CONCERNING THE PORCH PAINTING OF THE "ICOANEI" CHURCH

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Rezumat

Pictura pridvorului bisericii Icoanei din București stârnește interesul specialiștilor prin programul iconografic deosebit pe care îl abordează la sfârșit de secol XVIII. Datorită unor specialiști apreciați cu care școala de restaurare românească se poate mândri în aceste momente, fragmentele păstrate (în număr de 5 tablouri, în întregime, și alte câteva fragmente) se poate reconstitui parțial o perspectivă asupra mentalității și preocupărilor societății bucureștene din epoca ce i-a urmat lui Brâncoveanu.

***Cuvinte cheie**:* Apocalipsa, înger, Biserica Icoanei, Grigorie Zugravul, Sfântul Evanghelist Ioan, pridvor

In the 18th century Bucharest many churches were built, of whose purity of style and lines, sometimes equals the one of the Brâncoveanu´s foundations. The type of church – which knows a great development in the Brâncoveanu´s period and after that – is the one with porch. Consecrated in 1789, the foundation of captain of hirelings Panait Băbeanu, The Icon Church of Bucharest, stores till today in the old porch a painting made at the end of the 18th century, which raises some special iconographic problems. Although in the upper part the author – Grigorie Zugravul – follows the old iconography, he also painted some unusual elements, i.e. there are displayed some scenes from the Apocalypse. The Saint John vision[1] – illustrated in the Western world as early as the 7th century by Saint Severus (Spain), and much later in a Byzantine approach in the Eastern Orthodoxy at the Dionysiu Monastery (painting realized with the financial help of lady Ruxandra, the daughter of Petru Rareș) responded from an iconographical point of view to a harassed and bewildered society.

The Apocalypse cycle from the Icon Church cannot be read entirely, because after the 1838 earthquake the monument was rebuilt, the vault that crashed from the narthex being reshaped on a level lower than the original vault and the windows of the old porch were enlarged, that is why the present study wishes to present composition by composition (the subject-painting), by means of analogy, the theological and artistic originality of Grigorie Zugravul painting.

Towards the year of 1777, in the suburb of Ceauș David, on the place of a humble church, founded by the courier David Corbea, of Transylvanian origin, the Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu's[2] envoy to the Peter the Great's court, Misail the Monk, from Băbeni descent, a private ex-chancellor and known under the monkish name Macarie Schimnicul, built another – wooden – church, with one belfry, having also some cells around it[3].

In April 1777, the founder made his will and established as his guardian his nephew, Panait Băbeanu, captain of hirelings, who later on became purveyor, to whom he left all his fortune. Panait Băbeanu, noting that the church from the "Popa Dima's" suburb had deteriorated, "being a wooden church, which almost became a ruin", made a supplication to the Metropolitan Gregory the 2nd, asking for his agreement to thoroughly re-build the "Ceaușului David" church. Having received the Metropolitan's agreement for a thorough rebuilding (1st of June, 1783), the church was rebuilt using bricks, between the years 1784 – 1786 and consecrated on the 2nd of September 1786, for this being witness the inscription made on the western façade of the church, at the left of the porch. The foundation shows itself together with the dependencies, the destination and the rules governing the entire ensemble. It is one of the most interesting inscriptions of the end of the 18th century[4].

In Bucharest, a city that – at the beginning of the nineteenth century – already became a true country capital, many churches are being built, either as foundations of the boyars, or of priests or merchants. Having limited possibilities, these latter ones wanted in their turn to erect their churches following the model of the princely and boyar's foundations. The type of church preferred in that time is the one having a porch,

[1] *Dicționar biblic*, red. principal J. D. Douglas; trans. Liviu Pup și John Tipei, Oradea, Cartea Creștină, 1995, p. 579-580

[2] Nicolae Iorga, *Histoire des Roumains et leur civilisation*, H. Paulin Publishers, Paris, 1920, p. 176.

[3] George G. Potra, *Documente privitoare la istoria orașului București:1594-1821,* Editura Academiei R. P. R., Bucharest, 1961, p. 206.

[4] Dan Mohanu, Teodora Ianculescu Spătaru, *Raport privind lucrările de conservare-restaurare a picturilor murale din interiorul Bisericii „Icoanei" din București* în "Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice", Bucharest, 1-2, 1990, pp. 77-86.

