
RECOVERY OF A CULTURAL IDENTITY TYPES OF RESURRECTED AND PUNISHED PERSONS DURING THE LAST JUDGMENT, AS DEPICTED IN THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH PAINTINGS

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Abstract

This article aims at analysing the types of resurrected persons going to Hell, after the final divine judgment. The Last Judgment is to a Christian the most important moment to get access to the everlasting life. The paintings depicting this moment are very well rendered within the Romanian Orthodox Churches. Different factors – the founder, the community, the priest, the client – intervene in depicting the resurrected persons that are punished following the Last Judgment. This way, we can draw the conclusion that the society itself assesses the human earthly behaviour before the divine judgment. Studying these types of resurrected persons, going to Hell following the human judgment provides interesting information.

Keywords: resurrected, Romanian society, church painting, death, Orthodox Church

1. Introduction

Seen from a general view, the Orthodox Church painting expresses itself in the general frameworks of a particular and restrictive canon with regard to art [1]. Romanian historiography has proved that, within the limits imposed by the Byzantine tradition [2], there was a certain freedom of expression that the artist [3], had used to obtain spectacular results [4]. The painting canon was necessary in order to preserve the universal and uniform characteristic [5] of the Eastern Church [6]. Also, some subsidiary factors shouldn't be neglected, as they contributed to imposing those artistic patterns. Thus, church painting had two pragmatic roles within a deeply religious [7, 8] and illiterate society [9]. This way, the painting fulfilled a pedagogical and moralizing function [10], providing the essential Christian marks to believers. The paintings depicting the Last Judgment are within the two limits specified above, and, for this reason, the artist's freedom of expression is much larger [11], offering very important information to historians.

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The canon of the Last Judgment within the Orthodox church painting is copied after the pattern described by Dionysios of Furna [12] and has the following composition: “*Jesus Christ sitting on a fire throne, dressed in white; groups of angels frightened before Him; with His right hand He blesses the saints and with His left one shows the sinners the everlasting torments; on the right is Virgin Mary and on the left Saint John who bows before Christ; next to him, the twelve apostles sit on thrones, on their right, the saints hold branches in their hands, as a symbol of the personal virtues; in the first row there are the patriarchs and the prophets, then the bishops, the martyrs and the hermits and in the third row there are the religious kings, the devout and martyr women*” [13].

On the left side of Christ, the sinners can be seen together with the devils and Judas the traitor, the tyrant kings, the persons worshipping idols, the antichrists, the heretics, the killers, etc. These persons scream, tear out their beards and clothes. In front of other pagan or schismatic peoples, Moses holds in his hand a rotulus, on which it is written: “*Prophet from among you and your brothers, like Me, will God show to you: and you will listen to That*” [13, p. 217]. In front of the Judgment throne, the Holy Cross and the Book of Life are painted. From under the feet of the Saviour, a river of fire gushes and in this river the devils throw the sinners, torturing them with spears and hooks and plunge them into flames. To this canon, some other regional elements were added, like for example: the accession to Heaven of the fair people, the resurrection of the dead, the private trial of souls, the death of the fair person and the death of the sinner, angels tightening the sky with zodiacal signs and God the Father in the middle [14].

In some other scenes: the resurrection of the dead, the anthropomorphic depiction of earth and sea, zodiacal signs, or motives borrowed from traditional and pagan mythology (the trial of the soul using a balance, an idea taken from the Egyptian mythology) [15]. All these elements have been later incorporated in the canon regarding the depiction of the last Judgment, in a delimited architectural space [16].

2. A brief inventory of the sins condemned by the Orthodox Church and that appear in the paintings rendering the Last Judgment

The compositions having as a theme the Last Judgment are different from church to church, depending on the available space the artists has for painting (Figure 1). In general, the iconographic structure is respected, but little differences in details may appear. In wooden churches, where the available spaces for paintings are smaller, the composition of the Last Judgment has less elements and the artist insists on the categories of doomed persons, this revealing important social [17], cultural and mental information [18].

The inventory of sins shows the complexity of the types of doomed persons appearing in the mural paintings rendering the last Judgment within the Orthodox churches in Romania. We can distinguish six important categories:



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 1. The Last Judgment: (a) Putna Monastery, painting from 2010; (b) Voroneț Monastery, 16th century painting; (c) Bătușari Church in Curtea de Argeș.

