

MINIATURE ART IN THE TIME OF PROCOPIE PICU PĂTRUȚ

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ABSTRACT

Over time, manuscripts have developed within Byzantine or post-Byzantine artistic cultural areas and have become prominent within certain schools that developed alongside monasteries. Each school of miniature is identified by its own style, artistic value differences and, last but not least, uniqueness. Picu Pătruț was a prominent representative of Romanian miniature in the 19th century, and specialized books call him an exceptional composer, bibliophile and miniaturist. He was born in Săliște, in Transylvania, in the Marginea Sibiului and became a monk between 1862.

Keywords: manuscripts; Picu Pătruț; sacred art;

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, manuscripts have developed within Byzantine or post-Byzantine artistic cultural areas, and have become prominent within certain schools that flourished alongside monasteries. Each school of miniature is distinguished not only by its own particular style, or artistic value differences, but also by its uniqueness. Researchers who have closely analyzed the art of manuscripts have noticed an inextricable link between the texts and the images they depict, through the insertion of vegetal and geometric motifs, or other decorative elements, alongside religious or secular scenes. The goal of each researcher is to identify the different artistic workshops where this art of miniature was developed, with the help of stylistic elements offered by painting, most of which were created by monks, hieromonks or priests, as mentioned by Liana Tugearu (Tugearu, 1997, pp. 4-5).

The first local scriptoria are mentioned in specialised books to have originated in Moldavia, at the Neamț Monastery, where Gavriil Uric, between the years 1435 and 1436, created one of the most important *Tetraevangelia* written on Romanian territory. Another important center was Putna Monastery, where a certain monk called Evloghie painted the *Tetraevangelion* of Grigorie Fierție between 1553 and 1555. Other sources refer to the scriptorium from Craiova, in Wallachia, where the *Tetraevangelion* of Onufrie was written and illuminated in 1573, or the one at the Dealu Monastery, produced at the end of the XVIth century (Tugearu, 1997, p. 4).

As mentioned earlier, the specialized textbooks show that in the development of Romanian art, an important contribution was not only played by wooden or mural painting, but a special splendour was conferred by religious manuscripts incorporating gold decoration and painted with great diligence by master calligraphers, starting with the XVIth century. An important aspect that contributed to the development of manuscripts was the advent of

printing in Wallachia, so that the first prints were made in Târgoviște by the calligraphic monk Macarie. He learned the art of printing in Venice and spread it throughout the Romanian territory through the following three main works: the Liturgy Book of 1508, the *Octoechos* of 1510, and the *Tetraevangelion* of 1512. These books did not contain paintings depicting characters, being adorned only with different vegetal and floral ornaments, frontispieces decorated in an elegant manner, which did not lack the decorated initial at the beginning of the sentence (Florea, 2007, p. 199).

It is not known exactly whether it was due to the death of monk Macarie or his departure to Mount Athos, that the art of printing experienced a period of stagnation. However, starting in 1545, the printing activity resumed its course through Dimitrie Liubavici, both in Wallachia and in Moldavia. Furthermore, in his book entitled *Istoria Artei Românești*, the art historian Vasile Florea mentions the Romanian printer Filip Moldoveanu, who published an illustrated *Tetraevangelion* in 1546, displaying the first coat of arms of Moldavia within its pages (Florea, 2007, p. 199).

Although the art of manuscript illumination is particularly outstanding within the miniature school at the Dragomirna Monastery, which developed during the XVIIth century under the guidance of the venerable hierarch, calligrapher and a cultured man Anastasie Crimca (Giurescu, 1981, p. 289), after his move into eternal life, the art of typography goes through a period of decline in the Romanian territories, so that only in the XIXth century does a new name of great importance emerge, that of Picu Pătruț.

Picu Pătruț was a prominent representative of Romanian miniature in the XIXth century, and specialized books call him an exceptional composer, bibliophile and miniaturist¹. He was born in Săliște, in Transylvania, in the Mărginimea Sibiului area, and he became a monk in 1862. Before his affiliation with the priesthood, he was considered an enlightened villager: “a self-taught defender and preserver of tradition and the old Orthodox faith” (Popescu, 2014, p. 5). It is important to remember this name of great importance “who rose from the heart of the Romanian village” (Ionescu, 2001, p. 136) and who was appreciated as the last Romanian calligrapher and miniaturist, but also “the last great miniaturist of Europe”, as the master Academician Răzvan Theodorescu calls him (Theodorescu, 2012, FN).

Specialized books mention that in his research, the great historian and man of culture Nicolae Iorga used to say this ancient Romanian settlement at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains could be called “the Romanian treasure of Transylvania” (Theodorescu, 2012, p. 9), which shows that those born on these Romanian lands were truly considered valuable personalities of this nation.

Passionate about reading and the art of writing, monk Picu Pătruț starts his calligraphic work by (resorting to) hand copying Salomon Gessner’s *The Death of Avel* book, which was translated by Alexandru Beldiman. The monk does not only discard the characters he was not fond of, but he adds his own commentaries and interpretations to this book, inserting certain illustrations throughout the text, which he colours following his own inspiration. He resorts to this technique because the translation of the book seems to him to be lacking vitality, so he sometimes resorts to copying the illustrations from the original book, while at other times, he paints the drawings himself without following a particular pattern (Ionescu, 1958, pp. 6-8).