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widespread in the Brâncoveanu's epoch[5].

Shortly after Nicolae Mavrocordat finalized the construction of Văcărești Monastery[6] – meant to cast a shadow over the Hurezi's[7] fame with its magnificence – Misail the Monk managed as well to finish his church with sober and supple forms; in fact, according to the historical data, N. Iorga, in: *„Conducător istoric la bisericile din București"*, of 1935, mentions the fact that the church has an icon belonging to Brâncoveanu and Văcărești's family, the Icon of the Mother of God silver-covered and manufactured by Filip Nicolau Argintarul. It was a present given by the lord Constantin Brâncoveanu to the small wooden hermitage, which in that time existed in the park. In time, following its name, the hermitage changed his name for *Icoanei's* church, and the street and park nearby took the same name.

The iconography of the church porch

The painting of the church porch raises some interesting problems; for, if the scenes follow the old iconography in a somehow new interpretation, wholly unusual is the painting on the eastern wall, of some scenes taken from the *Revelation*[8], instead of the usual unfolding of the *Judgment Day*. Nevertheless, the ensemble is unitary, for what connects tradition to innovation are the painter plastic vision and his feeling in front of both thematic ensembles. This is not very unusual, because even the display of the book of *Revelation*[9] followed a tradition that reached to us from the Athonite monasteries through the Greek monks and the *hermeneias*. For the Romanian Principality though, in that time the painting of the *Revelation* cycle in the porch of the *Icoanei's* church was looked upon as an innovation[10].

Usually, the porch paintings' elements were the following: if the porch had two calottes, on the northern side was Psalm 150 displayed: *„Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord".* In the center was painted Jesus Emmanuelle framed from the four sides by the symbols of the Evangelists. Around the central figure guarded the angels' hosts from heaven and, finally, on the space located at the calotte's base, the entire cosmos was being unfolded in procession glorifying God. On the southern calotte, in the middle, was painted either Lord Jesus, or Holy Theotokos, or Saint John the Baptist. Around the central figure, the medallions comprised the prophet's figures.

The calottes' painting was meant to rouse in the believers' souls that entered the church, the feeling of worship towards the God's glory. But, in a period when a strong religious sensitivity, which enlivened the painting of the previous centuries, started to dim, the painters of the Brâncoveanu's epoch started to introduce in the porch ornamentations some picturesque elements, taken from the daily life. This new plastic vision is strengthen by the personality of the well-known painter Pârvu Mutu[11], who, in the last decade of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, as part of the Cantacuzins' foundations, creates a vigorous painting, full of energy and picturesqueness.

In Bucharest, the painting from the porches belonging to *Scaune*[12], *Doamnei*, *Kreţulescu*[13] or *Colţea*[14] churches, preserved till today, allows us to make some observations. In the porch of *Coleţea's* church (painted by Pârvu Mutu in the first years of the 18th century), the picturesque details are realistically recorded. The characters in procession on the northern calotte resemble Cantacuzine's ones, browns, with bushy eyebrows, with strong bodies, dressed in heavy clothes of expensive silk. Thus, the composition has more life and dynamism, but losses something of the grandeur and solemn rhythm that it had in the church painting of the previous centuries. Nevertheless, the school of Pârvu Mutu is an answer to the new plastic vision of the century, but becomes a custom in the hands of the more and more unskilled hands of the painters of the 18th century (for instance, as might be the porches of *Negustori* church, *Cu Sfinţi* church[15], *Mântuleasa* church).

Icoanei's porch

The painter of *Icoanei's* church does not take into account the *Colţea's* picturesque decoration of the porch, instead, he stops on the *Scaune* and *Doamnei* churches. The painting on the calottes, pendentives and tympanums of *Icoanei* church reproduces the paintings of the former. The painter Grigorie[16] of the *Icoanei's* church doesn't have a picturesque vision of the subject; he reduces the clothes' details, keeping only the

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[5] Pillat Cornelia, *Pictura din pridvorul bisericii Kreţulescu*, în "Studii şi Cercetări de Istoria" artei, Editura Academiei R. P. R., 3-4, 1957, pp 135-136.

[6] Grigore Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii românești – din cele mai vechi timpuri până la 1900*, 2-nd edition, Capitel, Bucharest, 2007, pp 204-205.

[7] Nicolae Iorga, *op.cit.*, p 176.