- *Social sins*: killing, theft, kleptomania, abduction, intemperate behaviour, vices (alcoholism, smoking, consuming drugs), laziness, cupidity, gambling, etc.;
- *Sentimental sins*: suicide, abortion, corruption, enmity, chauvinism, anti-Semitism, racism, etc.;
- *Spiritual sins*: worship of other deities (Mohammedism, Buddhism), idolatry of living persons claiming to have attributes similar to God (pope, priests, monks, shamans, false saints), worship of creation, money, food, cupidity, worship of Satan, belief in false religions and ideologies (materialism, atheism, communism), worship of idols (idolatry), false prophecies (all the false religions referring to faith in God, but that do not respect His word), etc.;
- *Occult sins*: prediction of future, reincarnation, witchcraft, exorcisms, magic, superstitions, cursing people, invocation of the spirit of the dead, polytheism, shamanism, religious occultism, etc.;
- *Sexual sins*: debauched sexual behaviour, adultery, incest, zoophilia, paedophilia, rape, homosexuality, prostitution, hedonism, etc.;
- *Speech sins*: curses, blasphemies, ugly talking, intentional deceiving, hypocrisy, simulation, flattery, false testimony, chattering, boastfulness, treason, etc.

The inventory of the sins condemned by the Orthodox Church explains the complexity of the spiritual and moral life of a believer [19]. The multitude of sins makes it impossible for them to be rendered in a mural composition and that is why several factors intervene in choosing only some types of sins to be depicted in these paintings.

The paintings depicting this moment are very well rendered within the Romanian Orthodox churches. Different factors – the founder, the community, the priest, the client – intervene in depicting the resurrected persons that are punished following the Last Judgment [20]. This way, we can draw the conclusion that the society itself assesses the human earthly behaviour before the divine judgment [21]. Studying these types of resurrected persons, going to Hell following the human judgment provides interesting information.

Below it is the list of churches and monasteries, which were the basis for drawing up the inventory:

- *Monasteries*: Râmeț-Alba, Lupșa-Alba, Horez-Vâlcea, Polovragi-Gorj, Vifora-Dâmbovița, Secu, Sâmbăta de Sus, Rohița, Râșca, Crasna-Prahova, Tismana, Petru-Vodă, Cozia-Arges, Văratec, Probotă, Moldovița, Humor, Arbore, Pătrăuți, Sucevița, Putna, Voroneț, Cotmeana, Schitul Maicilor-București, Sihăstria Voronei, Cernica, Bascovele-Argeș, Ciorlogârla-Samurcășești;
- *Churches*: Bătușari-Argeș, Goiеști-Alba, Runc-Alba, Gornovița-Gorj, Zalnoc-Sălaj, Margău-Cluj, Lăpugiu de Jos-Hunedoara, Bidiu-Bistrița Năsăud, Florești-Gorj, Cehei-Sălaj, Desești-Maramureș, Bogdan Vodă-Maramureș, Mântuleasa-București, Floreșteni-Gorj, Vadul Moților-Alba, Bodești-Alba, Ocolișel-Cluj, Someșul Rece-Cluj, Frățești-Gorj, Ociu-Hunedoara, Larga-Maramureș, Dobricu Lăpușului-Maramureș, Almaș-

Săliște-Hunedoara, Bărbătești-Poieni-Vâlcea, Cearatu de Copăcioasa-Gorj, Pietrarii de Sus-Vâlcea, Copăceni-Vâlcea, Căeni-Călinești-Maramureș, Jupânești-Coșești-Argeș, Neghinești-Cacova-Vâlcea, Târgu Gângulești-oraș Berbești-Vâlcea, Pojoni-Cerna-Vâlcea, Drăgănescu-Giurgiu, Corund-Arad, Poienile Izei-Maramureș, Păisani-Gorj, Pătulele-Mehedinți, Valea Sării-Vrancea, Frasin-Gorj, Murgași-Dolj, Ursani-Vâlcea, Scorteni-Bacău, Capela Militară-Timișoara, Sovata-Mureș.

3. Conclusions

The big variety of punished persons expresses essentially the problems of the Romanian society in its different moments of social and political evolution. The inventory puts together the human factors, that intervened in depicting the categories of punished resurrected, with the political and social moment, when the earthly judgments took place. The scientific approach provides new information on how the Romanian society regarded death and eternal life in its various moments of existence.

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