⁷ Petre Ș. Năsturel, *Le mont Athos et les roumains, recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du XIV^e siècle à 1654*, Orientalia Christiana analecta, 227, Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, Roma, 1986, 73-74.

⁵⁸ Petre P. Panaiteescu, “Inscriptiunile religioase grecești dela Biserică Domnească”, *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* 10-14 (1917-1923) 161-162; Orest Tafrali, *Monuments Byzantins*, cit., vol. I, 56.

ΑΞΗΝ ΕΓΘΝ ΟC ΑΛΗΘΟC ΜΑΚΑΡΙΞΙN CE THN ΘΕΟΤΟKON
TIN ΑHΜΑKAPICTON KE ΠΑNAMOMHTON KE MITEPAN [T]OY
Θ(E)Y HMON THN THMIOTEPAN [T]ON XEPOYBIM KE
ΕΝΔΟΞΟTEPAN ACINKPITOC [TGΩN CEPΑΦ]HM, [THN
ΑLIAΦΘOPGΩ]C Θ(E)N ΛΟG[O]N TEKOY[CAN T]HN ONTOC
[Θ(EOTO)]KON CE M[EGALYNOMEN]

Ἄξιόν ἔστιν ώς ἀληθῶς μακαρίζειν σε τὴν Θεοτόκον, τὴν ἀειμακάριστον καὶ παναμώμητον καὶ μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν. Τὴν τιμιωτέραν τῶν Χερουβείμ καὶ ἐνδοξοτέραν ἀσυγκρίτως τῶν Σεραφείμ· τὴν ἀδιαφθόρως Θεὸν Λόγον τεκοῦσαν, τὴν ὄντως Θεοτόκον, σὲ μεγαλύνομεν.

It is truly meet to call thee blest, the Theotokos, the ever-blessed and all-immaculate and Mother of our God. More honourable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, thee who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very Theotokos, thee do magnify [Translated from the Greek by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Massachusetts].

Different figures are referred by their name in Greek:

Ο APX(ΑΓΓΕΛΟC) MHXA(H)Λ

Ό Αρχάγγελος Μιχαήλ; The Archangel Michael;

Ο AGIOS NIKOΛAOС

Ό ἄγιος Νικόλαος; St. Nicholas;

Ο AGIOS IGΩ(ANNHC) O XP(YCOCTO)MOC

Ό Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος; John Chrysostom;

Ο APX(ΑΓΓΕΛΟC) Γ[-----]

Ό Αρχάγγελος Γαβριήλ, The Archangel Gabriel.

A second large inscription, in the arcosolium of the apse, perhaps an epigram of dedication, has not yet been discussed because of its state of conservation.

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LUX INCORPORATA

The Theme of Light and Its Ancient Sources in the Imagery of Christian Art

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Abstract: This study attempts to identify the theme of light in the imagery of ancient Greco-Roman and Christian art through a comparative analysis of the context and evolution of artistic language before and after the Christianization of the Roman Empire. An essential criterion in understanding the new aesthetic paradigm and highlighting the means of artistic expression characteristic to the two periods temporally delimited by the event of the Incarnation, is the way in which artistic consciousness relates to divinity. The acceptance or not of the Revelation, the reflection in religious art of the fact that God became Man and He has a Face, as opposed to other philosophical quests and religious systems that dress up the idea of divinity and its attributes in the face of the gods, personifying it or imagining it symbolically, – makes the difference. God communicates Himself to man through light, light being the common denominator of any epistemology, without placing in competition or in opposition the knowledge that comes to us through Revelation with that acquired by man through scientific experiments. Paradox is a mark of light. Science has proven it with the wave-particle dualism of quantum mechanics and theology fully confirms it. Light is a Person who says of Himself that He is: ‘The Light of the World’. (John 8, 12). The theme of light has multiple meanings in biblical exegesis; from the metaphorical image that runs through the Book of Revelation to that of the incorporated Light (*Lux incorporata*), an interpretation that refers to the Mystery of the Incarnation, to the world transfigured by grace, to the uncreated light communicated to people by the heavenly hierarchies through the Church in the form of the Holy Mysteries. In the world of late Roman antiquity, and later in the Byzantine world, there was a belief that the veining or luminous veins of colored marble, gemstones or translucent stones were embedded rays of light, an intervention of divine light in the rock. The uniqueness of these ‘graphic accidents’ was interpreted as signs of God in the creation that suggests the unseen, the unusual, the ineffable, in short, the paradox of the Christian world summed up in this confession: that God is both One and Three, that Christ is both Man and God, and that Mary is both the Mother of God and the Virgin. The art of mosaics and stained glass, as well as the entire decorative complex of precious stones, gems and polychrome marbles adorning objects of worship and liturgical furnishings, is built on a long tradition that aesthetically and theologically values the motif of light. Dogmatic notions such as hypostatic union and

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perichoresis are symbolically translated into visually striking plastic expressions – provided by the natural textures of the cut and polished rocks – with the sole purpose of suggesting the dogmatic ‘contradictions’ of the Kingdom of Light which, as they say, ‘already exists, but not yet’.

Keywords: light, Christianity, antiquity, art, church, icon, symbol

‘Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns,
Now from high heaven a new generation comes down.
You, the child who’s born, under whom the first race
of iron shall end, and a golden rise up throughout the
world...’¹

In 325, at the opening session of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, Emperor Constantine quoted this excerpt from the work of the poet Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BC)². The messianic character and the prophetic imagery captured in the great poet’s verses justifies why they echoed in the highest Christian forum, and why, like the Sibyls, Virgil will be placed by some Christian exegetes among the poet-prophets of antiquity. Creator of a founding myth through his epic *Aeneid*, the work of a Latin-speaking Homer, he educated and influenced generations of Romans until the institutionalization of Christianity and long afterwards. The Sparks of Revelation as manifestations of the Pre-Christian Logos³ inspired the poet to depict admirable prophetic images that mirror the face of the Unknown God (Acts of the Apostles 17, 23), with a poetic art unparalleled in the Greco-Roman literature⁴.

The space of Virgil’s creations is dominated by the figure of Orpheus⁵, whose failure, – a reflection of the powerlessness of the Pantheon

¹ Publius Vergilius Maro, *Works: Bucolica. Georgica*, verses from the Bucolics, 4th Eclogue, Institutul European publishing house, translated by Nicolae Ionel, 1997, p. 20.

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of God: a Theological Aesthetic, IV: In the Space of Metaphysics: Antiquity*, translated by Maria Magdalena Anghescu, Galaxia Gutenberg publishing house, Târgu-Lăpuș, 2019, p. 236, note 148.

³ Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, *Eastern Mysteries and Christianity*, Eikon și Renașterea publishing house, Cluj-Napoca, 2013, pp. 197; 200. The enlightenment of which ancient philosophy was capable finds its basis in the divine economy, manifested through the Logos. ‘The pre-Christian Logos is the living light of the divine mind that has been active in the world since its creation, through the intelligence and moral beauty of the most chosen among men’. St. Justin stated that all some philosophers, such as Socrates and Heraclitus, said well, they did by discovering and contemplating a certain part of the Logos, but since they did not know the whole Logos, Who is Christ, they often contradicted themselves. And he added: ‘those who lived according to the Logos are Christians, even if they were called pagans’.

⁴ H. U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of God...*, pp. 203-204.

⁵ Virgil, *Aeneid*, Institutul European publishing house, introduction and translation by Nicolae Ionel, 1999, p. 17.

– signifies the impossibility of salvation through art. One of the most brilliant insights of the culture and mythology of Greco-Roman antiquity is that artistic genius does not save souls. Neither his own nor others'. Neither does it hinder the one committed to the path of spiritual perfection. Being providential, Virgil's genius manifested itself at the temporal boundary of two intersecting eras, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ glimpsed by the poet being the milestone between the two worlds, for some a 'stumbling block', for others 'the cornerstone'⁶. After the genesis of the world, the Birth of Christ, a prophesied and long-awaited event, becomes the central chiastic point of history and time.



Fig. 1

⁶ H. U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of God...*, p. 236, note 148. Although many have disputed that the reference to a Redeemer and to humanity's 'golden age' was to Emperor Octavian Augustus, among others, Christianity has interpreted Virgil's love for the Saviour and the Divine Child as love for the One who came into the world a decade after the poet's death. From the perspective of the Divine Providence, nothing is coincidental.

Roman mosaic, 2nd century, Sousse, Tunisia. Bardo National Museum of Archaeology, Tunis. The scene shows the poet Virgil accompanied by Clio (the Muse of History) and Melpomene (the Muse of Tragedy). Virgil is holding a rotulus of the Aeneid, his work, open at Song I; 8, where it is written: "Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso...?" (Muse, tell me the causes, what god was offended...?).

The theophany of the divine Incarnation, marked by the light of a star that surpassed in brilliance the power of the sun, guides the fearless Magi, providentially mandated as once the pillar of cloud in the wilderness the chosen people, or Aeneas, the pious servant of the god of light, imagined with anticipation by Virgil to guide the Trojans to the promised land. The destination of the journey of the wise Magi turned out to be the Incarnate Light Itself⁷, the Divine Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the One who called Himself the Light of the world. Being astrologers, God revealed Himself to the Magi through what was most accessible to their understanding, approaching them in their own territory of competence, showing them a celestial body that was special in its size, its motion and its brilliance⁸. The divine economy, says St. John Chrysostom, surprised the Magi by the light of a star which manifested itself as a power endowed with reason, but this optical experience would have been in itself only a spectacle, if it had not awakened in their souls the light of a different kind of knowledge⁹. Saint John distinguishes between physical light and a different kind of light, which is relevant to the soul, the spirit, the intellect. God is present in and through symbols, as visible mirrors of the invisible¹⁰, the physical light through which we perceive the sensible world being a symbol of the uncreated light in which the transfigured matter of the world of the age to come will be bathed.

The guiding star – a celestial star for some exegetes, an angel for others – is the sign by which God proclaims the mystery of His Incarnation as well to those who ‘by nature do the things of the Law’. For many people the Nativity of the Lord went unnoticed for centuries even in the Greco-Roman world where Christianity was preached and born, but paradoxically,

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 203.

⁸ The Jewish sages’ confirmation of the information available to the magi with what the Torah also documented suggests, through the narrative of Evangelist Matthew, that natural and supernatural revelation support each other, and that if there is honesty on the part of one who can read the signs in nature, he eventually comes to know God. The scientific research of the last hundred years fully proves it.

⁹ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, translated by Rev. D. Fecrior, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1994, p. 80.

¹⁰ Archim. Maximos Constas, *The Art of Seeing – Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography*, Doxologia publishing house, 2017, pp. 313; 318.

even today there are populated regions for which the Incarnation, if it does not mean anything, it is not more than mere information.

Even before the human embodiment of Christ, the news of His Incarnation was partially revealed to the nations through myths and cosmogonies, ancient documents attesting that the Incarnation of the Lord was also revealed to the ‘unbaptized Christianity’ of ancient Asia. Chinese Confucianism, the successor of an ancient monotheism comparable to the biblical one of Abrahamic descent, records in the corpus of canonical books called the *Classics* the revelation of the coming of a Saviour¹¹. One of the recurring themes in the *Classics* is the wondrous conception of a child, Fu Xi, conceived by the virgin Jiang Yuan stepping into the footprint left in the sand by the giant foot of the divinity. Considered the father of Chinese civilisation, Fu Xi is the inventor of writing. ‘The Holy One will come from the West; His presence and parable will be enough for good and peace to rule over people and reconcile them all. His completeness cannot be described in words’,¹² . The ancient Chinese writings tell us that: ‘Before the birth of the Holy One, His beneficent law shone in Heaven and on Earth like a mysterious mirror, as if written by divine hand with mystic slovos for contemplation by the wise’¹³. The topos of the expectation of the Saint’s birth is combined here with that of the mirror, a metaphor we find in a Pauline epistle¹⁴ and in Virgil’s Aeneid.

Beyond the obvious association with the Incarnation of the Divine Logos at the Annunciation, this episode in Chinese mythology can be interpreted as a theophany expressed through the construction of a paradoxical ‘hieroglyph’, a palimpsestic pictogram obtained by overlapping the graphic sign of the human footprint with the divine one. The result is the representation of an oxymoron, a metaphor of a grapheme, of an archaic writing or pictographic ‘imprinting’, which attempts to capture and express the mystery¹⁵. There is approximation between the sacred belief in the iconic

¹¹ Andrei Dârlău, *China of grace: China's religions and Christianity: a cross-cultural, historical and hermeneutical incursion*, Fundația ‘Anastasia’ publishing house, Bucharest, 2018, p. 451. In the ideograms of the Chinese *Classics* it is spoken of ‘the Son of the Virgin, who conceived him from the Heavenly Spirit. (He) is the Son of God, who from the beginning was one with the Holy Spirit and is therefore called the Son of Heaven (Tian Zi) or the Son of God’. The main theme of *Zhong Yong* (one of the Chinese *Classics*) is the ‘perfected man’, noble or holy, seen as the mediator between heaven and earth. He is called the Beautiful Man, God-Man or Spirit-Man.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. XLI. The story of the birth of Hou Ji (the Sorghum God) is similar. The myth of Shang Di’s (or Tian’s) footprint imprinted on the ground is a quintessentially ‘semiotic’ myth; the divinity ‘does not speak, does not hide, but signals. He sets up a semiosis – a process or system of signification’.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 452.

¹⁴ (I Cor. 13, 12), ‘I now know partially’, (...) ‘for we see now as through a mirror, in divination’.

¹⁵ Andrei Dârlău, *op. cit.*, p. XLI.

power of codified writing, which is characteristic of archaic Chinese monotheism, and the iconic dimension of mysticism and theology on which Christian monotheism relies¹⁶. The present study attempts an identification of the theme of light through a comparative analysis of the context.

The lack of documents and the few archaeological testimonies make the period of transition from the antiquity of the worship of the gods to the antiquity of the Christian world one of the most difficult moments in the history of iconographic art to evaluate. The present study attempts to identify the theme of light in the imagery of Greco-Roman and Christian art through a comparative analysis of the context and evolution of artistic language before and after the Christianization of the Roman Empire. An essential criterion in identifying and evaluating the new aesthetic paradigm and highlighting the means of artistic expression, characteristic of the two periods temporally delimited by the event of the Incarnation, is the way in which artistic consciousness relates to divinity. The manner of worship, – the acceptance or non-acceptance of Revelation, the reflection in cultic art of the fact that God became Man and has a Face, as opposed to other philosophical quests and religious systems which dress up the idea of the divinity and its attributes in the face of the gods, personifying it or imagining it symbolically, – make the difference. The conceptions on the origin of the world reflected in the perception of space and time, specific to each theology, philosophy or mythology, and the kind of relationship existing between the concept of beauty and divinity, particularise the tendency, style and vision through which the image plastically describes the doctrinal background of a cult or a religious tradition.

One of the most ancient forms of knowledge in all the world's cultures is knowledge through myths, and what these traditions have in common is the organic connection between the human being and the cosmos. Art, as one of the highest expressions of this connection, is necessarily¹⁷ the dynamic and ineffable interface through which the human being dialogues with the sublime, a sublime in which the aesthetic and the divine are both found. The necessity of dialogue with the godhead has imposed the necessity of the face as a plastic mediating presence. Humans have felt the need to give a face to some phenomenon of nature and to attribute or describe qualities of the gods, using allegorical images, personifications, metaphors or symbols. If we observe the frequency with which, in all the cultures of the world, certain themes, subjects or plastic representations appear illustrated more often than

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. XIX.

¹⁷ If plastic beauty expresses the Divine, then it is necessary, says Saint Patriarch Photios. In the same tone, Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianz also speak of the necessity of art. Necessity is one of the most important reasons that determine human creation, art being a form of establishing new relationships between the world and man. See Mihail Diaconescu, *Lectures on Orthodox Aesthetics, I. Theology and Aesthetics*, Porto-Franco publishing house, Galați, 1996, pp.112; 334-335.

others, we cannot fail to notice that the most widespread of all is the image of the human body in all the complexity of its expressions¹⁸. The human figure is the universal standard by which heaven and earth are measured. Man and the cosmos, as subjects of the knowledge of the natural revelation, are structured according to our capacity for perception.

The knowledge of God is possible because there is, constitutively in man, the ability to perceive the order and the symmetry of the cosmos. The mission of the artist-priest who was aware that by creating a work of art he was setting a limit to chaos, being co-worker with God, is an idea that will be reaffirmed periodically throughout history in various forms. As a receptacle of the revealed Word translated into visual conventions, the creation of religious art is a process of knowledge through sight, by means of which man enriches his being and gains access to a visible manifestation, ‘endowed with meaning’¹⁹. Meaning, as transcendental reason, can only be interrogated through a specific language, a poetic language through which art, whether in visual or sound forms, identifies with prayer. Art devoted to worship will always be the result of the iconic adaptation of the providence in which divine revelation allows itself to be narrated, more or less accurately, by means of the inspired artistic act. Only in the icon will liturgical art find its full manifestation of meaning.

After the fall of the forefathers and the episode of the multiplication and mixing of the languages, the biblical reference tells us, reason perverted like a distorted mirror has distorted the perception and understanding of divinity, offering an illusory, speculative²⁰ and idolatrous image. Whether the image of divinity is idolatrously distorted in a crooked mirror or mirrors on its surface the iconically transfigured image of the Face of Christ, the mirror metaphor highlights comparatively the distinct perspectives on life in the two epochs bounded by the Incarnation event and shows us the interdependence relations between a religious cult and the means of expression characteristic of the artistic forms that theologically serve that cult.

As an interface to which we can relate the values of the two worlds, Virgil’s work can also display, through an ingenious compositional device, the metaphorical mirrors of the Aeneid, surfaces in which the past and future of the protagonists are captured and reflected in a plastic and visionary way. Virgil’s epic became, immediately after his death, the inspiration for a

¹⁸ Solomon Marcus, *Mathematical Poetics*, Academia Republicii Socialiste România publishing house, Bucharest, 1970, pp. 90-98. The frequent use of the metaphor of the human body since the dawn of humanity has given rise to expressions such as: geometric bodies, heavenly bodies, army bodies, etc.

¹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Gabriel Cercel and Larisa Dumitru, Gabriel Kohn and Cătălin Petcana, Teora publishing house, Bucharest, 2001, pp. 82-83; 116-117.

²⁰ To speculate (*fr. speculer*), for the ancient astronomers, meant observing the stars in the sky through a mirror (*speculum*).

programme of imagery, to which high-ranking Roman dignitaries with education and wealth turned to decorate their residences with frescoes and mosaics. The Romans recognised in the ‘Aeneid’ a part of their recent history and wanted to identify with the founding myth that Virgil had conceived, modelled on Homer. The writing argues the Romans’ descent from the gods and from the ancient Trojan people and justifies the inherence of their mission to found a new nation with Rome as its capital. In short, the message of the work, condensed and encapsulated in a few key moments of narrative composition, is illustrated and conveyed through scenes of symbolic and prophetic value. The poet describes events in anticipation and mirrors them, either in the metallic shine of a shield or in the scenes of mnemonic friezes carved and painted on the walls of a temple.

The main hero of the epic, Aeneas, receives as a gift, among other things, a miraculous shield²¹. On the front of the shield, created and gifted by the gods, bas-reliefs drawn and cast in precious metal reflect stories yet to be told, prophetic scenes of the birth and apotheosis of the Roman people. The scenes on the shield, connecting the past to the present, depict a future history of Rome, culminating in the victory of Emperor Octavian Augustus at Actium.



Fig. 2

²¹ Virgil uses Achilles’ shield from the Iliad as a model.



Fig. 3

In order to highlight the glory of Rome, the author uses a novel procedure: he reverses the perspective of time and shifts the poet's point of view, which makes the present recede into a legendary future²². The prophetic image depicted on the shield of Aeneas, through a change of perspective, could be perceived as a provisional exit from mythical, circular time and an anticipation of the future, foreshadowing in a shadowy way a vision similar to that which the Christian icon preaches, that of the age to come. In Christianity, man and cosmos together have an irreversible orientation towards the future, they advance linearly in a true history, towards an ultimate goal²³.

²² H. U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of God...*, p. 236. Thus, the Battle of Actium appears sublimated, from its natural plane into a mirifical golden world, as an ambience of glory, designed to give the great event a hieratic aura. See also Vergilius, *Aeneid*, translated by Eugen Lovinescu, preface by Edgar Papu, Editura pentru Literatură, 1964, p. 281-286.

²³ Arhim. Maximos Constas, *The art of seeing...*, pp. 124-125.

We find the same reverse perspective²⁴, prefigured without any obvious intention on the shield of Aeneas, in Byzantine iconography, which, by superimposing temporal planes, elaborates the visual image of the object not as a snapshot but as a synthesis of different successive images of it. In order to express unseen reality and divine ubiquity, the icon abolishes linear perspective by convention, creating spaces with several points of perspective. The volumes that populate these spaces arise from the ‘great simultaneity’²⁵ of perspective, as Paul Klee would say, being seen from several angles of view at once, as if the viewer of the objects were surrounding them and sequentially recording their images²⁶. Surprisingly or not, the polyvalent perspective and the superimposition of several episodes in the same compositional frame²⁷ is not just a distinctive feature of the icon or a discovery of modernity, it is present in countless works of antiquity.

Another moment of symbolic value described in the ‘Aeneid’ and emphasised by the author is the remembrance of the feats of bravery of the Greeks and Trojans, reflected sculpturally in the bas-reliefs of the friezes of a temple. Only a few years had passed since the fall of Troy and the deeds of this war were already legend sung and illustrated on the walls of Carthage. Looking at these friezes, Aeneas recognises his face in the carved images of the siege of Troy alongside his comrades²⁸. He finds himself visualising glimpses of his own life, being confirmed to him, through subtle divine pedagogy, that he is on the right path and that his choice is also the will of the gods, in which, if he continues to believe, he will fulfil his destiny. In the faith and perfect obedience to the divine instance of the hero of the ‘Aeneid’ we can glimpse some of the most important demands of Christian teaching: ‘These were the wonders which Aeneas admired on the shield of Vulcan, given to him by his mother, and, though he did not understand them, he willingly placed on his shoulder the sign of glory and of the fate of his

²⁴ Very reductionistically, the so-called reverse perspective in iconography is in fact a complex, atypical, often random perspective, with several vanishing points towards the viewer, sometimes a combination of reverse, axonometric and central perspective.

²⁵ Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Paul Klee*, Meridiane publishing house, Bucharest, 1972, p. 70.

²⁶ Marin Gherasim, *The fourth dimension*, Paralela 45 publishing house, Bucharest, 2003, p. 175. The procedure is used by cubist painters by breaking the image down into its constituent parts and bringing them into a single plane, recomposing them through a process of simultaneity. Cubism tries to suggest the idea of a total space, striving for an integral vision of objects, represented not from a single point of view but from several points simultaneously.

²⁷ In the icon, the overlapping of episodes and the coexistence of several scenes in the same compositional frame is nothing more than an attempt to achieve visually through plastic means that ‘concordia discors’ of the synoptic gospels, whose contents complement each other to describe the same event. See Dionisie Stamatoiu, *The Four Holy Gospels*, Universitaria publishing house, Craiova, 2000, p. 611.

²⁸ Virgil places Aeneas among the heroes ‘canonized’ during his lifetime, like those virtuous Christians whose sanctity is recognized by contemporaries before their official validation by the Church.

descendants’²⁹. Listening and waiting for the fulfilment of God’s promises is the foundational condition of all faith³⁰. Similar to the scenes depicted on the shield, the unfolding of the friezes carved in stone mirrors a world in which the prophetic act dominates the aesthetic act from the message point of view, prefiguring the kerygmatic function of iconographic art. We can see in the fate of the nomadic Trojans an analogy with the exodus of the Jewish people in expectation of the ‘fullness of time’ (Galatians 4:4)³¹. For the Trojans, the time of fulfilment is only achievable under the auspices of the lord of time, the god Aion³² or *Chronos*, alongside whom their main protector Apollo, god of the Sun and the Arts, is invoked. Wandering the seas, with hope and faith in the promises of the Olympians, the Trojans finally reach the promised land.

According to the meaning of the expression: ‘The New Testament lies hidden in the Old one’ and ‘The Old Testament is unveiled in the New’ formulated by Blessed Augustine about the supernatural Revelation, we can affirm that certain works and artistic manifestations of antiquity, whether or not they are plastic expressions of a religious cult, but whose content fragmentarily anticipates values of Christian moral and ethics, can be included among the testimonies of the natural revelation. Christians related to these peaks of universal culture and science by, on the one hand, dressing Christian faith and morality in the adornments of ancient art³³, and, on the other hand, attempting to reconcile the materialistic image of the world based on myths

²⁹ Vergiliu, *Aeneid*, translated by Eugen Lovinescu, preface by Edgar Papu, Editura pentru Literatură, 1964, p. 286. Although it seems that what is happening among humans is only a reflection of the real drama that is being played in the Olympus, Aeneas is not just the instrument of higher forces. There is no absolute determinism in the *Aeneid*, man is given enough freedom to choose the means. See also H. U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of God...*, p. 236, note 148.

³⁰ Andrei Pleșu, *The parables of Jesus: truth as story*, Humanitas publishing house, Bucharest, 2012, p. 141. God is the absence that becomes presence through man’s hopeful expectation. Through waiting, man becomes, in a certain sense, the creator of his Creator. See also H. U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of God...*, p. 226. This is, theologically speaking, the mystical privilege of the founder, just as Abraham sees in the stars on the sky the glory of his people, or St. Paul in the ‘third heaven’, the vision of his mission as a preacher of the Truth, a vision that raises hope to the level of certainty.

³¹ It is possible that Virgil had access to some of the Old Testament books, for there was a rather important Jewish community in Rome to which the apostle Paul addressed at least one epistle a few decades later.

³² Nicolae Achimescu, *History and Philosophy of Religion in Ancient Peoples*, Tehnpress publishing house, Iasi, 2000, p. 241. The god *Aion*, known in Phoenicia and Syria as *Chronos*, is a personification of the notion of ‘time’ and ‘eternity’, and in the 1st century BC was identified with the ancient Roman god *Janus*. He was the god of gates, doors, bridges, entrances and passages, symbolizing transition, but also beginning and end. *Janus* was depicted with two opposing faces: one looking forwards, the other backwards. Linked to this god also came the idea of Rome’s eternal ruling, in a new *saeculum*, a new *aion*, a new era marked by peace, happiness, of which Virgil and Horace speak.

³³ Saint Gregory of Nazians, apud Mihail Diaconescu, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

with the absolute exigency that came from the certainty of the Revelation. In any artistic representation, whether musical, plastic or choreographic, the mark of transcendence, of man's relationship with divinity, is revealed, more or less clearly, even if these manifestations do not become explicitly visual and sound expressions that are doctrinally affiliated to a religious cult. According to the characteristics of these artistic manifestations we can distinguish and interpret the particularities of an artist's work or we can analyse from an aesthetic and dogmatic point of view the specificity of one cult in relation to another. Just as there is an iconographic programme of Byzantine painting - which has at its centre the face, life and teachings of Christ surrounded by His saints - so we can deduct from the repetition of certain themes, compositional schemes and attitudes of the characters, an unwritten erminie, an imagistic programme of the art of Greco-Roman antiquity, which indicates how the faces and events in the lives of gods and heroes had to be illustrated. The Greco-Roman pantheon, essentialised in emblematic scenes inspired by the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Aeneid, together with the most popular characters of Indo-European mythology, formed the imaginary background to the iconography of the artistic representations that visually accompanied the rituals of worship and adorned homes and public buildings throughout the Roman Empire. They were made in fresco, mosaic, stone, ceramic or metal and decorated temples, altars, public squares and private houses. Most orders were requested from artists working in funerary art, portraits of dignitaries and imperial propaganda, but many works have survived depicting decorative ensembles, domestic, historical or hunting scenes, and portraits of some poets and philosophers.

