



PÂRVU MUTU THE PAINTER AND THE LATE POSTBYZANTINE ART IN WALLACHIA (1657-1735)

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ABSTRACT

In Wallachia, after the House of Basarab who founded it embraced the Orthodoxy, an effervescent period of flourishing of the Church art of Byzantine origin followed, arrived via Thessaloniki (illustrated by the monastic complex of Curtea de Argeș and that of Cozia). To the Wallachian Church art contributed both master iconographers from the South-Danubian territories and local ones. The latter will lay the bases of what historiography defines as the “Brancovan School of iconography” or Brâncoveanu style, whose foremost representative, acknowledged both in the specialized studies, and in the calendar of the Romanian Orthodox Church, is Saint Paphnutius the Iconographer, known during his epoch as Pârvu Mutu. Etymologically, the Romanian name “Pafnutie” (in English, Paphnutius) comes from the Greek name “Paphnoútis” probably derived from the Coptic term “p-a-ph-nouti”, meaning “Man of God” or “the one who belongs to God” (“Nout” being an Egyptian name for “God”). The present study analyzes the fundamental contribution of Pârvu Pârvescu, also called “Mutu” (“the Dumb”, “the Speechless”, “the Silent”, “the Inwardness-Seeker”) (canonized as the Pious Saint Paphnutius the Iconographer), during the crystallization of the post-Byzantine art in Wallachia at the turn of the 18th century. Going beyond the status of simple contractor, Pârvu Mutu imposes a deeply autochthonous stylistic direction, distinct from the courtly exuberance of the Athonite School led by the Greek master Constantinos. By his iconographic asceticism, compositional monumentality and innovations brought to the group donor portrait (the psychologization of the portraits), the artist succeeds in magistrally blending the rigor of the hesychast theology, the Byzantine tradition and the sensitivity of the local culture. His easel masterpieces (such as the Icon of the Holy Trinity of Sinaia) and the great mural complexes demonstrate the maturity of a “theologian of the image” who perfected the original character of the Brâncoveanu style.

Keywords: *Pârvu Mutu; iconographer; mural; icon; portrait;*

INTRODUCTION

Pârvu Mutu and the crystallization of the autochthonous vision in the art of the Brâncoveanu Epoch. In the effervescent landscape of the old Romanian culture, the figure of Pârvu Pârvescu, nicknamed “Mutu” (“the Dumb”, “the Speechless”, “the Silent”, “the Inwardness-Seeker”), stands out as one of the most representative iconographers of the post-Byzantine epoch in Wallachia, his activity corresponding to the period of crystallization, definition and maturity of the Brâncoveanu style. A new and magnificent stage in the history of the Romanian mural painting took place during the reigns of Șerban Cantacuzino (1678-1688) and Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714), a period marked by an unprecedented economic prosperity and a programmatic cultural mecenate.



This epoch does not represent just a simple continuity of the tradition, but is a true phenomenon of late “Byzantine Renaissance”, adapted to the North-Danubian realities and sensitivities.

From the perspective of the iconographic programs, during this period one can note a qualitative and quantitative transformation of the painted space. One can note, first of all, an amplification of the scenes depicting the lives and the passions of the Saints (especially the Martyric Cycles), functioning as a visual call to firmness in the Orthodox faith, during an epoch of external confessional pressures.

Secondly, a generalization of the *Day of Judgement* theme on the Eastern wall of the church porch. This transition space between the lay exterior and sacred interior becomes an ample eschatological and moralizing treaty, meant to catechize the believers before their entry in the naos.

Another fundamental change of this epoch is the transformation of the votive paintings. While during the previous periods (including during Matei Basarab's epoch) the founder was represented by himself or next to his wife, holding the church model in an attitude of humility, now we witness the emergence of ample family portraits, true genealogical galleries bringing together scores of members of the boyar lineages (especially the Cantacuzino family and the Brâncoveanu family). These vast compositions go beyond the simple function of liturgical offering, becoming visual manifestos of political legitimacy, ancientness and dynastic prestige. At the same time, in a subtle echo of the European humanism, the portraits of the bricklayers, stonemasons, and iconographers emerge, signalling the acquisition of a new self-awareness of the artist, who gradually comes out of the strict anonymity of the Middle Ages.

