



THE ICON AND THE DOGMA. DEVIATIONS FROM THE ORTHODOX FAITH OF WESTERN ICONOGRAPHY AND INFLUENCES ON EASTERN ICONOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

After the conclusion of the Second Council of Nicaea, in 787, which was to be recognized and received by the Church, following the steps of Patriarch Photius of Constantinople, as the Seventh Ecumenical Council, it seemed that the orthodox faith and the unity of the Church would no longer be questioned. The coronation of Charlemagne, by Pope Leo III, on December 25, in 800, as emperor of the newly founded Western Roman Empire soon led to the appearance of new theological disputes, this time between Constantinople and Aachen/Rome, starting from the icon itself and then continuing with the addition of the Filioque, over time adding others, like the Immaculate Conception. These new dogmas adopted by the Church of Rome came to be illustrated, in the IXth - XIIth centuries, in Western iconography, and, although the Orthodox East firmly rejected them from a doctrinal point of view, through Orthodox painters and iconographers who took them from the West, in the XIIth - XVth centuries they entered Orthodox iconography. The present study aims to present the main iconographic themes of Western origin and the dogmas specific to Rome, rejected by the Orthodox East, which they illustrate and which we find in Orthodox iconography.

Keywords: *icon; dogma; Caroline Books; Holy Trinity; Immaculate Conception; Resurrection of the Lord;*

INTRODUCTION

Since the icon has always faithfully reflected the teaching of faith professed by the Church, as long as the unity of faith of the Church has been preserved, the unity of the iconographic canon has also been preserved, despite the different reports of the Christian East and West to its role in the Church.

Therefore, the deviations from the orthodox faith that appeared in the Western Church and assumed by it as a teaching of faith caused not only the Great Schism of 1054, but also the loss of iconographic unity, both through the reflection of these dogmatic innovations in the icon, and through the fall of the sacred image from the status of a holy icon to that of a religious painting. Although it began to manifest itself in Western sacred art only in the twelfth century, this phenomenon was caused by the attitude of the Frankish king Charlemagne (768-814) and the theologians of his court towards the role of the icon in the church and towards the addition of *the Filioque* to the Symbol of Faith.



1. LIBRI CAROLINI AND THEIR INFLUENCE

After taking possession of the acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787), Pope Adrian I (772-795) requested their translation from Greek into Latin. Unfortunately, not knowing either Greek or Latin very well, the translator delivered a literary, unintelligible translation. Anastasius the Librarian (810-878), who after almost a century made a new translation of these acts from Greek into Latin, showed that in the case of the first translation, "the translator, leaving the specificity of each language, followed the text word for word to that point, so that what in that edition was either barely understood, or could not be grasped at all, to the disgust of the readers, he was despised for this reason by almost everyone..."¹.

Among the many translation errors, the most serious was the constant translation of the Greek term *προσκύνησις* (*proschínēsis* – bowing) with the Latin *adoratio* (adoration)², as if the two terms were synonymous, although their meanings are different³ and the Nicene Council highlighted the difference between the two terms, *λατρεία* (*latreia* – adoration) and *προσκύνησις* (*proschínēsis* – worship), and the cultic acts they call⁴. From a doctrinal point of view, equally serious was the erroneous translation of the words of Bishop Constantine of Konstanteia, of Cyprus, spoken by him at the Nicene Council. His statement, "I accept and embrace with due honour the holy and venerable images, and I venerate with worship only the supersubstantial and life-giving Trinity", was translated into Latin by the phrase "I accept and venerate with honour the holy and venerable images according to the worship that I pay to the consubstantial and life-giving Trinity"⁵, from which it emerged that the Byzantines would have worshiped icons like God, which would obviously have represented a blasphemy.

Pope Adrian sent the acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in this erroneous translation to the Frankish king Charlemagne. Reading it in the presence of the theologians of his court and considering it to be full of errors, the Frankish king asked them to combat point by point the decisions adopted at Nicaea. The one who took on the task of rejecting the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council was Alcuin⁶, the most important Frankish theologian of the time. He refuted, in the erroneous translation in which he possessed them, the acts of the Council of Nicaea (787), which he placed in line with the iconoclastic Council of Hieria (754), labeling both councils, alike, *infames et ineptissimas synodos*⁷. Fully aware of the fact that they were developing a theological

¹ Diac. Ioan I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol. 2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2020, p. 459.

² Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 400, traduction française par H. Leclercq, Paris, 1910, p. 1079.

³ For the meanings of the two terms in the iconodule writings and in the decisions in the 7th Ecumenical Council, see, in Romanian: Pr. Nicolae CHIFĂR, *Icoană, iconologie, iconomahie*, Ed. Basilica, București, 2018, pp. 101-105.

⁴ Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 400, p. 1079; François BESPFLUG, Emanuela FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident. Le conflit des images. Mythes et réalités*, Bayard, Paris, 2017, p. 72; Leonid USPENSKY, *Teologia icoanei în Biserica Ortodoxă*, prefață pr. Nikolai Ozolin, traducere Ciprian Vidican și Elena Derevici, Ed. Renașterea / Ed. Patmos, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, p. 130.

⁵ Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 400, pp. 1075-1076; în latină: „Suscipio et amplector honorabiliter sanctas et venerandas imagines, secundum servitium adorationis, quod consubstantiali et vivificatrici Trinitati emitto”.

⁶ Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 399, p. 1065; H. LECLERCQ, Appendice VII, dans Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, p. 1242; Egon SENDLER, *Icoana, imaginea nevăzutului: elemente de teologie, tehnică și estetică*, trad. din franceză de Ioana Caragiu, Florin Caragiu și monahia Ilie Doinița Teodosia, Ed. Sophia, București, 2005, p. 34; Diac. I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol. 2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, p. 715.

⁷ Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 400, p. 1067.



perspective different from the one adopted at Nicaea, the Frankish theologians reserved for the icon a simple historical-narrative and aesthetic role and a didactic and pedagogical function, an attitude that would lead to its desacralization⁸. Although Charlemagne tried to give his attitude of rejection of the acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council a theological motivation⁹, in reality, as most scholars observe, the real causes were political and personal in nature¹⁰. Thus, from a political point of view, the attitude of the Frankish king must be understood in the context of the political rivalry with the Byzantine Empire, caused by the Byzantine policy of regaining and consolidating influence in Italy and Illyria, which harmed the interests of the Frankish kingdom in those areas.

Also, Charlemagne added his role as defender of the true faith and of the Church as a result of the same competition for supremacy with the Byzantine Empire, in the context in which neither Pope Adrian kept him informed of the conduct of the Council of Nicaea, nor the Byzantines invited Frankish theologians to the synod, which displeased him¹¹. "In fact, Bœspflug stated, Charlemagne was asserting his own religious independence"¹² by this attitude and showed both Rome and Constantinople that the new cultural and theological center of true Orthodoxy was at his court¹³. Therefore, Charlemagne defied Constantinople and imposed on Rome its own theological vision in the matter of veneration of holy icons. Moreover, even the affirmation of the ecclesiastical primacy of the See of Rome¹⁴ served, indirectly, admittedly, the same ideal of affirmation of the political and ecclesiastical supremacy in the West of the Frankish king, since he was the protector of the primate throne.

In the same vein, the adoption of the teaching of the *Filioque*¹⁵, after his coronation as Emperor of the Western Empire by Pope Leo III (25.12.800), in the entire area dominated by him, was also inscribed, which contributed to the generalization in the Western Church of this dogmatic innovation, condemned and vehemently opposed by the Easterners. In fact, the subject of the *Filioque* was opened and officially endorsed for the first time in *the Libri carolini*¹⁶. Last but not least, from a personal point of view, Charles could not forgive the Byzantine Court for the offense of the Byzantine Empress Irene breaking the engagement of her son Constantine, heir to the

⁸ Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 400, p. 1068; F. BŒSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, pp. 75, 77.

⁹ Ch. J. HEFELE, *History of the Councils*, vol. III, second part, l. XX, c. 400, p. 1067.

¹⁰ Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 400, pp. 1068-1070; H. LECLERCQ, Appendice VII, dans Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, pp. 1240-1246; F. BŒSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, pp. 73, 76; E. SENDLER, *Icoana, imaginea nevăzutului...*, pp. 34-35; Diac. I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol. 2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, p. 696; Diac. Mihai SĂSAUJAN, "Repere istorice – teologice ale perioadei iconoclase", în: *Învățătura despre Sfintele Icoane, reflectată în teologia ortodoxă românească*, II, Studii și articole, Ed. Basilica, București, 2017, p. 290.

¹¹ Pr. Anton DESPINESCU, "Cultul icoanelor în Biserica Occidentului", în: *Cinstirea Sfintelor Icoane în Ortodoxie. Retrospectivă istorică, moment cruciale de stabilire a teologiei icoanei și de criză majoră. 1220 de ani de la Sinodul al VII-lea Ecumenic, Sesiunea anuală a Comisiei Române de Studii și Istoria Creștinismului*, Ed. Trinitas, 2008, p. 316; Diac. I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol. 2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, p. 696; E. SENDLER, *Icoana, imaginea nevăzutului...*, p. 34.

¹² F. BŒSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, p.76;

¹³ M. BETTETINI, I Libri Carolini: da un errore di traduzione nuovi sensi per l'immagine, *Versus*, 102, 2006, p. 108.

¹⁴ Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 400, p. 1070.