If Virgil is cited with reverence in an Ecumenical Council, Plutarch, a Greek writer and philosopher of Roman nationality, has the honour of featuring in the iconographic programme of Christian churches, being painted alongside prophets, sibyls and other philosophers on the walls of several places of worship. Priest of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, Plutarch affirms the existence of a single divinity: 'There is one Sun and one Sky over all nations and one Deity with many names'³⁴. One of the names of the god of the sun and light was Mithra or *Sol invictus*, considered the creator and saviour of the world, and his cult was widespread among Roman soldiers³⁵. The 25th of December, the founding day of the Roman Temple of the Sun (*Phoebus-Apollo*), became the birthday of *Sol Invictus*, and later, in early Christianity, the date of celebration of the Nativity of Lord Jesus Christ.

For most ancient civilisations, the harmony between man and the cosmos populated by deities was conditioned by the connection of human activity through a calendar ritual to an astral imaginary. The attempt to align oneself with the stars, to begin an ordinance based on a calendar, is the reason for the existence of so many architectural constructions intended for

³⁴ Andrei Dârlău, *op. cit.*, p. 44, note 88.

³⁵ Nicolae Achimescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 174, 213-215.

worship, oriented in such a way that light, on certain dates, indicates the altar or the most sacred place of the temple. All ancient peoples worshipped light, identifying the sun, moon and stars with all kinds of divine entities. The emperor of the early Christian Empire himself was a member of a solar cult.

God, for some, or the Universe, for others, communicates itself to man through light, light being the common denominator of any epistemology, without placing in competition or in opposition the knowledge that comes to us through Revelation with that acquired by man through scientific experiments. Whether we speak of physical light or its symbolism, or we approach the subject metaphorically, scientifically or theologically, the paradoxical nature and the diversity of perspectives from which light can be defined do not provide an answer that at least partially explores the mysteries it conceals. Paradox is a hallmark of light. Science has proven it with the wave-particle dualism of quantum mechanics, and theology fully confirms it. The Light is a Person who says of Himself that He is ‘the Light of the world’ (John 8:12). The divine Logos, says St. Gregory of Nazianz, is the incarnate Light, the supreme, ineffable ‘Archetypal Light’ which is found through uncreated energies ‘in a certain outpouring’ and in man³⁶.

In the Neoplatonic tradition, *Arché*, the unique principle of existence or ‘one’, has no name, being identified with ‘the supreme good’ and ‘the beautiful’³⁷. The supra-physical good communicates itself to all like the sun which spreads its rays of light to all things. This idea³⁸ is also found in Christianity and is one of the reasons why Plato is also painted among the saints on the walls of churches.

³⁶ Saint Gregory of Nazians, apud Mihail Diaconescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

³⁷ Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names; Mystical Theology*, translation, introduction, notes, glossary and bibliography by Marilena Vlad, Polirom publishing house, 2018, pp. 30-32. It is called ‘beautiful’ because it is beautiful in itself and always the same, being the source of all beauty and super-beauty. Dionysius shows that every movement, of the intellect, the soul or the sensitive, is from the ‘beautiful and good’ and that every action of everything is motivated by love for the beautiful.

³⁸ Olivier Clément, *Transfiguring Time in the Light of Orthodox Tradition*, translated by Măriuca and Adrian Alexandrescu, Spandugino publishing house, 2021, p. 32. For Plato, man cannot free himself from evil without a transcendent helper, which is not the world of ideas, as it is often superficially schematized by the Platonic conception of the divine, but is God who also transcends the intelligible, ‘the Beautiful that surpasses all possibility of expression’ and ‘the Good that is beyond being’. See also Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names; Mystical Theology...*, pp. 22, 23, note 1; 31. The similarities of the two traditions of thought show us that they are part of the same original thread, from the same revelation, they are nothing but steps and modes of the divine revelation. Without attempting to demonstrate revelation in terms of philosophy, St. Dionysius shows that revelation is already present in the terms of philosophy, which is a primary form of revelation; not an explicit one, but rather one in potential, one that had to be perfected in order to discover what is hidden in it. The Neoplatonic philosophers themselves consider philosophy to have divine origins, it being in fact a type of original revelation, then passed on by each of its exegetes.

Normative in Christianity, the vision of the theology of light that St. Dionysius the Areopagite describes is that of a ‘scalar’ universe, in which, similar to a cascade of light, the good is transmitted as a light that awakens the desire for light. We can recognise the pattern of the hierarchical order governing both the intelligible world (*kosmos noetos*) and the sensible world (*kosmos aisthetos*) in the sacramental worship of the Church, which is a visualisation of the unseen cosmic liturgy. God light (*phos*) communicates Himself to man through sight (*theoria*) and through inner knowledge (*episteme*). Uncreated light is communicated to people through the Church in the form of the Holy Mysteries by the heavenly hierarchies organized in triads³⁹.

Although sight by faith is above ordinary sight (John 14:11-16), St. Dionysius says that man cannot attain non-material sight (contemplation) of the heavenly hierarchies unless he makes use of ‘material lights as visible appearances of the gift of non-material light’⁴⁰. The earthly liturgy is mediated by ‘veils and symbols’, with images having a sanctifying role as stepping stones from the sensible to the intelligible ones. Now viewed as ‘through a mirror, in divination’⁴¹, these material symbols and veils, will become totally radiant, luminous and incorruptible in the life to come. The effort to gain access to the ‘sight of the unseen’ through ‘holy vestments’, understood as images defined by substance (*ousia*) and form (*morphê*), is common to many civilisations.

Man, ‘a moving image’, can only understand the world through images. In the image he can see himself and his eternal origin at the same time: in the image of his self he contemplates the absolute divine Self⁴². As plasticised rationality the human body expresses the divine. Of spiritual essence, human beauty has its cause in God. The archetype of beauty, therefore, in the Orthodox doctrine of the face, the human beauty, before being an aesthetic matter, is a theological one. The vision of beauty as the saviour of the world⁴³ is not only limited to the aesthetic dimension, because such beauty can also overshadow holiness.

³⁹ Egon Sendler, *The icon, image of the unseen – elements of theology, technique and aesthetics*, Translated by Ioana Caragiu and Florin Caragiu, nun Ilie Doinita Teodosia, Sofia publishing house, Bucharest, 2005, p. 181.

⁴⁰ Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *Complete Works and Scholias of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, translation, introduction and notes by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Paideia publishing house, Bucharest, 1996, p. 16.

⁴¹ I Corinteni 13, 12

⁴² H. U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of God...*, p. 64.

⁴³ The one that Dostoyevsky talks about.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

From the perspective of Christian soteriology, the neutrality of the artistic approach can be corrupted or ennobled by the intentionality with which it does or does not tend towards Truth. Otherwise, the artistic creation itself can be received only aesthetically, sometimes even with the aura of a masterpiece, but without any moral or soteriological significance. In accordance with the perspective of Neoplatonic philosophy, which aspires through the contemplation of beauty to the unique principle of existence, Saint Basil the Great notes the ontological and cognitive, initiatory and mystagogical role of images. Emphasizing the heuristic character of plastic art, which always establishes a new form of knowledge and existence added to the old one⁴⁴, he states that the iconic image is, at the same time, a means

⁴⁴ Mihail Diaconescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

of ‘glorifying’ knowledge and recognizing the divine identity⁴⁵. Although the Neoplatonists regarded matter as an inferior state of existence, they were the first to formulate a relational perspective of religious images as material symbols of some intelligible prototypes capable of elevating the human spirit towards them. Thus, in the early Christian centuries, the paradoxical situation arose where Platonic philosophers, whose metaphysics despised matter, defended the cult of images, while some Christians, whose faith was based on the Incarnation, opposed them⁴⁶.

This fact is explainable, if we consider that the reflection of the Christian exegetes of that period about the image and the visible, did not yet operate so thoroughly with the terms of the theological vocabulary of the icon and the figure (*eikôn*), which became dogmatized especially after the iconoclastic controversy of the 7th and 8th century. Another reason for the misunderstanding came from doubting the possibility of illustrating the divine chenosis of the Person of Christ beneath the image with the appearance of a slave. It was necessary to define the relationship between the human condition and the divine being of Christ, Who remains inseparable from the divine substance despite the emptying into the human appearance (form)⁴⁷. The representation of the image of the divinity as a place where the difference, and also the similarity are revealed, becomes possible alongside the Incarnation, because what the believer sees at once in the iconic image is both the chenosis and the glory of the divinity.

As Marie-José Mondzain distinguishes very clearly, Incarnation is not materialization, and the icon as a memorial of the incarnational economy places in the work a body that is not matter. ‘Became flesh’ is not equivalent to ‘became matter’. The icon of Christ is empty of His bodily and real presence, thus radically different from the Eucharist. When the Word became incarnate, divinity was not filled with matter, just as matter was not filled with divinity. To become incarnate means to become empty or to become alike, but not identical to, one’s own image⁴⁸. Stylistically, the dogmatic truth of the Incarnation is affirmed in the icon at the cost of the loss of natural reality. The result is a paradoxical ‘disembodied incarnation’,⁴⁹ characterised

⁴⁵ Anca Vasiliu, *On the diaphanous: the medium of light in ancient and medieval philosophy*, translated by de Irinel Antoniu, Polirom publishing house, 2010, p. 202.

⁴⁶ Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *Saint Theodore the Studite, Jesus Christ: Prototype of his icon*, translation and introductory study Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., Deisis publishing house, Alba-Iulia, 1994, pp. 7-9.

⁴⁷ Anca Vasiliu, *op. cit.*, pp. 203; 317.

⁴⁸ Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, icon, iconomy: the Byzantine sources of the contemporary imaginary*, Sofia publishing house, Bucharest, 2009, p. 134.

⁴⁹ Alain Besançon, *The forbidden image: the intellectual history of iconoclasm from Plato to Kandinsky*, translated by Mona Antohi, Humanitas publishing house, Bucharest, 1996, apud Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canon of Orthodoxy: VII Ecumenical Synod, vol. 1. Dogmatically Defining Icons (691-810)*, Deisis publishing house, Sibiu, 2020, p. 1086-1088. That is, giving up, in the conception of the iconic form, the imitation of the naturalistic reality of the image.

by the schematisation and hieratisation of forms, the suppression of perspective and the symmetrical sequencing of the composition, decorativism and the emergence of new iconographic terms.

The end of the Greco-Roman world was marked by the victory of the religious community over the ancient idea of the state, with Christian religious identity taking the place of political identity, and the citizen disappearing before the believer⁵⁰. One of the essential features of what is called by Christians ‘the baptism of art’ was the transfer of the current terms used in imperial and civil iconography into the nascent ‘ars christiana’, giving them a new content⁵¹. The transfer took place gradually, with many of the old faiths coexisting with Christianity for some time. We recognise in the imagistic and conceptual background of Paleochristian art symbols, personifications and allegories redefined from the iconography of the Greco-Roman Pantheon, some images, attitudes and compositional schemes being almost identically modelled. The images of Oranta, Orpheus, Hermes or Apollo, under which Christ – the Good Shepherd, the Healer or the Teacher – was portrayed, are prototypes that were used not only as graphic models for Christian patterns, but also as didactic and catechetical support. The cultic images of the polytheistic religions served as an introduction to the Christian imagery to the extent that an anecdotal or symbolic resemblance could be found among them. The kerygmatic effectiveness of these overlapping meanings and images could be noticed especially in mixed families or communities, where Christians and non-Christians had to interact socially without sharing the same faith.

DIAGRAM 1



Fig. 6a)

Fig. 6b)

Fig. 6c)

⁵⁰ Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *op. cit.*, p. 1078.

⁵¹ Nikolai Ozolin, *Orthodox Iconography of Pentecost – its sources and evolution of the Byzantine iconographic scheme*, translated by Vasile Manea, Patmos publishing house, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 87.



Fig. 6d)

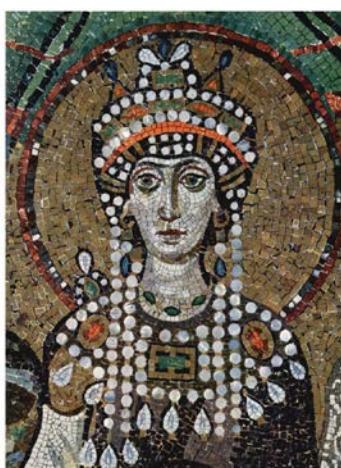


Fig. 6e)

The formal similarity and accuracy of Christian iconography towards the Greco-Roman anthropology is not only due to the influence of Hellenism, because it is also a consequence of the theology of the Incarnation. In Christ and His saints, the idea of humanity in its wholeness was accomplished. The iconic image goes beyond the symbol which can only express an abstract idea⁵². The Romans considered abstractions and their anthropomorphic personifications to be among the most appropriate ways of synthetically expressing religious or political content. If the Roman personifications of Abundance, Providence or Justice were represented anthropomorphically, another category, such as Peace or Concord, were conceived and rendered as pure abstractions in the form of monumental constructions, such as the Altar of Peace or the Temple of Concord. Another way of synthesising and communicating an idea was to use emblematic figures, such as: the representation of the river Tiber through the image of an old man holding a container from which water springs, or the representation of a citadel in the form of a woman sitting on a throne with a crown⁵³ on her head.

There are, in Roman antiquity, many examples of temples built in honour of abstract notions such as *Sophia*, *Ktisis*, *Aion*, or *Psuche*, conventional figures of some concepts, without any other support than the name of an intelligible reality, figures equivalent to allegories or personifications⁵⁴. Most often, these conventional figures were materialised in effigies and compositions with cosmological themes executed in the

⁵² Egon Sendler, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁵³ Richard Brilliant, *Roman Art from the Republic to Constantine*, Meridiane publishing house, Bucharest, 1979, pp. 172-173.

⁵⁴ Anca Vasiliu, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

mosaic or fresco technique, but such works have been found made from a variety of materials. Many such works were also executed in private residences, the last of them dating from the same period when Christian mosaic art was beginning to shape its own iconographic form.

We witness, in the early centuries, alternating episodes of attempts to Christianize Hellenism with attempts to Hellenize or even annihilate Christianity, one such moment being the short reign of Emperor Julian, nicknamed the Apostate. The process of the universalisation of Christianity took place gradually and naturally, with the Church, assisted by the Holy Spirit, providing answers and solutions, dogmatically and canonically proclaimed in the Ecumenical Synods. Before he became an emperor, Constantine the Great built in Trier a temple to the sun god Apollo, venerated as *Sol Invictus*. Coins minted during this period prove his devotion to the god Mars. After he takes over the empire, the faces of the gods on the coins are gradually replaced by neutral inscriptions and Christian signs. The emperor's cult is depleted of its religious content, retaining more of its political significance, but he does not relinquish the title of *Pontifex Maximus*, which allows him to maintain a balance, ensuring equality and unity between citizens of different faiths.

Constantine continues to finance the construction of temples and churches at the same time, but the temples dedicated to him become public places, without statues and without sacrifices. In the same sense of neutrality and concord, the first imperial churches founded by Emperor Constantine were not dedicated to saints, but were placed under the patronage of divine attributes and concepts such as Wisdom (Η ἀγία Σοφία), Peace (Η ἀγία Ειρήνη) or Power (Η ἀγία Δύναμις), personified notions that could be interpreted in two perspectives, one Christian and the other in the spirit of Greco-Roman philosophy and mythology⁵⁵.

The periods of religious decline are marked in art by an eclecticism that we also find materialised at the beginning of the Christian era in a multitude of forms covering the whole range of Greco-Roman cults. Imperial art from the 2nd to the 4th century created a certain stylistic community (*koiné*) similar to the political organisation of the various peoples of the empire under the *pax romana*: a broad framework within which diversity was possible. The stylistic unity, the result of formal solutions and typological models created during the 1st century AD, makes it possible, for example, – to recognise according to the criteria of the same plastic form – the funerary stars throughout the Empire, all of them belonging to the same common type, created for identical destinations and for beneficiaries belonging to the same

⁵⁵ Pavel Florenski, *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth, an attempt at Orthodox theodicy in twelve letters*, translated by Emil Iordache, fr. Iulian Criptu and fr. Dimitrie Popescu, Polirom, 1999, p. 245.

state⁵⁶. The same unified vision, achieved through assimilation and transformation, but without cancelling out the specific features of each province or local artistic ‘school’, is also seen in painting and architecture.

Aiming beyond the aesthetic dimension of the work of art, Christian iconography is born under the exigencies of spirituality, creating models and identity patterns, which attempt to take art out of historical temporality, elaborating new stylistic formulas obtained by replacing the classical spatial relations – dominated by the organic principle⁵⁷ existing in the culture of pre-Christian antiquity – with an aesthetic vision closer to the abstract or geometric one, usually found in archaic or so-called primitive cultures. Emperor Constantine’s Triumphal Arch, for example, departs from the specificity of classical landscape. We no longer find that proportional beauty, which balances each part by size and movement with the part next to it and with the whole; instead, we find a different kind of beauty, which finds expression in a rigorously symmetrical composition, similar to the structure of crystals⁵⁸. This new paradigm of thinking and composing images, – characterized by the attempt to perceive and redefine the alternation of light and shadow, by the rigor of execution, by the aesthetic finish of the volume with emphasis on the contour, by the suggestion of the weightlessness of the volumes, which seem to generate their own light, - will in time spread throughout the empire. The dominant aspect is given by the predominance of straight lines organized in prismatic structures, with planes that meet in a stylized geometry, where, especially in painting, accents of light are applied to volumes in parallel hatched areas, according to a plastic meaning through which an invisible reality is visibly induced, that the iconographic forms are permeated by the inner light of Grace.

We can talk about a light that is born and seems to spring from within the well-defined perimeter of the forms painted in the icon, but the rendering of light is shaped not according to how it naturally falls on the forms, but according to a purely plastic logic⁵⁹. Through the effect achieved by this graphic-pictorial convention, the iconic forms do not claim an

⁵⁶ Richard Brilliant, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁵⁷ Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Intropathy; and other art theory studies*, Univers publishing house, Bucharest, 1970, p. 80. A comparison between the Doric and Ionic temples shows how the abstract principle has been replaced by the organic. The monumentality full of majesty of the Doric temple, based on a purely geometric, or rather stereometric, consistency, which with its inaccessible, superhuman abstraction made one feel the futility of human existence, is no longer found in the Ionic temple.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 90, 91. In fact, it has been observed that the passive nature of crystals is dominated by the hexagonal symmetry of inorganic structures, while pentagonal symmetry is very present in organic structures in the morphology of living beings. See Matila C. Ghika, *Philosophy and mysticism of the number*, translated by Dumitru Purnicescu, Univers Encyclopedic publishing house, Bucharest, 1998, p. 91.

⁵⁹ Georgios Kordis, *Rhythm in Byzantine Painting*, translated by Mihai Coman, Bizantină publishing house, Bucharest, 2008, pp. 88-89.

autonomous source of light, being the symbolic expression of light, whose origin must be sought in the Sinaiitic and Taboric experience. The Holy Scripture provides us with numerous examples in which this light, shared in different intensities, makes the reception of revelation perceptible on several levels of understanding. ‘If the physical light enables me to see Christ, and the intelligible light enables me to understand him, the uncreated light, the Taboric light, enables me to have the living experience of God, which gives both intellect and body the power to perceive the meaning of God’⁶⁰. As a space of encounter and dialogue between the perceptible and the intelligible, iconically consecrated images have a sanctifying role.

The theology of uncreated light, which is the basis of liturgical art and worship, inspired by and commented on by Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, takes on a particular exegetical complexion in Western Europe after the Great Schism of the Christian Empire (1054). The Areopagite writings were reinterpreted in ways that had a major impact on the subsequent perception and orientation of the way the image was represented and venerated. After the Great Schism, the teaching on the icon is no longer viewed and dogmatically perceived through the same lenses, which means that iconography too, according to the two regions of the empire, is shaped by two different aesthetic visions. The main causes must be sought much earlier than 1054. Of the complex of factors which deepened this gap, the most serious are undoubtedly the iconoclastic crisis followed by the faulty translation of the acts of the Seventh Council by the theologians of Emperor Charles the Great’s court. The ambiguous use of the word adoration instead of veneration, with Latin theologians translating everywhere the word adoration as *προσκυνεσης*, led to a totally absurd understanding of the decisions of the synod⁶¹ and a misinterpretation of the iconic image. At the emperor’s command, the Frankish scholars respond with a series of theses entitled *Libri Carolini* (Opus Caroli Regis contra Synodus).

According to *Libri Carolini*, representations of art cannot elevate us to the contemplation of the spiritual world and eternal truths, because they can offer us nothing more than an immediate sensory experience. Also from the Carolingian texts we learn that the value of a work of art is given only by its aesthetic appearance and manoeuvre, by which we can judge whether it is beautiful or ugly, but we cannot evaluate whether it is true or false, because

⁶⁰ André Scrima, *The Liturgical Church*, Humanitas publishing house, 2005, p. 151.

⁶¹ Dumitru A. Vanca, *Icon and Catechesis*, Reînregirea publishing house, Alba-Iulia, 2005, pp. 161-162. The Frankish theologians composed a doctrinal work, the Caroline Books, in response to what they believed to be the rulings of Council VII, ending up accusing the Byzantines of idolatry. Where the Byzantines had developed an entire philosophical system to explain the relationship between type and prototype (which for Westerners went unnoticed), the *Libri Carolini* assert that there is no connection between the icon and the represented one (prototype). The relationship is up to the artist – and therefore arbitrary, since only the artist can write on an image ‘St. Virgin’ or ‘Venus’.

for the Frankish theologians a work of art means nothing more than the value of the materials of which it is made. The Frankish painters ‘do not depict divine characters or scenes, but visually reconstruct the interpretations of their meanings’⁶².

DIAGRAM 2



Fig. 7a)



Fig. 7b)



Fig. 7c)



Fig. 7d)

⁶² Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *op. cit.*, p. 1091.

DIAGRAM 3



Fig. 8a) Fig. 8b) Fig. 8c) Fig. 8d) Fig. 8e) Fig. 8f)

The *Libri Carolini* theses produced in the art of Latin liturgical worship a series of stylistic transformations and dogmatic innovations foreign to Byzantine iconography. As a result of destabilising the balance of criteria for the perception and validation of the iconic image, the new artistic productions placed increasing emphasis on natural and sensory aesthetic evaluation criteria, to the detriment of theological and spiritual ones. By the 13th century, when scholastic thinkers attempted to theoretically restore the status and veneration of the image, which had been distorted by the *Libri Carolini* theses, an inertia oriented towards the artistic ideals of non-Christian Greco-Roman antiquity had already taken hold in Western ecclesial art.

In the ancient world there was no clear distinction between art, science and religion, between sacred and profane. The pavement mosaics, illustrated for the most part with mythological themes, are the consequence of the type of manifestation of the religiosity of the time, that is, the way of understanding and living the philosophical principles of the time. Mosaic scenes were framed by large, predominantly geometric, ornamental surfaces, because the ancients believed that geometry embodied the primordial patterns of the universe which, when invoked, had the power to imprint heavenly order on earth. Apart from their decorative character, the execution

of mosaics can also be linked to the cyclical commemorations of the many deities of Olympus or to the protagonists of certain mystery cults.

The most popular subjects of the pavement mosaics are, according to the large number spread all over the Mediterranean basin, those deities with a tragic destiny such as Orpheus, Dionysos, Actaeon or Osiris, who, although having met a cruel end, are reborn sparking empathy, admiration and hope in people⁶³. Another category of portraits is that of heroes and demigods such as Ulysses and Aeneas, whose lives propose initiatory journeys as a model of knowledge and discovery of the world and the self. In the pre-Christian period there were numerous altars with mosaic wall decoration, built in the privacy of private gardens and courtyards, some of which have survived to the present day buried in the volcanic ashes of the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. A unique testimony of another wall decoration from the ancient period can be found within the walls and arches of the *Domus Aurea* palace, a foundation of the Emperor Nero, whose size and technical solutions made it last over two thousand years.

The walls were painted with frescoes, but what is surprising is the extravagance of the ceiling ornaments, which abounded in mosaics and gilded stuccowork, sprinkled with semi-precious stones and ivory slabs. The major themes of the compositional scenes were inspired by the Iliad and the Odyssey. The composition theme of an octagonal mosaic located in a *nymphaeum* with a fountain, featuring Ulysses as the main character, is suggestive. In the *nymphaeum*, the barrel-shaped dome originally imitated a natural cavern and was lined with pumice stone stalactites, a decoration abandoned during its restoration. It should be noted that the scene of Ulysses and the Cyclops Polyphemus, although set inside a cave, has a background covered with gold tesserae⁶⁴. For a long time, it was thought that gilding the background of a painting or compositional scene was an innovation of Christian iconography. The projection of Ulysses, who for ancient philosophers was considered the ‘icon’ of memory and non-forgetfulness, on a golden background, gives to the scene an iconic character and to Ulysses a heroic stance, amplifying his victory in the confrontation of the spirit with the brute, telluric forces.

Odysseus’ entire effort on the way back to Ithaca is a struggle to save his memory, to not forget who he is, where he comes from and where he has to go. According to the philosophical conceptions of the time, the immortal soul belongs to the world of ideas, but is a prisoner of a body from which it must free itself. The objective of Ulysses’ voyage, which symbolically means the itinerary of the soul navigating the sea of this life, is to return to the

⁶³ Their worship prepared and familiarized people with the coming of a God Who became incarnate, suffered and rose again, Jesus Christ.

⁶⁴ Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 241.

transcendent world of the original homeland from which he had left and alienated himself. In order to achieve the goal of ‘reuniting the divine that is in man with the divine that is in the universe’, Plotinus proposed an itinerary of the soul, an inner anabasis, whose mythical model is that of Ulysses returning to his homeland⁶⁵. The knowledge of reality and the discovery of the self is one of the main themes of Plato’s work, who, in the ‘myth of the cave’ from the work *Republica*, suggests by analogy that to know, starting from the sensible to the intelligible, is to remember, to recall.

Before the advent of Christianity there were many small memorials or places of meditation and prayer, *nymphaeums* and shrines of ‘remembrance’ in the empire, many of them dedicated to the nymphs of the springs or the nine muses, daughters of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. Most of these sanctuaries were built on the site of springs, designed as fountains with stone basins, with one or three arched niches in the form of apses, with frescoed walls or mosaics with glass paste and shell tesserae. As personifications of the arts, the muses were meant to maintain order in creation, to guide the principles of the sciences and the harmony of the universe, which is why an institution was dedicated to them and it could not be called anything other than the Museum. The Museum, *musaeum* in Latin or *μουσεῖον* in ancient Greek, was not, as one might think today, a collection of objects, but a place where the sciences that the Muses gave to the people were cultivated. Etymologically, we also have the following words from the Muses: music, *μουσική* (*τέχνη*) the art of the muses or *musica* in Latin; and mosaic, *musaicum* in medieval Latin or (*opus*) *musivum* in late Latin.

The niche or apse at the spring at the sanctuary of the nymphs, framed by a pediment and mosaic-covered columns, will be found transfigured over time as the main architectural element in the composition of Christian altars and in the sacred niches of synagogues (mizrah) and mosques (mihrab). In archaic cultures, caves, as well as springs, have always been linked to the cult of divinity. They were gateways to the underworld and the supernatural world, the favourite place for epiphanies. The myth of the cave, which for Plato was the symbol of the existential condition, finds its use materialized in the artificial caves of the sanctuaries built and decorated with the polychrome tesserae of the wall mosaics around the springs. A special cult was dedicated to music by the Pythagoreans and Platonists. Pythagoras advised that a temple for the Muses should be built in Crotone, so that they would preserve the concord and harmony that reigned among the citizens. Dedicating a small fountain to the Muses was not just a simple gesture of decorating the garden, but represented the creation of a niche, a cave in front of which to philosophize daily on the condition of life.