The work of Pârnu Mutu, taking place during a generous time interval, approximately between the years 1688 and 1735, defines a moment of magistral synthesis between the rigor of the Byzantine iconographic tradition, the refined Cretano-Macedonian influences (arrived in the north of the Danube through Greek iconographers) and the emergence of an absolutely coherent Romanian idiom. As the specialized historiography notes, in the Walachian painting at the turn of the 18th century, two major directions can be drawn, complementary in their ecclesiological essence, yet distinct as artistic expression. The first is the Balkano-Athonite direction, markedly aulic (courtly) and international, represented by the Greek iconographer Constantinos.

The second is the autochthonous direction, magistrally represented by the iconographer Pârnu Mutu¹. In a cultural and political context dominated by the ideal of the symbolic restoration of the Imperial Byzantium (the concept of “Byzantium after Byzantium”), supported both by the Brancovan Court and by the great boyar elite, Pârnu Mutu represents the paradigmatic example of the complete Romanian artist.

He is the creator able to manage an extremely complex visual vocabulary – rich in portrait innovations and narrative details – which he manages to adapt and to subordinate to an Orthodox theological program of a profound dogmatic and hesychastic rigor². By his paintbrush, the Wallachian ecclesial art proves its maturity, going beyond the stage of simple receiver of South-East European influences and becoming a radiant pole of original spirituality and aesthetics.

¹ Răzvan Theodorescu, *Bizanț, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești (Secolele X-XIV)*, Editura Academiei, București, 1974, pp. 254-256. (The academician's analysis emphasizes the fertile dichotomy between Constantinos' aulic orientation and deeply locally assimilated vision of Pârnu Mutu, both defining, along distinct directions, “the golden age” of the Brancovan art).

² Sorin Ulea, „Pictura brâncovenească”, in *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei*, Seria Artă Plastică, nr. 22 (1975), pp. 41-44. (The art historian substantiates the capacity of Pârnu Mutu to integrate his compositional innovation without altering the Byzantine Dogmatic Tradition, turning him into a prominent representative of the autochthonous iconographic program).



1. THE LIFE AND ACTIVITY OF THE ICONOGRAPHER PÂRVU PÂRVESCU MUTU

The famous painter Pârvu Mutu was born on 12 October 1657, in Câmpulung Muscel, being the son of the priest Ioan Pârvescu (1623-1702). His childhood was marked by the fact that he lost his mother, when he was only six years old, after which his five older brothers died as well, following a merciless epidemic. Remaining the only surviving child of his family, Pârvu followed his father, who became a monk at Negru Vodă Monastery in Câmpulung. In this monastic environment, at the age of 11, he was initiated in the first mysteries of iconography by Monk Eugenios (in Romanian, Evghenie), who noticed his exceptional talent.

To perfect his technique, at the age of 18, the young man was sent to Moldavia, where he was, for six years, the apprentice of a Russian iconographer. Here, he learnt the secrets of icon painting and assimilated the influences of the north Moldavian iconography³. Returning to his native land in 1677, he married Tudora (with whom he had two sons) and became Court painter of the Vlădești, boyars, founders of churches. This period is marked by his first collaborations at the church of Aninoasa Monastery and at the church of Negru Vodă Monastery in Câmpulung Muscel both of them in Argeș County. The latter was painted by him together with monk Eugenius, his first teacher, this being the place where his father had been tonsured a monk.

His true affirmation occurred the moment he entered under the patronage of the Cantacuzino family and of the reigning prince Constantin Brâncoveanu. Pârvu Mutu, together with his team, adorned with frescoes – integrally or partially – an impressive number of cult places: Cotroceni (Bucharest), Mărgineni (today the penitentiary of I.L. Caragiale, Dâmbovița County), Sinaia (Prahova County), Colțea (Bucharest), Berca (Buzău County), Poiana Skete (Poiana Câmpina, Prahova County), Lespezi (Comarnic, Prahova County), Bordești (Vrancea County), Călinești (Florești Commune, Prahova County) and Măgureni (Prahova County), the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Râmnicu Sărat (Buzău County) and the Church Fundenii Doamnei (Dobroești Commune, Ilfov County), the church of Mamu Monastery⁴ (Lungești Commune, Vâlcea County), and the Saint George the New (Sfântul Gheorghe Nou) Church of Bucharest.