¹⁵ În privința *Filioque*, a se vedea Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 411-412, pp. 1127-1133; Diac. I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol.2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, pp. 696-712.

¹⁶ Ch. J. HEFELE, *History of the Councils*, vol. III, second part, l. XX, c. 400, p. 1074.



Byzantine throne, with Erythro (Rothrud), daughter of the Frankish king¹⁷. The attitude of King Charles and the Frankish theologians in rejecting the Council of Nicaea was also favored by the position of Pope Adrian I, who, after receiving the acts of the council, did not respond with a letter of official confirmation, the pope's silence on the matter being interpreted by the Franks as a sign of his rejection of the Council of Nicaea.

The position expressed by the theologians of the Court of Charlemagne towards the Seventh Ecumenical Council and towards the icon was officially confirmed by the Western bishops by the second canon of the Council of Frankfurt (794)¹⁸. Paradoxically, after signing in the name of Pope Adrian I the dogmatic decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, the papal legates signed in the name of the same pope, without the slightest protest, the decisions of the Council of Frankfurt, by which the Nicene Council was condemned.

Pope Adrian I resolutely countered against the rejection of the Council of Nicaea, criticizing and rejecting article by article *Libri carolini* in a long defense of the Nicene Council¹⁹. Appealing to the tradition of the Roman Church and patristic arguments, the Roman pontiff confirmed Orthodox theology both with regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit, showing that the procession from the Father through the Son is in accordance with the "teaching of the holy fathers", and with regard to the veneration of the holy icons. At the end of his work, Pope Adrian I explicitly stated: "I have received this council", on the one hand, and, on the other, he also indicated the reason why he did not send an official letter confirming it: "But we have not given the emperor any answer about this council, [...]. For when I urged them to raise up the holy icons, I asked them also about the administration of both the archbishoprics and the bishoprics of the holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, which they kidnapped with our patrimony when they took down the holy icons [...]"²⁰.

Although the *Libri carolini*, after their rejection by Pope Adrian I, were no longer released at the Council of Frankfurt as the manifesto of the alleged true Orthodox faith whose defender, following the model of the Byzantine emperors, was seen as Charlemagne, over time, the position of the Frankish theologians became normative for Western religious art.

Libri carolini were to be used in the sixteenth century, including by Protestant reformers, to combat the veneration of holy icons²¹. These were theologically "recycled" by Calvin, who thus reaffirmed the theological positions of the iconoclastic council of Hieria in 754²².

¹⁷ SF. TEOFAN MĂRTURISITORUL, *Cronografia*, traducere, introducere și note de Mihai Țipău, col. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, s.n., Ed. Basilica, București, 2012, p. 442-443; Sebastian NAZĂRU, "Constantinopol, 786 – un sinod ecumenic care nu a avut loc", in: *Studii Teologice*, 11 (2015), 2, p.159; Diac. M. SĂSĂUJAN, "Repere istorice – teologice ale perioadei iconoclaste", p. 290. Diac. I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol. 2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, p. 696, expresses a contrary opinion, according to which Carol I was the one who broke off his daughter's engagement to the heir to the Byzantine throne precisely because he was not informed by the Byzantines about the council, and the Frankish theologians were not invited to this council.

¹⁸ Ch. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles*, tome III, deuxième partie, l. XX, c. 398, p. 1056.

¹⁹ Tradusă în limba română de Diac. I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol. 2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, pp. 729-756; F. BËSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, p. 77.

²⁰ Diac. I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol. 2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, pp. 755-756.

²¹ Ch. J. HEFELE, *History of the Councils*, vol. III, second part, l. XX, c. 399, pp. 1063; Deacon. I. ICĂ Jr., *The Canon of Orthodoxy, Seventh Ecumenical Council, vol. 2: Dogmatically Finalizing Orthodoxy (815-1351)*, pp. 819-823.

²² Diac. I. ICĂ Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Sinodul VII Ecumenic, vol. 2: Definitivând dogmatic ortodoxia (815-1351)*, p. 820.



2." THE SCHISM" OF THE SCHISM

Pope Adrian I's critical stance towards *the Libri carolini* delayed for three centuries the full manifestation in Western iconography of the theological direction imposed by the Council of Frankfurt regarding the holy icons, but it did not succeed in preventing it. The attitude of the Frankish theologians, however, was only a new symptom of the deepening rift between East and West, between Constantinople and Rome, announcing the Schism that would break the unity of the One Church in 1054.

Analyzing the consequences of the theology affirmed in the *Libri carolini* and adopted by the Council of Frankfurt, which denied the pneumatic character of the icon, in the plane of the sacred art of the West, Sorin Dumitrescu believes that the effect consisted first in the abolition *of the Byzantine canon* and that the phenomenon, which he suggestively calls the "schism" of the Schism, ended in the Duecento. After the abolition of the Byzantine canon, the phenomenon continued with the replacement *of the Byzantine guide*²³, a cultural movement manifested in Western sacred art starting with the "schism" of the Schism of the Duecento, continued in the following centuries and whose involution culminated in the "Latin iconoclasm" of the Italian Renaissance²⁴. It should be noted that while in the Latin West this phenomenon of desacralization of the icon and its fall to the status of a religious painting was in full swing, in Byzantium the Renaissance of the Palaiologos of the XIIIth - XVth centuries was in full bloom, both spiritual and cultural, both aspects positively influencing and fully contributing to the enrichment of Eastern sacred art.

The same author is of the opinion that the phenomenon that occurred in the West during the XIIth - XIVth centuries was the echo of a general schism, with repercussions at all levels of ecclesiastical discourse – theological, liturgical, homiletic, iconographic²⁵, and that it would not have been possible if the unity of the One Church had been preserved.

Sorin Dumitrescu's opinion on the existence of a sacred art common to the East and the West during the first Christian millennium, which corresponds to the unity of the Church, is not shared by François Bœspflug, for whom this thesis, which is quite widespread, is nothing more than a "misleading myth". According to the Catholic theologian and art historian, the conscious elaboration by Frankish theologians of a doctrinal perspective different from the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea was caused not only by Charlemagne's political and personal motivations, but above all by the "divergent readings" offered over the centuries by Constantinople and Rome to theological themes, ecclesiological and sacred art²⁶.

A first "divergent reading" can be perceived, for example, also at the level of the architecture of the churches built in that period in the East and West, an architecture that reflects, in turn, the "architecture" of theological thought, which influenced social-political and religious life in all its aspects.

Thus, the architecture of the Byzantine churches reflects the knowledge of God through a gradual revelation, through angels, prophets, the Gospel, apostolic proclamation, visions of the saints, mystical experience, theological language, a revelation that can be captured iconically²⁷. It is no coincidence that the formation of the Byzantine iconographic canon was favored by the emergence of the architecture of the church in the cross with a spire, in which the iconic revelation

²³ The Byzantine iconographic canon represents the dogmatic norm of the guide, and the guide, the practical or applied norm of the canon, the two being intrinsically linked.

²⁴ Sorin DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, Ed. Anastasia, 2010, pp. 92, 159, 183.

²⁵ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, p. 183.

²⁶ F. BŒSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, pp. 13-15.

²⁷ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, p. 191.



takes place from top to bottom, from Jesus Christ Pantocrator to man. Thus, the "humble" spires of the Byzantine churches evoke the kenosis of the Logos of God, Who descended, fully revealed Himself through the Incarnation and continues to reveal Himself through His icon located on the top of "heaven" in the central spire of the church.

The spires of the Gothic cathedrals piercing the sky, on the other hand, evoke the proud effort of the human mind, deprived of the light of divine grace, to discover God through one's own intellectual powers and to know Him in a natural knot, through the play of affirmations and negations of scholastic thought, which is reflected in the architecture of the Roman Catholic churches. According to the researchers, the synchronicity of the emergence and development of scholastic thought, embodied in the demonstrative "architecture" of some Summa Theologica, with the French Gothic in the architecture of churches, whose promoter was the abbot Suger of Saint Denis (1122-1151)²⁸, was not at all accidental. The "architecture" of theological thought and that of the churches therefore directly influenced sacred art, if in the Byzantine world the appearance of the architecture of the church in cross with a spire favored the formation of the iconographic canon, in the West, on the other hand, the appearance in the architecture of churches of French Gothic, the birth of scholasticism and the "renaissances" that preceded the Renaissance²⁹ ensured the "success" of the phenomenon of desacralization of iconographic art.

3. EFFECTS OF THE PHENOMENON OF DESACRALIZATION OF SACRED ART

In the West, the main effect of this "schism of the Schism" was the replacement of the icon with the religious painting, and the main aspect that makes the difference, from a plastic point of view, between the two types of images is visible first at the level of the "perspective" created by the lines of fleeing of the image. "If, in the religious painting, the directions of all the lines flee as in reality, in order to gather at a vanishing point located on the horizon line, a line that we see drawn somewhere far away, in the depth of the painting, in the icons, the directions of the lines apparently flee in reverse, that is, they seem to flee from the depth of the image to the foreground of the surface of the icon, which automatically becomes their horizon line. We are dealing with an inverted perspective [...]"³⁰. The difference between the icon and the religious painting at the level of "perspective" is not accidental, since the two perspectives, natural, in the religious painting, and inverted or upside down, in the icon, materialize from a plastic point of view the "divergent reading", in the East and in the West, of the teaching about the knowledge of God.