⁶⁵ Alain Besançon, *op. cit.*, p. 55. Sirens and all the fabulous entities trying to keep him on track make him proposals to make him forget about himself and his destination.

DIAGRAM 4

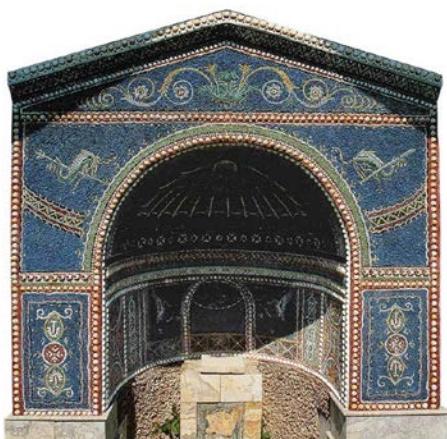


Fig. 9a)



Fig. 9b)



Fig. 9c)

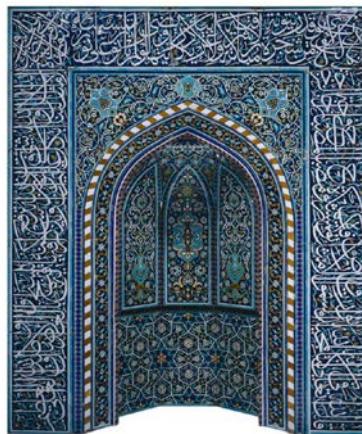


Fig. 9d)

The mosaic was an instrument of meditation on the Beauty and the Light, through which the worshippers of the muses connected to the life of the cosmos, becoming a conscious part of the whole, a connector between the One and the many⁶⁶. Myth has it that, in addition to the arts and sciences, the Muses taught Hermes how to predict the future by observing the arrangement of pebbles in a pool of water. The ceremonial presence before the multicoloured and shining portal of the apse was an exercise in aesthetic contemplation and invocation of the divinity, even though later, for some of

⁶⁶ Maurice Nicosia, <http://blog.abaravenna.it/mosaico/i-luoghi-della-rimembranza/>. *Musaea*, the springs decorated in mosaic, are originally ‘pebble water pools’, with the help of which the future was divined.

the Neoplatonists, the prime nature of Beauty was formless and Light was impersonal⁶⁷.

While in Hellenistic and Roman antiquity mosaic had become a technique of extreme refinement, representing mythological and hunting scenes, Christianity raised the art of mosaic, both literally and figuratively, from the level of pavement decorations⁶⁸ to the vertical of wall surfaces, which unfold their iconographic repertoire up to the height of the dome. The first series of mosaics, which demonstrate stylistic and programmatic unity, come to light with the Christians' freedom of expression. These mosaic ensembles still bear the stamp of Greco-Roman art, but gradually, between the 4th and 7th centuries, the stylistics of Christian art complies to the criteria of liturgical worship. Being very demanding, they were mainly financed by emperors and dignitaries of the upper class, and the contribution of mosaic artists was so highly valued that they were exempted from taxes under Emperor Constantine. After the approval of the iconographic programme, mosaic art, like all pictorial techniques, was refined and shaped into a unified whole, later known as what we now call Byzantine art. The height of Byzantine mosaic, from the 12th to the 14th centuries, culminates in the last wall paintings made before the fall of Constantinople. The economic weakening of the Eastern Roman Empire, through the iconoclastic crisis and the Fourth Crusade, had the effect of reducing ecclesiastical painting in the mosaic technique to extinction. Today the technique is revived in various meridians of Orthodoxy.

The art of mosaics and stained glass art, as well as the whole decorative complex of precious stones, gems and polychrome marbles adorning liturgical furniture and objects of worship, is built on a long tradition that aesthetically and theologically values the motif of light. The theme of light returns periodically in the history of thought, with consequences in the evolution of iconographic erminia, as an effect of the contemplative vision of saints such as Dionysius the Areopagite, Simeon the New Theologian, St. Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. With its roots in the tradition of symbolic decoration, polychrome statues and cameo techniques inherited from antiquity and resemanticized in the Christian era,

⁶⁷ Alain Besançon, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57; 61. Plotinus concludes that the only image of the divine is that which the soul, purified by contemplation, achieves by becoming that perfect 'inner mirror', with its smooth and tranquil surface, in which intelligence and the One can be reflected.

⁶⁸ I have shown that in pre-Christian antiquity most of the mosaics were pavements, but there are also some cases of works executed on walls and ceilings, which have survived to the present day. I mention here only the *Domus Aurea* in Rome, built by Emperor Nero in 64, and the facades of some of the altars and fountains in the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. In the 12th century, a new decorative pavement programme was developed in churches, using a complex of geometric patterns called *cosmatesque*.

the theme of light has multiple meanings in biblical exegesis, from the metaphorical image of the Heavenly Jerusalem to that of the incarnate (embedded) Light, *Lux incorporata*, an interpretation that refers to the Mystery of the Incarnation of God, to the world transfigured by grace, to matter permeated by uncreated light.

In the world of late Roman antiquity, and later in the Byzantine world, there was a belief that the veining or luminous veins of coloured marble, gemstones or translucent stones were embedded rays of light, an intervention of divine light in the rock. The uniqueness of these ‘graphic accidents’ depicting imaginary landscapes or abstract compositions, if we were to read them in a modernist key of art, are interpreted as signs of God embedded in creation suggesting the unimaginable, the unusual, the ineffable, in short, the paradox of the Christian world summed up in the confession that God is both One and Three, that Christ is both Man and God, and that Mary is both Mother of God and Virgin.

For the cladding of church interiors, slabs were chosen, whose chromorphemes illustrated graphic arrangements and random chromatic fusions, surfaces of a unique plasticity and pictoriality, symbolically expressing the intertwining of the divine with humanity, the mixing of spirit with matter, of soul with body. Dogmatic notions such as hypostatic union and perichoresis are symbolically translated into plastic expressions with a surprising visual impact – offered by the natural textures of the cut and polished rocks – or by contrasting colours that intertwine, melting their shades into sinuous asymmetrical zigzags, or by displaying surfaces dotted with irregular punctiform formations or striped screens that anamorphically fade into chromatic and value gradients, with the sole purpose of suggesting the dogmatic ‘contradictions’ of the Kingdom of Light which, as they say, ‘already exists but not yet’.

In the Church, it is dogma that retains and concentrates the revealed message, and in the worship, word and image form an inseparable totality, a true ‘pnevmatosphere’ in which the meaning of Scripture, the theological dimension (in the contemplative sense) of divine iconomy⁶⁹, is revealed. In the same sense, in a homily given on the occasion of the consecration of the mosaic painting of a church, Patriarch Photius said that all the symbolic images and iconic faces represented in the liturgical space are the essence of a theological discourse, ‘because by blending the flowers of colour with the rectitude of dogma’, the painters have immortalised sacred beauty through holy mosaics (*hierois morphōmasi*)⁷⁰.

While there is a certain continuity in the use of mosaics, both as a technical execution and as an iconographic programme in church decoration,

⁶⁹ Olivier Clément, *Considerations on the spirituality of the icon*, Rev. Ortodoxia, XXVII (1975), 2, pp. 384-389.

⁷⁰ Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *op. cit.*, pp. 254-255; 258.

stained glass appears sporadically, more decorative in the ecclesiastical art of the Christian Roman Empire, with the most consistent compositional ensembles being recorded in Western Europe starting with the 12th century, coinciding with the period of development of the Gothic style in architecture. The meeting of the abbot Suger de Saint-Denis⁷¹ with the theology of light, mediated by the Dionysian exegetical discourse of John Scotus Eriugena, Hugues de Saint-Victor and other translators, was to form the basis of a new aesthetic and liturgical vision, which led to the appearance of huge polychrome windows in the walls of churches, through the filter of which light gives the retina the materiality of a diaphanous atmosphere. The dominant colour is a sapphire blue, a metaphor for the celestial vault which, in the human imagination, is associated with the Kingdom of God. The same colour, but in warmer shades, *lapis lazuli* and turquoise stones, in association with gold, were the most sought-after, but also the most precious colour combinations of liturgical objects and pew furniture. There was a real fascination with these ‘immaterial matters’ and oxymoronic states of aggregation, such as the ‘solidified light’ of precious stones, rock crystals and translucent gems with which cult objects, reliquaries and evangeliaries were adorned⁷².

Suger tries to recreate anagogically, with the help of material means, a state of spiritual elevation that raises the mind and senses to the mystical height of contemplating the world above. The spread of stained glass in the West could be understood as a last effort to affirm iconicity in ecclesiastical art, after the impact that the *Libri Carolini* had on the Western artistic consciousness and before the humanist values of the Cultural Renaissance became manifest. *Libri Carolini* emphasize the rejection of any sacrality and iconicity of the artificial image, the place of the image here being not Christology and the visible symbol as in the East, but the Augustinian filioquist pnevmatology and linguistic sign⁷³. This Augustinian dualistic vision explains both the rejection of the Eastern icon and the Carolingian religious art limited to bodily vision radically based on sign, word and purely

⁷¹ Even if not all historians consider that abbot Suger de Saint-Denis was the first to contribute to the design and execution of the first construction with architectural elements specific to what would later be called the Gothic style, he is the example that remains the most visible landmark in history, of which written evidence remains.

⁷² Anca Vasiliu, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁷³ Olivier Boulnois, *Au-delà de l'image. Une archéologie du visuel au Moyen Âge (VII - XVI^e siècle)*, Paris, 2008, apud Deacon Ioan I. ICA jr., *op. cit.*, pp. 1092, 1095. ‘The Augustinian vision of the image has a double classification: theological and anthropological. For Augustine, who reads the Scripture in terms of Plotinian-Porphyrian Neoplatonism, both these essential images of God and man: the Son and the soul, are invisible; they have nothing to do with the lower corporeality. Image of the invisible God, man is exclusively through his invisible soul, in whose memory, intellect and will he sees mirrored the Father, Who begets the Son, His eternal Word, from whose common love results the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from both and is their common bond.’.

intellectual knowledge, promoting the iconoclasm of a purely invisible likeness of God through love, the sign of the presence of the Trinitarian Spirit in a personal and social ‘economy’. ‘Augustine departs from the tradition of the earlier Fathers by affirming that man is not after the image (after the face) of the Son, but after the image (face) of the common essence of the three Persons’⁷⁴.

Now, the artificial icon is visible because it reflects the economy of Incarnation (and creation) and allows through its likeness visible access to the personal Prototype, known and venerated in (and) through it. In this regard, Mondzain points out that ‘iconophile theologians have highlighted the fact that, linked to the paradox of the «economy» of the Incarnation as a hypostatic union between the divine and the human, without fusion or separation, the icon is part of a double «economic» and «eiconic» – «eiconic» – regime of a relational and imitative type (...). «The economy» of the Church and of the icon is the revelation and imitation of the ‘«economy» of God, and both bring into play the «economic» relation between the invisible natural image – the Son, the eternal icon of the unseen Father, reflected in every human being, an icon of Him, (...) and His artificial image visible in the icon painted and venerated through imitation and for imitation’s sake’⁷⁵.

By distinguishing between the natural and the artificial image, Patriarch Nichifor demythologizes the iconoclasts’ magical conception of the image. The icon, more precisely the artistic face represented in it, is by its nature different from the model. In order to show this, Saint Nichifor finds his conceptual tool in *Aristotelian categories* and defines the artistic face, the icon, with the category of *relation*, of *faip*. The face is always relational.⁷⁶

The veneration of the artificial icon in the Byzantine space is a synaesthetic interaction whose particularity is the tactile act, an honouring which is under the imperative of a triple function: educational, ethical and cultic. More than an expression of ‘the paradoxical relationship prototype-image, according to the Neoplatonic invisible-visible dialectic, the Byzantine icon expresses this relationship modelled on the Incarnation, according to an intangible-tangible dialectic’⁷⁷. Carolingian religious art, based on a ‘real

⁷⁴ Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canon of Orthodoxy: VII Ecumenical Synod*, vol. I...., pp. 1091, note 62; 1092; 1095.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 1090

⁷⁶ Christoph Schönborn, *Icon of Christ*, translation and preface by Fr. Dr. Vasile Răduca, Anastasia publishing house, 1996, p. 165. If the theology of the icon is based on the Platonic teaching about model and representation, about type and archetype, Patriarch Nichifor no longer bases the characteristics of the artistic image on the idea of participation to the being, as St. John Damascene had done, but only on the relationship of likeness.

⁷⁷ Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The sensual Icon: space, ritual, and the senses in Byzantium*, published by Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park PA 16802-1003, 2010. Apud Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *op. cit.*, p. 1112. ‘The immaterial is revealed on the surface of the

absence' and a fundamental distrust of the materiality of painting, refuses the sacredness of the icon and misses the encounter with divinity, with the polemic texts of the Latins accusing Empress Irina of spreading through material icons a deviant faith in idolatry. Because the icon is a 'memorial of the Incarnation', a seal of God's kenosis, its rejection is tantamount to denying the Incarnation and the entire Christianity⁷⁸.

The echo of Charles' theses had many consequences over time, of which history records two more important aspects: the Protestant Reformation and the status of the autonomous artist. Over the centuries, Calvin radicalised the Carolingian texts in an iconoclastic sense, with the Protestant Reformation reaffirming, almost Islamically, the primacy of the pure Word over the image in the communication of revelation and the obsessive rejection of any veneration of images. Another consequence of the Carolingian theses is the problematisation of the status of the autonomous artist. From the perspective of 'secular' art, the Carolingian theologians can be said to have liberated art as art and restored it to artists. The artist, freed from the canons of the Church, becomes the autonomous creator of his work, with consequences visible to this day.

The Byzantines had no word for 'art' (being an art without artists), but for Christians art had become a bridge between matter and spirit in 'an interesting kind of hypostatic union between word and image, in which these two languages reveal and affirm each other'⁷⁹. The word-image relationship here is about the equivalence of their discourse, because the visual purpose of icons is identical to that of the oral preaching of the Gospel. The manner, the way of praying, each in the particularities of its cult, in a particular historical period, determines the mode, the manner and the artistic expression. The artistic language is the expression of the spirit of an era. Byzantine art assimilated certain elements, but rejected others, and it is precisely this choice that led to the stylistic unity we are amazed by today⁸⁰.

The vision of the scholastic theology pioneers, shared in part by Suger and all those who along with him shared the same aesthetic and dogmatic creed, theoretically built up the innovative principles of Gothic architecture. From the philosophical perspective of aesthetic perception, which gradually began to dominate the Western ecclesiastical space, what characterises art and religious painting is the absence of mystery. Unlike the religious painting, which is informative, passive and imposes a distance between the viewer and the viewed, the authentic icon is constructively 'a

icon saturated with a materiality offered to a total synaesthetic perception as a sensitive manifestation of a tangible absence and a presence of the intangible.'

⁷⁸ Christoph Schönborn, *Icon of Christ...*, p. 181. Apud *Saint Theodore the Studite, Jesus Christ: Prototype of his icon*, Deisis publishing house, Alba-Iulia, 1994, pp. 21, note 38; 182.

⁷⁹ Jensen Margaret Robin, *Face to Face, Portraits of Divine in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis, MN, 2005. Apud Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *op. cit.*, p. 1110.

⁸⁰ Egon Sendler, *The icon, image of the unseen ...*, p. 69.

spatial and performative, active phenomenon, which exists not to be seen, but to prepare a space of mediation, neither only earthly nor only heavenly, between the invisible and the visible, and to unite the viewer and the viewed in a space of encounter⁸¹. The icon is a creator of sacred space (*chōra*). Within this hierotopian dimension, its veneration is a performative act, staged through a complex direction, offered not to a transcendent contemplation, but to a total sensorial experience in the space dedicated to the Divine Liturgy.⁸²

At once a seen face and an unseen gaze that sees, the icon is both cataphatic and apophatic. To see the icon means to be seen by its invisible divine Prototype whom we see, since we are seen by Him⁸³. In the icon, the visible and the invisible embrace each other with a fire that does not destroy but illuminates the divine face of mankind. Before being seen and making itself seen, the icon has only one aim: the crossing of gazes, therefore, strictly defined, love⁸⁴. In Eastern Christianity, the supernatural Light is being communicated and transfigured⁸⁵. In the *Hymns of Divine Love* of St. Simeon the New Theologian, God-Light addresses the saint as a voice speaking to him from the light, presenting to him its supernatural qualities: ‘Believe then that I am a formless light, entirely simple, uncomposed, indivisible by nature, inscrutable, unapproachably approachable (...); for I show Myself with love to men, changing my form according to the capabilities of each man; it is not Me who suffers this (change), but those who become worthy to see Me this way, for otherwise they could not, nor would they attain more; therefore, they see Me sometimes as the sun – when their minds are clear – and sometimes as a star, when they find themselves under the darkness and night of this body⁸⁶. The warmth of love makes Me fire and brightness, for when the friendship coal is ignited in you, beholding the zeal of your love, I also find Myself united with it and I give light and I show Myself as a fire, I who created fire by my word⁸⁷. Only when the relationship between Creator and

⁸¹ Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *op. cit.*, p. 1113.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 1113.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 1166, note145. Cardinal Nicolaus Cusanus also subtly grasped this logic of the icon in his 1453 treatise on mystical theology, *De visione Dei sive de icona*. In a commentary on his treatise, the cardinal states that seeing God coincides with being seen by Him (*Theos* in Greek was considered to derive etymologically from the verb *theaomai*, ‘behold’). In God seeing is identical with caring (*videre est providere*) and loving (*videre est amare*).

⁸⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Cross of the visible: painting, television, icon – a phenomenological view*, translated by Mihail Neamțu, Deisis publishing house, Sibiu, 2000, pp. 132-134.

⁸⁵ Saint Simeon The New Theologian, *The Eros of the Divine Hymns*, 53, in vol. *Hymns, Epistles and Chapters*, Introduction and translation: Deacon Ioan I. ICĂ Jr., Deisis publishing house, Sibiu, 2001, pp. 142-143.

⁸⁶ The passions represent forgetfulness of God. Dead are those who have separated themselves from God by turning to the passions. Saint Maximus The Confessor, *Ambigua*, translated by Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2006, p. 242, note 202.

⁸⁷ Saint Simeon The New Theologian, *Hymns of Divine Love*, in *Studies in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Hymn 39 (Z. 12), translation and notes by Fr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Mitropolia Olteniei publishing house, Craiova, 1990, pp. 142-143.

creation reaches such an intensity is man able to discern and choose boldly between Light and lights: ...O Sun of the sun and of the world, Creator of all the stars and of all other light; hide me outside them, in Thy light; (for only this way) (...), the mind is immersed (baptized) in Thy light, and becomes bright and turns into light, as Thy glory; and he who has become worthy to make himself so, is called Thy mind!⁸⁸

After the discovery of the True Light, St. Simeon asks to be always covered by It, understanding that the transcendent reality contemplated in the radiance of the Light of God is inaccessible to the vision mediated by physical light. In an allegorical interpretation of the Saviour's 'Transfiguration', St. Maximus the Confessor sees in the radiance of Christ's face a metaphor of apophatic theology, while in that of the garments and in the appearance of Moses (as a type of 'providence') and Elijah (as a type of 'judgment'), a metaphor of cataphatic theology. The light of the Lord's face is the symbol of negative mystical theology, since the uncreated cannot be contained by the creature, nor the infinite understood by the bounded⁸⁹. St. Gregory of Nyssa also speaks of the theme of knowledge penetrating the darkness in which God hides in the *Life of Moses* (II, 163.6-7) saying: 'true knowledge consists in «seeing by not seeing» ($\tauὸ\;ἰδεῖν\;ἐν\;\tauῷ\;\muὴ\;ἰδεῖν$), that is, by overcoming the intellect and approaching the One who transcends all knowledge' (...). 'Thus, to see God in darkness is to understand that he is beyond any knowledge'⁹⁰. St. Dionysius also speaks of the knowledge of God in his *Mystical Theology*, where he writes to Timothy: 'We pray that we may be in this super-luminous darkness, and by not seeing and not knowing may we see and know the one beyond seeing and knowing, that is, by the very fact of not seeing and not knowing – for this is truly seeing and knowing – and super-physically praise the super-physical, by suppressing all that is, just as those who make a natural statue remove all the hindrances that prevent the clear seeing of what is hidden, and only by suppressing it reveals in itself the beauty that had been hidden'⁹¹.

Echoes of the Dionysian teaching are also found in Michelangelo Buonarroti, who in a similar definition said that the art of sculpture is the science of removing the excess matter from a block of stone, in order to reveal the statue already completed but not yet revealed by the artist⁹². The

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 580.

⁸⁹ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Cosmic liturgy: the world in the thought of St. Maximus the Confessor*, translated by Fr. Alexandru I. Roșu, Doxologia publishing house, Iași, 2018, p. 118.

⁹⁰ Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names; Mystical Theology...*, p. 322, note 24.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 253; 323 n. 26. 'The phrase «natural statue» or self-grown statue suggests the idea that the soul must carve into itself its own statue, removing that which covers true beauty'.

⁹² Michelangelo, *Poems*, translation, preface, chronological table, notes and comments by C. D. Zeletin, Minerva publishing house, Biblioteca pentru toți, Bucharest, 1986, p. XXXVIII.

similarity between the definitions is not accidental because Michelangelo studied at the Neoplatonic Academy established in the Medici Gardens, at a time when Marsilio Ficino was teaching the philosophy and exegesis of Proclus' teachings.

The circulation of ideas through different environments and spaces is sometimes unexpected, with consequences for the hermeneutics of visual theology and the plastic language through which Revelation is communicated and understood. An example, to stick with Proclus, is the trajectory of some of his writings, compiled in a book of texts from other schools of philosophy as well, entitled *Liber de causis* (Book of Causes). This is a collection of texts by an anonymous Arab in the entourage of the 9th century philosopher Alkindi, which circulated as a treatise on theology and ontology attributed to Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas identifies passages from Proclus and Dionysius the Areopagite in *Liber de causis*, after comparing the work with Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, translated into Latin by William of Moerbeke in 1268⁹³. Among other things, it could be observed that Saint Dionysius the Areopagite's analysis on evil is very close to Proclus' perspective in *De malorum subsistentia*, although the guiding ideas are also found in Saint Paul's exposition of the Areopagus⁹⁴. The discovery and circulation of the *Liber de causis* manuscript was an encouraging event for Dominican scholastics who were striving to reconcile Aristotle's teaching with Christian theology.

The preparation, emergence and development of Gothic art, and therefore of stained glass art, takes place at the end of the first Christian millennium and the beginning of the second, around the same time as the Crusades, when many of the manuscripts of Greek and Arab philosophers and scholars arrive in Europe. This is the period of Latin translations and exegeses of many Greek manuscripts. In the absence of the original works of the last Great Ecumenical Council of the East on the issue of iconoclasm, Latin theologians attempted to answer some theological dilemmas about the role of the image in the iconomy of salvation but did not always combine

The non-finite of some of Michelangelo's sculptures is the equivalent of the assonance in popular poetry, the unfinished marble arouses an enigmatic contemplation, ... suggesting the infinity of possibilities of being.

⁹³ Pseudo-Aristotel, *Liber de causis*, translation, notes and commentary by Alexander Baumgarten, Univers Enciclopedic publishing house, 2002, pp. 5; 111.

⁹⁴ Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names; Mystical Theology...*, p. 33. Dionysius shows that evil is simply the capacity to want something other than what is naturally inscribed in one's nature, that of returning to God, of union with oneself and with God. Since by our very nature we tend towards the good, to go against this nature is, at the edge, a contorted way of seeking all good, even if we seek it elsewhere, in another direction. Evil is thus, in the end, also a way of tending towards the good, only in a deficient and unknowing way, missing or even destroying our own nature. Dionysius demonstrates that evil is not 'something' in itself, a specific reality, but it is a para-reality – a parasitic reality that manifests itself at the expense of the good, using the power of the good.

their results in a unitary, unanimously accepted answer. Commentaries have been developed in which attempts have been made to reconcile theses and concepts from Platonism and Aristotelianism with Christianity, on the status of the image and on the nature of light manifested as an intermediary diaphanous medium and epiphanic revealer, in a new aesthetic and liturgical dimension.

The skies of antiquity were populated by concepts embodied in images representing winged beings (*erotes*), who were also an embodiment of the intellect, half divine and half human, mortal and immortal at the same time. The nature of the intermediary, such as that of Eros, simultaneously belongs to two genres – two sequences that this ambivalent nature places in a relationship of implicit continuity, in order to give form (image or *eidos*) to a state of the being in the absence of any form. In Aristotelian language, from the relation of relative opposition between (Power) Δύναμις and the pure act ἐvéργεια, the *diaphanous* is born as a paradigm of the third genre or of the intermediate term⁹⁵.

The diaphanous is nothing in itself, being instead *present* in every thing of the external contact it causes and in the dialogue and established otherness of seeing and thinking. This is also the explanation of the persistence of the scholastics who seek to define, in turn, the diaphanous, returning again and again to the incorporeality of a light that is embodied in the very matter of colours and to the mediating and apparitional status of the image – iconic receptacle of a diaphanous ‘presence’ that unfolds itself while remaining essentially ineffable⁹⁶. The diaphanous is the *emergence from itself* of the luminous act and at the same time of the obscure potentiality of things, which it somehow brings into the world by giving them visibility and colour⁹⁷.

From the documentary evidence that has survived, it can be confirmed that Abbot Suger was in the entourage of some theologians involved in these debates, such as Hugues de Saint-Victor, translator and commentator of the Areopagite writings. We can assume that from these discussions and commentaries the theoretical framework for the argument for the appearance of the stained glass art and the terrestrial glass model of the

⁹⁵ Anca Vasiliu, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20. Subject to perpetual movement, heterogeneous and sensitive, the diaphanous environment thus unites opposites, while possessing a limit that circumscribes and determines it. The limit of the diaphanous medium is not nocturnal or blind opacity, but simply colour, i.e. an otherness of the diaphanous that defines the intermediary through its periphery.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 184; 342, note 1. For Avicenna the intermediary is only a ‘conductor’ of light and not an epiphanic revealer of its presence. The interval is therefore a luminous and at the same time a rarefied medium (*translucens* and *perveltas*), therefore a corporeal medium – even if it is, of course, a very subtle body, similar to the *pneuma* of the Stoics – and not a nature common to all visible things.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 320.

Church of the Heavenly Jerusalem was built. The debates preceding the conceptualisation of the prototype plan are not known to us, but the obvious and tangible result is the glass and stone architecture that has survived through the ages to the present day. Hugues de Saint-Victor's main teachers, whose works he would comment on and sometimes even correct, were Rabanus Maurus and John Scotus Eriugena, the latter playing a role that was as important as it was distorting in the reception of Dionysian thought in the Latin West. What Eriugena tried to do through his exegesis was in fact a retranslation and reformulation of Dionysius' work. By taking the Neoplatonic apophatic schemes and language used by the Greek holy fathers from the Hebrew biblical matrix of their thought, autonomizing Aristotelian categories and recycling them speculatively, Eriugena succeeded in blocking, through a rational discursive system, the true reception in the West of Greek and Byzantine patristic thought as ecclesial theology, contemplative liturgical mystagogy and asceticism⁹⁸. If in the Christian East, through the voice of Saint Maximus the Confessor, 'the solution to the return/unification of creation is Christological – the *hypostatic* union and renewal of natures in Jesus Christ – and the method is ascetic-contemplative-mystical, for Eriugena the solution is anthropological and the method epistemological'⁹⁹. Human nature, through the intellectual knowledge acquired via the 'liberal arts', says Eriugena, is capable, through dialectical reductions, of bringing about the return and unification of all creation in a single nature, in God. The absence of Christocentrism explains why the discourse of Eriugenean speculative theology remains a Hellenistic essentialist discourse of a generalized 'physiology',¹⁰⁰.

