



Interdisciplinary Doctoral School

Doctoral Field: HISTORY

## DOCTORAL THESIS

The Iconography of the church entrance in Romanian principalities in a south-eastern European context (14th - 16th centuries)

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## SUMMARY

The scientific paper *'The Iconography of the church entrance in Romanian principalities in a south-eastern European context (14th - 16th centuries)'* is the result of the research undertaken during the doctoral studies under the guidance of Professor Ioan Albu, Ph.D, scientific coordinator.

The doctoral thesis is the product of a systematic effort to identify and create a repertoire of iconographic themes present in the entrance area and passage portals of the church. The actual subject of the research is the entrance areas into the church and their iconography. These areas may differ for each monument depending on the region or the narrower epoch to which it is subjected by the artistic approach. The images are placed strictly in or near these portals.

The subject of the thesis is the expression of a personal interest in the medieval art in Romanian principalities, an interest materialized since the bachelor and master studies.

The research focused on the 14th - 16th centuries, an exemplary period from several points of view. The selected monuments are from Wallachia and Moldavia, erected by rulers or boyars, which received their mural decoration during this period. I added relevant monuments from the south-eastern European area, since the broader context approached offers the possibility to discern features that individualize or resemble achievements that we can include in the broad Byzantine synthesis.

I decided to approach the topic in an interdisciplinary manner. An analysis of the iconography only from an artistic point of view would merely capture hieratic forms and coloristic, in a solemn pictorial alphabet, sometimes conventional, perhaps rigid, anyway subordinated to conventions implicitly dictated by religious canons. It is obvious that an analysis approach only with artistic tools would keep us away from the intentions of the creators.

As such, the scientific approach has a multidisciplinary dimension in terms of analysis tools characteristic of several fields of study. Elements of history, art history, architecture, sociology and theology are intertwined throughout the work in order to formulate relevant analyses and interpretations (conclusions).

The scientific work belongs to the broad field of art history, with emphasis on the Byzantine and post-Byzantine period. The main methodology used is the iconographic analysis, but for necessities required by the purpose of the thesis I also made an iconological interpretation. In my work I used the case study method for the general presentation of the

monuments, on chronological and geographical principles. The case studies are the results of documentation from bibliographic sources and field research on the chosen monuments. Following the field research, I made a collection of photographs of mural paintings.

I structured the paper into six chapters grouped into three parts, in order to provide a logical path to the analysis. The first part is dedicated to clarifying the theoretical elements, the evolutions of research in the field, the definition of operational concepts. In the second part I made a detailed description of the selected monuments, and the third part is dedicated to the study of iconographic themes in the area of the church entrance in the selected monuments in the Romanian principalities. For comparison, I presented representative monuments from the Southeast European context.

In *Part I. Theoretical approaches*, in addition to presenting the scientific interests and studies dedicated to medieval Romanian and Byzantine iconography, I defined concepts with which to operate in selecting the monuments and creating the repertoire of themes (*Chapter I. Current stage of research in the field*) and made an exposition of the conceptions about the sacred of the most famous researchers, anthropologists, historians of religions, philosophers, theologians, and church fathers of different denominations (*Chapter II. Sacred and sacred space: conceptualizations*). All these notions and ideas achieve their implicit hermeneutic role in the chapters of monographic and comparative presentation of the monuments.

I studied a vast specialized literature to synthetically reflect the current state of research in the field and to identify the niche in which to place my research. The theme I propose contributes through a multi and interdisciplinary approach to cover a less researched thematic area: the study of the iconographic themes in the entrance and passage areas of the church from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, their placement in the context of art in the south-eastern European space and the clarification of their role in these areas of the church, in connection with the architecture and the symbolic entrance from a profane space into a sacred one.

The architecture - through doors, partitions - and the iconographic program have an essential role in defining the different spaces in the exterior-interior road and in their qualitative and symbolic differentiation. The entrance to a sacred space is the area that, physically, mentally and symbolically leads from one state/ condition to another. The entrances have a transformative effect on the person who is willing to passage the road from outside to inside.

Also in this chapter, I considered it necessary to delimit and define the space of the church that will be the object of the iconographic analysis: the entrance into the church and the areas of passage from one room to another.

I gave a large space in *Chapter II* to exposing the various approaches to the concepts of sacred and of sacred space. The concept of sacred is complex and has preoccupied many researchers over time, from various fields of theology, religious studies and the history of religions, to sociology, philosophy, history, anthropology. The subject was approached from as many methodological perspectives, however a common definition of the concept has not been reached. The definitions of the sacred differ from one author to another.