The inverted perspective represents God "as He lets Himself to be seen by us"³¹ through revelation. The reverse perspective, which opens up to the depth of the image, symbolizes man's knowledge of God, a knowledge that starts from the close plane, of the face-to-face encounter with God the Incarnate Son, represented in the icon either directly or indirectly, through His saints, knowledge that advances and becomes ever deeper on the path of mystical experience, revealing God as love and superabundance of light, perceived as divine darkness. On the other hand, the reverse perspective also symbolizes the descent of the Incarnate Son of God to men, in order to call

²⁸ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, pp. 162-163, 190-191; Erwin PANOFISKY, "Abatele Suger de la Saint-Denis", în: *Artă și semnificație*, traducere de Ștefan Stoenescu, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1980, pp. 184, 195-196; Erwin PANOFISKY, *Arhitectură gotică și gândire scolastică*, traducere de Marina Vazaca, postfață de Sorin Dumitrescu, Ed. Anastasia, 1999, pp. 53-91.

²⁹ E. PANOFISKY, *Arhitectură gotică și gândire scolastică*, pp. 56-73; E. PANOFISKY, Renaissance and Renascences, in: *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 6, nr. 2, 1944, pp. 201-236.

³⁰ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, p. 183.

³¹ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, p. 186.



them to Himself and to dialogue with each one of them. In other words, the reverse perspective has the capacity to mediate through the icon the "face to face" encounter of the believer with God the Incarnate Son, so that not only the believer contemplates Christ, but also Christ looks at the one who contemplates Him³². In the case of the religious painting, the natural perspective, whose angle closes in the depth of the image, being similar to the angles formed by the spires of Gothic cathedrals, symbolizes the distance from God to which man is confined to the plane of the created world, from where he tries to scrutinize his Creator and to know Him rationally, demonstratively-scholastic. Unable to ascend to God and to know Him in any other way than rationally, contenting himself with the knowledge of the Creator through the natural beauty of His creation, beauty which He made room for in the icon instead of the spiritual beauty of the deified man and the creation sanctified by him, he desacralized the iconic image and lowered it to the level of an art of aesthetic beauty.

Also, unlike the canonical icon, which intercedes for the believer the "face-to-face" encounter with the holy person and with the divine mysteries, the religious painting, since it ignores the theological perspective in order to emphasize exclusively the subject, being made to please and to create a state of aesthetic emotion, has been theologically "decoupled"³³.

The evasion of the theological dimension of the icon in the West was also favored by the fact that, starting from the XII - XIII centuries, the iconographer left the sphere of the Church's life, no longer responded to the needs of the spiritual life of the church community, ceased to be an iconographer, transforming himself into an artist. As an artist, he took the liberty of no longer representing the iconographic themes according to the canon, but according to his own imagination or the requirements of the individuals who commissioned those works. Therefore, if at the beginning, in the XII - XIII centuries, the religious picture was charged "with a tender human emotion", which substituted the spiritual hieraticism in the Byzantine icon, it finally ended, in the XIVth century, in a new, "realistic and non-transcendental" style³⁴.

At the same time, from that period onwards, the emphasis was placed on the artistic value of the representation, on its originality and uniqueness and, of course, on the skills and talent of the artist, who comes out of anonymity and signs his works, customizing them³⁵.

The phenomenon of desacralization of the icon occurred gradually over several centuries, as Byzantine sacred art continued to influence the religious art of the Catholic West until the XIVth century. In the IX-XII centuries the influences of Byzantine sacred art on Western art can be identified in the wall paintings or easel paintings executed in churches in Italy, France, Spain, England, Germany and even in Denmark or Sweden³⁶. After the emergence and spread of French Gothic in almost all of Catholic Europe, in the XIII - XIV centuries Byzantine sacred art reduced its area of influence, and that was increasingly fragile, exclusively in Italy³⁷. In Italy, a completely paradoxical situation of stylistic schizophrenia was reached, the same artist producing, depending on the requests of the beneficiaries, either canonical Byzantine icons or works of art "emancipated" from the tutelage of the Byzantine canon³⁸.

³² F. BŒSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, p. 85.

³³ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, p. 237.

³⁴ Charles DELVOYE, *Arta bizantină*, vol. 2, traducere de Florica-Eugenia Condurachi, prefață de Vasile Drăguț, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1976, p. 283.

³⁵ F. BŒSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, pp. 96-102.

³⁶ Ch. DELVOYE, *Arta bizantină*, vol. 2, pp. 168-176.

³⁷ Ch. DELVOYE, *Arta bizantină*, vol. 2, pp. 281-285.

³⁸ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, p. 165.



4. THE WAYS OF PENETRATING THE INFLUENCES OF WESTERN RELIGIOUS ART IN THE EASTERN SACRED ART

The first elements of Catholic religious art began to be introduced into Byzantine sacred art as early as the time of Palaiologos³⁹, which should not be surprising, given the almost six decades of Latin rule of Constantinople and other territories of the Empire, where important schools of painting were active, such as Thessaloniki, Crete or Corfu.

After the disappearance of the Byzantine Empire from history, under the increasing pressure of Catholic propaganda, Western religious art would further influence Orthodox iconography, which took over, without theological and canonical discernment, so-called iconographic themes and styles from the West, a process whose repercussions can be seen to this day. The exercising of the influences of Western religious art on Eastern art manifested itself in all areas of confluence of the two civilizations, from the Greek islands and the Peloponnese⁴⁰ to the borders of the Russian Empire.

Crete, Corfu and the other former Byzantine territories that remained under Venetian rule both after the reconquest of Constantinople and other territories by the Byzantines, and after the fall of the Empire under Ottoman rule, constituted the areas of confluence of Byzantine and Renaissance iconography, reaching an iconographic "dualism". As early as the fifteenth century, the terms *forma graeca* and *forma latina* were used to differentiate the style in which icons were painted⁴¹. Obviously, over time Cretan iconists borrowed not only the Renaissance style, but also Catholic iconographic themes. As Cretan iconographers worked throughout the Greek territory, including in the great monastic centers of Mount Athos and Meteora, the elements taken from Western religious art, both iconographic themes and artistic influences, were carried on⁴². Through successive takeovers, by other iconographers and painters, they spread to the other Orthodox territories of the Balkans⁴³. A similar phenomenon, although on a smaller scale, as there were no direct links with the great Italian Renaissance centers, also occurred in Transylvania, another territory inhabited by the Orthodox but ruled by the Catholics. As early as the beginning of the fifteenth century, the influences of the Renaissance art of the trecento at a stylistic level can be identified in the mural painting in the churches of this territory, as well as the insinuation of some Western iconographic themes⁴⁴.

Another way in which Western religious art influences insinuated themselves into Eastern iconography was Russian sacred art. The influences, which began to manifest themselves from the fifteenth century in the suburban cities - Novgorod and Pskov⁴⁵ -, a period in which they were reciprocal and were limited to some "iconographic themes and details", reached their peak and were

³⁹ Irene LEONTAKIANAKOU, "Western Elements in Icon Painting in Regions under Venetian Rule and the Early Work of Theotokopoulos", in: Nicos HADJINICOLAOU, Panayotis K. IOANNOU, *Perceptions of El Greco in 2014*, Benaki Museum, Society of Cretan Historical Studies, Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Athens, 2019, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Xanthi PROESTAKI, "Western influences on 17th century post-Byzantine wall paintings in the Peloponnese: Roots in the 16th century", in: *Byzantinoslavica-Revue Internationale des Etudes Byzantines*, 68 (2010), pp. 291-352.

⁴¹ I. LEONTAKIANAKOU, "Western Elements in Icon Painting in Regions under Venetian Rule...", pp. 30-37.

⁴² Maria VASSILAKI, "Religious Art under Foreign Rule: the Case of the Painter", in: Paschalis KITROMILIDES and Dimitris ARVANITAKIS (eds.), *The Greek World under Ottoman and Western Domination: 15th-19th Centuries*, Onassis Cultural Center, New York, 2008, pp. 80-86.

⁴³ M. VASSILAKI, "Religious Art under Foreign Rule: the Case of the Painter", p. 88.

⁴⁴ Zsombor JÉKELY, "Les ateliers de peinture murale en Transylvanie autour de 1400", in: *Ars Transsilvaniae*, XXIII, 2013, pp. 31-54.

⁴⁵ L. USPENSKY, *Teologia icoanei*, pp. 264-265; p. 299, p. 302.



finalized in the era of Tsar Peter the Great (1682-1725)⁴⁶. He invited Western artists to his court, who introduced elements of classical architecture into the Russian Orthodox icon, buildings with columns and porticoes, wooded landscapes, azure backgrounds, instead of the gold or purple ones, specific to Byzantine icons⁴⁷, on the one hand. On the other hand, Russian iconographers became extremely concerned with the "mastery of the execution of painting"⁴⁸, which led to the imitation of Western naturalism, theorized and defended in the seventeenth century by some Russian iconographers, with fine features and extremely vivid colors, promoting aesthetic beauty, and not divine⁴⁹ beauty. This sacred art that "delighted the eye", as Deacon Paul of Aleppo confessed, passed from Russia to the other Orthodox countries, being cherished by both the clergy and the Orthodox nobility⁵⁰.

