

EWA KOCÓJ

THE DAMNED OF THE LAST JUDGMENT OR WHAT THE ROMANIANS
PAINT IN THE ORTHODOX ICONS – HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY
CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Ewa Kocój

Jagiellonian University, Culture Institute, Krakow, a co-founder of the Polish-Romanian Society in Krakow, Poland.

Email: ewa.kocoj@uj.edu.pl, ekocoj@poczta.onet.pl

Abstract: The article describes manners in which history and culture influenced the details of the iconographic canon in the art of Orthodox church. The author was interested in relations existing between beliefs and their iconographic representation. Changes of the imagery of the damned in historical context portrayed in the Last Judgment icons painted in selected Orthodox churches in Romania came under the investigation of the author. Romanian icon painters using Byzantine characteristics of representation introduced some significant modifications into the canon. We can divide icons of the Last Judgment into two groups – on the one hand we see sinners who rebelled against the moral canon of Christianity, on the other there are some nations unknown to Romanians, foreign people of various nationalities and faiths that can be grouped into a few categories. The largest of them is composed of pagans (Turks, Tartars and Arabs), infidels (Jews) and heretics (Armenians and Latin rite Catholics).

With time this tradition turned into customary painting of the Last Judgment icons in Romania. It disappeared in the 20th century, only to be reborn with the fall of the communist era in new historical contexts. Old enemies of the Orthodox were replaced by new ones, the representatives of the greatest totalitarian systems in the 20th century – fascists, Nazis, communists; terrorists – the Muslims and their leader (Bin Laden) as well as contemporary Romanian politicians, who are being eternalized in the Last Judgment icons on the walls of Orthodox churches.

Key Words: Orthodox art, Romania - the icons of the Last Judgment - iconographic canon - eschatological beliefs - the damned - stereotypes - canonical and apocryphal texts - visual arts

This paper intends to explore the iconic imagination, or more specifically, the images of sacred art present in the consciousness of Believers. Many of them, depending on the faith they recognize, can be keen on worshipping holy pictures. Certain religious images function as great symbols uniting a whole nation; others play a major role in individual cults. Being a part of a given culture we are able to distinguish the great religious – symbol images at once – there is at least a dozen or so of those in Eastern and Central Europe. Poles have long revered the icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa from the Jasna Góra Monastery; the Lithuanians embrace with special reverence the image of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn from Vilnius. The leading religious image of Ukraine is the icon of Our Lady of Pechersk, which, in the religious representations of worshippers, had defended them against the Turks for many years. Among the Russians there are a few icons that take that role. An image of significant importance is an icon of Our Lady of Kazan famous for its part in the battles with the Poles as well as Our Lady of Vladimir protecting the Ruthenians against Mongolians. We can see a similar case in Romania – there is no one great religious symbolic picture that brings the whole nation together. This is partly the result of Romania being a united country relatively late, only appearing on the map of Europe in 1918. A part of the so-called Greater Romania, each of the three principalities has icons embraced by significant cults on their historical territories. For many Romanians from Moldavia and Bukovina such a religious symbolic image happens to be a byzantine miraculous icon of Our lady from the Neamț Monastery, on the reverse of which you can see St. George sitting enthroned. According to the legends, the force flowing from that icon frequently saved Romanians from the dangerous armies of Turks, Tartars or Russians. In Transylvania the most renown role is attributed to the icon of Our Lady from the Nicula Monastery near Cluj and in Wallachia there are two icons from Bucharest that are revered – Virgin Mary from the *Olari* church and Virgin Mary from *Biserica Icoanei*¹.

It is widely known that faithful Christians – Eastern as well as Western – follow icons with substantial cult. However, if we reversed the perspective and asked the questions: who is, in fact, painted in the icons and why? And does each believer see the same image? Is the person or the iconographic theme portrayed in the icon always interpreted by believers in the same way? Are there no individual discrepancies? Moreover – are we able to agree that certain details seen in the paintings, especially the complex ones, mean the same thing to each person? Who and what do we then see in the holy paintings? Who are we praying to?

When posing these questions we must first of all refer to the role of art and its relationship to the recipient as well as the facts regarding a culture in a given time and space. Once in a while this problem intrigues culture researchers and art historians. As an example we can call up the already classic work of Erwin Panofsky, who proposed the theory stating

that the determining factor of a piece of art is not its artistic value, but its involvement in the meaning and sense of the deeper strata of a given culture² or Ernest Gombrich, who claimed that when thinking of the meaning of the image we need to *consider the mind of the recipient* as well as individual imagination of each person³. Gombrich wrote that the meaning of art is conventional – what we actually see in a given form and shape painted in the picture depends on individual abilities of recognizing in it things or images existing in our memory. This scholar was also drawing attention to a different, equally important characteristic of art reception – even an incomplete, unfinished picture can provoke the viewer's imagination to project something that the picture does ...not represent⁴. David Freedberg went even further in his deliberations – he noted a fact that there are certain works of art that for no apparent reason invoke specific emotional reactions in the viewers (e.g. tears, anger, laughter), as their reception comes across as something that the scholar calls *the truth* of the recipient's life experience⁵.