[8] I.D. Şefănescu, *Iconografia artei bizantine şi a picturii feudale românești*, Meridiane, Bucharest, 1973, pp. 183-184

[9] *Dicţionar biblic*, pp. 57-59

[10] Scenes taken from the book of Revelation, the vision of Saint John in which are predicted to nations the events that would precede the Last Judgmen are illustrated also on Sucevița, Călimănești or Curtea de Argeş walls.

[11] Voinescu Teodora, *Zugravul Pârvu Mutu şi şcoala sa*, în *Studii şi cercetări de istoria artei, 3-4, 1955, pp. 133-136; Idem*, Ed. Meridiane, Bucharest, 1968, pp. 6-7.

[12] Ionescu Gion, *Istoria Bucureştiului*, Ed. Tehnopress, Iaşi, 2003, p.184.

[13] Grigore Ionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 189.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 214.

[16] Ionescu–Ghinea Neculai, Lucia Stoica, *Enciclopedia lăcaşurilor de cult din Bucureşti,* Ed. Universalia, Bucureşti, 2005, p. 204.

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vigor of the bodies arranged according to a decorative symmetry. Though the characters' silhouettes are clumsy drawn, the composition is still enlivened by a strong religious sentiment, which transmits a kind of solemnity to the whole ensemble. He obviously had analyzed the painting of *Doamnei* church, painted in 1983. Here, "Constantinos"[17] the painter, contemporary of Pârvu Mutu, continues to skillfully execute the sober and expressive composition of the classical Byzantine painting[18]. It is interesting to notice that, in the same period when the Pârvu Mutu's school[19] was developing, in Bucharest existed another painting style, which sprang from a sober interpretation of the traditional iconography. This style was more fitted with the plastic vision of the painter of Băbeni's foundation. Nevertheless, in this church porch, the formalism and lack of feeling that now began to make way into the religious painting, has brought to a harmoniously stylized composition, but lacking expressivity. What shapes a pleasant effect – produced at the beginning by viewing the painting from this porch – is the painter sense of fitting the scenes' composition into the space destined for it. Thus, by means of the equilibrium obtained through the movements' symmetry and the silhouettes' static display draped with plainness and naturally framed in the architectural space, the painter manages to bring back in his composition the harmony of the Byzantine classical style, though deprived of the warmness of the religious feeling.

In the Brâncoveanesc porches, on the eastern wall usually are being unfolded the scenes of *the Judgment Day*, which shows to the believers the end of times and the reward they'll receive, according to their deeds. At the *Icoanei* church though, instead of the Heaven and Hell's usual overflowing, on this wall are illustrated scenes taken from the book of *Revelation*, the vision of Saint John in which are predicted to nations the events that would precede the Last Judgment.

About the representation of the Apocalypse

The official Byzantine Orthodox Church accepted only later on the introduction of *Revelation* into the Christian iconography[20]. The Hellenic rationalist and dialectic spirit offers to Christian art an educational value. The events following the new religion were illustrated sequentially into the church around the central figure of Jesus Pantokrator. The Hellenic rationalism eliminated any fantastic or mysterious elements which could mislay the viewer's imagination from the rigorous and sober interpretation of the New Testament.

Beginning with the first centuries Christianity, in Syria and Egypt, the Easterners' ardent imagination exalted the Jesus Christ's divinity in all His glory, surrounded by hosts of seraphim and the Evangelists' symbols, in the manner in which was evoked by the vision of the prophet Ezekiel of the Old Testament[21]; in the Cappadocian painting, the supernatural appearance of Jesus Christ in the prophets' visions – Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah and the Apostle John in the book of *Revelation* – gave birth to a kind of fantastic apparition: Jesus was standing on a rainbow, surrounded by the Evangelists' symbols - the lion, the eagle, the angel[22], the bull, each with a book in hands. Around - the throne there are the hosts of seraphim with wings full of eyes, tetramorphs and the crystal sea. These images, initially forbidden in Byzantium, had echoed into the imagination of the Western "barbarian" nations, who of late received Christianity. The explanations of the book of *Revelation* written by the Eastern hierarchs in the first century Christianity are now resumed in West, posing as an explanation of the trials experienced by people in that time. Even from the 8th century, in a Spain being under the Moorish dominion, the Christians, bewildered by the collapse of their political system, had the impression of a catastrophe that should be followed by the awaited end of the world, predicted in the book of *Revelation*. In the northern Spain, in the year of 784, St. Severus embellishes the manuscript of *Revelation's* commentaries, done by Beatus, abbot of Leibana[23], with some artworks[24]. These artworks keep the themes of the Oriental iconography and draw the Christians' imagination towards the grandeur and the mystery of

[17] Florea Vasile, *Istoria artei românești*, Ed. Litera Internațional, București-Chișinău, 2007, p. 260.