Beside the monumental mural complexes that consecrated his fame, the activity of Pârvu Mutu in the domain of easel painting enriched the national patrimony with pieces of an inestimable theological and artistic value. His absolute masterpiece in this domain is the icon of *The Holy Trinity* (known in *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna* under the name of *The Supper at Mamre* or *Abraham's Philoxenia*), made in the year 1693. A work of maturity, it was initially meant for the Lespezi Skete (foundation of the Sword-Bearer Mihail Cantacuzino), being later on transferred, and since the year 1896 it was preserved in the museum collection of Sinaia Monastery⁵.

From a dogmatic and iconographic perspective, Pârvu Mutu does not content himself with illustrating narratively the biblical episode of the three celestial Guests receiving the hospitality of the Patriarch Abraham at the oak of Mamre (Genesis 18: 1-8). Following the hesichastic vision, he deepens the historical scene to a pure Treimic revelation. His direct source of inspiration is the famous *Trinity* painted in the fifteenth century by the Russian iconographer monk Andrei Rublev. Like Rublev, he eliminated from the forefront the figures of Abraham and Sarah (or reduced them

³ Teodora Voinescu, „Pîrvul Mutu și școala sa”, in *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei*, nr. 1-2 (1954).

⁴ *** *Domnitorii și ierarhii Țării Românești – ctitoriile și mormintele lor*, Editura Cuvântul Vieții a Mitropoliei Munteniei și Dobrogei, București, 2009, p. 254.

⁵ Grigore Constantinescu, *Pârvu Mutu Zugravu*, Pitești, 1996, p. 20. (The author documents the trajectory of the icon from Lespezi to the museum collection of Sinaia Monastery, where it was integrated at the end of the 19th century).



to a strictly marginal role), the attention being concentrated exclusively on the Three Angels staying around the table⁶.

The composition is governed by an impeccable sacred geometry. The silhouettes of the three angels are inscribed in an invisible circle, symbol of divine perfection and eternity, while the free space between the angel on the left and the angel on the right delineates a chalice, whose centre is the Lamb Himself (the eucharistic sacrifice) put on the table. This visual structure visually translates the dogma of the Trinitarian consubstantiality and love lying at the basis of the Sacrifice on Golgotha⁷.

The compositional refinement is supported by a color range of a sobre, balanced elegance, specific of the Wallachian painter. Pârnu Mutu uses a bright golden background (symbol of the Uncreated Light), on which the angels' vestments are delineated by ample, fluid folds, with subtle reflexes. The expressions of their faces are unearthly gentle, "truly angelic", emanating that inner peace that the artist himself was cultivating through asceticism and silence during work.

The major innovation and unmistakable mark of the genius of Pârnu Mutu consists, however, in the way in which he chose to anchor this absolute transcendence in the reality of the autochthonous area. On the half-round table, in front of the Angels, the painter situated a white table cloth, decorated at its ends with geometric motifs of popular inspiration, woven in red and black, specific of the Romanian textile art in the area of Muscel or Prahova Valley. This insertion of a clearly recognizable ethnographic element is not a simple picturesque detail, on the contrary, it bears a profound theological significance: it is an expression of the theology of the embodiment and assumption of the local culture. Christ and the Holy Trinity do not reveal Themselves in an abstract space, but "come down" and bless the Romanian people's ethos, sanctifying the matter and the work of his hands⁸. We have here the proof of the integration and the interpretation of the elements of autochthonous material culture as a form of affirmation of the national identity in the cult painting.

This remarkable detail drew the attention of the specialized literature, the well-known historian Nicolae Iorga formulating an appreciation that remained famous: "The tablecloth is obviously Romanian. A great painter worked here, and his work, well-reproduced, should be found in all our houses. (...) It is the most beautiful Romanian icon of the pictorial achievements of its time"⁹. By this masterpiece, the teacher Pârnu Mutu demonstrates an extraordinary capacity of synthesis, managing to unite the dogmatic depth of the Byzantine and hesychastic theology with the vibration and intimacy of the Romanian feeling, transforming the icon of the Holy Trinity from an influential work into a true manifesto of the Brancovan art.