Trying to write a history of the evolution of the idea of the sacred and to classify the tendencies of the different approaches can be a difficult and subjective undertaking, depending on the perspective from which you analyze this evolution. I have allocated a special place to the way in which the sacred space is reflected in the Holy Scriptures and how it is defined and interpreted by the Church Fathers and Byzantine theologians (Dionysius the Aeropagite, Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint Simeon of Thessalonica). I reviewed the main ideas and works that shaped the discussion about the concept of sacred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I tried to follow a chronological criterion in structuring ideas, noting that it was sometimes omitted, in order to give coherence to an evolution of the concept of the sacred related to certain areas of study and methodological perspectives. The space given in the presentation of each idea varies depending on its contribution to the evolution of the concept.

In the second part of the thesis (*Part II. Monuments in the 14th - 16th centuries in the Romanian principalities*), I considered useful to describe the wider Byzantine context in those historical and artistic connections close to the analyzed period and which could have an influence on themes and style of iconography in the Romanian principalities (*Chapter III. The historical-artistic context*). In this way, I aimed to bring other elements that make it possible to understand what is specific and what is different in this field. In south-eastern Europe, it was possible for an artistic tradition to emerge when political and ecclesiastical institutions were sufficiently developed to ensure a continuous relationship with those who carried out the act of construction and creation, including firm order and funding. These conditions met in the middle of the 14th century in Wallachia, where the churches of the monasteries Cozia and St. Nicholas in Curtea de Argeș exhibit a pictorial cycle of Byzantine Palaeologue tradition, and about a century later in Moldova we can find an artistic program fully articulated, within the same tradition.

Chapter IV (*Analysis of the monuments from Wallachia and Moldova. 14th - 16th centuries*) is dedicated to the presentation of the selected monuments from the two Romanian principalities. Through extensive bibliographic study and site visits, I selected the following monuments from Wallachia: the princely church „St. Nicolae ” from Curtea de Argeș, the

church „Sfânta Treime” from Cozia, the hospital “Schimbarea la Față” of the Bistrița monastery from Vâlcea, the church „Adormirea Maicii Domnului” of the former Stănești monastery from Vâlcea, the hospital “Sfinții Apostoli Petru și Pavel” of the Cozia monastery, the church “The entrance of the Mother of God into the Church” of the Snagov monastery, the church “The Assumption of the Mother of God” of the Tismana monastery, the church “St. Nicolae ”of the Bucovăț monastery, the church “St. Nicolae” of the Călușu monastery. To these were added the following monuments from Moldova: the church "Sfântul Nicolae" from Rădăuți, the church "Sfânta Cruce" from Pătrăuți, the church "Sfântul Ilie" from Suceava, the church "Sfântul Gheorghe" Voroneț, the church "Sfântul Nicolae" Popăuți, the church „Saint Nicholas” Bălinești, the church „The Ascension of the Lord” Neamț, the church „The beheading of Saint John the Baptist” Arbore, the church „The Descent of the Holy Spirit” Dobrovăț, the church „Sfântul Gheorghe” from Hârlău, the church „Sfântul Nicolae” Probotă, the church „Sfântul Gheorghe” of the monastery of St. John the New from Suceava, the church “ The Assumption of the Mother of God” from Humor, the church “Buna Vestire” Moldovița, the church “Sfântul Nicolae” Coșula, the church “Tuturor Sfinților” Părâuți, the church “Învierea Domnului” of the Sucevița monastery.

In Wallachia, for the period of the end of the 13th century - the beginning of the 14th century, the constructive activity is known to us through the archeological remains of the churches from Drobeta-Turnu Severin and Sân Nicoară from Curtea de Argeș, whereas the painting can be traced starting with the middle of the 14th century. Prior to this period, no relevant evidence is preserved except for a few fragments found in the ground in the layer corresponding to the ruin of the church in the citadel of Severin. The oldest preserved paintings, of interest to researchers, are those from the princely church "St. Nicolae” from Curtea de Argeș and those from the narthex of the “Holy Trinity” church from Cozia. These are also the first examples of painting stylistically belonging to the late Palaeologue era, preserved in Wallachia.

The fifteenth-century mural painting has an information gap. The period coincides with political unrest, the fall of the Empire and the advance of the Turks in the Balkan Peninsula. The foundations erected in times of relative political quietness are modest and do not preserve the painting of this period.

The relatively quieter and more prosperous period of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is reflected in the large-scale foundations built in those times, of which several murals are preserved.