5. THEMES TAKEN OVER BY EASTERN ICONOGRAPHY FROM WESTERN RELIGIOUS ART

Over time, the differences, which accumulated not only at the theological, dogmatic level, but also at the level of themes, style, composition and technique, would penetrate Orthodox sacred art and parasitize it.

a). *The Holy Trinity*. A first corrupt iconographic theme in the Western world, which underwent serious innovations under the influence of the doctrine of the *Filioque*, a doctrine foreign to the common tradition of the One Church, which Charlemagne and his court theologians imposed, is the one entitled *The Holy Trinity*. In its corrupt Western form, this theme was also taken up without theological discernment in Orthodox iconography, being reproduced until the twentieth century by iconographers uninitiated in Orthodox theology. Given the importance of this iconographic theme from a doctrinal point of view, I have dealt with it in a special chapter⁵¹.

b). *The Resurrection of Christ*. For Christian art, the Resurrection of the Savior Jesus Christ was the motif treated in various themes or iconographic sequences, the origin of the oldest of them going back to Christian antiquity. For a long time it has been argued and convinced that the earliest scene that refers to the Resurrection is the one on the wall of the baptistery of the oldest church in the world preserved so far, dating back to around the year 240, discovered at Dura Europos⁵², on the banks of the Euphrates. The scene, of which only a fragment has been preserved, depicts three women dressed in white, carrying a torch in their right hand and a half-full vessel in their left, in procession, heading towards a white structure taller than them, guarded at the top, on either side, by

⁴⁶ L. USPENSKY, *Teologia icoanei*, pp. 264-265; a se vedea, pe larg, în aceeași lucrare, capitolul „Arta iconografică în perioada sinodală a Bisericii Ruse”, pp. 408-460.

⁴⁷ F. BËSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, p.43

⁴⁸ L. USPENSKY, *Teologia icoanei*, p. 307.

⁴⁹ A se vedea, pe această temă, capitolul „Arta eclesială în secolul XVII: O artă divizată. Abandonul Tradiției”, în L. USPENSKY, *Teologia icoanei*, pp. 306-356.

⁵⁰ L. USPENSKY, *Teologia icoanei*, pp. 306-307.

⁵¹ Pr. Cristian GAGU, "The canonical representation of the Holy Trinity in Orthodox Iconography" – Revised and added study, in: *Icoana credinței*, International Journal of Interdisciplinary Scientific Research, no. 17, year 9/2023, pp. 5-43, <https://doi.org/10.26520/icoana.2023.17.9.5-30>; în limba română: "Reprezentarea canonică a Sfintei Treimi în iconografia ortodoxă. Studiu revăzut și adăugat", in: *Teologie și educație la Dunărea de Jos*, vol. 21, Analele Universității "Dunărea de Jos", fasc. XVI, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2023, pp. 117-158, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1206145>

⁵² Carl Hermann KRAELING, Charles Bradford WELLES, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII, Part II: The Christian Building*, New Haven & Dura-Europos Publications, J. J. Augustin Publisher, Locust Valley, New York, 1967; Michael PEPPARD, *The World's Oldest Church. Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2016.



two stars of considerable size. On the lower part of the east wall, from where the procession is presumed to have started, five pairs of legs can be seen, from which it would appear that five women would participate in the procession. Although, according to some scholars, the scene would rather render *the Parable of the Ten Virgins*, being consequently called *the Procession of the Women*⁵³, or a simple procession symbolizing baptism, however, most arguments in relation to the interpretation of this scene support the claim that this is the first known representation of the Resurrection of the Savior Jesus Christ, being called *the Procession of the women bearers of myrrh*⁵⁴.

This theme, iconographically transposed into scenes that present compositional variations, was the main model for representing the Resurrection until the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the next⁵⁵. Thus, after the fourth century, the angels who proclaimed the Resurrection to the myrrh-bearing women appeared in the compositions⁵⁶, and at the beginning of the fifth century the soldiers who guarded the tomb appeared, two or even four in number, surprised in different attitudes, as in the miniatures in the *Gospel of Rabula*⁵⁷. However, it was not the only scene dedicated to the Resurrection, being sometimes followed by others, considered secondary by some scholars, the most common being *Christ appearing to the myrrh-bearing women in the garden*⁵⁸, but also *Thomas touching the wounds of Christ*, *Christ appearing to the Apostles*⁵⁹.

From the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth, the main theme that illustrates the Resurrection, and which in the Orthodox tradition has become normative, since it corresponds to the truth of faith about the Resurrection expressed in the New Testament texts (1 Peter 3:18-20), in the liturgical texts and in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*⁶⁰, is *Anastasis* (fig. 2), also known as *the Descent into Hell* or *the Descent into Limbo*⁶¹.

⁵³ M. PEPPARD, *The World's Oldest Church...*, pp. 119-154; M. PEPPARD, "New Testament Imagery in the Earliest Christian Baptistry", in: Lisa BRODY and Gail HOFFMAN, *Dura-Europos: Crossroads of Antiquity*, Boston: McMullen Museum of Art / Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, pp. 103-121; M. PEPPARD, "Illuminating the Dura-Europos Baptistry: Comparanda for the Female Figures", in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2012, pp. 556-571; M. PEPPARD, "Early Christian Art and Ritual", in: Robin M. JENSEN and Mark D. ELLISON (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, pp. 281-283; Sanne KLAVER, "The Brides of Christ: *The Women in Procession* in the Baptistry of Dura-Europos", in: *Eastern Christian Art*, vol. 9, 2012-2013, pp. 63-78.

⁵⁴ André GRABAR, "La Fresque des Saintes Femmes au Tombeau", in: *Cahiers archéologiques*, 8, 1956, pp. 9-26; C. H. KRAELING, Ch. B. WELLES, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII, Part II: The Christian Building*, pp. 190-197; Arhim. Sofian BOGHIU, *Chipul Mântuitorului în iconografie*, Ed. Bizantină, București, 2001, p. 98; Jeanne VILLETTE, "Que représente la grande fresque de la maison chrétienne de Doura?", in: *Revue Biblique*, vol. 60, no. 3, 1953, pp. 398-413;

⁵⁵ Arhim. S. BOGHIU, *Chipul Mântuitorului în iconografie*, p. 98; F. BÆSPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, p. 152; S. G. TSUJI, "Quelques réflexions...", p. 81.

⁵⁶ J. VILLETTE, "Que représente la grande fresque...", pp. 407, 411.

⁵⁷ S. G. TSUJI, "Quelques réflexions...", pp. 67-69, 71.

⁵⁸ Brook W. R. PEARSON, Felicity HARLEY, "Resurrection in Jewish-Christian Apocryphal Gospels and Early Christian Art", in Stanley E. PORTER and Brook W. R. PEARSON (ed), *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries*, London / New York, 2004, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁹ Anita STREZOVA, *Hesychasm and Art: The Appearance of New Iconographic Trends in Byzantine and Slavic Lands in 14th and 15th Centuries*, ANU Press, Canberra, 2014, p. 136; S. G. TSUJI, "Quelques réflexions...", pp. 68, 72.

⁶⁰ "Evanghelia lui Nicodim", în *Evangheliile apocrife*, traducere, studiu introductiv, note și prezentări de Cristian Bădiliță, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2^a 1999.

⁶¹ Arhim. S. BOGHIU, *Chipul Mântuitorului în iconografie*, p. 98; S. G. TSUJI, "Quelques réflexions...", p. 81; Wladyslaw PODLACHA, *Pictura murală din Bucovina*, în: Wladyslaw PODLACHA, Grigore NANDRIȘ, *Umanismul*



In the Byzantine composition, the most famous representation of it of all being the one in the chapel of the Chora church in Constantinople, the current Kariye Djami, the Savior Jesus Christ, dressed in a luminous hat and in the light of divine glory symbolized by the mandorla, is figured frontally, descended into the depths of the darkness of hell. Being in full motion, Christ snatches with a vigorous movement the first parents Adam and Eve from the tombs in the form of sarcophagi, dragging them out of the darkness of hell into the light of divine glory, and at the same time breaks down under His feet the brass gates of hell, into the depths of which He throws Satan, faithfully bound with iron chains in his hands, to the feet and neck. On the right, behind the Savior Jesus Christ, there is a group of righteous people of the Old Law, among whom we can identify Kings David and Solomon, led by Saint John the Baptist who shows the Lamb Christ with the right hand of all, and on the left is Abel, behind whom there is another group of the righteous.

In other versions of the scene, prior to the twelfth century, Christ carries the Holy Cross in his right hand, with his left hand taking Adam out of the tomb, while Eve waits to be lifted from the tomb, the tombs of the two being side by side.

In the various representations of *Anastasis in the Orthodox space*, in the center of the stage is Christ clothed in divine glory figured by the mandorla, stepping over the gates of hell always represented superimposed in the shape of the letter X. According to S. Dumitrescu this is the threshold "at the crossroads of the two eternities", that of being together with Christ, in the light of the uncreated glory of God within the Kingdom of Heaven, or that of being with Satan, in the outermost darkness. In this threshold stands the mandorla, itself a paschal threshold, which separates the divine light from the darkness of hell, the life of death, inside and outside⁶².

The presence of Old Testament saints who are identifiable is not accidental. The presence and resurrection of Adam and Eve, as the forefathers of the human race, signifies the redemption of the whole human nature from the dominion of death and sin. The presence of King David, as a descendant of Jesse, shows that through him and his descendants the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled (11:1-3), Christ being the King to whom the prophet refers through the "scepter" or "rod" that sprung from the root of Jesse. Abel's presence is also charged with soteriological meanings, since he was the first man to know death with the body and who is resurrected by Christ along with his parents Adam and Eve. St. John the Baptist is depicted with his right hand showing Christ the Lord because, after his death, he proclaimed the Lamb of God and to those in hell, who were waiting for the coming of the Messiah.