According to Eriugena – which will also bring him the condemnation of some synods –, God, being beyond all intelligible form and intellect, is invisible in Himself, being seen only through intermediate symbolic theophanies which conceal Him as much as they reveal Him¹⁰¹. The parallel with the Areopagian view on the theme of this study is illuminating. 'For Dionysius, the medium through which light manifests itself by illuminating and self-transmitting through reflections to terrestrial things is a hierarchical

⁹⁸ Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *op. cit.*, p. 503, note 61.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 502-503.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 503, note 61. As Ernesto Mainoldi has shown, in a clear review of the reception of Dionysian thought in the Latin West, this was in fact a retranslation of it from the 'hypostatist-energetist' register of the Cappadocian Fathers' 'revolution of ontology' to the 'ontological-idealistic' register of philosophical thought. (...) Latin theologians continued to prefer the synthesis between Neoplatonism and Christianity, which they knew from the more accessible writings of Blessed Augustine. Because of the Euryugenistic view, the chance of a profound dialogue between the two Christian traditions was lost, which could have blocked the drift of the anti-Greek polemic started by Charles the Great and relaunched by Pope Nicholas into the irreconcilable theological antagonism that unfortunately came later.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 1096. The Euryugenistic position was condemned in 1241, but also in 1334 and 1346.

medium, communicating itself in an order of descending purity as the luminous emanation moves away from its source. For John Scotus Eriugena, on the other hand, this intermediate diaphanous medium incorporates the light (or the divine essence), makes it present in everything and everywhere (...) and thus transmits it without the phasing or gradient of a luminosity as in the Dionysian hierarchical cosmos¹⁰². Dionysius uses the terms διανγής and φωτοδοσία for the diaphanous, transparent and/or illuminating medium, while Eriugena uses the terms *lucidus* and *claritas*, with the remark that there is a distance between the two authors regarding the role and significance of the intermediary. At the risk of schematizing, one could say that diaphaneity is a cosmological and theological notion for Areopagite, while Scotus conceives it from the philosophical angle of aesthetic and metaphysical perception¹⁰³.

From the Eriugenean, aesthetic and philosophical perspective of the term with which Suger supports his theory of anagogical illumination, the diaphanous medium is dependent on the optical phenomenon of physical light passing through the translucent or transparent density of multicoloured coloured glass. Similar to the stained glass, by its willingness to receive light and make it visible, the diaphanous ‘illuminates’ like a ‘clear stone’, but its ‘power’ does not last long and darkens when the light weakens¹⁰⁴. ‘O may it never grow dim!’, Suger had it written on one of the inscriptions marking the consecration of the new choir at Saint-Denis, and elsewhere he wrote: ‘...the church shines (...) for bright is that which in a luminous way is linked to light’¹⁰⁵.

The diaphaneity allows us to define the dual nature by the fact that it is both earthly, like water, for example, and heavenly, like air or ether. The relatedness or similarity of diaphaneity with light also plays an important role in liturgical practice: it makes certain translucent matters be considered more suitable than others for use in worship and sacrament. Hugo de Saint-Victor and Thomas Aquinas explain by diaphaneity (*sua diaphaneitate est luminis susceptiva*) the preferential choice of water as ‘matter in the mystery of baptism’, capable of symbolizing grace, invoking the resemblance of water, through its natural properties, to the very nature of grace, before any institutional placement. Rabanus Maurus also defined glass as a matter which, by its qualities, was suitable for building the church to match its

¹⁰² Idem, *On the diaphanous: the medium of light in ancient and medieval philosophy...*, pp. 181-182, note 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, pp. 179-180; 181, note 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem...*, p. 344.

¹⁰⁵ George Henderson, *Goticul*, translated by Gabriel Gafită, Meridiane publishing house, Bucharest 1980, pp. 47, 77.

model, as *Ecclesia celestis*, which is also the place where the baptism of believers should take place as a purifying bath of light¹⁰⁶.

Following the model of Saint-Denis, the Gothic cathedrals built later included in their design the idea of becoming allegorical images of the Church of the Heavenly Jerusalem, with an architecture of imposing verticality, with walls translucent like glass, in the colours of beads (Revelation 21:21), all forming a monumental instrument for capturing the light and goodwill of God. In the same way, the transparent or translucent surfaces of the goblets, chalices, reliquaries and other liturgical objects are enlarged, allowing as much light as possible to shine in. The prismatic crystal or glass surfaces of the treasures, sometimes polished to a lens-like finish, amplified the intensity of the light entering these ‘devices’ for capturing the luxes and ‘storing grace’. (see Diagram 3)

Among the stained glass windows, which at night were reduced to the function of furniture (glass paintings), the spaces were filled with huge painted panels, pieces of pew furniture and all kinds of monuments and sculptures. However large the surface area of the windows (with the exception of Sainte-Chapelle and perhaps a few others), the multitude of pillars and interior stone pillars occupied a large enough area inside the cathedral to fragment the space and interrupt the visual unity of the unfolding narrative of the iconographic programme, unlike the Byzantine basilica, whose interior architecture covered with fresco or mosaic paintings allowed for continuity in reading the iconographic discourse. It is possible that one of the aesthetic principles of the Gothic style, that visual *continuum* through which the distinctions between the major and minor arts were blurred, also had in mind restoring the possibility of reading from a single perspective the multitude of visual scores juxtaposed in the ecclesiastical space, through the formal similarity of architectural details, furniture and ornamentation¹⁰⁷. This principle of the visual *continuum* would later be identified in the compositions of the *art-nouveau* style.

Although much more decorative than frescoes or mosaics, Gothic stained glass tries to recover and restore to the Western liturgical space as much as possible of the specificity and characteristics of the iconic image lost at the end of the first millennium. Strictly technically defined, stained glass

¹⁰⁶ Anca Vasiliu, *op. cit.*, p. 345 note 2. And as for the Eucharistic mystery: the gifts are ready to be consecrated (according to John Colet’s comments on Dionysius’ *Church Hierarchy*), when they are also considered transparent through diaphanousness and translucent, becoming receptacles, suitable for the ‘offering of light’ by the officiating priests. Rabanus Maurus uses the term *perspicuus* instead of *diaphanus*, from classical Latin. It was not until the discovery of Aristotelian texts between the 12th and 13th centuries, when the diaphanous made its lexical appearance again, that it received its own Latin translation (*transparens*).

¹⁰⁷ George Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 77, 84. The visual *continuum* is that artificial link between pattern and rhythm, it is the formal compromise which alone provides the context in which the motifs and individual elements of the Gothic repertoire can be related to each other.

is, according to some historians, merely the artistic conclusion of a physical experiment in which the optician's light, i.e. electromagnetic waves passing through Newton's prism, creates decorative effects. Certainly, stained glass painting is much more than just a bright ornamental carpet. On the same critical note, some historians point out that, depending on how the symbolism of light is understood and received, there is necessarily a confessional antagonism between stained glass and mosaic techniques, from which it would appear that the potential of stained glass technique to fully express an icon is less than that of the mosaic technique¹⁰⁸. There are, of course, nuances, just as there are stained glass windows with iconographic scenes made in a spirit much closer to Byzantine legacy than some of the poor-quality mosaics in some Orthodox churches. In fact, we notice that more and more Orthodox churches are built with Byzantine architecture, having stained glass windows (not just ornamental, as it was the tradition in some parts of Byzantium), and new Roman Catholic cathedrals are adorned with mosaics.

Different in perception and spiritual message, authentic Byzantine mosaics are not only works of art, but also models and patterns of identity for Eastern spirituality. In Eastern churches, light enters reservedly through narrow windows and lunettes, its place being taken by candles and memory lights. Thus, the mosaic seems to emanate light from itself, from the gold of the mandorlae, haloes and backgrounds, and the saints' robes, pierced with golden haloes, radiate an inner, timeless and immaterial light¹⁰⁹. In the 13th and 14th centuries, after Byzantium stopped decorating churches with mosaics, a series of portable icons covered with micromosaics appeared, a technique that could rival the meticulousness of jewellers' work of unimaginable refinement. Shrinking the tesserae to the size of poppy seeds offers new possibilities of expression, but I hope to come back to this and to the mosaic art in general with more data and information in a future study.

Under cover of the concepts on the image established by the Caroline Books, the artist has moved further and further away from the tutelage of the Church, and thus, freed from any ideal model, becomes the creator and autonomous sovereign of his images, which have become his projection, his work and his expression. The works of art, now signed, showed that they were the expression of their subjectivity on a number of Church themes. Religious contemplation had become aesthetic emotion, the religious image a painting, and worship an art¹¹⁰. Dogmatic deviations lead to stylistic

¹⁰⁸ Pavel Şușară, *Brâncuși – a sculptor from the East*, Monitorul Oficial R. A. publishing house, Bucharest, 2020, p. 65.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

¹¹⁰ Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *op. cit.*, pp. 1097-1099. Nicolaus Cusanus speaks of the existence of an 'icon of God' without the mediation of Christ's humanity; this is man himself, who projects his own image in God, God and man reflecting each other perfectly in each other: the anthropomorphosis of God corresponds to the theomorphosis of man who has become a creator himself.

reconfigurations in terms of plastic expression, just as over-emphasis of any kind leads to further exaggerations. ‘In the absence of a proper theology of the icon, as in the Byzantine world, left free to the inspiration of artists and public or private commissions, religious images in the West have become less and less the place of a visible manifestation of the invisible and the divine and more and more the scene of affirming artistic creativity and aesthetic sensibility, announcing the modern transformation of religion into art and of churches into museums’¹¹¹.

Western Christian art, alienated with the Renaissance from the universe of the old Western medieval symbolism and the Eastern icon, becomes an autonomous approach and an end in itself, subject to aesthetic quests, oscillations between realism and abstraction, and the crisis of the subject in the modern and postmodern world. In the attempt at the figurative, in the death of image and contemporary art, historian Alain Besançon notes the triumph of an aesthetic gnosis in metaphysical conflict with nature, creation and man. ‘Emancipated from the prototype, the image no longer represents anything or only itself and its creator as realities opposed to the created world’¹¹².

For some painters, the theories of Albert Einstein and Max Planck at the beginning of the 20th century had an extraordinary impact on our understanding of the world and art. According to the new theories, quantum particles reveal another dimension of the world, a microuniverse that is just as real and immeasurable, but governed by different laws. In the logic of quantum mechanics, the world appears to us as a work of light of varying degrees of opacity and transparency, with particles having a diaphanous structure and the property of delocalisation. As a carrier of information, light combines the structure of space and time, underlying the relationship between matter and energy. Modern physics states that there is only a difference in density between matter and energy¹¹³.

All the archaic cultures that developed so-called geometric artistic styles noticed that there are no straight lines in nature, so in order to represent transcendence or to have a dialogue with divinity they created a geometrized and abstract imagistic language. We recognise this geometric artistic style in the Cucuteni Culture, for example, a sun-worshipping civilisation, where

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 1100.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 1086-1090.

¹¹³ Quantum particles are like clouds or vibrating strings of energy that oscillate and interact with each other, continually relocating and recomposing. Quantum particles are self-organizing structures resulting from crystal lattice vibrations, an apophatic dimension of matter that is difficult to penetrate and understand. Although they have these specificities, quantum particles make up the objects of this world and ensure the coherence of macroscopic matter that we see as opaque, hard, consistent and perfectly locatable. The data are taken from a lecture given by physicist Adrian Ștefan Cârstea from the ‘Horia Hulubei’ National Research and Development Institute for Physics and Nuclear Engineering.

vases and statues were painted with geometrized solar symbols and synthesised in spiral and zigzag shapes. Most objects that were consecrated and dedicated to the god bore the graphic evidence of this abstracted language.

Abstraction, for artists such as Paul Klee, Kazimir Malevich, Vasili Kandinsky or Piet Mondrian, was like an attempt to escape from this materialistic world and an attempt to mediate the encounter of man with the transcendent. In a technologized and atheistic world, abstract art brings together the artistic consciousnesses of different faiths and confessions, which partially claim a soteriological dimension along with the originality of their vision. Their mission was to educate the eye so that through the exercise of contemplating abstract art it could go beyond natural sight and discover an unseen world. Identifying idolatry with the realist naturalism of images, abstraction, in the stylistic sense of the term, is nothing more than an explicit formulation of the withdrawal of the figure away from the threat of idolatry¹¹⁴.

The central objective of Kandinsky's and Malevich's painting is the knowledge of God, but unmediated by matter, a non-objective knowledge that disregards God's creation. Inspired by the theories of R. Steiner, W. Worringer and M. Planck, Kandinsky believes that shapes, colours and sounds come from the same primordial vibration that brings things to life. According to Planck's quantum theory, you can access an unseen world, with abstract painting being an attempt of bidimensional illustration of the fourth dimension. The multi-dimensional geometries of the Surrealists and the 'hyperspaces' of Salvador Dali are well known. In order to see the invisible, artists perform a reduction, an abstraction (they place the sensible world between brackets) by dissolving the object and keeping the subject. In their understanding, emptying the world from objects is not nihilism, because detachment from the object means the return to the original state, a creative liberation and the construction of a new reality, which Malevich calls Suprematism.

In 'The Black Square' (Fig. 4, Appendix 7), the painting that would become the banner of Suprematism, Malevich introduces the idea of the 'presence of an absence' (of the zero of sensation), a paradoxical formula synonymous with the 'darkness of unknowing'¹¹⁵ in the negative theology of the mysticism of uncreated light. The 'black square' is the visual quintessence into which Malevich projects his idea of the revealed God of the Old Testament whom Moses could only 'see' from behind. Because of Malevich's extraordinarily elevated idea about painting and the painter's

¹¹⁴ Marie-José Mondzain, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

¹¹⁵ Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *op. cit.*, pp. 247; 322, n. 22.

mission, ‘The Black Square’ is an equally extreme response through the austerity of simplification of the figurative and imitation in painting¹¹⁶.

On an even more apophatic note, P. Klee’s work with the title ‘Rotating Black Sun and Arrow’ (Fig. 3, Appendix 7) can also be considered one of the plastic resolutions of the oxymoronic expression ‘super-luminous darkness’ in Dionysian theology, where the ‘Black Sun’ suggests the moment of Christ’s Second Coming (Revelation Ch. 6, 12). The paradoxical image¹¹⁷ of the ‘Black Sun’ is rendered by a swastika revolving around its axis, central image projected contrastingly on the background of an explosion of light: ‘And night shall be no more; and they have no need of the light of the lamp or of the light of the sun, for the Lord God will be their light’ (Revelation 22:5). The line of force of the compositional scheme is a double swastika whose valorically and chromatically rhythmic arms suggest a centrifugal dynamic. On either side of the sun, Klee introduces two elements suggesting the fourth dimension, that of time. The arrow shows the flow of historical time towards Eshaton, and on the other side Trinacria is depicted, the rotating black triangle with three arms, symbolising the Holy Trinity and time as eternity.

The theory of relativity has had a major impact on the evolution of image and art. Even if God did not give us natural receptors to look at this dimension of creation, the world of quantum mechanics exists and has been the subject of many artists’ works. Among others, Jackson Pollock, an abstract expressionist and gesturalist illustrator of matter seen through a ‘microscope’ or ‘telescope’, is one of the atypical investigators of pictorial language; his work does not fit into the paradigms of known modernity. His compositions have neural, plasmatic or galactic structures, an uncoagulated or post-apocalyptic world, with undefined spaces suggesting the pulsation of the universe. His painting, like a spongy mass, is made up of layered networks of colour that seemingly randomly interweave, a texture that is both material and immaterial at the same time, which you can only penetrate and visualise by settling into his unique regime of perception.

The mission and the vocation of the artist who gets the visible out of the invisible, who, like Orpheus, brings life out of darkness into light, is the

¹¹⁶ Alain Besançon, *op. cit.*, pp. 385-386. The expressive force and compositional synthesis in art lies, *a contrario*, in the elementary and minimal character of the forms, ‘creative thought flees from openwork and tangled ornaments’, the work of abstraction being in accordance with the ‘principle of minimum action’ or ‘principle of optimization’ of the laws of physics. ‘Treat nature through cylinder, sphere and cone’! said Cezanne, from whom Picasso, Brâncuși and many modern artists claim credit.

¹¹⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22. ‘Paradox affirms the visible but opposes or rather reverses it; it literally constitutes a counter-visible, a counter-view, a counter-appearance, which proposes as a spectacle the opposite of what one would expect to see at first sight. More than a surprising opinion, the paradox often designates the miracle – it makes visible what we should not be able to see and what cannot be seen without astonishment’.

act of a resurrection whenever he makes an image visible. Klee's polyphonic paintings shed a light on that original unity, the depth without form and content of which the beginning of the Bible speaks. For Klee art does not render the visible, it reveals it when it is hidden. Klee's abstract works try to capture the moment when the world breaks out of nothingness to become something. God's thoughts existed in a pre-time of creation. Nature was made through a plasticisation of this reason, says St. Maximus the Confessor. The artist (Orpheus) imitates the act of creation through the law of nature, except that he does not create like God, out of nothing. The artist enters the undefined universe of pre-creation, in that *tohu wa bohu*, in order to rediscover, reconstitute and recreate through convention a world of the visible¹¹⁸. He is a co-worker with the Creator of the world and, symbolically, a saviour who gives voice to the nostalgia for the lost paradise world. The painter descends into the obscurity of chaos to miraculously get out of the Kingdom of Shadow a new, previously unseen visible. If every painting gives us a rescued Eurydice, every icon initiates a soul-saving encounter¹¹⁹.

The icon does not exhaust itself in an object offered to the eye that might see in it a simple display. It lets another gaze appear. The invisible transits through the visible, so that the painted icon sustains the pigments less through the wood of its panel than through the liturgical prayerful exchange of the gazes that meet in it. The icon achieves the penetration of the invisible into the visible in a more radical way than the Suprematist *Square*¹²⁰. Art evolves and it will find new forms of expression as long as the world exists, but the liturgical icon will remain in the artistic landscape, through its relationship with Christ, a mark of the absolute, a constant, like the speed of light in the equations of mathematics.

APPENDIX 1



Fig. 10a)

¹¹⁸ Paul Evdochimov, *The Art of the Icon: a theology of beauty*, Meridiane publishing house, Bucharest, 1993, p. 74.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 47-48.



Fig. 10b)



Fig. 10c) Fig. 10d)

APPENDIX 2



Fig. 11a)



Fig. 11b)



Fig. 11c)

APPENDIX 3



Fig. 12a)



Fig. 12b)



Fig. 12c)

APPENDIX 4



Fig. 13a)



Fig. 13b)

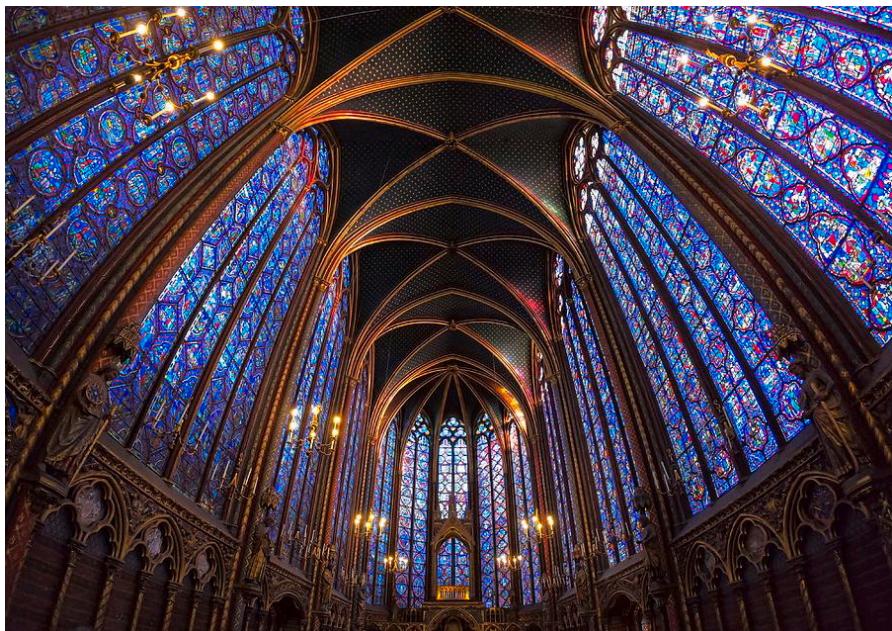


Fig. 13c)

APPENDIX 5

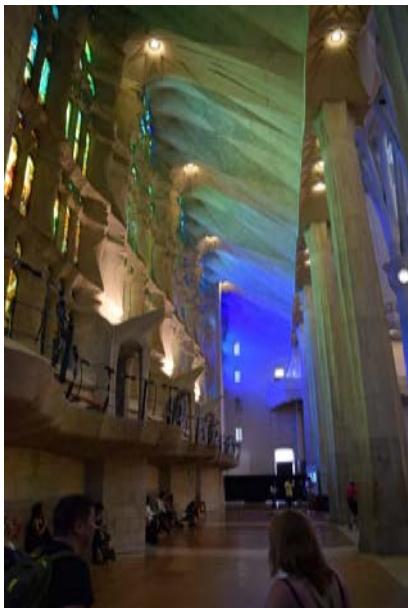


Fig. 14a)



Fig. 14b)



Fig. 14c)



Fig. 14d)

APPENDIX 6



Fig. 15a)



Fig. 15b)



Fig. 15c)



Fig. 15d)



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APPENDIX 7



Fig. 16a)



Fig. 16b)



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Fig. 6e). Mosaic in the ‘San Vitale’ Cathedral of Ravenna, built between 526 and 548. Detail. The votive portrait of Empress Theodora illustrates the abundance of pearls and precious stones in the jewels, which at once emphasised the pecuniary value, the aesthetic quality and the status of political authority. Above all, what distinguishes the jewellery of Christian dignitaries, whether in the imperial or ecclesiastical administration, is the symbolic-theological dimension of the gems and pearls nominally indicated in the revealed texts, with uses in religious worship.

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Fig. 8c). Gilded silver reliquary ark decorated with prisms and crystal caps mounted as oversized windows, if one were to compare to the size of the box, with white zoomorphic ornaments on a blue background in enamel. Venetian workshop, 15th century. Gallery of the Academy of Florence, Italy.

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Fig. 9a). Pompeii, the Fountain in the House of Scientists. One of the sanctuaries of 'remembrance', a place of meditation and prayer dedicated to the Muses, daughters of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. The sanctuary's artificial 'cavern', with apse and basin, is decorated in mosaic with glass paste and shell tesserae. The type of apse and the blue colour theme of the sanctuary, framed by a pediment and sometimes also by mosaic-covered columns, are also found with some modifications as the main architectural element in the composition of Christian altars and in the sacred niches of synagogues (mizrah) and mosques (mihrab).

Fig. 9b). Synagogue of Dura-Europos, Syria, years 244-5 AD. Painting in tempera on dry plaster. The Torah altar or niche in the Synagogue wall (mizrah), facing Jerusalem. Reconstruction in the National Museum in Damascus, Syria. Although mizrah is the Hebrew word for 'east' or 'sunrise', in practice it indicates Jerusalem, the direction in which believers worship during prayer. Usually, the wall facing Jerusalem is inscribed with the word mizrah (Hebrew: מִזְרָחַ mīzrāḥ), with symbolic images and scriptural passages such as 'From the rising of the sun (mi-mizrah) to the setting of the sun, praise be to the name of the Lord' (Ps. 112:30). The symbolism of light is also evident in the depiction of the burning menorah. Above the niche of the Torah at Dura-Europos, in the centre, the Temple of Solomon is symbolically depicted, and, inside it, the Ark of the Covenant is featured. On both sides the menorah, the lulav (bundle of palm leaves) and the scene of Abraham's sacrifice are depicted. This bouquet, together with the citron fruit, are used in the prayer service on the mornings of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Fig. 9c). Mosaic-decorated niche from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, 6th century. The symbolism of light and water is richly represented in the apses of the mausoleum. In Greek funerary art, the dove drinking from a vessel symbolises the spring of memory¹²¹. In the upper register of the niche, the mosaic depicts two doves drinking from a large bowl, a source of water, between two saints interceding in prayer for the ‘eternal remembrance’ and repose of the souls of those buried in the sarcophagi of the mausoleum. Here the spring, represented under both bezels, is associated with the source of light that flows through the translucent alabaster tile, symbolising the divine energies that permeate matter transfigured by grace. The image of the spring from which the stags drink is a reference to Psalm 41:1; ‘As the stag desires the springs of water, so my soul desires you, O God’. Above the scene is a fan-shaped, shell-shaped canopy, a regular feature in the niches of ancient Greco-Roman altars and shrines. In Christianity, this covering symbolises the protection and intercession of divine grace.

Fig. 9d). Mihrab (prayer niche) in a mosque in Isfahan, Iran. The calligraphic style and compositional tendency indicate the Safavid period, after the years 1500. Today it is in the Cleveland Museum of Art, USA. The prayer niche or mihrab is the most important point inside a mosque and it is located in the wall that is facing Mecca, the holy city of Islam. The white enamel inscription, which surrounds the mihrab like a frame, is rendered in a form of Arabic script called *thuluth*. It is a quotation from the Qur'an, from the Chapter of Light (*Surah An-Nur* 24, 35) which says: ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp is in a crystal, the crystal is like a shining star. It is lit from a blessed olive tree, neither to the east nor the west, whose oil would almost glow, even without being touched by fire. Light upon light!’¹²².

Fig. 10a). The Rotunda Church of St. George in Thessaloniki, built between 300-306. The graphic-pictorial convention arrived at in order to illustrate the rainbow in the visions of Revelation and the prophet Hezekiah. Fragment of the polychrome (rainbow-like) girdle on the mosaic of the dome, 4th century.

Fig. 10b). Marble pavement and other rare ‘Cosmati’ stones, Basilica of St. Hrisogon, years 1123-1129, Rome. With the development of the art of stained glass, we also see, in parallel, the development of a decorative pavement programme executed in the *opus sectile* technique, works of remarkable artistic virtuosity and a unique inventiveness of the geometric forms. These inlays of coloured stones would later be called *Cosmatesque*, after the Cosmati family, four generations of creators and makers of these ensembles.

Fig. 10c). The plinth-belt in the interior fresco of the Bogdana princely church in Rădăuți, 14th century. The variously coloured stones in the fresco, arranged at the base of the wall, refer to the foundations of the Citadel wall in the Book of Revelation, which are adorned with all kinds of precious stones (jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, hrisolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprasus, jacinth, amethyst (Revelation 21, 19-20).

Fig. 10d). Church of the Arbore Monastery dedicated to the ‘Beheading of St. John the Baptist’, Arbore, Suceava. 16th century. Detail of the frescoed interior plinth with

¹²¹ André Scrima, *Spiritual experience and its languages*, Humanitas publishing house, Bucharest, 2008, p. 302.

¹²² Internet Archive <https://clevelandart.org/art/1962.23>

modular elements, which, like those at Bogdana Monastery, symbolize the precious stones from the wall of the City of Jerusalem mentioned in the Book of Revelation. The type of stylisation of the cut of the gems varies from one church to another, sometimes their geometric surfaces imitate the veining and striations of marble slabs, but their placement in the iconographic programme will always be at the base of the pictorial ensemble. More often than not, the perimeter of the plinth will compete for its surface with another type of ornament, the folded drapery, an adaptation of the *velarium*¹²³, those ancient stylised canopies which Christian iconography has taken over, converting their mythological meaning and exploiting their ornamental value. Present in the decoration of the residences of dignitaries and hypogean tombs, painted draperies were a common practice in antiquity. They were an integral part of the scenery of imperial and religious ceremonies, and were found at the base of buildings, marking certain ceremonial routes, or demarcating an area to be used for religious rites (see the Tent of Confession). Having become part of Greco-Roman pictorial imagery, the plinth-draperies will also find their place in the iconographic programme of Christian churches, with specific variations.

Fig. 11a). Altar of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople, 11th century.