[18] The school of Hurezi (XVII-th century) is the strongest workshop in the history of Romanian vernacular art, described as follows: "for its refined ecletism, the intense interest for decoration, the integration of some new suggestion of post-Byzantine painting of Cretan ambiance into traditional essence of local painting, realism (especialy of the portraits shown in votive paintings), the school of Hurez is one of the main achievements of the Brâncovenescu era", from Vasile Drăguț, *Arta românească*, I, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1982, p. 171.

[19] "Pârvu Mutu school founder in the time of Șerban Cantacuzino and Constantin Brâncoveanu, was born in Câmpulung and started his education at the local painting school, which functioned under the authority of the Negru Vodă Princely Monastery, and continued in Bucovina. He worked in Wallachia, under the patronage of the Cantacuzino family, and art hstorians consider him the father of modern Romanian portratit painting" Vivian Dragomir, *Centres of icon painting masters within the Romanian space. The specificity of the painting materials and techniques*, Ed. Universitaria, Craiova, 2011, p. 53.

[20] Brehier Louis, L*es visions apocalyptiques dans l'art byzantin*, in "Artă și arheologie", Iași, IV, 1930, p. 6.

[21] Emile Màle, *L'art religieux du XII-e siécle en France*, Paris, 1924, pp. 4-7.

[22] *Dicționar biblic*, pp. 692-693.

[23] Albert Châtelet, Bernard Philippe Groslier, *Histoire de L'Art,* Ed. Larousse, Paris, 1990, p. 272; Henri Focillon, *L'an mil*, Paris, 1952, p. 38.

[24] The Saint-Sever Beatus, also known as the Apocalypse of Saint-Sever, (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 8878) is a French Romanesque illuminated Apocalypse manuscript from the 11th Century, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Apocalypse_of_St._Sever

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Jesus Christ apocalyptic appearance[25].

On the eve of the year 1000, the same psychosis of awaiting the dramatic dénouement about to come, was lived also by the Christians of the Western Europe. The belief according to which for 1000 years the enemies of Jesus Christ and His believers shall engage in combat, and the end of this terrible battle will take place the return of Jesus as supreme Judge and the establishing of a happy life, found a favorable climate within the frame of the political and social events that took place close to the 1000 year. The Carolingian Empire collapsed; an unmerciful taxation system oppressed the people decimated by famine and pandemics. At the same time, the last barbarian invasions and especially the Normand repeated forays taken aback the Europe people. All these phenomena were reckoned by the people of the time as heavenly punishments, predicted by the book of *Revelation*. But even after this obsession diminished in the imagination of people who longed for more peaceful times, the French painters, impressed by the illuminations of the Mozarabic and Carolingian manuscripts, began to transpose on the cathedrals' walls of the 11th and 12th century scenes from the book of *Revelation*. The sculptures of the cathedrals' tympanums of the 13th century, as well as the tapestry with the scenes from the book of Revelation (Apocalypse), of Angers (drawn by Jean de Bruges and performed by Nicolas Bataille in 1370[26]), prove though that the Apocalypse occupied the Middle Age people's mentality. Even in the Reform times, Dürer in 1498, and Cranach, in 1522, still manage to find in the illustrations of the Apocalypse explanations for the conflicts which were prone to favor the religious wars[27].

In Byzantium, so long as the Church leaders managed to keep the tradition, the representation of the Apocalypse could not gain place[28]. The conquest of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204 and the presence of the Western rulers on the Greek territories for decades (in Morea, in the islands, in Thessaloniki) opened the gates of the Western influence. On the other hand, the taking of Constantinople by the Orthodox kings of Niceea (1261), has mean a new and a strong penetration in Byzantium of the Eastern spirit and thus, the themes inspired from the apocryphal texts – so appreciated in the Orthodox East – were faining more and more space in the iconography of the religious art. Nevertheless, the Byzantine Empire could not last more and its final collapse under the Turks in 1453 could only confirm the disaster that the Balkan world had been foreboding. This awaiting of the cosmic catastrophe that should come together with the political catastrophe, could thus produce in Byzantium – now at the beginning of the new times – the same state of "anxiety" experienced in the West some decades ago. In these conditions, the apocalyptic vision of Saint John could constitute and answer to a disoriented and hopeless society.