The soteriological aspect so specific and accentuated in the Orthodox iconography of *the Descent into Hell* is completely lost in the religious art of the Catholic Church, which shifted its interest towards the historical event of the Resurrection as coming out of the grave. The reason for the appearance and imposition of this representation of the Resurrection in the Western world was the weakening of the faith of Western Christians, especially intellectuals, starting from the twelfth century, as a result of the promotion of rationalism and nominalism, which ultimately led to skepticism and unbelief. There was a need, therefore, for witnesses of Christ's Resurrection, who would have seen Him emerge victorious from the tomb so that others would also believe⁶³. Therefore, Western artists iconographically rendered the Resurrection as they imagined it to have

picturii murale postbizantine, vol I, prefață de Vasile Drăguț, cuvânt înainte de Mabel Nandriș, traducere de Grigore Nandriș și Anca Irina Ionescu, note de Grigore Nandriș și Anca Vasiliu, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1985, p. 205.

⁶² S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și icoana*, pp. 262-263.

⁶³ M. DIDRON, note 1, in: DENYS DE FOURNA, *Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne grecque et latine*, avec une introduction et des notes par M. Didron, traduit par Paul Durand, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1945, p. 200; F. BESPFLUG, E. FOGLIADINI, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident...*, p. 156.



occurred, since neither the Gospel texts nor other sources describe the mystery of the Resurrection with the body from the tomb of the Savior Jesus Christ. As in the case of other iconographic scenes, in the case of the Resurrection they were inspired by religious theater, which was in great vogue in the Catholic West⁶⁴.

In the Western composition, Christ is represented emerging victorious from a tomb-sarcophagus, which refers to the table of the holy altar, holding on the right a crusader flag, with a red cross on a white background, while a few soldiers, between two and five, are depicted around the sarcophagus in different poses, either sleeping, or frightened, or amazed by the event whose witnesses are supposed to have been (fig. 1).

This composition specific to the Catholic Church, made famous by the Renaissance, despite the fact that it has no New Testament biblical or liturgical foundation, "made a career in the Eastern countries"⁶⁵, being preferred to the image of the Eastern canonical tradition of *the Descent into Limbo*. The phenomenon happened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, since it even entered the *Erminia* of Dionysius of Furna, as a representation of the first voscresna⁶⁶.

c). *The Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 3). Another theme of Western influence that Eastern iconographers have taken up is the one known as the *Coronation of the Virgin*. In the Orthodox churches where it is painted, the theme occupies the entire dome of the apse of the holy altar. The theme has its beginnings in French church painting of the twelfth century, being attributed to the abbot Suger⁶⁷. In the "classical" iconography of the theme, the Virgin Mary, represented frontally, either on her knees or standing, with her hands clasped in the form of a prayer, standing between the angels on high in heaven, is crowned by the Holy Trinity, represented according to the corrupt iconography under the influence of the *Filioque*, namely God the Father in the shape of an old man with a white beard, God the Son in the shape of the Savior Jesus Christ and God the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove. Until crystallization in this form, the theme also knew other variants, such as the coronation of the Virgin Mary, on the throne, by two angels, while the Savior Christ makes the sign of blessing on them, by the Savior Christ, who places the crown with both hands, or by God the Father. In depicting these variants of the theme, the scene often refers to the common image of coronations held at the European Royal Courts.

Most art historians and theologians believe that the theme of *the Coronation of the Virgin* illustrates the Catholic teaching on *the Immaculate Conception*⁶⁸, which, after germinating in

⁶⁴ Rosemary WOOLF, *The English Mystery Plays*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1972, pp. 274-279; Katharine GOODLAND, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama. From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear*, Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama, Ashgate, Hampshire, 2005, pp. 77-98; Emile MÂLE, *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France. Etude sur l'iconographie du Moyen Age et sur ses sources d'inspiration*, Paris, 1908, pp. 3-75; I. D. ȘTEFĂNESCU, *Iconografia artei bizantine și a picturii feudale românești*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1973, p. 65; Arhim. S. BOGHIU, *Chipul Mântuitorului în iconografie*, p. 98.

⁶⁵ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și icoana*, p. 258.

⁶⁶ Wladyslaw PODLACHA, *Pictura murală din Bucovina*, p. 206; DIONISIE DIN FURNA, *Erminia picturii bizantine*, Ed. Sophia, București, 2000, p. 117.

⁶⁷ Wladyslaw PODLACHA, *Pictura murală din Bucovina*, pp. 230-233; vezi nota 1, p. 233.

⁶⁸ Cu privire la dogma Imaculatei Concepții, a se vedea: Mirella LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*, coll. *Monographs on archaeology and fine arts*, VII, published by The College Art Association of America and The Art Bulletin, New York, 1957, pp. 5-11 (istoria apariției și cristalizării învățaturii despre Imaculata Concepție), pp. 11-13 (apariția și impunerea sărbătorii); Emile MÂLE, *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France...*, pp. 214-219; Lionel BATAILLON, "Les symboles des litanies et l'iconographies de la Vierge en Normandie au XVI^e siècle", *Revue archéologique*, cinquième série, tome XVIII, 1923, pp. 278-281; Séverine LEPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", *Médiévales* 57, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, automne 2009, pp. 117-121, 128-130.



Western popular piety for five centuries, was officially accepted in 1476, when Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) instituted the feast of the *Immaculate Conception*⁶⁹, Catholic Christians are left free to receive it or not. In 1854 Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) took another step and imposed this teaching as a dogma through the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*⁷⁰. According to this Catholic doctrinal innovation, the Infant Mary was conceived through the work of the Holy Spirit without original sin, like the Savior Jesus Christ.

Like other themes of Western church art from the XIth - XIIIth centuries, *the Coronation of the Virgin* initially illustrated another direction of the people's growing piety towards the Virgin Mary. According to some historians of Western sacred art, *the Coronation of the Virgin* illustrates since the eleventh century the antiphons of the hymns *Regina Coeli*, *Ave Regina Coelorum*, *Salve Regina*, dedicated to the Virgin Mary honored as "Queen of Heaven", who protects all Christians: "Holy Mary, save those in trouble, strengthen the weak in faith, comfort those who mourn, pray for the people, defend the priests, intercede for women"⁷¹. From the scriptural point of view, *the Coronation of the Virgin* is justified, in a totally false way, with Psalm 109, v. 1. Despite the evidence of the text that says "The Lord said to my Lord, «Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool»", referring beyond doubt to the person of the Savior Jesus Christ (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36), some Western theologians associated him with the Virgin Mary, as happened in the *Flemish Psalter* of the thirteenth century⁷².

The theme, glossed by Mirella Levi d'Ancona among the images illustrating the Catholic teaching on *the Triumph of the Virgin over death*, which is subsequent to the theme of *the Assumption of the Virgin*, was frequently associated with the dogma of *the Immaculate Conception* in the XIIIth - XIVth centuries on the basis of a theological sophistry, according to which, since the Virgin did not know the corruption of death, being raised to Heaven and crowned by the Holy Trinity, she did not even know original sin, the effect of which is the corruption of death. In the thirteenth century, Western theologians who promoted the teaching of *the Immaculate Conception* affirmed that the Virgin was protected from corruption after death precisely as a result of her immaculate conception⁷³.

However, the theme is rather related to that of the *Dormition of the Mother of God*, the coronation following the reception of the Virgin into Heaven⁷⁴.

The spread of the theme in the Catholic world was favored, however, by the development of the Marian cult, which experienced a great flowering after the Council of Trent (1545-1563)⁷⁵.

⁶⁹ Catholics celebrate *the Immaculate Conception* on December 8, while Orthodox Christians have on their calendar the feast of *the Conception of the Virgin Mary* by the Holy and Divine Fathers Joachim and Anna on December 9.

⁷⁰ "We declare, pronounce and define the fact that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a unique grace and privilege of Almighty God, having regard to the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, protected from every stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore must be firmly and continually believed by all believers".

⁷¹ E. MÂLE, *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France...*, p. 206; Jean FOURNÉE, "Aspects historiques du culte et de l'iconographie de la Vierge en Normandie", *Études Normandes*, 37^e année, n° 4, 1988, p. 9.

⁷² M. LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception...*, pp. 28-29.

⁷³ M. LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception...*, pp. 28-30; Laurence RIVIALE, "L'Immaculée Conception dans les citeaux normands", dans: Thelamon FRANÇOISE (ed.), *Marie et la «Fête aux normands»*: *Dévotion, images, poésie*, Mont-Saint-Aignan, Presses Universitaires de Rouen et Havre, 2011, p. 181; Françoise BARON, "L'iconographie de l'Immaculée Conception dans la sculpture medieval et modern en Normandie", dans: Thelamon FRANÇOISE (ed.), *Marie et la «Fête aux normands»*, pp. 168-170.

⁷⁴ W. PODLACHA, *Pictura murală din Bucovina*, pp. 231-234, vezi nota 1, p. 234.