The nickname "Mutu" (The Dumb, The Speechless, The Silent, or The Inwardness-Seeker), iconographic asceticism and monastic perfection.

The nickname "Mutu" (The Dumb or The Speechless, The Silent or The Inwardness-Seeker), under which the artist entered for good in the art history and in the Church conscience, did not derive from a phonetic or speech sound disorder as some folklore sources or late lay interpretations erroneously suggested. On the contrary, this appellative describes an ascetic conduct taken on programmatically: the artist was painting exclusively in a state of absolute silence (hesychia), ceaseless prayer and total fasting. The tradition records that if he had to utter a word or taste food

⁶ Leonid Uspensky, Vladimir Lossky, *Călăuzire în lumea icoanei*, translated by Anca Popescu, Editura Sophia, București, 2003, pp. 215-218.

⁷ Paul Evdokimov, *Arta icoanei. O teologie a frumuseții*, translated by Grigore Mândrescu, Editura Meridiane, București, 1992, p. 210.

⁸ Sorin Ulea, „Pictura brâncovenească”, in *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei*, Seria Artă Plastică, nr. 22 (1975), p. 55.

⁹ Nicolae Iorga, citat în Teodora Voinescu, *Pârnu Mutu Zugravu*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1968, p. 34; see also Grigore Constantinescu, *Pârnu Mutu Zugravu*, p. 20.



during the day, Pârvu would interrupt his work on the scaffold, considering that the state of cleanliness necessary for the transmission of grace had been altered¹⁰. By this rigorous asceticism, the act of painting was no longer a simple aesthetic exercise or courtly order but was becoming an extension of the Holy Liturgy. His paintbrush would translate in visual forms a direct mystic experience, Pârvu Mutu respecting *ad litteram* the old Byzantine *Painter's Manuals* which required that the icon-painter had to be a clean vessel, a “theologian of the image” able to first contemplate the uncreated light in order to render it on the walls afterwards.

This spiritual rigor, doubled by an unequalled talent, brought to him an immense recognition among his contemporaries. Aware of the need to transmit not just a craft, but an entire Orthodox ethos, Pârvu Mutu became a true school maker. Starting with the year 1702, taking advantage of the stability provided by the Wallachian capital, he opened a painting school in his own house of the Slobozia outskirts of Bucharest. Here, he trained a whole generation of reputed iconographers, such as Andrei, Marin, Neagoe, Stan or Radu. The relation with his disciples was one of spiritual paternity; along with them, he painted great mural complexes (such as the Church “The Three Holy Hierarchs” of Filipeștii de Pădure in 1691-1692) and began to sign his works as “the teacher Pârvu Mutu the iconographer”¹¹. The title of “teacher” attests the fact that the artist went beyond the stage of simple executant and was recognized as a teaching authority, a magister, able to impose a visual and spiritual canon in the Brancovan art.

However, his professional success and his closeness to the most influential boyar families (the Cantacuzino family and the Brâncoveanu family) did not save him from a profound existential kenosis (emptying of one's self). The end of his life was marked by painful events, as if resuming the series of dramas from his childhood: the death of his wife, Lady Tudora, and later on the loss of his younger son, monk Gherasim (Gerasimos). In pain, but looking for his comfort in the transcendent, the artist undertook a long pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This act of piety marked his definitive breakup with the world of humans and his preparation for his entry in the world of angels¹². On his return, he withdrew from the world, dedicating himself to God, first at Mărgineni Monastery – founded by the Cantacuzino family, a monastery which he himself had adorned with frescoes a while ago. Yet, looking for an even more rigorous isolation, in tune with his hesychastic thirst, Pârvu withdrew deep in the forest, at the Robaia Skete in Argeș County. Here he received the tonsure in the Great and Angelic Schema (the highest and most demanding degree of the Orthodox monasticism), receiving the name of Pafnutie (Paphnutius), etymologically meaning “The man of God”. He lived his late years in total asceticism, in silence, fasting and prayer, passing into eternity in the year 1735 (some research works also indicating a short period during which he seems to have been a hegumen (an abbot) at Aninoasa Monastery, where he is supposed to have been interred)¹³.