The first known example in the Orthodox-Christian East of representing the book of Revelation is to be found in the *Dionysiou* monastery of Mount Athos[29], where in the entrance hall of the refectory, on the southern, eastern and northern walls are painted scenes from this cycle. The building and the ornamentation of the *catholicon* of *Dionysiou* were achieved with money offered by Petru Rareş and the refectory painting, by the kindness of his daughter, Ruxandra, the wife of Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, the ruler of Moldavia between 1552-1568. At *Dochiariou* we have a similar cycle and it is interesting to notice that the same Alexandru Lăpuşneanu is mentioned among the benefactors of this church. At *Xenophontos*' monastery, in the same Holy Mountain, the entrance hall of the refectory is adorned with an identical[30] painting, together with the portraits of its benefactors: Matei Basarab and his wife Elina (1637-1654). In an epoch in which the Balkan Peninsula war under the Turkish yoke, the Romanian rulers, who still kept their autonomy in exchange for heavy taxes, use their money for the cultural and artistic movement to continue, now gathering around the Church.

Until 16th century, not a single Byzantine cycle of the Apocalypse is known. The fourteen engravings of Dürer stay as the basis of the Apocalypse iconography[31] of 16th and 17th centuries. In 1522[32], Cranach illustrates the Bible and carries on the Dürer's artwork, giving it a greater proportion, treating with realism and picturesqueness the tumultuous fancifulness of the Apostle John's vision. The recent art historians prove convincingly that at the basis of the *Apocalypse* from *Dionysiou* stay the Western engravings of Dürer and Cranach, showing a changing of the same scenes through a Byzantine interpretation[33]. If it is thrilling to follow the way this style is summarizing the realistic and picturesque character of the Western engravings – giving a pithy, symbolic value to the conflicts between the heaven and earth – it is not less

[25] Moses Lowman, *A paraphrase and notes on the the Revelation of St. John,* the third edition, printed for T Cadell in the strand, MDCCLXXIII .

[26] Albert Châtelet, Bernard Philippe Groslier, *op.cit.*, p. 289.

[27] *Ibidem*, p. 345.

[28] Alexandru Ștefăniță, *Despre reprezentarea Apocalipsei - Biserici din Muntele Athos și Țările Române*, in Ziarul Lumina, 2012, http://ziarullumina.ro/patrimoniu/despre-reprezentarea-apocalipsei.

[29] Juliette Renaud, *Le cycle de l'apocalypse de Dionysiou, Presses universitaires de France*, Paris, 1943, p. 180.

[30] Dionysios of Fourna, *Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne, grecque et latine*, Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1845, pp. 30-31.

[31] Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die Kunst Albrecht Dürers*, München, 1908, pp. 40-60.

[32] *Cranach illustrates the New Testament*, published by Luther at Wittenberg

[33] Juliette Renaud, op. cit., p. 3.

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Fig 1 – Capitolul 7 al Apocalipsei – Biserica Icoanei, București – fotografie realizată de Gabriela Ștefăniță /Chapter 7 of the book of Revelation – Icoanei church (photo: Gabriela Ștefăniță)



Fig. 2 - Capitolul 8 al Apocalipsei – Biserica Icoanei, București – fotografie realizată de Gabriela Ștefăniță/Chapter 8 of the book of Revelation – Icoanei church (photo: Gabriela Ștefăniță)

interesting to notice how the Apocalyptic vision from *Dionysiou* changed in time through the interpretation of the painter Grigorie of *Icoanei* church. Despite of the rigorousness of its Byzantine style, the composition from *Dionysiou* still kept something of the dynamism and baroque boisterousness of the German engravings. But, if at *Dionysiou* the heavenly register overwhelms the earth action[34] and the symbolic, personified fantastic elements magnifiy the supernatural atmosphere, the porch painter of *Icoanei's* church is guided by entirely different other criteria and feelings.