Picu Procopie Oprea Pătruț, was a remarkable man of the traditional village, who calligraphed manuscripts related to Transylvanian glass icons, from the collections of famous icon painters such as Savu Moga or Matei Țimforea. The art of this great miniaturist of the XIXth century can be associated not only with the naïve, picturesque and decorative glass icon, but also with the mural paintings found in churches of the Maramureș or Oltenian style (Ionescu, 1958, p. 6).

An analysis of his works reveals inspiration drawn from the old iconographic manuals of the XVIIIth century, which capture a “geometrized stereotype” and a “two-dimensional canon”, due largely to the influence of Western painting, but also to folkloric influence (Theodorescu, 2012, pp. 7-8). The calligraphy used in his miniatures is neat and legible, sometimes in Cyrillic, sometimes in Latin or combined. Both the illustration and the inscriptions are placed in such a way as not to exceed the rectangular frame. In general, he places the painting in the upper part, while the lower part contains the writing, which would always start with a beautifully ornamented letter and a frontispiece made of geometric or floral motifs (Ghibu, 1976, p. 414).

As far as the technique used in his manuscripts in concerned, we may remark that he used water-based colours, watercolour in its pure form, using a restricted palette of colours: permanent red or vermilion, cadmium and citron, ochre, blue, emerald green, brown, and pink. The colours were applied flatly, without following geometric shapes of the figures or the decorations, over which he would then apply ink (Ghibu, 1976, p. 414).

Some articles mention that between 1842-1847, Picu Pătruț managed to decorate more than 1400 pages of several religious books. Through his work, he conveys a lot of joy, grace, and dedication, and makes his readers love his reading, but also the art of manuscripts (Ionescu, 2001, p. 135). I believe that viewing some of the miniatures from his rich body of work is necessary in order to better understand the connection and the relation between his style and the traditional art found in glass icons.

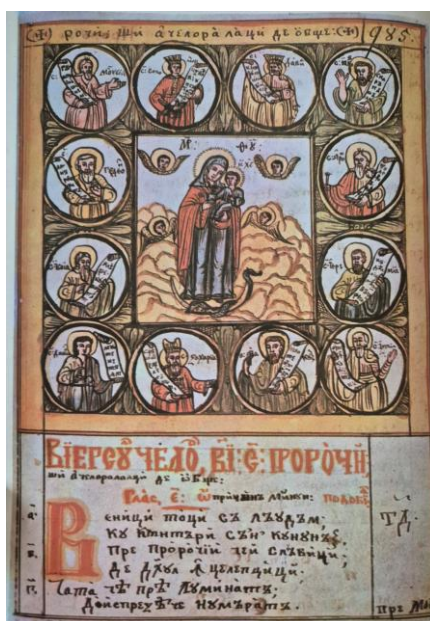


Fig. 1 Picu Pătruț, *The Mother of God with the Child, surrounded by the 12 Apostles*, XIXth century

Being passionate about the two types of art, I have chosen two representative works for the Transylvanian art of the XIXth century: a miniature by Picu Pătruț, depicting the *Mother of God, surrounded by the twelve Apostles*, but also a glass icon depicting the *Virgin Mary*, but painted together with the 12 Prophets, a work belonging to the Avachian collection, supposed to have been painted by Ioan Kosteia. In both works, we notice that the Virgin and the Child are depicted centrally, in a rectangular frame, seated on a throne, surrounded by holy apostles or prophets painted in 12 medallions. In both cases, the floral element embellishes the setting. The chromatics are restricted, but Picu Pătruț's miniature is reduced to three colours: yellow, red and blue.



Fig. 2 Ioan Kosteia, *The Mother of God with the Prophets*, mid-XIXth century

Another work made by this great miniaturist is that of the Virgin Mary and the Child, an image that we find represented almost identically in the glass icon, and which we find under the name of *Mother of God, the Queen*, painted within the school of iconography from Laz, under the hand of the great iconographer of naïve art, Ilie Poienaru.



Fig. 3 Picu Pătruț, *The Mother of God with the Child*, XIXth century



Fig. 4 Ilie Poienaru, *The Mother of God, the Queen*, first half of the XIXth century

Although Picu Pătruț's miniature art seems to belong to medieval art, he associates his drawing with the verses found in contemporary writings, such as those of Vasile Alecsandri, but he was particularly focused on religious art.

It is well known that Sălișteя and the Sibiu area in particular have brought to light monuments and personalities of great importance in art and culture, which have survived since the XVIIIth – XIXth centuries, as stated by Academician Marius Porumb in the Dictionary of Painting that he coordinated (Porumb, 1998, p. 349).

CONCLUSION

Picu Pătruț's art seems to be drawn from the heart of the traditional village, from the lives of people who lived in the hearth of the community, and who, through their faith, placed God at the center of everything. His compositions are simple through the limited number of colours, yet they appear complex due to the large number of characters and decorative elements within the scenes. His stylistic vision is indebted to the past and the tradition that he manages to renew through creative sensitivity, largely thanks to his taste for the picturesque and the sacred.

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