⁷⁵ I. D. ȘTEFĂNESCU, *Iconografia artei bizantine...*, p. 65; Cornel TATAI-BALTĂ, "Reprezentarea încoronării Fecioarei Maria în icoanele pe sticlă", în *Annales Universitatis Apulensis*, Series Historica, 9/I, 2005, p. 100



In the Romanian countries, the scene entered the sixteenth century, first in Transylvania, through the mediation of woodcuts, the most famous and widespread being those that reproduced this theme in the representation of Albrecht Dürer, from where it later spread, through the Făgăraș Country, in Wallachia, on the Olt Valley, while in Moldavia, where we find it reproduced in the exterior painting from Sucevița, it came under the influence of Russian sacred art⁷⁶.

Not only the theme of *the Coronation of the Virgin* was taken up and used to iconographically illustrate this new Catholic dogma, but also others, such as *the Virgin of the Apocalypse*, *the Virgin with the biblical symbols*, *Daniel in the lions' den*, *The Three Young Men in the fiery furnace*, *The Burning Bush*, *Gideon's Wool*, *Aaron's Rod*, even the theme *The Closed Gate of Ezekiel*, although this always confirms the virginity of the Mother of God, *the Meeting of the righteous parents Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate* and *the Tree of Jesse*⁷⁷.

Of these, the theme of *the Tree of Jesse* was also taken up by Orthodox iconography, although it did not enjoy the same spread as *the Coronation of the Virgin*.

d). *The tree of Jesse*. One of the scholars who studied this theme stated that "among the traditional images considered to illustrate the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, *the Tree of Jesse* occupies an ambiguous place"⁷⁸. Although the author does not specify what this ambiguity consists of, we can guess that it consists in the question of the place of appearance of the theme, West or East, on the one hand, and, on the other, in that of the relationship of the theme with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Western historians of religious art, especially the French, affirm that *the Tree of Jesse* appeared in the West towards the end of the eleventh century⁷⁹, initially illustrating Isaiah's prophecy: "a rod from the root of Jesse will appear, and a flower from its root will rise" (11:1). It seems that the earliest representation of the theme dates back to 1086 and appears in *the Vyšegrad Codex*, before the Gospel of St. Matthew the Evangelist. In this first representation, from the foot of Jesse, which is wrapped in a parchment inscribed with the text of Isaiah 2:1-2, grows a tree in whose branches seven doves' shelter, symbolizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2-3).

The development of this theme, by associating the prophecy of Isaiah (11:1) with the theme of the royal genealogy of Jesus as the successor of David, son of Jesse, in the prologue of the Gospel according to St. Matthew the Evangelist (1:1-16), is attributed to the abbot Suger of Saint Denis⁸⁰. In a stained glass window in the monastery of Saint-Denis, rebuilt and reconsecrated in 1144, he added the images of kings to the original theme, transforming it into the genealogy of the Savior⁸¹. From Saint-Denis the theme spread in the XIIth - XIIIth centuries throughout France⁸², and the crusaders would have taken it to the East⁸³, in the second half of the twelfth century, more precisely

⁷⁶ I. D. ȘTEFĂNESCU, *Iconografia artei bizantine...*, p. 65; C. TATAI-BALTĂ, "Reprezentarea încoronării Fecioarei Maria...", pp. 93-102

⁷⁷ M. LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception...*, pp. 47-48; F. BARON, "The iconography of the Immaculate Conception...", pp. 167-172; L. RIVIALE, "The Immaculate Conception in the Norman Cîteaux", p. 181.

⁷⁸ S. LEPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", p. 114.

⁷⁹ Margot FASSLER, "Mary's Nativity, Fulbert of Chartres and the Stirps Jesse: Liturgical Innovation circa 1000 and Its Afterlife", *Speculum*, vol. 75, no.2, The University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 391; S. LEPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", p. 114; I. D. ȘTEFĂNESCU, *Iconografia artei bizantine...*, p. 176.

⁸⁰ M. FASSLER, "Mary's Nativity...", p. 391; S. LEPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", p. 115; F. BARON, "L'iconographie de l'Immaculée Conception...", pp. 170-172.

⁸¹ F. BARON, "L'iconographie de l'Immaculée Conception...", pp. 170-172;

⁸² S. LEPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", pp. 114-115.

⁸³ I. D. ȘTEFĂNESCU, *Iconografia artei bizantine...*, p. 176.



in 1169, being represented in Bethlehem, in the church of *the Nativity of the Lord*⁸⁴. In the initial representation of the West, from the chest of Jesse, who was depicted sleeping, came a tree on the stem of which the faces of the kings from the Saviour's genealogy were depicted, at the top of the tree being represented the Virgin Mary and the Savior Christ, in adulthood and separated from each other. On either side of the stem were two thick branches in whose branches appear the prophets who announced the birth of the Savior from the Virgin Mary⁸⁵. Over time, the complexity of the iconographic program increased, adding the representation of the biblical prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the coming of the Messiah, no less than sixteen or even eighteen images, of the twelve Apostles, as well as of some pagan sages who would have prophesied the coming of Christ⁸⁶. In the sixteenth century, the theme was enriched by the figure, in a stained glass window in the cathedral of Rouen, under the branches of the tree, of the twelve Sibyls, carrying scrolls with their prophecies in their hands and looking towards the prophesied One⁸⁷.

Although most scholars attribute the origin of this theme to the West, there is also the opinion that its origin is an Eastern one, even Constantinopolitan. The one who supported this opinion is André Grabar, who wrote in one of his studies the following:

"Until now, *the Tree of Jesse* has passed as the creation of the Latin iconographers, and no Byzantine examples of this composition can be cited prior to the oldest *Tree of Jesse* in the West (the *Visegrad Bible*, 11th century). But the presence of a sketch of *the Tree of Jesse* among the illustrations, entirely Byzantine, in the illustrated *Book of Kings*, in the Vatican Library (gr. 333) (the manuscript is from the twelfth century and its images are inspired by older models), and several other considerations, could lead us to reconsider the question of the origins of this theme".⁸⁸

It does not follow from the above expression that the statement is categorical; on the contrary, through the expressions "if we were to succeed in attributing it to Byzantium" and "it could lead"⁸⁹, the author clearly places it in the key of an optional conditional. The nuance is extremely important, since the illustrated manuscript of *the Book of Kings* is dated as belonging to the third quarter of the eleventh century⁹⁰, from which it follows that the representation of *the Tree of Jesse* in this volume precedes the one in the *Vyšegrad Codex*, being the oldest. An important argument in support of this opinion is the fact that the Old Testament prophets are depicted with the aura of saints, as is the case in Orthodox iconography, not in Western iconography⁹¹.

However, even if the illustrations in *the Book of Kings* are entirely Byzantine and "copied no doubt from precise models" earlier, at least those illustrating the Books III and IV of the Kings⁹², it

⁸⁴ Pippa SALONIUS, "Arbor Jesse – Lignum Vitae: The Tree of Jesse, the Tree of life, and the Mendicants in Late Medieval Orvieto", in: *Medieval Art and Thought*, Pipa SALONIUS and Andrea WARM (eds), IMR 20, Brepols, 2014, p. 225; Tania VELMANS, "L'Arbre de Jessé en Orient chrétien", *ΔΕΙΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ*, τόμος ΚΣΤ' (2005), ΑΘΗΝΑ, p. 125.

⁸⁵ S. LÉPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", pp. 121, 131.

⁸⁶ P. SALONIUS, "Arbor Jesse – Lignum Vitae: The Tree of Jesse...", pp. 222-223; T. VELMANS, "L'Arbre de Jessé en Orient chrétien", p. 126.

⁸⁷ F. BARON, "L'iconographie de l'Immaculée Conception...", pp. 170-172;

⁸⁸ André GRABAR, "Une pixyde en ivoire à Dumbarton Oaks. Quelques notes sur l'art profane pendant les derniers siècles de l'art byzantine", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 14, 1960, p. 132.

⁸⁹ A. GRABAR, "Une pixyde en ivoire...", p. 132.

⁹⁰ John H. LOWDEN, "Kings, Book of", in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. By Kazhdan, 1991; Jean LASSUS, "Les miniatures byzantines du Livre des Rois, d'après un manuscrit de la bibliothèque Vaticane", *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome*, 45, 1928, p. 38.

⁹¹ P. SALONIUS, "Arbor Jesse – Lignum Vitae: The Tree of Jesse...", p. 221.

⁹² J. LASSUS, "Les miniatures byzantines du Livre des Rois...", p. 43; A. GRABAR, "Une pixyde en ivoire...", p. 132.



cannot be excluded that the image of the *Tree of Jesse* was added after the manuscript was made, as P. Salonijs admits that it would be possible⁹³. In favor of this hypothesis, he argues that *the Tree of Jesse* was illustrated on the back page of the last sheet of the manuscript (fol. no. 199), being the only theme placed in this way⁹⁴. A second argument in favor of this hypothesis is the fact that the theme of *the Tree of Jesse* does not correspond with the text of *the Fourth Book of Kings*, a principle assumed by the miniaturist and respected in the rest of the manuscript⁹⁵, nor with the image that precedes it on the obverse of the page, *The Ascension of the Holy Prophet Elijah to Heaven*. Even if the miniatures in *the Books of the Third and Fourth Kings* were made by a miniaturist other than the one who illustrated them in the first two, being substantially smaller in number and of a lower artistic quality than those in the first two⁹⁶, they still differ and are superior in the complexity of the compositions of the representation of *the Tree of Jesse*, which is nothing more than an unfinished sketch. That is, ultimately, a third argument supporting the hypothesis of the subsequent addition of that image to the manuscript in question.