Fig. 11b). Chora, detail. Imitation in fresco of the marble slabs symbolizing the stones in the walls of the Citadel of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Even in the absence of the marble slabs, which may have been absent for financial reasons or because the painter thought it was better for the visual unity of the whole, their place in the region of the plinth is replaced by painting imitating these slabs. This shows how important the symbolism of placing these panels on the plinth of the interior walls of the church is in the economy of the iconographic programme.

Fig. 11c). Dečani Monastery, Serbia, 14th century. Fresco. Details of the painting imitating the striations and veins of various slabs of coloured marble. The painters' imagination is more daring in capturing the most bizarre configurations of marble. Symbolism alluding to the beading of the gates and the stones in the foundations of the Citadel of the Heavenly Jerusalem is evident. The further we move towards the margins of the empire, where artists are not as cultivated as those in Constantinople, there is a 'site folklore', which manifests itself in many ways, but which is primarily characterised by greater stylistic freedom, rawness of language, a slight indifference to detail (in the writing of texts and the rendering of figures), of symbolic and allegorical interpretation, which give a certain expressiveness to the narrative, but also give archaeologists and restorers a lot of trouble today.

Fig. 12a). The painting of the 'Annunciation' painted by Fra Angelico in 1432. Museum of the Church of *Santa Maria delle Grazie* in San Giovanni Valdarno, Italy. Detail, tempera on wood. Half of the background of the composition is covered with large slabs of marble, or rather tiles that fancifully imitate the chromatic blends of translucent marble panels with diaphanous iridescence. The emphasis on the imaginative play of colours, which interweave spectacularly on the fissures that bound shades which melt into each other, or become firm again to highlight the contrasts, only suggests through an artistic licence, with abstract resonances, the miracle that Mary is both the Mother of God and the Virgin.

Fig. 12b), 12c). Icon of the 'Annunciation' in the Church of St. Clement of Ohrida, tempera on wood. Years 1300 - 1325, Ohrida, North Macedonia. The scene of the

¹²³ Velarium, or cloth cover used in Roman amphitheaters to protect spectators from the sun.

‘Annunciation’ takes place in an iconographic setting in which the marble elements appear with an unusual and unpredictable texture of striations, a plastic convention marking an equally unpredictable and inexplicable event, the miracle of the Annunciation of the Incarnation of the Lord.

Fig. 13a). Ivory and glass skylight, Patras, Roman period, 1st-2nd century AD stained glass dome skylight. Polygonal glass panel consisting of a honeycomb-shaped ivory frame and trapezoidal surfaces that are covered with opaque blue and white glass. At Pompeii (a city buried in ash and lava in 79 AD), the public buildings and the houses of patrician families had enclosed verandas with stucco or plaster frames in which pieces of glass or thin translucent alabaster slabs were embedded. Pliny the Elder described several of these, which are among the earliest testimonies of the art of stained glass.

Fig. 13b). Stained glass window in the Saint-Denis basilica (chapel of Saint Pérégrin). 12th century. Detail from The Life of Moses. The burning bush.

Fig. 13c). Interior view of the *Sainte-Chapelle de la Paris*, 1242-1246. The chapel sums up all the stylistic acquisitions begun a century earlier by the master craftsmen of the Saint-Denis Basilica (1137 - 1144).

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Fig. 14c). Temple of the Goddess Hator in Dendera, Egypt, 1st century BC.

Fig. 14d). Phra Sri Rattana Chedi Golden Stupa, Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace, Bangkok, Thailand. The gold-blue colour pair (in all shades), as well as transparent and translucent rocks, are the pigments and materials that people have dedicated to the sky deities in all religions and cultures of the world.

Fig. 15a). Egyptian Museum in Cairo, gold, enamel and gemstone pectoral ornament in the shape of a scarab. It comes from the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun at Luxor.

Fig. 15b). Detail from the Gate of the goddess Ishtar in Babylon. Glazed terracotta. Built in 575 BC, huge fragments of its walls are now in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

Fig. 15c). Two-headed serpent, Aztec sculpture on display at the British Museum in London, England. Made from small fragments of turquoise applied like a mosaic to a wooden base, it is one of nine pieces of the same material that are in the British Museum.

Fig. 15d). Amulet case of Vishnu Riding Garuda, Nepal, 17th-19th century. Amulet cases had talismanic functions, and the images depicted often refer to the divine realms. Here Vishnu travels in a cosmic sphere on his Garuda vehicle. New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 15e). Detail from Pharaoh Tutankhamun’s mask, discovered in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. Made of gold and predominantly blue enamel. Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

Fig. 16a). Faience statuette with blue glaze depicting Isis with the infant Horus. Ptolemaic period, 332-30 BC. Egypt.

Fig. 16b). Buddha statue of green jade in the Wat Phra Sing temple, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Thailand. As the god of light, his statues are made of gold or of luminous, transparent or translucent materials.

Fig. 16c). Paul Klee, ‘With the Black Rotating Sun and Arrow’. Gouache and tempera on canvas. Granet Museum, Aix en Provence, France. Year 1919.

Fig. 16d). Kazimir Malevich, ‘Black Square’, 1915. The work is located in the exhibition in the top corner, where icons are usually placed in the house.

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Porches et narthex dans les églises médiévales du Liban

Hany Kahwagi-Janho*

Abstract: As part of the architectural heritage workshops of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, a group of churches dating back to the medieval and Ottoman eras were identified and analyzed. A lot of these churches have porches that project beyond their volumes, a typology which has proven to be very rare, being limited for around forty churches out of the several hundred in Lebanon. These porches, which are mostly characterized by the poverty of their design and architecture, do not seem to play any liturgical role of the first order and their function seems to be limited to a simple transitional space between the nave and the outer space. It is in this context that the present article will seek to study these porches in their architectural, structural and functional aspect.

Keywords: porch, narthex, church, medieval, Lebanon.

0. Introduction

La présence du porche devançant les églises de l'époque médiévale et des débuts de l'époque ottomane au Liban se présente comme une rareté limitée à moins d'une quarantaine de monuments, dispersés essentiellement dans la zone située entre Byblos au Sud et le Koura au nord, avec deux exceptions dans la région de la Vallée Sainte et celle de Beyrouth. Ces porches, généralement ouverts sur l'espace extérieur, quoique à des degrés différents, présentent des formules structurales variées. Les relations qu'ils entretiennent avec leurs églises respectives varient eux aussi d'un monument à l'autre. Toutefois, l'aspect rustique et dénudé caractérise la grande majorité de ces porches, si nous mettons de côté celui de la cathédrale Saint-Jean-Marc de Byblos.

Cet article cherchera à dresser un corpus des églises à porches et à établir une étude typologique de ces porches d'un point de vue spatial, structural et volumétrique. Une tentative pour élucider le rôle de ces porches dans le cadre global des monuments auxquels ils appartiennent sera aussi

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mise en œuvre, dans le but de mieux connaître leur fonction et leur raison d'être. Ce dernier point se fera suivant une approche comparative avec les cas de certains modèles européens contemporains.

1. Le corpus :

Au total, une quarantaine d'églises remontant essentiellement au Moyen Âge et dotées d'un porche, ont été dénombrées¹ (**fig. 1**). Une d'entre elles se situe à Beyrouth (l'ancienne cathédrale franque de Saint-Jean, actuellement mosquée el-Omari)², tandis que quatorze d'entre-elles se trouvent dans la région de Byblos, quinze dans la région de Batroun, sept dans le Koura et deux dans la région de la Qadisha. Ces églises se répartissent en trois types principaux : les églises mononefs, qui forment la moitié de l'ensemble, avec 21 monuments, les églises doubles avec leurs variantes (biconques, communicantes, juxtaposées), formant environ le quart du corpus (neuf monuments) et enfin les églises à plan basilical comprenant neuf monuments aussi. Notons que, dans cet ensemble, l'église de Saints-Basile-et-Lucius de Smar Jbeil associe un volume basilical à un autre mononef.

Beyrouth

Commune	Église	Typologie	Couvrement du porche	Position	Etat des lieux
Beyrouth	Saint-Jean-Baptiste	Basilicale	Dôme ?	Axiale	Conservé

¹ À cet ensemble s'ajoutent quelques églises médiévales devant lesquelles des porches ont été ajoutés au cours du XIX^e et XX^e s. telles que celles de Habbouch (Koura) et Notre-Dame du Fort (Ehden). De son côté, Al-Amchiti, dans le cadre de son exposé historique sur l'église de Chamat, indique qu'elle était devancée d'un porche, tout comme les églises de KfarHay, Maad, Mesreh et Toula (Al-Amchiti, Youhanna, « Kanisat Shāmāt. ṣafahāt tarikhīyathāriyyt », « Al-Mashrek », 10/1931, 753-757, p. 754. Si les deux premières ont bel et bien des porches, les deux dernières telles qu'elles sont actuellement connues n'en présentent aucune trace visible.

² Enlart, Camille. *Les Monuments des Croisés dans le royaume de Jérusalem. Architecture religieuse et civile, Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique*, 7, Geuthner, Paris, 1926-1927, p. 71-78 ; pl. 5.

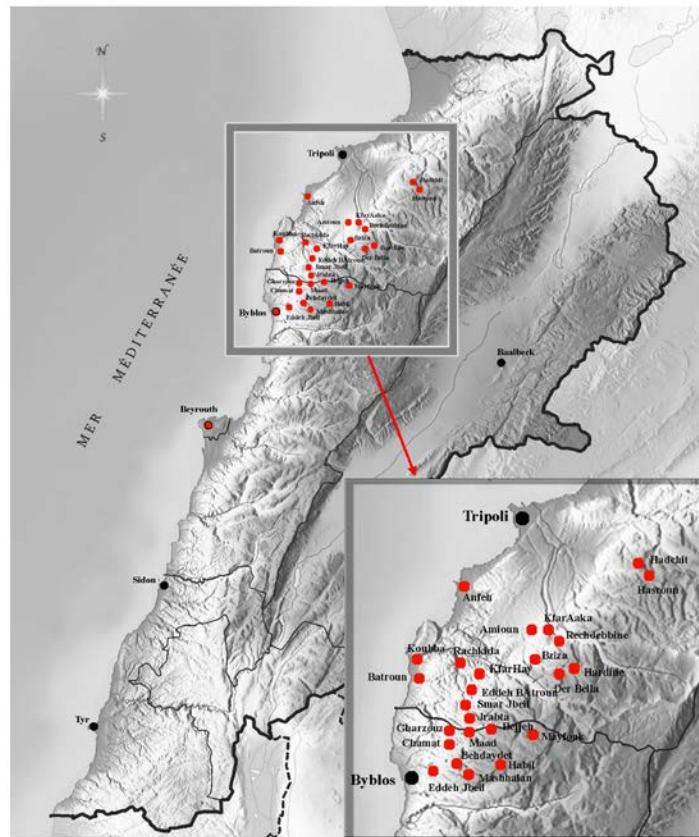


Fig. 1

Jbeil

Commune	Église	Typologie	Couvrement du porche	Position	Etat des lieux
Behdaydet	Saint-Nicolas – Notre-Dame	Double/Com municate	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Behdaydet	Saint-Théodore	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Bejjeh (/Ain Kefaa)	Saint-Siméon (et Saint-Abdon) aposée	Double/Juxt aposée	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Bejjeh	Notre-Dame	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Byblos-Jbeil	Saint-Jean-Marc	Basilicale	Dôme	Axiale?	Remonté, non <i>in-situ</i>
Byblos-Jbeil	Saint-Siméon le Stylite	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Latéral	Conservé

Chamat	Saints-Thècle-et-Stéphan	Double	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Largement disparu
Eddeh-Jbeil	Saints-Jean-et-Théodore	Double/Juxt aposée	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Partiellement conservé
Eddeh-Jbeil	Saint-Elysée	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Gharzouz	Quarante-Martyrs	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Habil-Jbeil	Notre-Dame	Biconque	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Partiellement Conservé
Maad	Saint-Charbilius d'Édesse	Basilicale	Voûtes en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Mashhalan	Saint-Tarokhos	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Porche disparu
Mayfouk	Notre-Dame-d'Illige	Basilicale	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé

Batroun

Commune	Église	Typologie	Couvrement du porche	Position	Etat des lieux
Batroun	Saint-Sissine	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Becheeleh	Saint-Mames	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Disparu, partiellement reconstruit
Der Bella	Saint-Boula	Double	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé, non communicants
Eddeh-Batroun	Saint-Sabas	Basilicale	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Conservé
Eddeh-Batroun	Saint-Mames	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Hardine	Saints-Phocas-et-Georges	Biconque	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Disparu
Jrabta	Saint-Abdon	Double	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Conservé, fermé tardivement
Jran	Saints-Serge-et-Bacchus	Mononef	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Conservé
KfarHay	Saint-Sabas	Mononef	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Conservé

KfarHay	Saint-Serge	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
KfarHelda	Notre-Dame (Saydet-al-Qale')	Mononef	Toit-terrasse	Axiale	En ruine
Koubba	Saint-Sauveur	Mononef	Toit-terrasse	Axiale	Disparu
Rachkida	Saint-Georges	Basilicale	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Conservé
Smar Jbeil	Notre-Dame	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Smar Jbeil	Saints-Basile-et-Lucius	Basilicale/Double Communicante	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Conservé

Koura

Commune	Église	Typologie	Couvrement du porche	Position	Etat des lieux
Anfeh	Saint-Siméon-et-Archange-Michel	Double	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Disparu
Amioun	Saint-Domitien	Mononef	Voûte à arêtes	Latérale	Conservé
Amioun	Saint-Georges	Basilicale	Voûte à arêtes	Latérale	Conservé
Amioun	Saint-Phocas	Basilicale	Voûte à arêtes	Axiale	Disparu
KfarAaqqa	Saint-Luc	Mononef	Voûte à arêtes	Latérale	Conservé
KfarAaqqa	Saint-Lucius	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé
Reshdebbin	Saint-Jacques	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Axiale	Conservé

Qadisha

Commune	Église	Typologie	Couvrement du porche	Position	Etat des lieux
Hadchit	Saint-Jean	Mononef-Troglodyte	Toit-terrasse	Latérale	Conservé
Hasroun	Saint-Leba	Mononef	Voûte en berceau	Latérale	Conservé

Tab. 1. Le corpus des églises à porche

2. État de conservation :

La grande majorité des porches de ces églises sont parfaitement conservés (29 sur 39 porches). Leur état de conservation est parfois même bien meilleur que celui de l'église à laquelle ils sont associés, comme dans le cas de l'église de Saint-Serge de KfarHay. Toutefois, certains de ces porches ont partiellement, voire presque totalement disparu. Ainsi, les églises de Anfeh, Chamat, Hardine et Koubba n'ont gardé que de légères traces de leurs porches.

2.1. *Les porches totalement disparus :*

Plusieurs églises ont totalement perdu leurs porches, ces derniers n'étant plus matérialisés que par quelques traces encore conservées *in-situ*. À Anfeh (**fig. 2**), le porche n'est matérialisé que par le départ d'un grand pilier encastré au centre du mur occidental de la chapelle nord. Les traces de réfection du côté nord de ce même mur indiquent l'emplacement du second pilier, totalement disparu. Deux massifs récemment construits à quelques mètres devant cette façade ouest, semblent indiquer l'emplacement des piliers parallèles aux deux premiers et qui devaient recevoir la retombée de la voûte à arêtes qui recouvrait le porche.



Fig. 2

À Chamat³ (**fig. 3-4**), le porche est encore matérialisé par la présence de trois piliers qui s'accouplent là aussi contre la façade occidentale de l'église.

³ Kahwagi-Janho, Hany, « Les églises doubles du Liban. Formes, types et évolution », in *Liturgie et Art Sacré dans le patrimoine syriaque. Septième conférence liturgique*, ed. Badawi, Abdo, PUSEK, Kaslik, 2018, 106-140, pp. 111-113.

Les deux piliers latéraux sont conservés jusqu'à des hauteurs allant entre 2,50 m et 3,15 m, indiquant ainsi le départ des voûtes qui devaient les couvrir. Quant au pilier central, il n'est conservé que sur une hauteur de trois assises (1,40 m). Cet état de conservation médiocre ne remonte que vers quelques dizaines d'années, le porche ne s'étant effondré que vers le début du XX^e s. En fait, il est visible dans un état mieux conservé sur une photo publiée en 1931⁴. Cette photo, prise du côté nord-ouest, montre les deux piliers libres de l'angle nord-ouest du porche ainsi que le pilier central de sa façade principale, conservés presque sur l'ensemble de leur hauteur et englobant les montants des arcs de la façade. À Mashhalan (**Fig. 5**), la présence du porche n'est matérialisée que par les restes des fondations de son piédroit sud, tout comme celui de l'église Saint-Mames de Bcheeleh, dont le piédroit sud a été récemment partiellement reconstruit en même temps que certaines parties effondrées des murs de l'église et son couvrement.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

En passant à Hardine, l'église biconique de Saints-Phocas-et-Georges semblait être devancée par un porche dont il ne reste que de minimes traces.

⁴ Al-Amchiti, «Shāmāt», fig. 1.

Il s'agit principalement d'un pilier encastré du côté sud de la porte principale de l'église, ainsi que les traces de trois autres au niveau du sol (**Fig. 6**). L'un d'entre eux est conservé au nord du premier et les deux autres leurs font face. Le premier pilier, le mieux préservé, est large de 1,05 m et conservé sur une hauteur de 1,92 m ; il s'intègre dans l'épaisseur du mur. Construit avec des blocs taillés, à la surface lisse et posés suivant des assises régulières, ce pilier présente le départ d'une voûte actuellement disparue. La maçonnerie de ce pilier, totalement différente de l'ensemble des murs du monument, est indépendante de celle du mur ouest qui semble venir tout simplement l'envelopper. Restitué, le porche aurait un plan carré aux dimensions internes égales à 2,80 x 2,90 m et semble avoir été couvert par une voûte d'arêtes.



Fig. 7

Le porche de l'église Saint-Sauveur de Koubba a lui aussi totalement disparu⁵. Il n'en subsiste que les traces d'encastrement de sa maçonnerie dans celle du mur occidental de l'église ainsi que les corbeaux qui devaient recevoir la retombée des arcs de ses façades latérales (**Fig. 7**). Ces traces consistent en des blocs faisant saillie de la maçonnerie principale du mur, suivant deux alignements verticaux placés aux angles de la façade et composés de trois blocs chacun (0,25 m x 0,30 m). Ils s'élancent à 3,40 m du sol et leurs blocs sont espacés l'un de l'autre de 0,25-0,30 m. Ces deux alignements surmontent deux corbeaux en quart de cercle couronnés par un astragale et un bandeau lisse et supportant chacun un bloc correspondant au point de départ d'un arc. La limite inférieure de ces corbeaux se situe à 1,90 m du sol. Une série horizontale de cinq corbeaux similaires s'aligne avec les

⁵ Enlart, *Monuments*, 325-326 ; Coupel, Pierre, « Trois petites églises du comté de Tripoli », *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, 5 (1941): 35-55, pl. 4.

tout derniers des trois blocs en saillie susmentionnés. Ils sont placés à 4,40 m du sol et leur lit d'attente correspond à la pointe maximale du portail de la façade. Chacun de ces corbeaux est surmonté d'un trou de boulin de section carrée ($\approx 0,26\text{--}0,28$ m). L'absence d'indices supplémentaires ne permet pas de restituer d'une façon précise le porche, qui devait, proportionnellement, être constitué de trois arches en élévation principale et couvert par une toiture en terrasse avec des solives en bois, dont témoignent les trous d'enca斯特ment dans la maçonnerie de la façade ouest du monument. Le cas de l'église de Saint-Phocas à Amioun⁶ est assez similaire à celui de Anfeh et de Hardine. Les départs de voûtes en arêtes sont encore conservés sur la paroi extérieure du mur occidental de l'église. Ils correspondaient sans doute aux supports des trois voûtes sur piliers qui devaient couvrir le porche disparu qui devançait l'église⁷. Enfin, le porche de l'église du monastère de Balamand (Belmond), représenté sur le plan de C. Enlart⁸ et où ce dernier indique avoir retrouvé les vestiges conservés dans des salles situées à l'ouest de l'église et qui furent à l'époque utilisées comme étables s'est révélé être inexistant, suite aux fouilles réalisées par la direction générale des Antiquités dans les années 1960⁹.

2.2. *Les porches partiellement conservés :*

Trois églises présentent des porches partiellement conservés. Il s'agit de l'église Saints-Jean-et-Théodore de Eddeh-Jbeil (**fig. 8-9**) celle de Habil (**fig. 10**) et enfin celle de KfarHelda¹⁰ (**fig. 11**). Du porche de l'église de Habil, il ne subsiste actuellement que le mur nord, placé perpendiculairement à la façade principale. Tel qu'il a été conservé, il a une longueur de 2,95 m pour une épaisseur de 0,85 m et une hauteur de 2,15 m. Ses trois dernières assises correspondent au départ de la voûte en berceau qui le couvrait. Du côté sud, le porche semblait prendre appui sur le rocher long de 0,65 m, situé parallèlement à son mur nord et qui s'enfonce dans la maçonnerie du mur ouest de l'église. Le porche de l'église Saints-Jean-et-Théodore de Eddeh-Jbeil est un peu mieux conservé. De ce porche, large de 1,90 m et long de 1,57 m, ne tiennent plus debout aujourd'hui que son mur nord, conservé presque sur l'ensemble de sa hauteur, égale à 2,85 m, ainsi que les deux

⁶ Enlart, *Monuments*, 35-37.

⁷ L'hypothèse de Coupel est celle d'une travée supplémentaire effondrée (Coupel, «Trois églises», 46-47, fig. 4). Toutefois, ces départs de piliers ne s'alignent pas parfaitement avec ceux du côté intérieur et semblent correspondre à une structure différente de celle d'une travée supplémentaire intérieure.

⁸ Enlart, *Monuments*, 52-53; pl. 60.

⁹ Asmar, Camille, *L'abbaye de Belmont dite Deir el Balamend*, *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, 25 (1972), p. 26.

¹⁰ À propos de l'église de KfarHelda, voir Nordigian, Levon, « Chapelles médiévales de Kfar Malkoun et de Kfar Helda », *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 66 (2015-2016) : 324-344, pp. 341-343 (aucune mention du narthex)

premières assises de son mur sud. Le départ de la voûte en berceau qui le couvrait prend naissance à 1,45 m du sol. Cette voûte était encore conservée aux débuts du XX^e s., comme le montre une photo prise par J. Delore¹¹ (**Fig. 9**) et remontant probablement à cette période. Cette photo montre le porche dans un état assez complet, notamment avec la voûte et son mur sud partiellement conservés. Enfin, à KfarHelda, l'église largement en ruines de Notre-Dame (Saydet--el-Qale') est devancée par ce qui semble être une salle large de 6,55 m. Délimitée par des murs fermés sur ses trois côtés et conservés sur des hauteurs ne dépassant pas les trois assises (0,50-0,60 m), cette salle est accessible par une porte ouverte dans son mur occidental, là où les restes du piédroit nord sont encore visibles. La paroi intérieure du mur nord de la salle présente une série de niches tandis que son intérieur est jonché de blocs de remploi, notamment des fûts de colonnes.

**Fig. 8****Fig. 9****Fig. 10****Fig. 11**

¹¹ Cf. Nordigian, Levon, « La christianisation des temples païens dans l'arrière-pays de Byblos », *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph*, 62, 2009, 149-189, p.173, fig. 27.

3. Entre porche et narthex :

L'ensemble de ces espaces devançant les églises répertoriées dans cette étude peuvent être répartis en deux types quant à leur aspect spatial : les espaces ouverts sur l'extérieur (porches) et les espaces fermés (narthex). Alors que ceux du premier type sont largement majoritaires, ceux du deuxième type ne forment qu'un petit lot de deux monuments : Saint-Charbilios de Maad et Notre-Dame de KfarHelda¹². Le narthex de Kfarhelda est en ruine totale. Il reste toutefois clair qu'il s'agit d'un espace fermé, comme le montre la présence des murs continus sur ses deux côtés nord et ouest ainsi que les traces d'une porte conservées du côté nord du mur occidental. Le cas du narthex de l'église de Maad est totalement différent. Là aussi, le volume tripartite du narthex est un ajout clair au volume basilical de l'église. Il ne communique toutefois avec cette dernière qu'à travers une porte, celle de la nef centrale et qui devait former la porte d'origine de l'église, ainsi que via une ouverture percée dans le mur commun avec la nef sud. Dans son aspect actuel, ce narthex semble dater du courant du XIX^e s¹³. Toutefois, les sources historiques confirment sa présence dès l'époque médiévale. Ainsi, le récit du Patriarche Doueihy dans son « Histoire des temps », indique qu'en 1243, une jeune femme franque prénommée Anne, fille d'un boulanger, décéda à Maad et fut enterrée dans le « dahliz » devançant l'église, « qui fut leur cimetière »¹⁴.

Contrairement aux narthex, les porches sont des volumes largement ouverts sur l'espace extérieur avec lequel ils communiquent *via* des arches qui peuvent occuper l'ensemble de la largeur d'un, deux ou bien trois de leurs côtés, notamment dans le cas des porches couverts par des voûtes d'arêtes. Leurs structures, formes et proportions seront discutées ci-dessous.

¹² Un troisième cas de narthex fermé est parfois mentionné. Il s'agit de celui de l'église Notre-Dame-du-Vent à Anfeh. Le volume d'origine byzantin de celle-ci, partiellement reconstruit à l'époque médiévale, est devancé par un ajout datant du XIII^e s., de plan carré, légèrement désaxé et qui est parfois désigné par le vocable « narthex » (Enlart, Monuments, 312-313). Toutefois, cet ajout, couvert par une voûte à arêtes, est ouvert sur toute la largeur de la nef et semble être plutôt une simple extension de cette dernière, comme nous en trouvons sur plusieurs églises du Liban plutôt qu'un vrai narthex (cf. Panayot-Haroun, Nadine *et al.* « Mission archéologique d'Enfeh. Résultats préliminaires des travaux de prospection et de fouille de 2011 à 2015 », *BAAL*, 16, 2016, 255-294, pp. 255-259).

¹³ La maçonnerie et le bossage de ses pierres ainsi que la forme décorative de sa porte surmontée d'un fronton triangulaire sont caractéristiques de l'architecture libanaise du courant du XIX^e s.

¹⁴ Tawtel, Fedinand, “al-batoryark estefanus al-Douaihy. *Tārikh al-azminah* 1095-1699”, *Al-Mashrek*, 1, 1950, 117-118, p. 118. Doueihy indique, dans ce sillage, que le père d'Anne, dit le « boulanger » aurait probablement reconstruit l'église voûtée, après que la première fut tombée en ruines.

4. La structure des porches :

Quatre types de structures et de couvrements de porches ont été identifiés : murs porteurs aux voûtes en berceau (**fig. 12**), piliers aux voûtes d’arêtes (**fig. 13-14**), piliers à dôme et enfin arcades ou piliers (?) au couvrement en terrasse (**fig. 15**). Les deux premiers types forment la majeure partie du corpus avec vingt porches composés de murs porteurs et couverts par des voûtes en berceau et quatorze composés par des piliers supportant des voûtes d’arêtes. Les deux autres types ne sont que des exceptions, fournissant deux exemples d’un porche composé de piliers supportant un dôme et trois autres composés probablement de piliers supportant une toiture en terrasse (tab 2).