From the period between the second half of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th century, no remains of mural painting are preserved in Moldova, which can be researched

with significant results. Fragmentary discoveries of traces of color are found in the pit and nave of the ruin from Vatra Moldoviței, from the time of Alexander the Good, and in the Citadel of Suceava, fragments of plaster with painting from a demolished chapel from the time of Stephen the Great.

The oldest extant mural painting is to be found in a niche of the church from Dolheștii Mari and, just as old, at the church from Lujeni. The first complete ensembles that have been preserved from the old Moldavian painting are those from Pătrăuți, Voroneț, Sf. Ilie and Milișăuți (destroyed in the First World War). The basic decorative scheme is the same, the differences being noticeable only in details.

The history of Moldova was uniquely marked by the reign of Stephen the Great through artistic achievements. Mural painting and ceramics, together with real art treasures preserved in monasteries and which give their integral value, make up a special heritage.

The artistic achievements of the late 15th century in Moldavia have their origin in the art of the previous era. There was a local tradition, a material background in the field of materials, techniques and constructive and decorative style, closely linked to the immediate neighborhood, northeastern Transylvania. Byzantine and Oriental, Romanesque and Gothic influences were added in successive layers to local approaches in the field of construction and later art, gradually achieving an original style.

In the 16th century, the ruler Petru Rareș continued his father's activity as a founder, a work he began with the mural painting from Dobrovăț (1529). Two great innovations that characterize this period take place during the reign of Petru Rareș the appearance of the porch and the exterior painting. Another element that characterizes the constructions from the time of Petru Rareș is the frequent presence, between the space of the nave and the narthex, of the tomb room, the grave.

For the selected monuments from the Romanian principalities, I made a historical identification of each building, I presented significant constructive and artistic data and analyzed the iconography of the passage portals.

In the last part of the thesis (*Part III. Iconography of the entrance to the church*) I presented the iconographic themes identified in the passage portals or near them. These are the topics that appear most often in these areas. Thus, I identified ten themes (*Chapter V. Study of iconographic themes in the entrance and passage areas of the church. Meanings*): Our Lady, Archangels Michael and Gabriel, Deisis, Holy Cross, Mandylion, God's Hand holding the souls of the righteous, representations of Saints Women, the Holy Great Martyr Marina, the Holy Pious Mary of Egypt, the Icon of the Feast. To these are added other themes which, although

they contain at least some of them, figures of the highest level of holiness, do not appear mainly in these areas and for this reason I have grouped them separately. Each iconographic theme was analyzed from the perspectives that made it possible to highlight its significance. This is the reason why the historical presentation was combined with - because the moment when they appeared, what conglomeration of mentalities, folklore or superstitions generated them were very important in explaining their current meaning and status in an iconographic program -, the artistic analysis, and the religious hermeneutics.

I also considered it useful to present the iconographic themes in a differential, comparative approach to the monuments, making a synopsis that gives more clarity to the analyzed subject (*Chapter VI. Study of iconographic themes in Southeast Europe, Wallachia and Moldova, in the 14th - 16th centuries. Differential approach*). In this sense, I analyzed the iconographic themes listed in the entrance and passage areas of the 14th - 16th century churches on two levels. In this chapter, the ten recurring themes are treated in part and are presented in parallel, examples of their presence in monuments in Romania and in Southeast Europe. Secondly, I made a synoptic table that aims to locate the iconographic themes in the analyzed churches. Thus, in the table (presented in full in the Annex), for each monument are exposed the iconographic themes, grouped on each area of entrance and passage separately. The monuments are organized in three regions, Wallachia, Moldova and Southeast Europe.

The conclusions of the paper come to complete the scientific approach of the doctoral thesis. The entrance to the church and the passages, through the different portals, to the church rooms, delimit spaces with different degrees of spiritual load. They accompany and guide the traveler, marking the Way and creating an ascending path to the heart of the church.

The iconographic inventory I have made includes sacred images that watch, guide, inspire in dialogue with the architecture and the religious procession. In this syncretic composite of image, music, and imagination lies the power to achieve the purpose of presence in the place of worship, which is not an aesthetic one. The analysis of the iconography can make a cut-out inside this composite in order to highlight some preliminary meanings, but only the symphony of all the elements involved transmits the full message of the presence in a place of worship.

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*sacred, sacred space, church entrance area, church passage areas, Romanian Principalities, 14th-16th centuries, south-eastern European area, iconographic program, church, mural painting, Virgin Mary, Archangels Michael and Gabriel, Deesis, Holy Cross, Mandylion, Hand of God holding the souls of the righteous, representations of holy women, Saint Marina the Great Martyr, Saint Mary of Egypt, Feast Icon*