The changing of *Apocalypse* representation in time and the way it has come to be transposed on the eastern wall of the porch in *Icoanei's* church, shall be better understood after we have first examined the painting of the *Xenophontos* monastery, realized after about 100 years from the painting of the *Dionysiou's* refectory and 70 years before the painting of our porch[35]. Once the *Apocalypse* representation was established in the iconography of the Athonite churches through the *Dionysiou's* painting, the painters did not need to depart from the consecrated model. If in the West, the religious pictures strived to stir up a mystic sentiment, making use of a realistic and picturesque representation, enlivened by expressive gestures of the biblical characters, in the Orthodox Church, for a simple believer the painting was a manner of getting to know truths reckoned to be immutable. Thus, the painting should have remained faithful to the past models, in order to preserve, in time, the illustration of the same truths considered absolute[36]. For this reason, at *Xenophontos* monastery, the painter seemed to transfer the painting model of *Dionysiou's,* which then he fills with color. Nevertheless, the painting of *Xenophontos* monastery is no longer preserving the dramatic breath and the living but coordinated motion of the characters, enlivened by the Apocalypse hallucinated action. The bodies are stiff, in rigid frames, and the mingling between contour and relief is no longer organic.

The Apocalypse cycle illustrated in the porch of the Icoanei's church

If at *Xenophontos* monastery, the same scenes gained this rigid character due to a subservient copy, in the case of Băbeni's foundation, the interpretation of the same iconography gains other characteristics. On the one hand, here, the painter stays bound to the old Athonite tradition, and on the other hand, some new Western influences, as well as the painter's personality – who intervenes with timid contributions, though apparent – revive the servile copy of *Xenophontos* monastery. Never the less, the decorative ensemble remains a pale reflexion of the *Dionysiou's* painting. In the porch of the *Icoanei* church, the pictures come in turn on two registers along

[34] Gabriel Millet, *Les monumens de l'Athos – La peinture*, Paris, 1927, pp. 206-209.

[35] *Ibidem*, pp. 184-185.

[36] Georgije Ostrogorskij, *Les décision du Staglov concernant la peinture d'images et le principes de l'ichonographie byzantine*, Mélanges Uspensky, 2-éme partie, 1930, p. 394.

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Fig. 3 - Capitolul 9 al Apocalipsei – Biserica Icoanei, București – fotografie realizată de Gabriela Ștefăniță/Chapter 9 of the book of Revelation – Icoanei church (photo: Gabriela Ștefăniță)



Fig. 4 - Capitolul 10 al Apocalipsei – Biserica Icoanei, București – fotografie realizată de Gabriela Ștefăniță/Chapter 10 of the book of Revelation – Icoanei church (photo: Gabriela Ștefăniță)

the eastern wall. Due to the architectural changes that came in time, only five scenes are preserved.

The composition that illustrates chapter 7 of the book of *Revelation*[37] – showing the righteous sealed with the God's sign and the four winds soothed by the angels – is much reduced in the respective picture in the porch of the *Icoanei* church. The painter hesitates and renders only the four angels[38] who rule the winds and the angel that bends above the clouds, as in *Dionysiou's* painting. The elected group, clothed in white – that in the *Dionysiou's* painting was located between the rocky landscapes and the clouds' margin – was excluded from the picture of *Icoanei* church.

Chapter 8[39] from the book of *Revelation* displays Lord Jesus Christ among the seven angels, who received the trumpets, by whose sounds they will announce to the world the scourges that will come over the people, fiery hail stone, the mountain fallen into the sea, the drowned ships and the fallen star. In this picture, divided in two equal registers, the *Dionysiou's* painter pay attention both to the terrestrial world and the heavenly one. The painter of *Icoanei* church renders only the heavenly register, but which he arranges as an icon.

In the *Dionysiou's* composition, appears "the Ancient of days", seated behind the Altar. An angel, seated beside him, puts a cap on the Altar from which the incense smoke is raising. The seven angels are grouped around Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, three on one side and four on the other, and are seated two by two, one behind the other. This composition, bounded on the lower side by the clouds rolling up and the angel who flies horizontally above the earth, keeps an intimate character. At *Icoanei's* church, "the Ancient of days", clothed in white, is seated on the clouds. He blesses with His right hand and with the left keeps the earth globe, and is somehow isolated by the rest of the composition. The angels are staying on the clouds along two vertical lines and in the middle, Jesus stays in a cup. Their gracious bodies between the lithe wings and the trumpets on the mouth in a parallel movement constitute a solemn framework of Jesus Christ's appearance. The sky, on which nothing is happening anymore, gained a frozen and symbolic character, as in some icons. In the painting of the *Icoanei's* church "*the Ancient of days*" has a mature figure, with a dark hair and beard, clothed in white clothes. From the terrestrial register, which occupies one third of the painting of *Dionysiou* monastery, the painter of *Icoanei's* church no longer represents something, losing from the features that characterized the complex symbolism of the Byzantine traditional iconography.