	Mur porteur/Voûte en berceau	Piliers/Voûte à arêtes	Pilier/Dôme	Arcades/Toit terrasse	
Total	20	14	2	3	39
Beyrouth	0/1	0/1	1/1?	0/1	1
Jbeil	12/14	1/14	1/14	0/14	14
Batroun	5/15	8/15	0/15	2/15	15
Koura	2/7	5/7	0/7	0/7	7
Qadisha	1/2	0/2	0/2	1/2	2

Tab. 2. Les types structure/couvrement

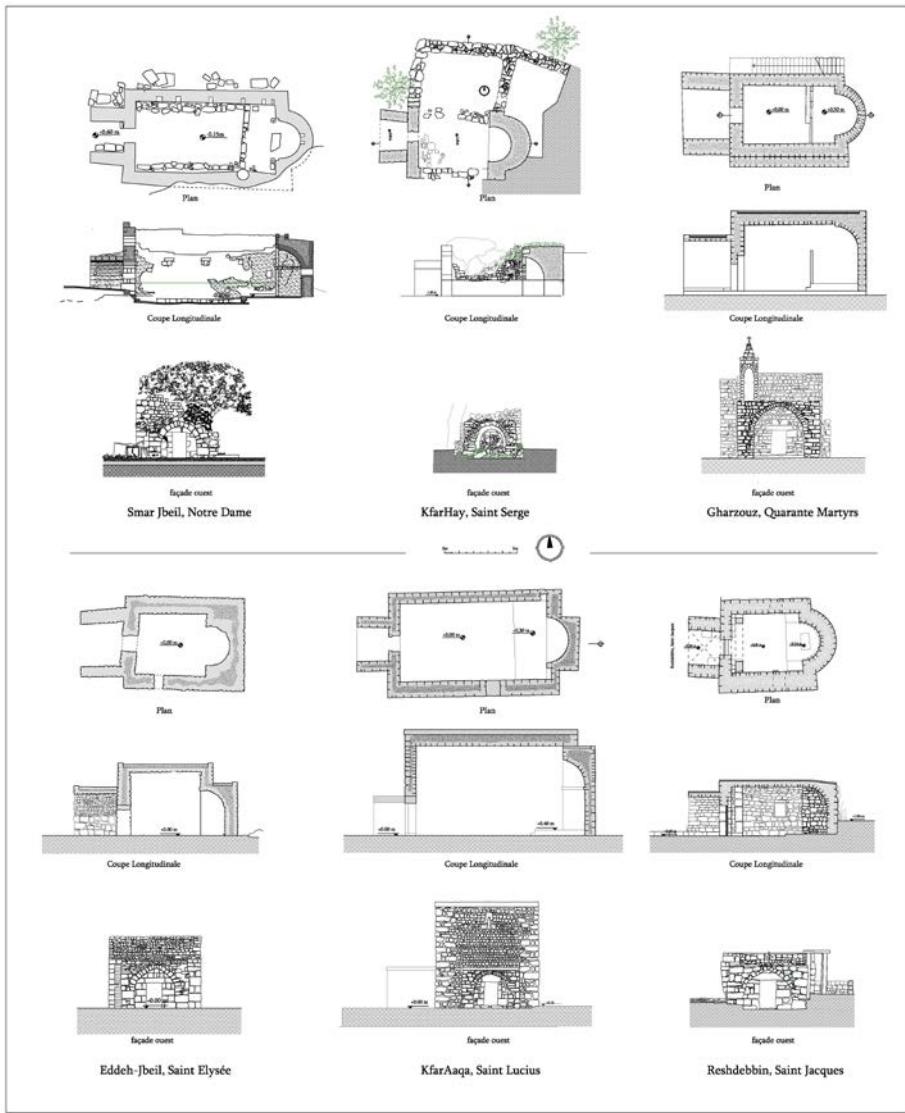


Fig. 12

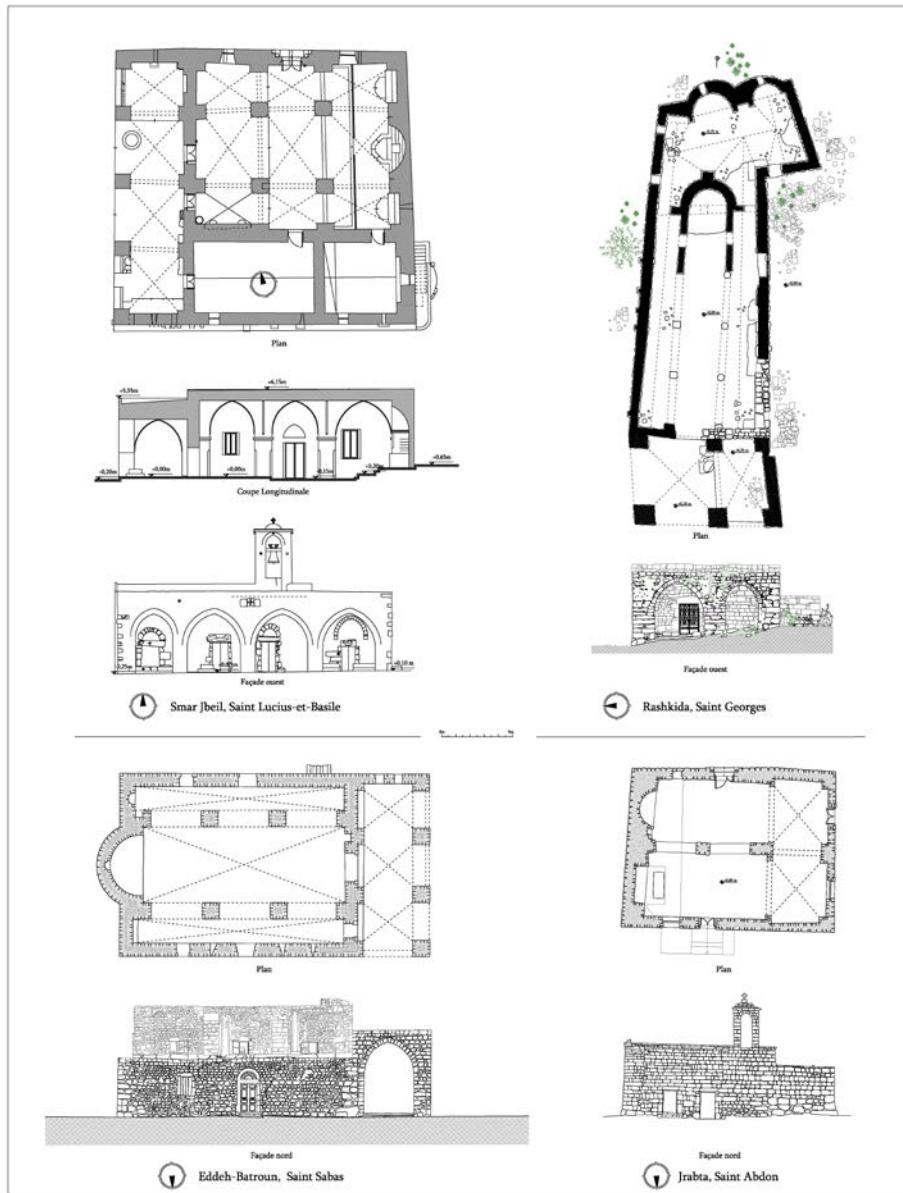


Fig. 13

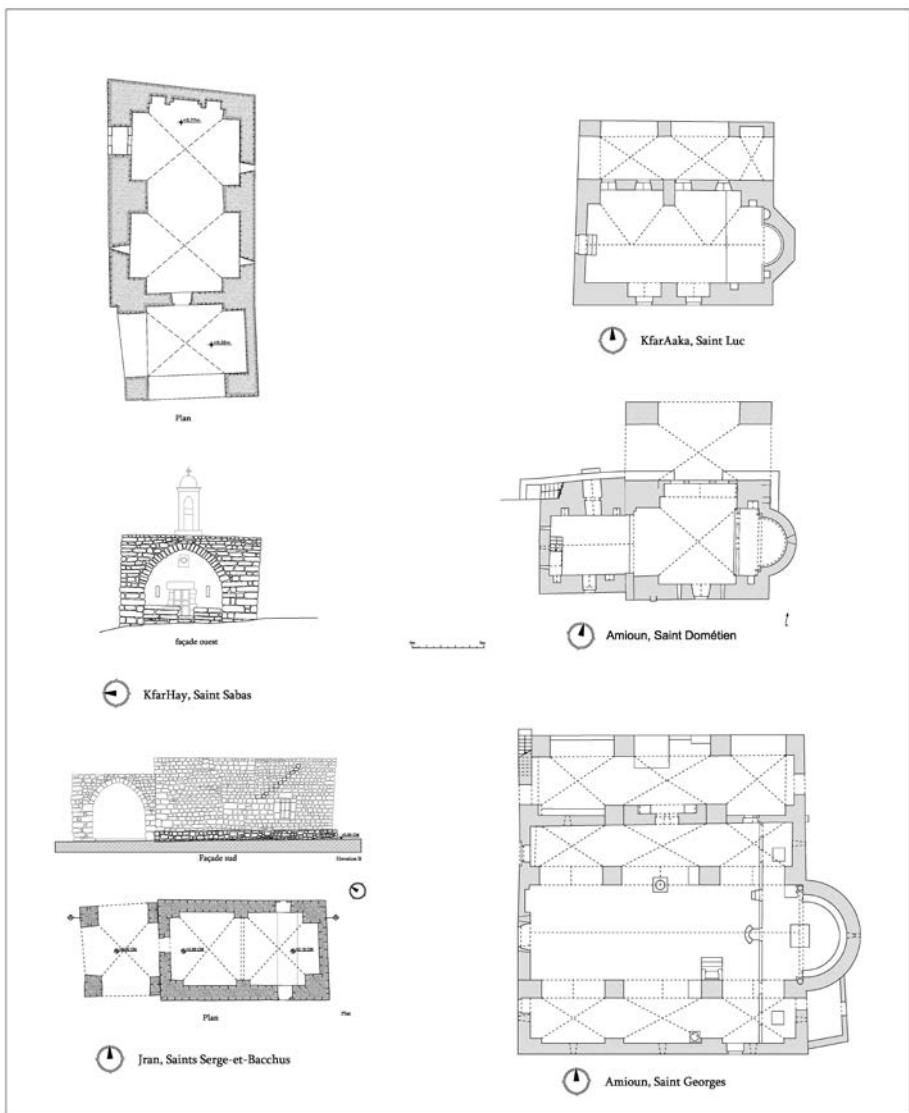
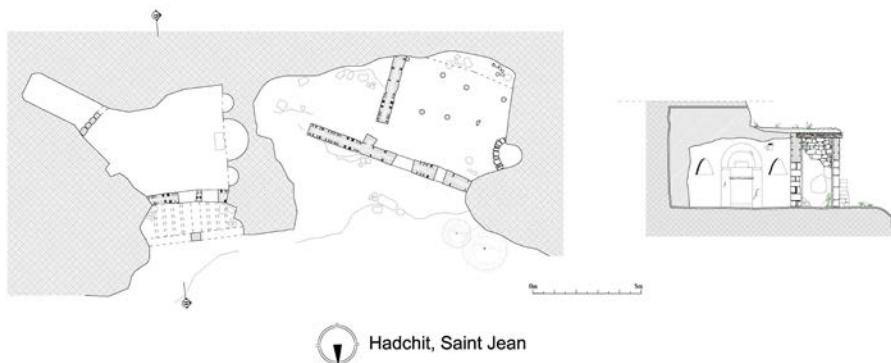


Fig. 14

**Fig. 15**

Toutefois, le rapprochement quantitatif de la distribution entre les deux premiers types ne doit pas cacher les disparités régionales. En fait, plus que la moitié des églises dont les porches sont constitués par des murs portant une voûte en berceau se concentre dans la région de Jbeil, là où ces églises forment l'écrasante majorité (83%) des églises à porche de cette région (Behdayet¹⁵ (fig. 16-17), Bejjeh¹⁶ (fig. 18), Eddeh (fig. 19), Gharzouz¹⁷ (fig. 20). Un second lot se trouve dans la région de Batroun (Batroun (fig. 21), Saint-Mames, Eddeh-Batroun (fig. 22-23), Saint-Serge de KfarHay (fig. 24), Notre-Dame de Smar Jbeil (fig. 25), tandis les restants se trouvent dans la zone de Koura (Saint-Lucius Kfaraaka) (fig. 26) et la Qadisha. Pour ce qui est des porches constitués de piliers supportant des voûtes d'arêtes, nous notons une distribution plus étalée, entre les deux districts de Batroun (où elles forment un plus que la moitié des porches de ce type ainsi que des églises de ce district, comme à Jran (fig. 27), Saint-Sabas de KfarHay (fig. 28-29) et Rachkida¹⁸ (fig. 30)) et de Koura (71% des églises de ce district, notamment Amioun (fig. 31-32) et KfarAaka (fig. 33). Quant

¹⁵ Kahwagi-Janho, «Églises doubles», 124-127; Asmar, Camille, *Christian Footprints in the Lebanon, Archaeology and History in Lebanon* 32-33, 2010-2011, p..

¹⁶ Kahwagi-Janho, «Églises doubles», pp. 134-138.

¹⁷ Davie, May (dir.), *Vingt églises et chapelles du Qornet ar-roum (pays de Jbeil) : une étude en architecture religieuse du Liban*, Koura, Université de Balamand, 2012, pp. 237-243.

¹⁸ Nordiguijan, Levon, «L'église Mar Girios (Saint-Georges) de Rachkida. Aménagements liturgiques et nouvelles peintures murales», *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 67, 2019-2020, 243-274, pp. 245-247; Makowski, Piotr, «A Preliminary Report on Polish-Lebanese Excavations at the St. George's (Mar Girgis) Church in Rachkida (Northern Lebanon)», *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* 6-2, 2019, 209-239.

aux deux types restants, ils se retrouvent pour l'un (dôme sur piliers) à Beyrouth et Jbeil (**fig. 34**) et pour les trois autres (couvrement en terrasse avec arcades) à Batroun (Koubba)¹⁹, Koura (KfarHelda) et dans la Qadisha (Hadchit) (**fig. 35-36**).



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

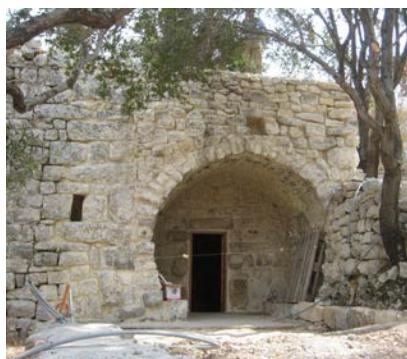


Fig. 18



Fig. 19

¹⁹ Coupel, «Trois chapelles»; Enlart, *Monuments*, 325-326 ; Salameh-Sarkis, Hassan, *Batroun et Ras al-Chaka'a dans l'histoire et l'archéologie*, Beyrouth, Presse de l'Université Libanaise, 2008, pp. 217-219.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

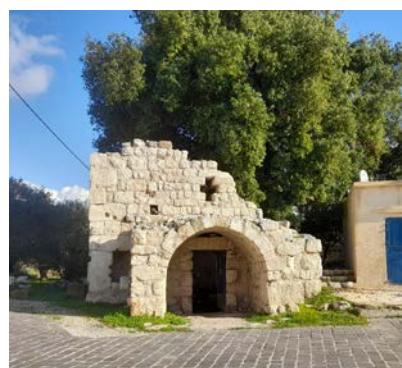


Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

5. L'ouverture des porches :

Si l'ouverture des porches à base de murs porteurs ne pouvait généralement s'effectuer que dans le seul sens axial²⁰, celle des autres types pouvait présenter une plus grande variété dans le mode de communication de ces espaces avec leur entourage. Leur mode structural leur permettant de s'ouvrir vers leurs trois côtés libres, ces porches ne prenaient pas le plus souvent avantage de cette possibilité. Ainsi, seulement la moitié de ces porches s'ouvrent de trois côtés (huit de seize), tandis que trois s'ouvrent de deux côtés (la façade principale et une façade latérale, celle du côté nord) et cinq ne s'ouvrent que sur un seul côté, celui de leur façade principale. Notons que ce dernier lot renferme certains des plus grands porches comme celui de Saints-Basile-et-Lucius de Smar Jbeil (**Fig. 37**) ou bien celui de Saint Georges de Amioun. Par ailleurs, il est intéressant de remarquer que, parmi les églises mononefs ayant des porches s'ouvrant par des arcades sur piliers, cinq de sept ont les porches qui s'ouvrent des trois côtés (les deux exceptions étant celle de Saint-Sabas de KfarHay et celle de Saint-Luc de KfarAqqa), tandis que, sur les huit églises ayant des porches s'ouvrant des trois côtés, aucune n'a un plan basilical (cinq mononefs et trois doubles).



Fig. 37

²⁰ Seule l'église de Saint Mames à Eddeh-Batroun présente une exception avec une deuxième ouverture formée de deux arches superposées se trouvant dans le mur latéral sud du porche.

6. La position des porches :

L'emplacement des porches par rapport aux volumes de leurs églises respectives varie entre une position axiale, placée le long de la façade qui fait face au sanctuaire (le plus souvent la façade occidentale) et une position latérale, placée contre un des côtés perpendiculaires à celui du sanctuaire, le plus souvent le côté nord. Les porches en position axiale forment la grande majorité avec 33 cas, soit 85% du total. Elles forment la totalité des cas de Batroun et de Jbeil (là où nous notons la seule exception de la chapelle de Saint-Siméon-le-Stylite).

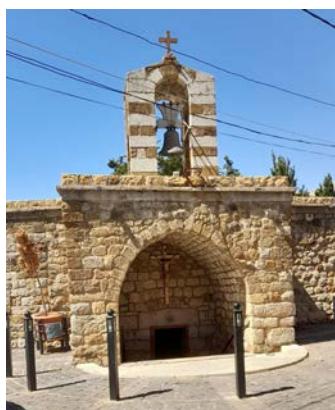


Fig. 38



Fig. 39

Les porches en position latérale sont minoritaires, avec seulement six cas. Cette position latérale est sans doute due à la position de l'église dans son contexte urbain, ou bien, dans le cas de certaines, dans son cadre naturel. Ainsi, les églises de Saint-Georges²¹ et de Saint-Domitien à Amioun, KfarAaqa (fig. 31-33) et Hasroun (fig. 38) sont coincées dans les vieux quartiers, où s'agglomèrent les habitations autour de ces monuments de sorte que les porches n'ont d'autre choix que de s'implanter le long des rues qui longent les côtés latéraux de ces églises. Dans le cas de Saint-Siméon-le-Stylite de Jbeil (fig. 39), la position du porche a été dictée par la topographie des lieux et la nécessité d'avoir une ouverture située du côté sud de la nef. Enfin, la position du porche de Saint-Jean de Hadchit est dictée par l'implantation de l'église dans le relief très accidenté de la falaise dans laquelle elle s'intègre. Voulant orienter leur église vers l'est et l'implanter au sein de la cavité rocheuse, les constructeurs n'avaient d'autre choix que de

²¹ Nordiguijan, Levon, «Quatre chapelles médiévales du Koura», *Chronos*, 24, 2011, 7-51, pp. 7-19.

positionner leur porche du seul côté libre, donnant vers la face extérieure de la grotte.

7. Rapport entre la typologie de l'église et celle du porche :

Le rapport entre la typologie de l'église et celle du porche semble être, pour des raisons avant tout fonctionnelles, bien étroit. Ainsi, les porches formés par des murs porteurs supportant une voûte en berceau sont le plus souvent associés à des églises mononefs, donc là où la largeur relativement limitée du volume de la façade principale est facilement couvrable par la portée d'une seule voûte. Sur ce point, il faudra toutefois évoquer quelques particularités quand ce type de porches est associé à des églises doubles : dans trois des cas (Saint-Nicolas – Notre-Dame de Behdaydet, Saint-Siméon et Saint-Abdon de Ain Kefaa/Bejjeh et Saints-Jean-et-Theodore de Eddeh-Jbeil), le porche est uniquement associé à une des nefs de l'église, ce qui nous ramène au cas d'une église mononef. Dans les cas de Behdaydet et de Eddeh-Jbeil, les deuxièmes nefs sont en retrait vers l'arrière et seule la nef principale se présente en façade, devancée par le porche, tandis qu'à Ain Kefaa-Bejjeh, la nef munie de porche est une addition tardive à un volume déjà existant, sans porche. La nef s'est donc posée en retrait par rapport à celle déjà existante, de sorte que le porche qui la devance s'aligne avec la façade de la première. Le cas de Habil reste aussi similaire aux trois premiers, vu qu'avec sa typologie biconque, l'église ne présente qu'une seule nef ainsi qu'une seule porte d'accès centrée au milieu de sa façade occidentale. La seule vraie exception reste donc celle de Der Bella, là où le porche s'associe à deux nefs alignées en façade. Là, les constructeurs ont pris le choix de séparer totalement les deux zones du porche, bien que ce dernier soit construit d'un seul pan, avec un mur porteur médian totalement aveugle, de sorte que chacune des deux nefs ait un porche totalement indépendant de l'autre.

À part le cas exceptionnel de Der Bella (**fig. 40**), les églises à plan double et basilical sont exclusivement associées à des structures sur piliers permettant la communication entre leurs différents compartiments, ainsi qu'avec l'extérieur, dans le cas des porches ouverts sur leurs côtés latéraux. Cette association n'est toutefois pas exclusive, pouvant comporter des occurrences en sens inverse. Ainsi, plusieurs églises mononefs (six au total) sont devancées par des porches à piliers.



Fig. 40



Fig. 41



Fig. 42



Fig. 43

8. Rapport volumétrique et structural des porches avec leurs églises :

Le rapport structural qu'entretiennent les porches avec leurs églises respectives semble varier s'il s'agit d'un porche à murs porteurs ou bien d'un porche sur piliers. La très grande majorité des porches à murs porteurs ont des structures totalement indépendantes de celles des églises leur correspondant (**fig. 41-43**). Ainsi, tous ces porches viennent s'accorder contre les façades de leurs monuments, sans qu'il y ait une quelconque connexion structurale du côté de la maçonnerie. La qualité même de la maçonnerie et la taille des blocs varient même entre le volume de l'église et celui du porche, dans la plupart des cas. L'impression globale qui s'en dégage est que ces porches ne furent jamais planifiés avec leurs monuments et qu'ils furent régulièrement ajoutés à une période ultérieure, suivant l'achèvement de la construction de leurs églises.



Fig. 44



Fig. 45

Cet aspect est plus nuancé dans le cas des porches sur piliers. Si, dans ce lot, les porches de certaines églises (Saint-Sabas de Eddeh-Batroun, Saint-Sabas de KfarHay, Saint-Georges de Rachkida...) sont clairement un ajout qui s'accole contre le mur du volume principal, dans d'autres situations il semble faire partie intégrante de ce volume. Il en est ainsi de l'église Saint-Abdon de Jrabta (**fig. 44-45**), dont la maçonnerie du porche présente une parfaite continuité avec celle de la façade nord mais non avec celle de la façade sud, dans un contexte chronologique complexe de l'évolution au cours de la construction de l'église²². Un cas similaire se présente pour l'église de Saints-Basile-et-Lucius de Smar Jbeil, où le porche est contemporain de l'ancienne église, dont le mur sud présente une parfaite continuité structurale entre la zone relative à la nef et celle relative au porche, tandis que le volume basilical, clairement plus tardif, vient s'imbriquer derrière les trois arches nord du porche²³. Cependant, ces cas de porches structurellement liés à leurs églises restent rares. Les porches des deux cathédrales franques de Beyrouth et de Byblos seraient, eux aussi, contemporains de leurs monuments respectifs.

²² La chronologie des différentes phases de la construction de cette église est un peu complexe à établir. Les coups de sabres ainsi que les variations dans la maçonnerie des divers murs mettent en évidence plusieurs phases de construction et/ou de reconstruction. En gros, le phasage se divise en une première phase liée à la présence d'un monument précédent l'actuelle église (les assises inférieures en blocs peu équarris de la façade nord), une deuxième phase liée à la construction de la nef nord, une troisième phase liée à une reconstruction du mur est et de l'angle du mur nord de cette même nef nord, une quatrième phase liée à la construction de la nef sud et enfin une cinquième phase liée à une reconstruction partielle de la nef sud, perceptible au changement de l'aspect de la maçonnerie de sa zone supérieure. Celle-ci représente une reconstruction sans doute contemporaine de l'ouverture du portail dans la façade sud, datée par une inscription insérée dans le tympan du portail de 1910. Dans cet ensemble, la construction du porche est clairement liée à celle de la nef nord, mais à aucune des phases de construction de la nef sud. Cf. Kahwagi-Janho, «Églises doubles», 119-124.

²³ La longueur de la façade principale du porche (19,40 m), composée de quatre arches, dépasse largement celle de l'ancienne église dont la façade, longue de 6,50 m, n'occupe que l'équivalent de la seule arche sud. Ce fait suscite des questionnements quant à la raison d'être de l'ensemble de ce porche sur une telle longueur.



Fig. 46

Concernant l'aspect volumétrique, à l'exception de celui du monastère de Mayfouk, l'ensemble de ces porches sont des volumes projetés qui se détachent clairement de ceux de leurs églises. Cette volumétrie est clairement différente de celle des grandes églises des XVIII^e et XIX^e s. Dans ces dernières, les porches qui devancent leurs églises respectives s'intègrent dans leur volume global, dont la hauteur permet d'avoir un étage qui s'avance au-dessus du porche pour l'englober dans le volume total²⁴. Le cas du monastère de Mayfouk²⁵ (**fig. 46**) reste exceptionnel à cet égard, vu que l'ajout du porche devant la porte d'entrée de l'église du monastère se plaçait dans le cadre d'une large addition en deux étages, le long de la façade principale du monastère. Pour le reste des porches, leur aspect projeté est généralement lié à la volumétrie et aux hauteurs relativement réduites des églises médiévales libanaises, empêchant une intégration du porche dans le volume global.

Les porches à murs porteurs ont des dimensions globales en façade plus petites que celles de la façade de l'église. Ainsi, la grande majorité de ces porches présentent des rétrécissements des deux côtés par rapport à la façade principale de l'église qu'ils devancent. Dans de rares cas, un de leurs côtés latéraux s'aligne avec celui de leur église, comme dans le cas du mur nord du porche de Der Bella, ou bien à Bejjeh, où le porche a dû prendre appui sur le volume déjà existant de la nef nord. Ces porches présentent aussi

²⁴ Ceci est aussi le cas d'une multitude d'églises médiévales d'Europe. Citons à titre d'exemple la basilique de Paray-le-Monial ou celui de Saint-Martin-d'Ainay à Lyon. Cf. Baud, Anne et Tardieu, Joëlle, *Organiser l'espace sacré au Moyen Age*, Lyon, Alpara, 2014, fig. 94 et 95. Au Liban citons les exemples des cathédrales de Saint Stéphan de Batroun, Saint Georges de Tripoli, Saint Siméon de Wadi el-Karm...

²⁵ Mouawad, Ray, « Mayfūq revisité. Le couvent de l'épée et du fourreau », *Parole de l'Orient* 26, 2001, 159-199.

le plus souvent une hauteur moindre que celle de l'église, de façon à laisser libre la zone supérieure de la façade principale dans laquelle s'ouvre la lucarne qui fait pendant à celle qui s'ouvre dans le mur de chevet, juste au-dessus de la conque de l'abside. Quant à la profondeur de ces porches, cette dimension ne dépasse les 3 m que dans de très rares cas, à l'image de celui de Der Bella, là où sa profondeur atteint les 4 m, conséquence du dédoublement du porche et de sa relative monumentalisation en accord avec le volume de l'église double dont il fait partie.

Les porches sur piliers se présentent sous un aspect plus monumental, qui est parfois lié à leur association à des églises de grande taille, très souvent de plan double ou bien basilical. L'usage de la voûte à arêtes sur piliers permet par ailleurs, d'un point de vue structural, de rehausser les volumes des églises et par conséquent ceux des porches, contrastant ainsi avec les petites chapelles aux murs porteurs et aux basses voûtes en berceau. Tout comme les porches du type précédent, ces porches ont eux aussi des hauteurs le plus souvent inférieures aux volumes de leurs églises respectives, quoique cette différence puisse devenir minimale (elle n'est que de 0,55 m pour l'église Saint-Georges de Rachkida). Par contre, leur largeur s'étire pour couvrir l'ensemble de celle de leurs églises. Leurs murs latéraux s'alignent donc avec ceux du volume principal des deux côtés pour former une parfaite continuité entre les deux volumes. La profondeur de ces porches s'élargit aussi et dépasse parfois les 6 m, comme à Rachkida. Ces profondeurs entretiennent toutefois avec les volumes de leurs églises des rapports proportionnellement moindres que ceux des porches à murs porteurs.