Two other representations of the theme *The Tree of Jesse* in the East, this time in monumental wall art, the earliest of these being the one from 1169, in the church of *the Nativity of the Lord* in Bethlehem, and the second, in the church of the Constantinopolitan monastery of *St. Mary Peribleptos*, dated 1260, are also considered as arguments in favor of its Constantinopolitan origin. The earliest of these representations, although made by the Constantinopolitan master "iconographer and mosaicist" Ephraim, at the order of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180)⁹⁷, cannot plead for the Eastern origin of the theme since, as can be easily seen, it is later than the stained glass window of Saint Denis, described by Abbot Suger at the consecration of the church, in 1144. The second representation can be invoked even less as an argument in favor of the Eastern origin of the theme. On the other hand, according to C. Mango, according to whom the theme in question entered the Byzantine iconography only in the time of the Palaiologos, under the influence of the Latins, who ruled Constantinople between 1204-1261, the monastery of Saint Maria Peribleptos was the source of the spread of this theme throughout the Orthodox area⁹⁸.

In favor of the Latin origin of the iconographic theme *The Tree of Jesse* also pleads the dates of the study in which T. Velmans follows its evolution on the edges and in the vicinity of the borders of the Byzantine Empire. In the representations to which the author refers, at the top of the tree appears either the non-canonical, Latin representation of the Holy Trinity, or the Virgin and Child, which was used in the West to illustrate the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, so that the author concludes that "its appearance may have been encouraged by Western influence"⁹⁹.

The Latin origin of the iconographic theme *The Tree of Jesse* was undoubtedly argued, I think, by Margot Fassler. According to her, the theme, originally called *the Root of Jesse*, first appeared at the end of the eleventh century and "was the result of strings of liturgical renewals and ancient scriptural and liturgical exegetical traditions"¹⁰⁰. The origin of the theme was, therefore, the

⁹³ P. SALONIJS, "Arbor Jesse – Lignum Vitae: The Tree of Jesse...", nota 35, pp. 221-222.

⁹⁴ J. LASSUS, "Les miniatures byzantines du Livre des Rois...", p. 74.

⁹⁵ J. LASSUS, "Les miniatures byzantines du Livre des Rois...", p. 40.

⁹⁶ J. LASSUS, "Les miniatures byzantines du Livre des Rois...", p. 43.

⁹⁷ P. SALONIJS, "Arbor Jesse – Lignum Vitae: The Tree of Jesse...", pp. 224-225; T. VELMANS, "L'Arbre de Jessé en Orient chrétien", p. 125.

⁹⁸ Cyril MANGO, "The Monastery of St. Mary of Peribleptos (Sulu Manastir) at Constantinople Revisited", *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, 23 (1992), p. 484.

⁹⁹ T. VELMANS, "L'Arbre de Jessé en Orient chrétien", pp. 130-131.

¹⁰⁰ M. FASSLER, "Mary's Nativity...", p. 391.



liturgical renewals related to the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God carried out in the West in the time of Charlemagne, consisting in particular in the introduction to the service of the text of Matthew 1:1-18 and in the liturgical hymns explaining the Old Testament texts of Numbers 17 and Isaiah 11, and some sermons delivered on the occasion of the feast. Of the latter, the most important in the appearance of the theme *The Root of Jesse* seems to have been the one entitled *Approbate consuetudinis*, pronounced by Bishop Fulbert of Chartres around the year 1000. In his sermon, the French bishop showed that the Virgin Mary is both the descendant of the priestly family of Aaron and the royal family of David, thus initiating the theme of the family of Jesse¹⁰¹.

The depictions of the new iconographic theme *The Root of Jesse - Stirps Jesse*, later translated *The Tree of Jesse*, dating from the XIth - XIIth centuries, are generally more developed than that of the *Vyšegrad Codex* and show Jesse lying down, looking up at the two branches into which the stem growing from his womb separates. Between the two branches, symbolizing the double descent, from the high priest Aaron and King David, figured on the outside on either side of them, with scrolls in one hand and with the other pointing to Christ, is represented the Virgin Mary. Above the Virgin appears the Savior Christ, either Child, or in the hypostasis of Pantocrator, sitting on the throne, with the Holy Gospel open, or in the medallion, and in the branches of the tree are the seven doves, symbolizing the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit¹⁰² (fig. 4).

This composition was the basis from which Abbot Suger started to develop the theme of *Jesse's Root* in the much more complex version made in the stained-glass window of the church of Saint Denis Abbey in 1144, which would then spread to the East.

If initially, from a doctrinal point of view, both in the primary version and in the one developed later, in the twelfth century, there was no deviation from the right faith, things would change starting with the thirteenth century.

In England, since the thirteenth century, this theme has been associated with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception¹⁰³, changing its original meaning. In the version that promotes the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, *the Tree of Jesse* refers exclusively to the Virgin Mary, Christ being represented only as a Child in the arms of the Virgin or being excluded altogether. Also, in this variant appears at the foot of the tree the Righteous Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Virgin Mary¹⁰⁴. The logic of those who have taken up this theme to promote the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is that from a "root" laden with persons guilty of crime, perjury, idolatry, fornication and other sins, a Virgin could not appear, a "branch" without defilement, except through the special work of God, who ordained to be born without original sin¹⁰⁵.

The Orthodox East received the theme of *the Tree of Jesse* from the West before it was taken up by the followers of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and iconographically adapted to illustrate this new doctrine, alien to the true faith. Therefore, in the Orthodox East, the representation of the theme differs in that at the top of the stem on which the kings of Israel are depicted, starting with David, the theme of the Birth of the Savior Jesus Christ is represented¹⁰⁶. Also, under the

¹⁰¹ M. FASSLER, "Mary's Nativity...", pp. 396-413.

¹⁰² M. FASSLER, "Mary's Nativity...", pp. 426, 429, 431.

¹⁰³ M. LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception...*, pp. 47-48; S. LEPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", p. 131.

¹⁰⁴ M. LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception...*, pp. 18, 47; S. LEPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", p. 122; I. D. ȘTEFĂNESCU, *Iconografia artei bizantine...*, p. 176.

¹⁰⁵ E. MÂLE, *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France...*, p. 227; S. LEPAPE, "L'arbre de Jessé: une image de l'immaculée conception?", p. 134.

¹⁰⁶ DIONISIE DIN FURNA, *Erminia picturii bizantine*, p. 99.



branches of the tree, on either side of Jesse, in the East under painted the philosophers of the Hellenes¹⁰⁷, who, according to some traditions, prophesied the birth of the Savior from a Virgin¹⁰⁸, as well as the sorcerer Valaam (Numbers 24:17).

The representation of the theme of the Birth of the Savior Jesus Christ at the top of the *Tree of Jesse* signifies not only the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah and the other prophets, but goes beyond any possible forced interpretation of the theme, as happened in the Catholic West.

e). *The Holy Family*. In Western religious art, the *Holy Family* is generally understood as any scene in which the Savior Jesus Christ appears as a Child with members of His family - the Virgin Mary, the Righteous Joseph, the Virgin's fiancé, Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin, Saint John the Baptist, also a child, and his mother, Saint Elizabeth - understood as corresponding to the mentality of the Middle Ages, when the family was understood in its extended sense, which included all the members of the household under the authority of the *pater familias*, including the servants¹⁰⁹.

In a specific sense, the theme refers to those scenes in which the Infant Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the Righteous Joseph appear, the first representations of the theme thus understood appearing in the form of miniatures in manuscripts from the beginning of the fifteenth century¹¹⁰. As a result of the growing importance given by Catholic theologians to the person of the Righteous Joseph and his role in the life of the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus¹¹¹, over time the theme became extremely popular for Renaissance art, the earliest representations in figurative art belonging to the end of the fifteenth century.

The one who aroused interest in the person of the Righteous Joseph in the West was Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who showed an ardent devotion to him, manifested including in the sermons delivered on the feasts dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the most important of which was *De Laudibus virginis*. Two centuries later, the cult dedicated to the Righteous Joseph would be promoted by the French scholar Jean Gerson (1363-1429)¹¹², professor at the University of Paris, who was the first to use the phrase "Holy Family", stating that the Righteous Joseph can be rightly called its head¹¹³. The phrase "Holy Family" was also used in the same period by St. Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444), in one of his sermons¹¹⁴. At the end of the sixteenth century, the cult of the Righteous Joseph would be definitively imposed in the Catholic Church thanks to the writing

¹⁰⁷ Regarding the tradition regarding the Greek philosophers who prophesied the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ from a Virgin, see: Aude BUSINE, "Les Sept Sages prophètes du christianisme. Tradition gnomique et littérature théosophique", in: H. SENG (Hrg.), *Theologische Orakel in der Spätantike*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, sd (Bibliotheca Chaldaica, 5), 2016, pp. 257-279; Albo CICADE, *Les païens au monastère. Sages païens, philosophes grecs et historiens antérieurs à la venue du Christ représentés comme annonciateurs du salut sur des fresques dans des monastères et églises orthodoxes*, Albocicade, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/40287264/Les_Sages_païens_au_monastère; Julia VALEVA, "Les sages païens dans l'iconographie de l'arbre de Jessé et leurs antécédents", dans: Héléne MORLIER(éd.), *La Mosaïque Gréco-Romaine*, IX, vo. 2, 2005, pp. 1241-1254.