It follows the picture that depicts a fragment from the 9th chapter[40]: *"The well of the deep".* In the middle, a

[37] *La Sainte Bible*: accompagnée du texte latin de la Vulgate; trad. en français par Lemaistre de Sacy, Nouv. éd., rev. / par M. l'abbé Jacquet Paris; Garnier Frères, 1867-1868, p. 91-95, Diac. Gheorghe Băbuț, T*âlcuire la Apocalipsă a Sfântului parintelui nostru Andrei arhiepiscopul Cezareii Capadochiei*, Oradea; Pelerinul Român, 1991, pp. 50-57.

[38] *Apocalipsa lui Ioan în tradiția iudeo-creștină*, translated by Petru Creția and Cristian Bădiliță, Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 57.

[39] *La Sainte Bible*, pp. 95-98; Diac. Gheorghe Băbuț, *op.cit.*, pp. 57-62.

[40] *Ibidem*. pp. 99-105; *Ibidem*., pp. 62-69.

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form of hexagonal prism imagines the well. On its edge, a strange animal[41] – that cannot be defined, because the picture is partly wiped up – replaces the locusts with scorpion tail from the *Dionysiou's* picture. On one side of the well, a group of people kneeling, with serene countenances and bodies in parallel design, replace the corpses spread on the earth of the respective picture from Athos. The star with human form, that is located on the end of a roll, over the well in the picture of the *Dionysiou* monastery, is pale, simple, with a grey contour in the picture of the *Icoanei* church. Above, through a firm drawing and color contrasts, the painter manages to suggest the heaven's deep. The background, grey, like a curtain, is shattered and, through the clouds' garland in relief, on the yellow space, appears an angel flying, announcing the world the fifth plague.

The following scene illustrates chapter 10 of the *Apocalypse*[42]: the fiery angel[43] bringing the book of prophesies to Saint John, the Apostle and Evangelist. The angel's body is made of clouds, shown more by means of contour than by relief. The columns that replace the angles' legs in the *Dionysiou's* painting – following the model of the German engravings – were removed, the angel having real legs. The text of the *Apocalypse* says that the angel stands with a leg in the sea and with another on earth. If in the *Dionysiou's* painting the stylization of the sea waves, concentrically designed, starts from the interpretations of a reality, in the picture from *Icoanei* church, the blue, mat background no longer reminds of the text letter. The body of Saint John, young, dynamic, dashes to receive the book from the angel's hand. His gesture is no longer full of significance, as in the *Dionysiou's* picture, where Saint John, old, consciously receives the book as a burden. The composition of the upper part closes with the "Ancient of days" in the clouds blessing with both hands.

The 11th picture illustrates chapter 11 from the book of *Apocalypse*: Saint John measuring the Church and the two prophets killed by the beast. In the *Apocalypse* cycle from Athos, the beast – as a winged dragon, boosted strongly on its fours – occupies three thirds of the first plan. Yet, in the painting of *Icoanei* church, the painter confines himself only to represent Saint John with a twig in his hand measuring the grey and upright silhouette of a true church; he receives a reed, with the commandment to measure the temple of God, the altar and the one who worship it. "*I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, «Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles*»" (ch. 11, 1-2). The temple described in this chapter represents the Catholic/Universal Church or the New Jerusalem, "the outer court" being the place prepared for the heathen and faithless nations, such as the Ottomans, unworthy to be measured due to their uncleanness.



Fig. 5 - Capitolul 11 al Apocalipsei – Biserica Icoanei, București – fotografie realizată de Gabriela Ștefăniță/Chapter 11 of the book of Revelation – Icoanei church (photo: Gabriela Ștefăniță)

In the corresponding painting from Mount Athos, the Church is symbolized by an altar seated under a ciborium, laid under the archway of an apse. In this painting too the artist preferred to replace the Church symbolic representation by means of the church itself, taking from the text only the elements that allowed him to give a more accessible character to the *Apocalypse* cycle.