Beyond his huge artistic heritage, his life has been acknowledged as an icon of holiness. For his High-minded life, for his perfect humility and for the way he confessed the Orthodox faith by the light of his colours, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church canonized him in the year 2017, being acknowledged among the Saints under the name of *Sfântul Cuvios Pafnutie - Pârvu Zugravul* (The Pious Saint Paphnutius - Pârvu the Iconographer), celebrated on 7 August¹⁴.

¹⁰ ****Biserica Ortodoxă Română, Monografie-Album*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al B.O.R., București, 1987, pp. 161-208.

¹¹ Teodora Voinescu, *Pârvu Mutu Zugravu*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1968, p. 21.

¹² Grigore Constantinescu, *Pârvu Mutu Zugravu*, Pitești, 1996, pp. 45-48.

¹³ Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române*, vol. II, Editura Academiei, București, 1982, p. 273.

¹⁴ Actul Sinodal de Canonizare a Sfântului Cuvios Pafnutie – Pârvu Zugravul, aprobat de Sfântul Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în ședința de lucru din 4-5 iulie 2017 (The Synodal Act for the Canonization of the Pious Saint



2. ARTISTIC CONTEXT AND STYLISTIC DIALOGUE

Constantinos' School and the autochthonous vision of Pârnu Mutu

To fully understand the originality and the importance of Pârnu Mutu for the Church, his work needs to be referred to the general artistic context of the Brancovan epoch, a visual space dominated at first by the prestigious “Hurezi School”, led by the Greek iconographer Constantinos.

During the last decennia of the 17th century, Wallachia became the hub of the South-East European Orthodoxy, fully taking on the role of continuer of the Byzantine imperial heritage (the ideal of *Byzantium after Byzantium*)¹⁵. In this climate of cultural effervescence, the courtly and boyar mecenate encouraged the manifestation of two major stylistic directions, which did not exclude each other, on the contrary they completed each other: the Balkano-Athonite (aulic) direction and the autochthonous (monastic) direction.

“The theology of magnificence” and the imperial legitimization: Constantinos' School

The iconographer Constantinos was a perfect master of the late post-Byzantine art, conversant in the Athonite painter's teaching, yet receptive to the innovations of the Baroque and late Renaissance painting which had penetrated in the Balkan and insular area (School of Crete). He painted at the Hurezi Monastery – belovedly founded by Constantin Brâncoveanu with the intention to be his resting place – a complex characterized by exuberant narrativism, scores of characters caught in motion, a complex architectural scenography and an obvious inclination to realism and decorativism¹⁶. Two iconographic themes define the climax of Constantinos' School, both with a deep politico-theological substratum:

First, the *triumphant iconography of the Holy Emperor Constantine the Great*. The detailed representation of the battle with Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge is not just a lesson of Church history, but also a political allegory by which Brâncoveanu (bearing the name of the first Christian emperor) was legitimating his power of God-anointed sovereign, defender of the Cross in a world threatened by Ottomans and Habsbourgs¹⁷.

Second, the *impressive procession of the votive painting* from the pronaos, where the family of the reigning prince and the Basarab and Cantacuzino ancestors are rendered with an extraordinary magnificence of apparel, along with the unusual representation of the gallery of the master bricklayers, stonemasons and (aici nu am stiut sigur daca se includ doar pictorii, sau si alti mesteri, in caz ca doar pictorii ce e cu albastru se sterge) painters (in the narthex). This attention given to the creating artist reflects a humanistic vision, in which the master comes out of the anonymity characteristic of the Middle Ages. Analyzing this visual magnificence, the reputed French Byzantinologist Charles Diehl noted that these frescoes prove the late yet stunning sunset of the Byzantine art under Constantin Brâncoveanu¹⁸.