9. Raison d'être de ces porches :

La raison d'être des porches des églises libanaises n'a jamais été discutée d'une façon directe, bien que sa présence ne soit pas limitée au seul corpus libanais²⁶. Hors du Liban, les études sur les porches des églises médiévales en Europe ne manquent point. C'est le cas de plusieurs porches-chapelles de l'Angleterre²⁷ et de France. Dans cette dernière, le porche

²⁶ Le corpus des églises du royaume croisé de Jérusalem de Denys Pringle recense plusieurs églises ayant des porches qui les devancent. On pourrait retenir à titre d'exemple celles de Saint Marie de 'Aboud (Pringle, Denys, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. A Corpus. Volume I, A-K (excluding Acre and Jerusalem)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.19), celle de Saint Jean-Baptiste à 'Ain Karim (Pringle, *Churches*, 34), celle de 'Amwas (Pringle, *Churches*, 55), l'église de Saint Georges à Dair el-Asad (Pringle, *Churches*, 99) et celle de Gaza (Pringle, *Churches*, 212) pour n'en citer que quelques-unes.

²⁷ Cette thématique liée aux chapelles anglicanes a été largement étudiée et publiée par Lunnon, Helen, *East Anglican Church Porches and their Medieval Context*, Woodbridge-Rochester, Boydell Press, 2020.

comporte plusieurs aspects, nomenclatures et fonctions : avant-nef, galilée, westwerk, tour-porche... une multitude d'appellations qui correspond à la large diversité liée à ce dispositif qui, en Europe, semblait encore garder une fonction liturgique au Moyen Âge. Ainsi, comme le font remarquer Baud et Tardieu, le porche, qui s'inscrit dans la filiation de l'*atrium paléochrétien* [...], correspond à l'entrée dans la vie chrétienne et symbolise aussi la transition de la mort à la vie éternelle²⁸. Toujours selon Baud et Tardieu, cet espace sert parfois de zone de refuge [et de] de lieu d'attente » qui, dans les premiers siècles servait à l'instruction des catéchumènes, mais qui ensuite « devient celui des pèlerins dans l'espérance de la découverte des reliques, [...] également un espace utilisé dans le cadre d'une liturgie ambulatoire comportant des stations, des chapelles et des autels²⁹. Ainsi, dans les églises occidentales, le porche se transformait lui-même en une chapelle ou bien en abritait une. Dans un autre cas de figure, celui du porche-tour, le porche au rez-de-chaussée servait de soubassement à une chapelle installée au premier étage ou bien au clocher. Son rôle restait ainsi largement attaché à une fonctionnalité liée structuralement et/ou liturgiquement à l'édifice religieux principal. Sa monumentalité et son ornement suivaient par là cette dimension fonctionnelle et structurale.

Cet aspect des choses semble rester loin des caractéristiques du porche médiéval des églises libanaises. Si nous mettons de côté le porche de la cathédrale de Saint-Jean-Marc de Byblos, dont les trois façades sont ornées de motifs décoratifs caractéristiques de l'architecture franque en Orient, la quasi-totalité des porches libanais sont de simples espaces voûtés sans aucune décoration ou bien ornementation. Démunis de toute installation liturgique, ils ne semblent pas avoir servi à une quelconque cérémonie religieuse qui se soit déroulée d'une façon indépendante dans leur espace. De surcroît, presqu'aucun de ces espaces ne comporte une niche ou bien un aménagement qui eût permis l'installation d'une statue votive qui aurait fait l'objet d'un culte particulier. L'absence d'indices matériels est aussi relayée par la quasi-absence d'indices historiques. En effet, rares sont les sources qui mentionnent le porche des églises libanaises ou bien leur usage potentiel. L'une de ces sources est le traité du patriarche Douaihy sur l'architecture des églises maronites. Dans son commentaire de ce traité, le P. Charbel Abdallah indique que son auteur ne mentionne le porche (dahlîze) qu'une seule fois³⁰. D'après lui, c'est « un des endroits où on place la cuve baptismale ». Ce fait amène le P. Abdallah à conclure que le porche ne peut être ainsi considéré comme faisant partie de l'espace intérieur de l'église. Toutefois, le reste de la brève analyse du P. Abdallah demeura peu concluante. Ainsi, il indique que,

²⁸ Baud Tardieu, *Espace sacré*.

²⁹ Baud et Tardieu, *Espace sacré*.

³⁰ Abdallah, Charbel, *L'architecture des églises maronites. Le traité liturgique et artistique du Patriarche Douaihy*, 2 vol., Kaslik, PUSETK, 2007, pp. 593-594.

d'après Etienne Douaihy, la raison du placement de la cuve baptismale dans le porche était une coutume des premiers siècles du christianisme, période pendant laquelle les catéchumènes n'avaient pas le droit d'entrer dans l'église. Pendant cette période, le porche, désigné plutôt par « narthex », prenait une forme tantôt totalement fermée comme à l'église byzantine de Faqra³¹, tantôt ouverte par un portique comme à l'église byzantine de Ghineh³². Cet espace perd évidemment sa fonction dans les siècles qui suivent avec la disparition du paganisme, alors que la cuve baptismale est transférée à l'intérieur de l'église³³. Perdant toute fonction directement liturgique, le porche semble ainsi devenir un simple espace de transition assurant une sorte d'abri devant la porte principale de la nef, qui peut, en cas d'affluence, abriter des participants supplémentaires comme le montrent les bancs en pierre ajoutés le long des murs latéraux de certains des porches (Saint-Georges de Amioun, Saint-Nicolas de Behdaydet, Gharzouz, Smar Jbeil, Eddeh-Batroun...). Toutefois, les dimensions réduites de quelques porches, comme celui de Eddeh-Jbeil ou bien celui de Notre-Dame de Smar Jbeil, ne permettent même pas de recevoir une affluence de gens et jouerait plutôt le rôle d'un simple auvent devant la porte de l'église.

Une deuxième hypothèse liée à la présence du porche est celle de son usage pour les inhumations. D'après Baud et Tardieu, vu que la pratique de l'inhumation était canoniquement interdite à l'intérieur des églises, *se faire enterrer dans l'avant-nef apparaît comme un compromis qui rejoint la théorie de l'attente et prône une humilité souvent ostentatoire*³⁴. Cette hypothèse pourrait avoir sa place dans le contexte libanais. Toutefois, la rareté des fouilles archéologiques dans des églises à porches entrave sa confirmation aussi bien que son infirmation. Le cas le plus évident est celui du narthex de l'église de Maad. La tombe de la dame franque qui occupe l'angle nord-ouest du narthex semble être l'unique inhumation avérée. Toutefois, le récit du patriarche Douaihy indique que le narthex était devenu « leur » cimetière, le pronom « leur » étant relatif à l'ensemble de la famille de la défunte franque. Par ailleurs, le prêtre Basbous († 1901), originaire du village de Maad et qui a laissé un manuscrit relatif à l'histoire du village et de l'église, indique que la tombe était devenue celle de sa propre famille et établit une liste de ses aïeuls inhumés dans cette tombe³⁵.

³¹ Dounceel-Voûte, Pauline, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban : décor, archéologie et liturgie*, 2 vol. (Louvain : Département d'Archéologie et d'histoire de l'art, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1988).

³² Chéhab, Maurice, « Église de Ghiné », in *Mosaïques du Liban. Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, 14, 1958, 141-164.

³³ Abdallah, *Églises maronites*, 593-594.

³⁴ Baud et Tardieu, *Espace sacré*.

³⁵ Basbous, Youhanna, *Manuscrit n. 57* (Beyrouth : Bibliothèque Orientale, Beyrouth, s.d), p. 57.

À part l'église de Maad, les deux cas d'églises à porches de Behdaydet et Eddeh-Jbeil, fouillées récemment dans la cadre d'une mission hongro-libanaise³⁶, ont été révélateurs à ce propos : tandis que l'église de Saint-Nicolas et Notre-Dame de Behdaydet a révélé des inhumations aussi bien dans la nef que dans le porche, celle de Saints-Jean-et-Théodore a livré des inhumations dans la nef, le porche étant en tout cas trop exigu pour recevoir des sépultures. Toutefois, l'inhumation du porche de l'église de Behdaydet, correspondant à une tombe collective relativement récente et qui semble remonter à la famine de 1914, ne peut être mise en relation directe avec la construction du porche, sept siècles plus tôt, alors qu'aucune tombe médiévale n'a été mise au jour dans le porche. Ainsi, si l'inhumation médiévale dans le narthex de l'église Maad peut se placer dans le cadre de la tradition occidentale de faire enterrer ses morts dans le porche, cette pratique est loin d'être vérifiée au Liban dans l'état actuel de nos connaissances.

Pour conclure, il semble donc évident que le porche médiéval libanais avait perdu tout rôle liturgique qu'avait son ancêtre, le narthex byzantin, en se transformant en un simple espace formant un abri pour les visiteurs de l'église. Ce fait expliquerait par ailleurs la rareté de ce dispositif, due à l'absence de toute fonction qui le rendrait essentiel dans l'architecture des églises, si bien que sa présence n'est plus qu'une commodité additionnelle devant la nef.

10. Conclusion :

En conclusion, l'architecture du porche médiéval libanais présente une grande unité dans son aspect spatial, architectural et décoratif. À part quelques cas qui présentent des variantes insolites d'un point de vue structural (Hadchit) ou bien architectural (Byblos, Maad, KfarHelda), les porches des églises libanaises, par leur structure et leur couvrement, se divisent en deux grands lots : ceux qui se fondent sur une structure à murs porteurs, couverts par une voûte en berceau brisé et ceux qui se fondent sur des piliers, couverts par des voûtes à arêtes. La position des porches est aussi généralement standardisée, se plaçant dans l'axe central de la nef, à l'exception de quelques rares cas, notamment dans la région de Koura et de la Qadisha. D'un point de vue volumétrique, il faudra noter que, globalement, les porches présentent un volume rectangulaire ou carré ouvert sur l'extérieur, à l'exception de quelques situations où le porche se rapproche plus du narthex byzantin fermé comme à Maad et KfarHelda. Comme il s'accorde au volume principal de l'église dont il se distingue par une hauteur et parfois une largeur plus réduites, le volume du porche est le plus souvent

³⁶ La mission archéologique s'est déroulée dans le cadre d'un projet de restauration d'un ensemble d'églises historiques financé par le gouvernement hongrois et exécuté conjointement par l'Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik (USEK) et Paznamy Peter Catholic University (PPCU).

un ajout clair qui ne présente aucun lien structural avec celui de l'église, ce qui se rattache à la question de la rareté de sa présence sur les églises médiévales à l'aube de la période ottomane. Cette rareté va de soi avec le fait que le porche semble avoir perdu toute fonction liturgique propre à son ancêtre, le narthex de l'époque byzantine, ou même aux porches contemporains d'Europe, qui servaient encore comme chapelles et espaces d'inhumation. Rares sont les cas libanais où le porche gardât encore une fonction funéraire comme à Maad, fait intimement lié à sa construction et son usage par une communauté franque installée dans le village. Ainsi, le porche médiéval libanais ne semble être qu'un simple espace d'abri et de transition entre la nef et l'espace extérieur, dont la présence est devenue très largement optionnelle dans l'architecture religieuse chrétienne du Moyen Âge au Liban.

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Image of the Snake-Dragon in the Architectural Decoration of the Christian Churches of the Medieval Period *

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Abstract: *The article focuses on the evolution of the image of the snake in the architectural decoration of the Christian churches in Caucasus during the medieval period. The origins of the image in the more ancient cultures of the Mesopotamia and of the Mediterranean world are studied. An attempt is made to trace the continuity in the image and meaning of the snake from ancient times up to the present day (according to ethnography and folk art). A rare iconographic type of a snake was revealed, which appears in the Middle Byzantine period in the remote mountainous regions of the Caucasus (the upper reaches of the Ksani and Liakhvi rivers, Racha, Svaneti, Upper Kartli).*

Keywords: snake, dragon, architectural decoration, Caucasus, medieval period.

The image of a serpent (or dragon) is quite common in canonical Christian art throughout its history. The plot of serpent fighting has become a textbook when a holy warrior (or warrior-rider) defeats (tramples) a snake, which is the embodiment of evil forces. The serpent is also usually depicted in the plot of the expulsion from paradise. Compositions of these two types are widely used in early Christian art both in the Roman Empire and Byzantium, and in the Caucasus. As L. Mikaelyan, the author of a recent study on dragon-serpents in medieval plastic art of Armenia, notes: "In the medieval sculpture of Armenia, images of dragons (serpents) are first found on stelae of the 7th century BC in scenes with holy warriors trampling

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snakes”¹. Resembling images are found in a similar situation (on steles) on the territory of Georgia².

However, in the post-iconoclastic period (VIII - IX centuries) (and this is typical both for the territory of the Byzantine Empire and for neighboring Christian states, including those located in the Caucasus), “a fundamental change takes place in the manner of perception and understanding of the surrounding art objects. The reasons for this change should obviously be sought in the transition from the worldview inherited from classical Antiquity to the medieval way of thinking. Starting from this era, the message that these images carried began to change. Being perceived as a receptacle of protective powers, they began to attribute the value of a talisman, as evidenced by the numerous texts and treatises on magic written during this period. The presence [of various zoomorphic images] in architectural plastics such as slabs of the altar barrier or ciborium arches, doors, lintels, floors or facades of churches, as well as on seals and on ceramic dishes, well confirms this function”³. The same transformations took place, apparently, with the image of the dragon-serpent. Along with the canonical images of this creature, which are found throughout the history of Christian art (including in the Caucasus: Expulsion from Paradise (Akhtamar), Baptism (miniatures of the XIII-XV centuries))⁴, there appear (starting from the X century) “heraldic compositions with dragons (serpents) with human faces (Tatev, Kars) or animal heads (Ani) in the center, in which the archaic function of dragons as satellites of the luminaries, guardians of power, structures was rethought”⁵.

According to the observations of L. Mikaelyan (with regard to Armenian monuments, although, probably, the same trend characterizes the art of neighboring Georgia), “the apotropaic significance of dragons is most fully expressed in the sculpture of the 13th century. Such examples are found mainly above the entrances and windows of church and secular buildings (Ani, Akhtala, Arinj)”⁶. In her article, the researcher published a complete dossier of images of dragon-serpents (as well as paired dragons woven

¹ Mikaelyan L., “Image of dragon-snake in sculpture of Armenia X – XIV centuries: iconography and symbolic aspects in context of Christian culture.” in *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019 (in Armenian), p. 410.

² Dadiani T., Khundadze T., Kvachadze E. Medieval Georgian Sculpture. Tbilisi, 2017. P. 61. Il. 83.

³ Vanderheyde C. La sculpture byzantine du IX au XV siècle. Contexte. Mise en oeuvre. Décors. Paris, 2020. P. 202.

⁴ Mikaelyan, L., “Image of dragon-snake... p. 410.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mikayelyan, Lilit Sh. Various Aspects of the Image of a Dragon-serpent in Armenian and South-Caucasian Sculpture of the 7th–14th Centuries. Actual Problems of Theory and History of Art: Collection of articles. Vol. 11. Eds A. V. Zakharova, S. V. Maltseva, E. Iu. Staniukovich-Denisova. — St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Univ. Press, 2021, (in English), pp. 232 – 243.

together, animals with dragon tails, scenes of a dragon fighting or a snake with an animal (Ishkhan, Makaravank) on medieval monuments originating from the territory of Armenia)⁷.



II. 1



II. 2

Let us supplement this corpus with some images from the territories of Georgia and the Republic of South Ossetia. So, two snakes, whose bodies are wrapped in a ring, are presented on both sides of a slit-like window in the

⁷ Ibid.

eastern part of the vestibule in Sagamo (X century)⁸ (Il. 1). A snake with a round object is depicted on a slab inserted into the masonry of the eastern facade in Pavnisi (X century)⁹ (Il. 2). A snake, whose body forms a small ring in the middle of its length, is depicted next to bunches of grapes on an impost at the door of the southern pastophorium in Shangli (X century)¹⁰ (Il. 3). At a later time, the snake is shown in a zigzag pattern on the capitals of the niche of the southern wall of the porch in Dmanisi Zion (XIII century)¹¹ (Il. 4).



II. 3

⁸ Dadiani T., Khundadze T., Kvachadze E. Medieval Georgian Sculpture... P. 129. Il. 208.

⁹ Ibid. P. 157. Il. 304.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 188. Il. 401.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 297. p. 619.



II. 4

The earliest depiction of a two-headed serpent with an animal muzzle and a body curled into two rings appears on the upper casing of a window from a church in Nadarbazev (X century)¹² (Il. 5). A similar snake (with two heads), curled up into a ring, is shown as part of the composition “Jonah in the belly of a whale” on a fragment of a lining located nearby a church in Kvaisa (X century)¹³ (Il. 6).

Images of dragons with animal muzzles and bodies twisted into rings are also found in the art of the Byzantine Empire. As K. Vanderheide notes, “this monster rarely adorns Middle Byzantine sculpture, but images of a dragon with an elongated tongue and a snake’s body become more frequent in the 13th century as evidenced by the sculptures at Pelion in Greece, which betray oriental influences that have become popular, perhaps through the

¹² Mepisashvili, R., Tsintsadze, V., “Architecture of the mountainous part of the historical province of Georgia – Shida-Kartli.” Tbilisi, 1975. (in Russian). P. 80. Il. 70.

¹³ Ibid. p. 84. Il. 74.

medium of textiles”¹⁴. A similar observation regarding sculptural decoration in Armenia was made by Mikaelyan, noting that the apotropaic significance of dragons is most fully expressed in the sculpture of the 13th century¹⁵.



II. 5



II. 6

¹⁴ Vanderheyde C. La sculpture byzantine... pp. 207-208.

¹⁵ Mikaelyan L., “Image of dragon-snake... p. 410.



II. 7

Images of dragon-serpents of various types were especially popular in the Caucasus. Another evidence of this is the non-standard iconography of the prophet Jonah, who was being absorbed by a sea monster, which developed in this region. In its most complete form, an unusual interpretation of this plot is recorded on a limestone block round in cross section (perhaps it was the base of the column) from Dranda (now kept in the collection of the Church-Archaeological Museum of the Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia in New Athos) (X century)¹⁶ (Il. 7, 8). The quality of the execution of this scene, as well as some stylistic parallels (compared with the slabs of the altar barrier from the village of Olginskoe and two lost slabs from Dranda)¹⁷ allow us to consider this relief the work of Byzantine masters, possibly related to the sculptural workshops of Greece (the circle of Osios Loukas and Thebes (X c.)).

From an iconographic point of view, the depicted scene is unusual in that in this case the whale is shown twice, as if encircling the block. The tail of one animal ends at the muzzle of its counterpart. In one case, the torso of the prophet Jonah with raised arms is visible in the whale's mouth, in the second, his legs disappear into it. In this case, the whale is presented as a hybrid creature. It resembles a fish with a scaly body and tail (the scales are

¹⁶ Endoltseva E. Y., *Architectural decoration of Abkhazia in the period of the Abkhazian kingdom VIII – XI centuries*. Moskva, 2020. pp. 260-267.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 260.

depicted by large diagonal stepped lines that form an acute angle on the imaginary line denoting the middle of the fish's body along its entire length). It has a toothy mouth with fangs, sharp predatory ears, round, protruding eyes, stylized wings (shown by parallel vertical notches in the upper body near the head), clawed lion paws. Such hybrid creatures are often found in the ornamentation of Christian churches of the Middle Ages in Transcaucasia. For example, a similar creature, in which the resemblance to the Sasanian "senmury"¹⁸ is captured, is depicted in the scene of the swallowing of the prophet Jonah by a whale on the southern facade of the church of St. Cross on Akhtamar island (X century). Apparently, this kind of hybrid mythological creatures, the images of which were especially common in the decorative and applied art of the Islamic period, penetrated to neighboring Christian peoples due to the rapid development of cities and trade¹⁹. As Z. Hakobyan and Mikaelyan rightly point out, hybrid mythological creatures of this kind began to be especially common on the monuments of Transcaucasia during the High Middle Ages²⁰.



II. 8

¹⁸ Hakobyan Z., Mikayelyan L. The Senmury and Other Mythical Creatures with Sasanian Iconography in the Medieval Art of Armenia and Transcaucasia// Fabulous Creations and Spirits in Ancient Iran. Proceedings of a Workshop held on May 3d 2016 at the Near Eastern Department, University of California, Berkley. Bologna, 2018. pp. 39-77.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 41.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 44.

It is interesting that, starting from the period of iconoclasm, hybrid mythological creatures, in particular the Senmury, are often depicted not only in Transcaucasia, but throughout the entire Christian world – from Byzantium to Western Europe²¹. On the facade of the church of St. Cross on Akhtamar in the iconographically traditional scene “The Swallowing of Jonah by the Whale”, the whale is shown in the same way as on the relief from Dranda: it has a fish tail and scales, a toothy mouth, sharp ears, wings and clawed paws.

The episode from the story of the prophet Jonah is one of the rarest iconographic examples. It is interesting that on the earliest Christian monuments (the turn of the 3rd-4th centuries) a scene with the image of the prophet Jonah being swallowed by a whale already appears. From the very beginning of its history, two different iconographic versions can be recorded in art.

In one case, for example, on a Roman sarcophagus²² from the end of the 3rd century, the story of the prophet Jonah is shown in two scenes (he is thrown from the ship, and he lies in the belly of a monster). This type of image of this plot on the monuments of Christian art was widespread not only in the Early, but also in the High Middle Ages (for example, numerous Roman sarcophagi of the 4th century²³, the Ravenna diptych of the 6th century, the southern facade of the Church of St. Cross on the island of Akhtamar and many others).

In the second case (that is, in what we see on a fragment of the altar barrier from Dranda), the moment of the absorption of the prophet by the sea monster and his expulsion from the womb is simultaneously shown. The toothy mouth of a whale is presented twice. From one sticks out the torso of Jonah with raised arms, from the other – only his legs. The earliest depiction of this type is found, for example, in Asia Minor in the 3rd century BC. (280-290 years, pair sculpture from the Cleveland Museum of Art)²⁴. Thus, the iconographic origins of the image of the prophet Jonah on a fragment of the altar barrier from Dranda originate in the early Christian art of Hellenistic ambience.

It is interesting that this iconography was developed in the 10th century precisely in the Caucasus. For example, a part of the composition in question (the torso of Jonah sticking out of the mouth of a whale with raised

²¹ Ibid. p. 47.

²² Bovini, G. Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. I. Rom und Ostia. Textband und Tafelband / G. Bovini, H. Brandenburg. Wiesbaden, 1967. № 35.

²³ Ibid. № 11, 44, 77, 770.

²⁴ Dudochnik, B. N., “About the image of “whale” of prophet Jonas in the frescoes of Andrej Rublev and Daniil in the cathedral of Dormition in Vladimir and in the miniatures of Evangile of Hitrovo group.” *Unknown masterpieces. New discoveries. Digest of scientific articles to jubilee of the Museum named after Andrej Rublev*. Moskva, 2017 (in Russian), p. 123.

arms) is on the southern facade of the temple in Khakhuli (X century)²⁵ and at the top of the window from Beris-sakdari (X century)²⁶. Moreover, in both cases, the interpretation of the whale is closer to the Akhtamar sample (the head of the beast, the toothy mouth and paws). In another example, originating from the territory of modern South Ossetia, the monster is shown as a two-headed snake, curled up into a ball. On a limestone slab from Kvais Jvari (X century), in the mouth of one of his heads, the torso of the prophet Jonah with upraised arms is visible, in the mouth of the other – the legs of the prophet. Unlike the image from Dranda, in this case the snake is shown more realistically. It lacks predator fangs, wings, and clawed feet²⁷. The same double-headed serpent is also shown on the lost lower framing of a window from the eastern facade from Joisubani (Racha, 10th century)²⁸ (Il. 9). It is interesting that the same two-headed toothed serpent, coiled in a ring in the middle of its length, is shown already without the prophet Jonah on the upper casing of the window from Nadarbazev (X century). In the latter case, the snake clearly acts as apotropaea (as evidenced by its location – above the window). This is obviously one of the earliest depictions of this type. Thus, it can be stated that the emphasis on the image of a snake (as part of a composition or separately) appears first of all on monuments from the territory of the mountainous regions of the upper reaches of the Ksani and Liakhvi, Upper Kartli, and Racha. It is on this territory (along with a group of reliefs from Abkhazia) that the appearance of zoomorphic images in the 10th century, made in a characteristic flat-graphic style with hybrid features, is recorded²⁹. The territory of their distribution as a whole coincides with the distribution area of the ancient Koban-Colchian cultural and historical community. It is even possible that the originality of this group of reliefs “is precisely due to the influence of traditional culture in the territories that were most active in the revival of artistic life in Western and Central Transcaucasia after the devastating Arab conquests”³⁰.

This fully applies to the images of snakes. Indeed, as noted by A.Yu. Skakov at the round table dedicated to traditional beliefs in the Caucasus (held on December 18, 2020 at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences), “the image of a snake is one of the most characteristic for the ancient art of the Caucasus and, especially, for the art of the Koban-Colchis cultural and historical community. There are two ways to

²⁵ Aladashvili, N. A., Monumental sculpture of Georgia. Figurative reliefs of V – XI centuries. Moscow, 1977. (in Russian). Il. 118.

²⁶ Mepisashvili, R., Tsintsadze, V., “Architecture of mountainous part... p. 67, il. 57.

²⁷ Aladashvili, N. A., Monumental sculpture... p. 81 – 86. Il. 69.

²⁸ Dadiani T., Khundadze T., Kvachadze E. Medieval Georgian Sculpture... p. 149. Il. 276.

²⁹ Endoltseva, E. Y., Skakov, A. Y., “Zoomorphic images in the architectural decoration of Caucasus IX – XI centuries.” *Vestnik PSTGU. Voprosi istoriji I teoriji hristianskogo iskusstva*. Vip. V (37). Moskva, 2020, pp. 9 -28. (in Russian).

³⁰ Ibid. p. 22.

reconstruct the mythological representations associated with it (given that the ethno-linguistic affiliation of the carriers of this community is unknown to us): to collect and generalize the entire set of mythologemes characteristic of the image of a snake on the territory of Eurasia (usually researchers go this way) or to analyze the reflection of the snake mythologeme in epic and folklore (and hence in mythology) of the three ethnic areas of the modern Caucasus, corresponding to the three main regions of the Koban-Colchis community. These are the Abkhazians, Kartvelians and Ossetians. In our opinion, the analysis of the mythologems identified for these three areas can lead to mythological images characteristic of the ancient population of the Caucasus. The snake acts as a guardian and distributor of water, while water can be its element, or it can be hostile to it. The snake acts as a kidnapper of girls (or as a groom), or an absorber of girls, but being eaten/ swallowed by a snake is not tantamount to death. Also, characteristic are the motif of the snake's dream (symbolizing the transition from world to world), the fiery nature of the snake, its connection with the wind, the inferiority (non-integrity) associated with another world, the duality or androgyny of the snake (it can act both in a female and in a male role). The image of the snake is based on a system of binary oppositions and has the ability to bifurcate, which is the reason for the story about the struggle of two snakes. Another function of the serpent is a means of transportation, a bridge between worlds, with which the image of the celestial serpent is associated. The serpent also has the ability to provide a valuable gift, and this gift was probably originally a gift of immortality”³¹.