The history of *Icoanei's* church was once again recorded by the representation of this scene. In all cases, the church painters would use then, as today, "The Hermeneia of the Byzantine Painting", one of the most widely used version being the one of Dionysius of Fourna, in which there are recorded all the necessary directions for the iconographic representations. In this manual it is mentioned the following: "*The temple and in it, the altar and Saint John (the Theologian) measuring with a rod…",* yet the temple representation from this scene is a construction similar to the one votive picture from narthex, in which the church founder keeps in hand the image of *Icoanei* church, in the way it looked at the beginning of the 18th century.

[41] Albert Châtelet, Bernard Philippe Groslier, *op.cit.*, p. 197.

[42] *Le Sainte Bible, op. cit.*, p. 105-107; Diac. Ghe. Băbuț, *op. cit.,* pp. 68 - 69.

[43] Albert Châtelet, Bernard Philippe Groslier, *op.cit.*, p. 217.

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Final considerations

It is a historical truth that, due to the numerous revisions, the present form of *Icoanei* church does no longer preserves the initial (original) one, presently having only two spires. But, out of the two church representations found in the iconographical program, it can be confirmed the fact that on the date it was embellished with painting, the worship place had three spires, a big one, placed in pronaos and two smaller ones, placed on an open porch.

Thus appear another two files from the history of *Icoanei's* church preserved on its interior, and this owing to the vision of Grigorie, the 18th century painter. For him, the image of the church of God in the *Apocalypse* cycle[44] is the same with the one from *Icoanei* church. "The temple" or "the *Icoanei* church" represents the hope of the believers of that time that they shall be spared by the God's anger, and, by analogy, the outer courtyard awaits the divine punishment, to be destroyed together with the heathen nations that do not belong to the Church[45].

Also to be observed in this register from the church porch is that there are painted only scenes from the prophetic part of the *Apocalypse*, the first chapters, of historical nature, being eliminated.

From the described scenes, it has been seen that the one who painted the porch of the *Icoanei* church preserved, in most of his pictures, the iconography of the Apocalypse present on *Dionysiou*. The innovations he brought are made possible either due to the fact that, besides the Athos model, our painter considered also other images – that we might not know – and combined new elements, introduced in the religious painting by way of an original interpretation, or that the *Apocalypse* iconography, established at *Dionysiou*, have changed in time and came to be transposed, as we saw, on the wall of our porch. But in the 18th century, the painter could present the old tradition of the *Apocalypse* from Athos, in a kind of unrestrained manner, as in the painting on calottes, which preserves the iconography of the Brâncovenesc style, dared an original achievement, as a result of the decorative, rational vision.

Thus, of the narrative illustration of the *Apocalypse*, from what is preserved, the order is decorative, the scenes losing dynamism and the fantastic elements are reduced to a symbolism whose value is easily understood. Most of the time, as well, he is lessening the scenes' configuration, ignoring the text acuteness, giving a greater importance to the elements which he liked and understood more[46].

If in the past centuries the *Apocalypse* illustration was born of people's restless imagination and mystical effervescence, the displaying of this cycle on the porch wall of *Icoanei* church is due to the wish for originality and achievement of well-made decorative effect. In this way, at the beginning of the "Enlightenment" – in a century in which the French encyclopedists (very appreciated at the Mavrocordat's court) started to give history a materialistic orientation, thus removing in part the prejudices that still shackled people's minds – the painter of the porch of the *Icoanei* church follows the themes of the traditional iconography, saving a tedious art, by the harmonious and ornamental demeanour of the ensemble.

[44] *Ibidem, op.cit.*, p. 351 "Signorelli execute son oeuvre maîtresse, en 1499 – 1504 le cycle peint de L'Apocalypse".

[45] Gabriela Ştefăniţă, *Un registru iconografic deosebit în pridvorul de la Biserica Icoanei – File de istorie în culori,* Ziarul Lumina, 2013, http://ziarullumina.ro/patrimoniu/un-registru-iconografic-deosebit-pridvorul-de-la-biserica-icoanei.

[46] H.W. Janson, *History of Art*, fourth edition, revised and expandet by Antony F. Janson, Pentice Hall Abrahms, 1920, p. 827.

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