“Theology of the hesychia” and psychological inwardness: the School of Pârnu Mutu

In complementary contrast with Constantinos' exuberance, Pârnu Mutu develops and imposes a profoundly autochthonous school. Although they both activate during the same period and often

Paphnutius – Pârnu the Iconographer, approved by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the working meeting of 4-5 July 2017).

¹⁵ Răzvan Theodorescu, *Bizanț, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești (Secolele X-XIV)*, Editura Academiei, București, 1974. (The concept of “Byzantium after Byzantium”, initially theorized by Nicolae Iorga, is fundamental for understanding the artistic ideology of the epoch).

¹⁶ Sorin Ulea, „Pictura brâncovenească”, in *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei*, Seria Artă Plastică, nr. 22 (1975), pp. 41-43.

¹⁷ Andrei Paleolog, *Pictura românească din secolul al XVIII-lea. Artă de tradiție bizantină în epoca iluminismului*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1982, pp. 65-68.

¹⁸ Charles Diehl, apud Vasile Drăguț, *Artă brâncovenească*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1971, p. 26.



answer the orders of the same elite (the Cantacuzino family and the reigning prince Brâncoveanu), Mutu filters the Byzantine heritage through a local sensitivity and a much more austere personal spiritual living.

While Constantinos' School excels in courtly magnificence, Baroque motion and dynamism, Mutu's School stands out for its low-key monumentality, a marked psychological inwardness and a striking monastic and hesychast character¹⁹. Pârvu Mutu's characters do not "parade" before our eyes on the church walls but seem immersed in continual prayer. His chromatics, based on deep ochres, English red ochre and related earthy nuances rejects stridencies, inviting the believer's eye to meditation, not just to aesthetic admiration.

A difference both theological and of vision is clearly noticeable in the approach of the *portrait*. Constantinos paints at Hurezi figures with an aristocratic dignity, highlighting the social rank by the minuteness of the apparel details (embroideries, jewels, imported fabric). In exchange, although he, too, paints great boyar families at Filipeștii de Pădure or Măgureni, Pârvu Mutu moves the accent on the countenance and the *spiritual state* of the characters. His Saints and his founders have penetrating gaze, an attitude of humility (feature derived from his own ascetic practice of painting in fasting and silence) and a gravity anticipating the eschatological Judgement²⁰.

Consequently, the originality of the Brâncovan art resides precisely in this bipolar synthesis. On the one hand, Constantinos offers the Church in Wallachia a *theology of the glory* and of the imperial triumph, necessary to political affirmation. On the other hand, Pârvu Mutu offers the Church in Wallachia a *theology of the sacrifice*, of the silence and of the hesychia, keeping unaltered the ascetic vein of the Carpathian Orthodoxy. The work of the "silent iconographer" demonstrates that the assimilation of the Byzantine tradition in the Romanian area was not a simple copying of external models but a living process of creation, capable of generating masterpieces of an unique sensitivity²¹. Cornelia Pillat goes deeper into the way the ascetic vein is intertwined with the Balkan tradition.

3. STYLISTIC FEATURES IN THE WORK OF PÂRVU MUTU

Recent research confirms that Pârvu Mutu developed a personal artistic language, defined by some major stylistic coordinates.

Monumentality of the composition: His compositions are ample, organized on clear axes. This monumentality of Byzantine filiation is refined by the Brâncovan balance, in which the proportions are strictly controlled, and the spatial scenography is distributed perfectly symmetrically²².

Chromatic palette: His colours are dominantly warm, built on ochres, saturated reds and intense green. Unlike the Greek School, Mutu uses the light directly, without exaggerated diffusions, which gives the Saints' faces an inner tension and an asceticism specific of the late Cretan School, yet with a distinctive local tone²³.

Portrait individualization: In votive portraits, Pârvu Mutu innovates radically. He does not idealize the characters excessively but searches for their psychological features, introducing a realism adapted to the Orthodox canon. It is the first post-Byzantine painter of Wallachia setting a

¹⁹ Vasile Drăguț, *Arta brâncovenească*, pp. 115-118.

²⁰ Teodora Voinescu, *Pârvu Mutu Zugravu*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1968, pp. 38-42. (The author details Pârvu Mutu's ability to renounce the ornamental touches in order to favor the psychological depth of the faces).