¹⁰⁸ DIONISIE DIN FURNA, *Erminia picturii bizantine*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁹ Irénée NOYE, "Famille (Dévotion à la Sainte Famille)", dans: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique*, V, Beauchesne, Paris, 1964, col. 85.

¹¹⁰ E. MÂLE, *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France...*, p. 155.

¹¹¹ A se vedea în acest sens Janet Elizabeth HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph in Early Modern Art*, vol. 1, Birmingham City University, doctoral these, 2011; Sophia BOFFA, *Joseph of Nazareth as Man and Father in Jerónimo Gracián's Summary of the Excellencies of St Joseph (1597)*, The University of Notre Dame Australia, doctoral these, 2016

¹¹² J. E. HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph...*, pp. 14-18; S. BOFFA, *Joseph of Nazareth...*, p. 9.

¹¹³ J. E. HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph...*, p. 112.

¹¹⁴ J. E. HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph...*, p. 112.



Sumario de las excelentias del glorioso San José, esposo de la virgin Maria, published in 1597 by Jerónimo Gracián (1545-1614). Until Gerson and Gracián promoted the person of the Righteous Joseph in the scenes in which he appeared, he was represented as an old man, according to the texts of the apocrypha¹¹⁵, but also to the vision of Saint Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373)¹¹⁶. Also, the Righteous Joseph was always placed in the background of the scene, either in an attitude of amazement before the mystery, or of adoration of the Child Jesus, or in a humble one. In fact, as early as the sixth century, the Righteous Joseph was represented in sacred art smaller in size than the Virgin Mary and even than the Child Jesus¹¹⁷.

Gerson and Gracián contributed decisively not only to increasing and strengthening devotion to the Righteous Joseph, but also to changing the perception of his age and physiognomic features and, therefore, of the way in which he began to be represented in art compared to the previous period. They promoted another image of the Righteous Joseph, stating that he was not an old man, but a young, beautiful and vigorous man, capable of fulfilling the mission for which he was chosen by God, that of protecting the Infant Jesus and the Virgin Mary¹¹⁸. For Gracián, the "old age" of which the apocrypha recalled was only an allegory for the virtues of wisdom and prudence, which adorned the Righteous Joseph¹¹⁹. In keeping with the mentality of the sixteenth century, according to which holiness and goodness were synonymous with the beauty of the face, the Righteous Joseph began to be represented by Renaissance artists in the face of a young man¹²⁰. In fact, according to the apocryphal *The History of Joseph the carpenter*, which records that Joseph was "advanced in age", "his body had remained strong. He had a sharp look and was not missing a single tooth. He had lost neither his righteous judgment nor his wisdom. At one hundred and eleven years old he still looked young"¹²¹.

The Holy Family has been represented in Western art in various scenes, which capture moments of family life during Jesus' childhood spent either in the garden, or in the house, or in the workshop of the Righteous Joseph, or on the way, such as the one that imagines the moment of rest under a palm tree during the journey to Egypt. In all these images, Renaissance painters created scenes so human, full of bonhomie and such an accentuated naturalism that only the presence of angels reminds us that the subject is the Holy Family and not just any family¹²². Regardless of the author, the compositions in question create the illusion of idyllic images and convey a superficial sentimentality, specific to the Christian who, not being able to elevate himself to the holiness of divine glory, lowers God to the measure of his own sentimental feelings.

This theme, so widespread in Western religious art, made famous by equally famous Renaissance painters, is alien to the Orthodox iconographic canon. According to *Hermeneia (oe Painter's Manual)* of Dionysius of Furna, the Virgin Mary, the Child Jesus and the Righteous Joseph appear together in six iconographic themes: *The Birth of Christ*, *The Worship of the Magi*, *The Circumcision of Christ the Savior*, *The Meeting of Christ*, *The Flight into Egypt*, *Christ among the*

¹¹⁵ "Protoevanghelia lui Iacob", IX, în *Evangheliu apocrife*, p. 39; "Viața lui Iosif tâmplarul", II, X, în *Evangheliu apocrife*, pp. 64, 66; J. E. HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph...*, p. 65

¹¹⁶ J. E. HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph...*, p. 99.

¹¹⁷ J. E. HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph...*, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ J. E. HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph...*, p. 18; Sophia BOFFA, *Joseph of Nazareth...*, p. 9.

¹¹⁹ S. BOFFA, *Joseph of Nazareth...*, p. 41.

¹²⁰ J. E. HOPE, *Transformations of the Image of St Joseph...*, pp. 188-191; Sophia BOFFA, *Joseph of Nazareth...*, p. 42.

¹²¹ "Viața lui Iosif tâmplarul", II, X, în *Evangheliu apocrife*, p. 64

¹²² E. MÂLE, *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France...*, pp. 152-154.



*teachers*¹²³. In all these scenes, the main character is the Savior Jesus Christ. Without being ignorant of the Orthodox iconography, the Righteous Joseph, which also appears in the scenes of *Joseph receiving the Blessed Virgin*, *Joseph seeing the Mother of God weighed down*, *the Meeting of the Mother of God with Elizabeth*¹²⁴, always appears in the background.

Recently, the theme has been taken up indiscriminately in the Orthodox area and "Byzantinized" from an iconographic point of view, if we can use such a term, in an attempt to give it a canonical Orthodox "shape" (fig. 5).

Unlike the various scenes in family life in which this theme was represented in the West, the composition present in the Orthodox space is even more harmful, both theologically and morally, since, although the Infant Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the Righteous Joseph are represented with halos, by placing the three within the image, especially of the Virgin Mary and the Righteous Joseph, with their heads close together or even touching, induces the idea of a natural, conjugal family. In fact, this composition is nothing more than a copy of a freeze frame extremely common in family photos taken today. It does not in any way convey the holy thrill of faith and piety, nor the holy fear before the Person of the Incarnate Son of God of the Ever-Virgin Mary, but the familiarity and sentimentality of a superficial faith, unenlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The non-canonical representation, through the idea of the conjugal family that it induces, calls into question the ever-virginity of the Mother of God, even if the three stars, on the forehead and on the shoulders, the symbols of this teaching, are represented, feeding the heretical theories of those who affirm, forcibly interpreting the Holy Scripture (Matthew 1:24; 12:46; Mark 3:31-33; 6:3; Luke 2:7; 8:19-20; John 2:12; 7:3-5; Acts 1:14; 1 Co 9:5; Ga 1:19), that after the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ the Righteous Joseph and the Virgin Mary had other sons and daughters.

CONCLUSION

Taken over without theological discernment in the XIIth - XVth centuries in Orthodox iconography, these iconographic themes, which promote Catholic dogmas that the Orthodox East rejected and condemned, continued to be represented in the wall painting of Orthodox churches until the end of the nineteenth century, becoming part of the ecclesiastical cultural heritage, together with the churches they adorn. Because of this, those images can neither be removed nor corrected in accordance with the canon of Orthodoxy. As a consequence, it is important for curators and guides, in the case of churches transformed into museums, and for priests who serve in churches where there are such images to know the true faith of the Orthodox Church and the doctrinal deviations that those images promote so that they can enlighten all who come to look at them in this regard.

¹²³ DIONISIE DIN FURNA, *Erminia picturii bizantine*, pp. 101-103.

¹²⁴ DIONISIE DIN FURNA, *Erminia picturii bizantine*, pp. 138, 101.



Fig. 1. Anastasis (canonical icon of the Resurrection of the Lord), Kariye Çamii (Chora Church), Istanbul, sec. XIV



Fig. 2. Andrea Mantegna, *Resurrection*, 1457-1459, (non-canonical) Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tours



Fig. 3. *Coronation of Virgin*, Amaro do Vale, c. 1615-1619

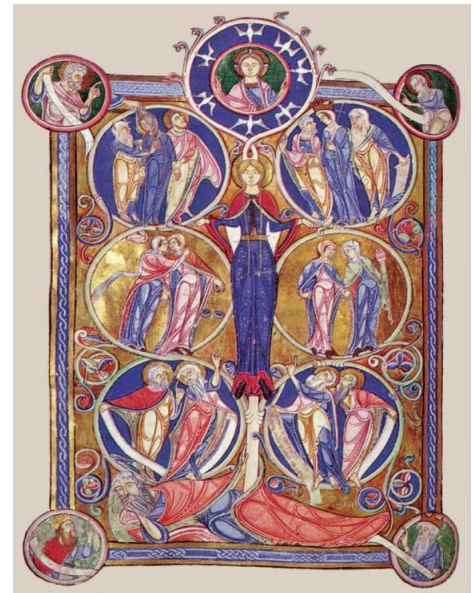


Fig. 4. *The Jesse Tree*, Lambeth Bible, c. 1140



Fig. 5. *The Holy Family*, a non-canonical icon, "Byzantine" as a style



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ICOANA CREDINTEI

International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies

No. 23, Year 12/2026

E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

ICOANA CREDINTEI

Icon of Faith. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies

IFIJISR- IISSN 2501-3386; ISSN-L 2393-137X| <https://doi.org/10.26520/icoana>

Frequency: 2 issues/year, with possible supplementary issues.

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IFIJISR, is a journal published and promoted at international level by IFIASA in collaboration with members of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology and Education Sciences, "Valahia" University, Târgoviște. Icon of Faith is a Scientific, Open Access journal, with the main aim to promote a high level of Christian Theology in an intercultural context.

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Publisher: IFIASA® Ideas Forum International Academic and Scientific Association.