Evidence of a special veneration of snakes is also found in the South Caucasus, starting from ancient times. Suffice it to recall the snake-like ornaments of sacred significance in the Shengavit culture³², on the ceramics of the Bronze and Iron Age from the territory of Armenia³³, the images of

³¹ Skakov, A. Y., “Obrazi zmei, ljagushki i ribi v mifologiji drevnego naselenija Kavkaza (kobano-kolhidskaja kulturno-istoricheskaja obsnosnost epohi rannego zeleza) [Images of the snake, frog and fish in the mythology of the ancient population of Caucasus (Cobano-Colchis cultural historical community of the Early Iron Age)]// ALLON. K 60-letiju zasluzennogo dejatelja nauki RYO professora Y. A. Dzitsojti: kollektivnaja monografija (Moskva 2021 – Tshinval 2021). Kollektivnaja monografija. [Allon. To the 60 jubilee of the honored personality of science of the Republic of the Southern Ossetia professor Y. Dzitsojti: collective monograph (Moscow 2021 – Tschinval 2021). Collective monograph]/ ed. A. Skakov, I. Skakova. Moskva, 2021. (in Russian). p. 101.

³² Azizjan, A., “Snake-like ornaments on the ceramics of Shengavit culture.” *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019, pp. 274-281. (in Armenian).

³³ Engibarjan, N., “Snake ornament on the ceramics of the Bronze and Iron Age periods in Armenia: II millennium – beginning of I millennium BC.” *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019, pp. 282-288. (in Armenian).

snakes on the ritual axes of the Bronze Age³⁴, the sacred statues-vishaps, the images of snake-dragons in Urartian iconography³⁵, and more.



II. 9

³⁴ Gevorkjan, A., “Image of snake-vishap in ancient bronze”. *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019, pp. 289-293. (in Armenian).

³⁵ Engibarjan, N., “Dragon-snake in Urartian iconography.” *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019, pp. 295-303. (in Armenian).

Echoes of such ideas are also found in folklore. So, “in the folk art of Ossetians, the snake is presented as the keeper (giver) of vitality”³⁶. Snake skin is used as an amulet in the traditional culture of Armenians³⁷. Vishaps are depicted as amulets on homespun carpets³⁸, snakes – in patterns of embroidery³⁹ and jewelry⁴⁰. Similar ideas about the snake as a talisman are obviously reflected in the architectural decoration of later temples. For example, on the eastern facade of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Sagareio (XVII-XVIII centuries) in the heraldic composition, two snake-dragons with second heads on their tails are represented⁴¹. A serpent-dragon with wings and a body writhing in a ring in the middle of its length is also depicted on the eastern facade of the church in Kintsvisi (XVII century)⁴².

Thus, the spread of images of dragon-serpents in the architectural decoration of Christian churches in the Caucasus (with the exception of snake-fighting motifs), starting from the Middle Ages, is probably associated with a special veneration of these creatures in traditional culture, the origins of which can be traced back to the most ancient local archaeological cultures. These images clearly had an apotropaic significance. It is important to note that single images of snakes already had a certain established iconography, which is closest to the images of dragons. In this capacity, they appear in the Southern Caucasus not earlier than the 13th century (framing the window of the southern facade of the church in Akhtala, for example)⁴³. “In these compositions, the animals follow contemporary Seljuk patterns. Paired dragons, as a rule, are given intertwined, often with twisted, knotted bodies, with an animal head and open mouth (Vanstan, Tigran Onents, Nor Varagavank). Such animal iconography, especially in the case of Islamic winged dragons with paws, definitely echoes the images of ancient sea monsters and the Sasanian senmurv”⁴⁴.

However, in more remote mountainous regions (the upper reaches of the Ksani and Liakhvi rivers, Racha, Svaneti, Upper Kartli), on the territory that approximately coincides with the area of distribution of the Koban-

³⁶Chibirov, L. A., *Traditsionnaja duhovnaja kultura osetin* [Traditional spiritual culture of Ossetians]. Moskva, 2008. (in Russian). p. 175.

³⁷ Davidova, G., “Snake in Armenian traditional medicine.” *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019, pp. 206-214. (in Armenian).

³⁸ Pogosjan., A., “About questions of origins and typology of classical vashapagorgov.” *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019, p. 323. (in Armenian).

³⁹ Bazejan, K., “Snake-dragon in Armenian broidery of XVIII – XIX centuries.” *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019, pp. 333-334. (in Armenian).

⁴⁰ Pogosjan, A., “Snake-like ornaments in Armenian national costume and jewelry.” *Vishap on the frontier of fairytale and reality*. Erevan, 2019, pp. 343-344. (in Armenian).

⁴¹ Dadiani T., Khundadze T., Kvachatadze E. Medieval Georgian Sculpture... p. 336. Il. 689.

⁴² Ibid. p. 338. Il. 693.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 287. Il. 577.

⁴⁴ Mikaelyan, L., “Image of dragon-snake... p. 410.

Colchis cultural and historical community, images of dragons as apotropaeus in the outer facing of temples appear already in X century (Nadarbazev). A special attitude towards the image of the serpent is also manifested in the fact that in the scenes depicting Jonah in the belly of a whale, the sea monster is shown not as a hybrid of a senmury and a dragon (following the Sasanian tradition), but as a two-headed serpent (without paws). It is possible that this feature is due to the influence of an older tradition, which is associated with the sacralization of the snake on the territory of the Koban-Colchis cultural and historical community.

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[Images of snake, frog and fish in mythology of the ancient population of Caucasus (Cobano-Colchis cultural historical community of the Early Iron Age)]// *ALLON. K 60-letiju zasluzennogo dejatelja nauki RYO professora Y. A. Dzitsojti: kollektivnaja monografija (Moskva 2021 – Tshinval 2021). Kollektivnaja monografija.* [Allon. To the 60 jubilee of the honored personality of science of the Republic of the Southern Ossetia professor Y. Dzitsojti: collective monograph (Moscow 2021 – Tschinval 2021). Collective monograph]/ ed. A. Skakov, I. Skakova. Moskva, 2021. (in Russian).

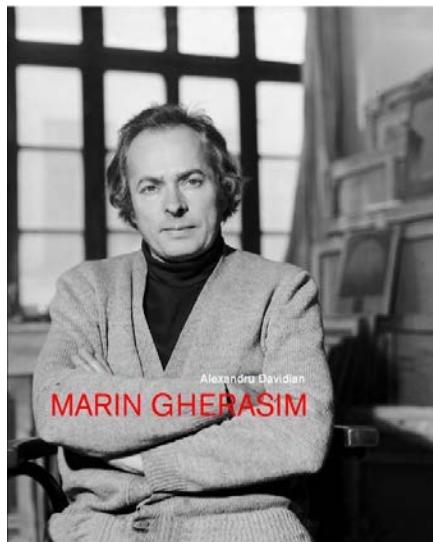
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BOOK REVIEWS

A Great Romanian Artist: Marin Gherasim

Adrian Stoleriu*

Alexandru Davidian, *Marin Gherasim*, Vellant, Bucharest, 2019, 440 pages



“Vellant” Publishing House offers a new book to the public who loves art and beauty; this time, it is the work of an important representative of the autochthonous creation of the last decades of the last century: the painter Marin Gherasim (1937-2017). The volume signed by Alexandru Davidian was printed in 2019, being a consistent monography of 440 pages, minutely worked upon, enriched with relevant texts and expressive images.

Even if the deep mark that he left in the history of Romanian Art is obvious, it is never too much to remind people who Marin Gherasim was, an artist of inner depth and rich feelings whose life and career offered an unforgettable example for the generations of artists that came after him. In this respect, the work of Mr. Davidian can be considered a well-deserved tribute, an invitation to remember the artist and it is the necessary way to underline the creation of an artist who is a benchmark at the end of the 20th century.

The rich monography is structured in four distinct parts, *Trepte împotriva uitării [Steps Against Oblivion]*, *Desen și Pictură [Drawing*

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and Painting], Repere biografice [Biographic Frames] and Bibliografie selectivă [A Selective Bibliography], each of them having a specific importance in the process of chronological sketching of the human and artistic portrait of the one who was Marin Gherasim, a painter whose personality is organically linked to the subtle expression of the dissent against the regime and of the official art during the communist period.

The author starts his work by launching a forget-me-not request, suggestively naming the first chapter *Trepte împotriva uitării [Steps Against Oblivion]*, describing important details of the beginning of the artist and of his development phases, from the miracle of childhood on the fields of Bucovina, he claims to be the son of a priest – this fact will essentially mark his artistic future, including the moment of admission to the Institute of Arts “Nicolae Grigorescu” from Bucharest. All these evolutive phases took place during the ferocious oppression of the communist regime against everything connected to religion and faith in God. What is interesting is the fact that the quality of student of the future great artist already predicted the attitudes and the ideological fights that he had against the oppressive anti-religious totalitarian system. He also lacked the support and understanding of professor Angheluță who remarked his student's relative early detachment compared to his colleagues, among whom some of them remained tributary to their master for a long time. This is the moment when the personality of Marin Gherasim receives a specific shape and it becomes stronger, also due to the fact that he had a series of important meetings with the cultural personalities of that time. Alexandru Davidian mentioned seven of the people that shaped the personality of the great artist, among them we mention Petru Comarnescu, Catul Bogdan, Ion Țuculescu, Paul Gherasim, Ernest Bernea, Nicolae Steinhardt and Sofian Boghiu. Distinct, powerful and remarkable personalities, but different regarding their vision, ideals and ways of expression; their common ground was their Christian spirituality that Marin Gherasim would bring forward through his creation.

All these personalities left the seed of deep faith in the sensitive soil of the artist Marin Gherasim; this was the basis of his powerful painting that proved to be a true ”messenger of hope” during the long period of oppression and quasi-total control on the act of creation. Marin Gherasim transferred the following elements to his paintings: the absolute spirit, mythology, history, the return to archeology, divinity

and hope, thus finding the uprightness of meeting his own self during the act of painting, as a form of his love for people, perceived from the Christian perspective. His artistic effluvia thus flooded several cycles of works, such as Proteic, Urban I, Urban II or Drumul I [The Road I] and Drumul II [The Road II]. Above all these creations, what the works of the artist Marin Gherasim transmit is a specific persistence of the icon having a Byzantine tradition whose forms and symbols have probably inspired beautiful cupolas, domes, thrones or apses, through them, he managed to express the (a) temporality of the creation act compared to eternity. Consequently, it is extremely powerful and deep the honest confession of the artist who remembered the time of communist tightness and he mentioned: „În anii când la noi se distrugneau biserici – până în 1989 – eu le construam în chip simbolic în picturile mele” / “During the time when the churches had been raised to the ground – until the end of 1989 – I was building them back in a symbolic way in my paintings”.

The notes of the artist from the diaries he held bring to light less known details which are indelible, keeping the reading interested, thus underlining the profile of a courageous perfectly lucid fighting artist ”who does not accept under any circumstances to abandon fighting, both against himself and the cultural models of this time” (p.170).

The reader of the work will also find interesting the part which recalls the activity as an essay writer and publicist of Marin Gherasim, pointing out the relevant aspects from exhibition chronicles, portraits or evocation of some personalities that were part of his social, cultural and artistic entourage. Thus, the written portraits of the following are brought again to light: Paul Neagu, Mircea Teodorescu and Florin Niculiu, Adela Petrescu, Cristian Paraschiv and Ion Grigorescu, Doru Covrig, Mihai Ispir, Alexandru Chira, Alexandru Țipoia and Florin Mitroi who are evoked in eulogistic terms, underlining the essence full of meanings of each creator’s work and exhibiting it or offering it to the public to be admired and contemplated. All these images recreated through the text determine the author of the interesting monography dedicated to the personality of the artist Marin Gherasim to state again, as a conclusion, the way in which his work managed to make a stand against the communist system and also to the consumerist one, without claiming for the dissident-revolutionary merits. In this way, according to Alexandru Davidian, ”Marin Gherasim is qualified to be the representative of alternative culture and of the resistance through

culture" (p.233), this is the rare quality of the ones who had the courage and found the means to oppose to the totalitarian ideology.

The second great chapter of the work is dedicated to the analysis of another important creation of Marin Gherasim, illustrating „*Fațetele neliniștii. Între expresionism și suprarealism*” [The Facets of Intranquility. Between expressionism and Surrealism], extraordinarily expressed through drawing and painting. In this case, what impresses us is the investigation power of the artist having the deep background of Christian spirituality, persistently reinterpreting major themes of the artist which are obviously against the trend of the official art dictated by the powerful people of those times.

In a nowadays cultural and social context which proves to be more and more dynamic, we consider that the publishing of this work in a bilingual format is utterly inspired, both in Romanian and English, this fact offers the possibility of discovery to a larger public interested in the work of Mr. Davidian, consequently it opens the road towards better knowledge and appreciation of the Romanian art from the second half of the 20th century, in general, but also to the artistic creation of one of the most talented artists of this period, that is the painter Marin Gherasim, in particular.

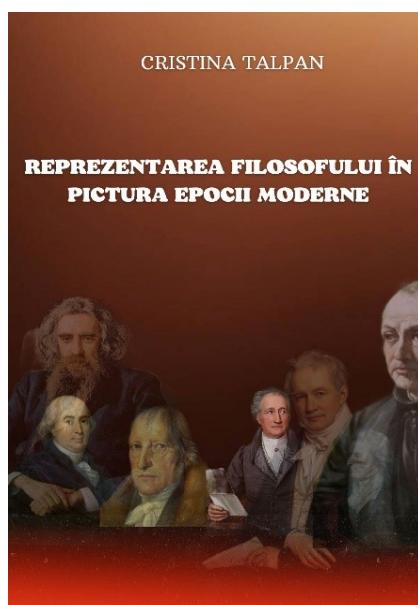
The reproduced images have an excellent printing quality, they offer unhindered access to the artistic heritage of this creator, his works definitely take him out of oblivion and convincingly propose him for eternity.

It is a work that fully deserves to be read and admired, offering a representative image of a defining moment from the history of Romanian art from modern and contemporary times.

Philosophers in Modern Fine Arts. Insights from a Teacher of Philosophy

Ana-Magdalena Petraru*

Cristina Talpan, *Reprezentarea filosofului în pictura epocii moderne/ The Representation of the Philosopher in Modern Fine Arts*, Ed. Pim, 2022, 276 pages, foreword by prof. univ. dr. Petru Bejan, cover: graphic concept by Ana Maria Alexoiae Conachi



As the prefacer Petru Bejan, full professor at the Faculty of Philosophy from UAIC argues, Cristina Talpan's book pertains to a speculative register, at the crossroads of several fields, competencies, and methodologies. The author aims at bringing together philosophy and visual arts, with data from art history, aesthetics, and semiotics, focusing on the 17th-19th centuries, inciting the viewer to adopt the perspective of Umberto Eco in *Opera aperta* and contribute to the visual text's array of significance.

In her motivation, Cristina Talpan mentions that the Age of Reason, Enlightenment, the Age of Romanticism, and the Victorian Age are correlated with cynical philosophy represented by reputed figures of Antiquity, among others, that stirred the imagination of painters from the modern age (p. 3). In fact, the cover, a graphic concept designed by the artist Ana Maria Alexoiae Conachi was

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created by using symbolic portraits of the philosophers mentioned in this work. In this cover, the artist tried to harmoniously grasp, both visually and semiotically, the essence of the book; as a result, she envisaged imagery from the ghostly portraits of philosophers, faces – statues – testimonies. Departing from the concept of awakening their shadows, she aimed at giving meaning to the pencilled forms of deeply cultural and historical ideas¹.

Drawing on theory (Charles Sanders Pierce's and Ferdinand de Saussure's foundations of semiotics) (p. 5), Edmund Husserl surrogates (p. 6), and Jean Chevalier's, Carl Gustav Jung's or Mircea Eliade's symbols (pp. 7-9), to name but a few, C. Talpan assesses that humanity has always turned into symbols everything that surrounded it, hence the already argued infinitive possibilities that a work of art brings (p. 11).

In the language of fine arts, the man of the modern age is known for three hypostases: autonomy, insecurity, and autarchy, possible due to the acknowledgement of reason as the only authority of knowledge, hence man's distancing from the Church and the State. The artist is 'unfaithful' in the attempt to create an identity between a project and the model used so s/he needs to find certainty (p. 12).

Symbolism in fine arts has been an expression of philosophical language since ancient times; thus, in Antiquity, fine arts were marked by the sublime and its relation to beauty, whereas Greek and Roman culture reversed the rapport. In the Middle Ages, priority of the sublime towards the beautiful was regained, while Renaissance stressed a harmonious rapport between the ideal and the spiritual, physical, and spiritual beauty. Finally, modern art, as M.J. Bartos also argues, "reevaluated the relation between aesthetics, art and non-artistic fields, bringing to the fore several unconventional categories such as the ugly and the ordinary, each artistic category drawing on a different category, based on its immediate interests and perspective."² (p.17) Artistic language, in its specificity, is presentational, non-discursive, ambiguous and self-reflexive at times as the work of art cannot be divided and decontextualized (p. 19). Philosophy and the philosopher's language are redefined in a pictural semiosis (p. 21) and

¹ Ana-Magdalena Petru, text message with the artist, Ana Maria Alexoae Conachi, September 25, 2023, translation ours.

² M.J. Bartos, *Compoziția în pictură*, Polirom, Iași, 2009, p. 56.

the author deals with the philosophers' portraits, overviewing their features in history, from ancient times to the 19th century (pp. 21-26).

Dealing with the philosopher between idea and representation in fine arts, the cynics have been subjected to the hexadic poles of pictural semiosis, i.e.: context, the portrait painter and the philosopher, the painting as work of art and its semantic codes and finality (p. 27). The historical context of modernity in fine arts is related to Schlegel's identification of anarchy and chaos in modern culture, the drive towards "interesting" and "a passing crisis of taste"³ (p. 28). The modern art style draws on Hegel's and Baudelaire's theories, the former speaking about the romantic artist's irony towards life, whilst the latter claiming that the artist lost the notions of righteous and beautiful (pp. 29-30). Moreover, the museum is regarded as a temple of art from the 18th century to become a palace of arts in the middle of the 19th century (p. 33). In a hermeneutical stance, since the 16th century the author pleads the case of a painting that aims at expressing the personality of the subject, a true mirror of the soul, not the faithful image of the model. It also expresses social category, in terms of influence or power so as to promote virtues in society. Rembrandt's *chiaroscuro* showed a philosopher in meditation, reading, or Aristotle with a bust of Homer. Rubens depicted the death of Seneca and several artists (e.g., Carracci, Velazquez, etc.) portrayed Heraclitus and Democritus between the 16th-17th centuries (pp. 34-35). Diogene was also picked for his desire to renew society which matched the spirit of the era, whereas St. Augustine was portrayed by Murillo and appreciated by aristocracy and bourgeoisie having faith in the power of Catholicism, the promotion of ascetism and one's giving up a life of pleasure (p. 37). Francis Bacon was favored at the beginning of the 18th cent. for his minute observation of nature, scientific knowledge based on inductive reasoning, his portrait being carried out by Paul von Somer and William Larkin (p. 38). David Hume who supported empiricism and promoted the ideas of Enlightenment was portrayed by the neoclassical Scottish painter Allan Ramsay and Leibniz by J.F. Wentzel and A. Karcher (p. 40). Joseph Wright of Derby was a painter marked by several scientific discoveries, passioned by alchemy, who drew the portrait of Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin who had taken an interest in philosophy, medicine, physics and botany

³ Jakob Minor, Friederich Schlegel 1794-1802, p.112, *apud* Hans Sedlmayr, *Epoci și opere*, vol. II, Meridiane, Bucharest, 1991, p. 258.

(pp. 41-42). Romanticism, climaxing in fine arts between 1820-1850 renders the motive of strong affection between father and daughter in William Frederick Yeames's *Meeting of Sir Thomas More with His Daughter After His Sentence of Death*. Delacroix's paintings for the Senate library in Paris, today's Luxemburg Palace comprise a group of images entitled "Famous Greeks" and show Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Xenophon and Cicero; Regnault rendered Socrates and Alcibiades in two paintings that can now be admired in New York and Paris, respectively (p. 45). After the publication of Proudhon's *The Philosophy of Poverty* and two years later, Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, new portraits of philosophers tackling society marginalia occur by Gustave Courbet, E. Manet and others as a sign of rejection of neoclassical and romantic elements and adoption of realism that takes the shape of a rise against authority (p. 47).

As iconic text, a painting is analyzed from eight different criteria: according to the main directory (a personalized portrait or a private one, of friends, relatives, a self-portrait); according to the function attributed to the painting (an official portrait, a commemorative one, an allegorical portrait or an office one); according to the relations with other works (a couple's one, an individual portrait, a portrait inspired by another portrait, a copy or one to a lesser extent); according to the state of execution of a work (a study portrait, a preparatory sketch, an unfinished portrait, a painted portrait, a refined portrait); according to its topic (an individual portrait – self-portrait, a group portrait – family portrait, professional portrait); based on the part of the represented figure – a bust portrait, a half-length portrait, a three-quarter portrait, a full portrait; according to the position of the figure (a frontal portrait, a profile portrait, a three-quarter portrait) and according to posture (standing, sitting, leaning) (pp. 52-53).

As mirroring image and sign, the portrait replaces life and gives the model rendered in the image eternal life. Another human need publicly expressed is the will of power, acknowledgement of prestige, the ambition to be different from others, to symbolically underline a preeminent position, to expose a socially important role (p. 54). Philosophers are shown meditating (by Rembrandt), suggesting the duality between the earthly world and that of the spirit, active and passive, sky and earth, light and darkness (pp. 65-66). The stairs are a possible sign of transcendence and the ascending nature of contemplative thought (p. 67). Democritus meditating on human frailty

was represented by Salvator Rosa, the author arguing that the philosopher seems sad and is surrounded by death imagery; the symbols summarize the conception of the age on the existential universe and put forward an internal tension created by the painter implying rhetorical interrogation, showing despise towards man's artificial deeds and advocating a return to mankind's natural state (pp. 68-69). Goya's *Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* belongs to the same category, the author sharply criticizing the Spanish society of the era, rising against the tyrannical monarchy, the nobility, clergymen and taking the side of the people condemned to poverty (pp. 72-73).

The philosopher in dialogue, either with himself, a small group or a crowd was tackled by Rubens in *The Four Philosophers*. Seneca's bust was considered by critics to be a copy of an imaginary portrait of the Greek poet Hesiod. Tulips in a vase are supposed to symbolize the appurtenance to cynicism, the ones that were not depicted in bloom, testifying to the death of two of the characters at the time the painting was drawn (pp. 75-76). One of the most remarkable works from the end of the 19th cent., beginning of the 20th cent. is Jean Delville's *School of Plato*, the Greek philosopher resembling Christ; two groups of young people are positioned in a triangle, and along with other elements of representation, they form David's star, leading us to the Theosophical Society the painter was a member of (pp. 83-84). The disciples listen to the philosopher as the apostles to Christ, hence Plato's comparison to a prophet (p. 85).

The philosopher in action is analyzed from various perspectives, i.e., 'the philosophy of technology' focused not only on man's ability to contribute to technological progress, but also the impact of technology on human lives, artistic creation and the reflection it leads to in aesthetics and last, but not least, the theoretical and practical approach of moral action to guide our behavior or others' towards ethics and happiness (pp. 86-87). David Tenier's *Philosopher Laughing at Magick* (London, 1775) renders a 'philosopher' sitting at his desk, surrounded by objects specific to scientific study and experiment, a human skull which symbolizes space for thought, spirit and intelligence, the starting point of knowledge, whereas the glass reminds us of the recipient that contains the elixir of redemption. On the background, terrifying creatures fly, similar to night bats, a metaphor for supernatural forces associated to the alchemy and magic surrounding the philosopher, a reasonable human being reading a book; his whimsical smile is a sign of skepticism (pp. 94-95). Tenier's

Alchemist shows laboratories in which alchemy is practiced, alluding to philosophical meditation, the desire to become immortal and the spiritual preparation required (p. 96). Mathematicians such as Euclid, Archymedes and Pythagoras are portrayed by Ribera, all his philosophers expressing pragmatism, an innate wisdom resulting from a life of hardship which made them question existence and man's place in this world (p. 114). A new approach to philosophy can be encountered in William Blake's *Newton* (1795) which surprises through its natural state the simplicity of structure, order, symmetry, and balance of proportion. Challenging limits, as a total artist, Blake aimed at depicting the absolute in his prophesizing visions, reaching surrealism and romanticism in art history. His Newton is an expression of the innovative power of science in man, rather than the spirit of creation and inspiration. The painter rendered an idealized essence, an idea-form of Newton which, in his perception, was left unanswered in his time through an imagination insufficiently accepted during his life. The deep blue ocean is a symbol of serenity and isolation of the scientist since it was a known fact that Newton aimed solitude and quietness and, for a long time, refused to publish his works (pp. 122-123).

The philosopher in his family is depicted by Jean-Victor Schnetz behind bars, the evening before his execution. His daughter and grandson came to say goodbye, lifting the latter to kiss his grandfather one last time, which suggests a strong bond between generations and the artist's intention to illustrate the controversies and spiritual torments of the age in which Boetius lived (p. 130). The artist also manages to grasp two ideas in Christian philosophy, the encounter of innocence with patriarchal authority after Jesus's calling, 'Let the children come to me', and the ideal of reaching happiness in the afterlife through acceptance of suffering in earthly life (pp. 130-131). In the representations included in C. Talpan's volume, the philosopher facing death is illustrated by paintings by Jacques Louis David (Socrates and Seneca), Rubens (Seneca) (pp. 139-140), yet the most representative one is Van Gogh's *Head of a Skeleton with a Burning Cigarette*, a vanitas or memento mori that meditates on a radical shift in the vision of the world in 19th cent., the period in which Nietzsche expressed his disapproval on the world dominated by dogma and fanaticism. Van Gogh attempted at avoiding the world of art dominated by academia, hence the interpretation of his painting as

satirical criticism to conservative academic practices and alignment to stoic philosophy reminding people of their mortality (p. 145).

The last part of the book overviews the image of the cynical philosopher from Antiquity to the modern era, contextualizing pictorial portrayal and focusing on Diogene as measure of philosophical cynicism with his representations in modern fine arts. Among the famous representations in painting, there are his encounters with Alexander the Great (depicted by Jacques Gamelin, Jean Baptiste Reginault and Sebastiano Ricci) (pp. 170-172), Plato (represented by Maria Pretti and an anonymous author of the European school in the 19th cent.) (p. 174). Other case studies are paintings of Diogene and his lamp, symbol of illumination and clarity of the spirit (p. 177), his face, cup and the position he held in the school of Athens.

C. Talpan concludes that cynicism as philosophy found echoes in the contemporary world through the writings of the American analyst William Chaloupka teaching at the University of Montana, in his *Everybody Knows: Cynicism in America*. Herein, he suggests that the democratic regime may be to the liking of cynics as it provokes and undermines elites⁴. The Romanian author argues that, as opposed to the active cynicism of the ancients, as imprudent as arrogant as it had been, today's cynical manifestations are characterized by selfishness, mistrust, disappointment, reluctance and detachment (p. 197). To summarize, the results of research show that the painting is a performance that resonates with the values promoted by the space of its existence, the author rejecting Victor Mașec's idea according to which only an educated public may receive a work of art (pp. 201-202). C. Talpan also noticed that the approach of classical topics by modern painters ensured a spiritual connection between the classical, modern and postmodern ages. Moreover, by analyzing the 'language-object', i.e., the painting, we advance in the development of philosophical 'methodology' though the application of the scheme of semiotic language to a specific situation which, in its turn, improves methodology, as well (*ibidem*).

⁴ William Chaloupka, *Cynicism, the Heuristic Pharmakon*, ESC, 38.2, 2012, pp. 4-7.