²¹ Cornelia Pillat, *Tradiție și inovație în iconografia picturii românești din epoca brâncovenească*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1980, pp. 22-25.

²² Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române*, vol. II, Ed. Academiei, București, 1982, pp. 275-276.

²³ Vasile Drăguț, *Arta brâncovenească*, p. 121.



true group “historical portrait”²⁴. His masterpiece remains the votive painting of Filipeștii de Pădure (1692), regrouping 55 members of the Cantacuzino family, offering a homogenous complex, despite the strongly individualized physiognomies. A similar performance can be found at Măgureni (60 portraits), along with his valuable self-portraits²⁵.

The narrative density (The example of Aninoasa Monastery): At Aninoasa (1715-1718), Mutu offers an extended iconographic program, remarkable by the dialogue among the scenes of the Old and the New Testament, integrated into a unitary theological vision²⁶. An intense expressiveness, characterized by strongly delineated figures, can be found as well at “St. Nicholas” Church in Șcheii Brașovului (1700-1701)²⁷.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the work and the life of Pârvu Mutu illustrate a unique paradigm in the history of the old Romanian art: that of the perfect artist who transcends the aesthetic craft, turning it into a veritable dogmatic confession and liturgical act. Unlike his contemporaries who privileged the decorative majesty and Baroque dynamism (like Constantinos' School of Hurezi), Pârvu Mutu opposed to this trend an aesthetics of the silence, of the hesychia and of the spiritual inwardness.

By founding his own school in Bucharest and by training a whole generation of apprentices, he assured the triumph and the perpetuation of the autochthonous direction in the Brancovan art. His exceptional capacity of individualizing the historical portrait – immortalizing for the posterity scores of images of the boyar and clerical elites – demonstrates a refined humanism, completely integrated in the rigour of the Orthodox painter's manual. Moreover, by the integration of certain elements of local material culture in compositions of a great theological abstractization (as is the case of *The Supper of Mamre*), Pârvu Mutu proved that the Byzantine heritage can assimilate the national ethos. The work of Pârvu Mutu represents the climax of the transition of the Romanian ecclesial art from the post-Byzantine rigidity to the Brancovan synthesis. Fine connoisseur of the frescoes in Wallachia and Moldavia, connected to the Athonite echoes, the artist created a unique style, excelling at ample compositions and, especially, at lay and clerical portraits.

His mural painting is part of the refinement of his epoch by conception and technique, representing, according to the historian I.D. Ștefănescu, “a peak of the local ecclesiastic art, by the harmony and the luxury of the colours enriched by the glittering of the gold”²⁸. Pârvu Mutu was not just a perfect craftsman, he was a theologian of the image; his artistic humanism allowed him to individualize the figures of the Saints without disrespecting the Orthodox Painter's Manual rules, weeding out rigid schematism and giving the Church an invaluable visual and spiritual heritage.

Beyond his harmony of proportions and chromatic refinement acknowledged by the art historiography, Pârvu Mutu remains a “theologian of the colour”. His existential trajectory – marked by suffering, asceticism, monastic withdrawal and crowned by his canonization by the Romanian Orthodox Church – confirms the fact that in the authentic ecclesial art, the work cannot be separated from the holiness of its creator's life.

²⁴ Sorin Ulea, „Pictura brâncovenească”, pp. 52-53.

²⁵ Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, „Constantin Brâncoveanu și ctitoriile sale din Oltenia”, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, XVI (1964), nr. 9-10, p. 716.

²⁶ Mariana Șlapac, *Ansamblurile brâncovenești*, Meridiane, București, 1985, pp. 112-118.

²⁷ Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române*, vol. II, p. 280.

²⁸ I.D. ȘTEFĂNESCU, *Arta feudală în Țările Române. Pictura murală și icoanele de la origini pînă în secolul al XIX-lea*, Timișoara, 1981, p. 38.



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International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science

IJTPS- ISSN 2601-1697 online; ISSN 2601-1689 print| <https://doi.org/10.26520/ijtps>
Frequency: 2 issues/year, with possible supplementary issues.

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