Such ideas not only refer to art in general, but also to an exceptional genre belonging to it – the sacred art. The works of Robin Cormack follow that trend – in seemingly canonical iconographic themes he searches for representations characteristic to the culture in which the given icon was created. It is worth to note that Cormack sees an icon in places where it is disregarded by the Orthodox theologians⁶. The development of Orthodox spirituality, deeply mystical and liturgical, at some point in history led to the icon being connected very closely to the architectural symbolism of the sanctuary, and the element that allows to fully understand this holy painting is above all the liturgy celebrated there⁷. Beyond those two elements – the sanctuary and liturgy, an icon and the image painted on it, is, according to the theologians, partly dead. However, those opinions cannot be fully adopted by the cultural researchers. Thus Cormack goes a step further – he proposes to view the icon not only in the perspective of the sanctuary and liturgy, but also in the perspective of the culture in which the icon had been created or functions. That what one paints and sees in one icon, may – despite the Orthodox canons – change in historical time frame and even within cultural space. The author emphasizes that the canonicity in painting icons, generally taking place in the monastic environment, does not need to presume that the recipient will only be of one kind and will always see the same content in the image⁸.

However Cormack is not opposing theology. He does not have to. For, it is worth to remember that the birth of the icon, although being religious, did not indicate strict and exclusive relations with the sanctuary and liturgy. The icon has functioned within a broad social context from the very beginning. This was also confirmed by the Second Council of Nicaea in the year 787, according to which the appropriate place for the icon could be the Christian sanctuary as well as devotional objects, liturgical vestments, walls, planks, houses or the sides of roads. Across the

centuries, as well as in contemporary times, Christians have placed them on the walls of their dwellings, next to their fireplaces, inside roadside chapels, wore them on their necks and nowadays icons are carried around in wallets or displayed on computer monitors. Cormack claims that understanding the icon as work of art inseparably related to a particular society provides us with opportunities for researching the world of common representations. Despite the fact that popular culture did not create the art of the icon, the art somehow adapted to collective imagery. Thus, the canonicity of icons does not have to assume only one type of art viewer and the same type of content related to the icon⁹.

The cult of the icon existing beyond the scope of sanctuary and liturgy allows it to be researched in reference to the world of the collective imagery of people, who worship them at a given time and place. The icon, conscious of typical ethnic group representatives, has its own connotations that not only refer to the canonical and religious content, but are also one of the symbols from the perspective of the world in which they function. Therefore questions as to: what the icon is, what is painted on it and what it signifies within the culture are at the same time questions about collective imagery existing in that particular culture. Viewers of art differ and their understanding of art and what they see in it requires the consideration of the framework of knowledge and culture within which it functions. This scientific approach does not require extreme relativism in apprehending sacred art, but in discerning various contexts across centuries in which the icon existed within the culture.

The damned in the icons of the Last Judgment in Moldavia

Towards the end of European Middle Ages – in the 15th and 16th centuries – painted Orthodox wooden churches and monasteries were being built in the territories of Moldavia. They are well known for their polychrome surfaces preserved on the exterior walls of the buildings. Such sanctuaries can be found in: Arbore, Sucevița, Moldovița, Voroneț, Pătrăuți, Părhauți, Humor, Rîșca, Hîrlău, Baia, Probota. Most of them had been founded by Moldavian Hospodars, chiefly by Stephen the Great and his son, Peter IV Rareș; a few of them – such as Humor or Arbore – were Boyar foundations¹⁰. Understanding the iconographic system of Bukovina sanctuaries was a matter of notable interest for cultural researchers starting from the beginning of the 20th century. It is worth to note that hypotheses created over the years associated the birth of exterior iconography with the influence of art and religion originating in the East as well as in Byzantium, the Balkans and Mount Athos, Serbia and Bulgaria¹¹, Tyrol¹² or Transylvania.¹³ While searching for the phenomenon behind this painting the researchers pointed to: the enlightenment program for the Moldavian people¹⁴, the polemic with the main ideas of reformation¹⁵, and the time after the Second World War, when Romania

experienced an extraordinary union of the Orthodox religion with ideology. By appreciating the utopia of autocephaly it was either seen as an illustrious message directed to Moldavians calling to fight the enemies of the nation or as an invocation of Moldavians themselves asking God to save their land from enemies of their country and faith¹⁶. This exceptional iconographic program of the Moldavian Orthodox churches was in 2001 for the first time interpreted hermeneutically, reverting to icon interpretation approaches on the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical levels¹⁷.

However it is worth to note that over the course of these sanctuaries' history certain icons were removed from the whole framework of its exterior iconography. Those icons acquired new meanings within culture and in the course of time became particularly important for Romanians. Over the years certain stories were created about those icons in Romanian culture, credited to the researchers and ideologists as well as to ordinary dwellers of nearby villages. They did not always have identical content, which can be seen as an effect of who Romanians are and what their cultural instruments are.

For Romanians, one of those sacred images has been and continues to be the icon of the *Last Judgment* placed on the western wall of Moldavian Orthodox churches (including Voroneţ, Vatra Moldoviţa, Suceviţa, Pătrăuţi, Probota or Rîşca). As understood in Romania this icon was attributed specific interpretations that move beyond religious contexts, in which we can clearly see political-national mythology. In collective imagery, this icon became a stark symbol of the future destiny of *our people*, identified with the Romanian nation and the Orthodox faith as opposed to *the others* – the enemies of the nation and its dominating religion.

In the wooden churches of Bukovina, Orthodox painting canon claims that the *Last Judgment* icon has a regional attribute that corresponds to the six key moments of the end of time and the end of the world:

1. The disappearance of the cosmos after the angels unveil the curtains of the heavens (time);
2. Christ appears in His glory in the form of the Holy Trinity, surrounded by hosts of angels organized according to rank following the philosophy of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite; an order to prepare *Etimasia* – the Throne of The Last Judgment in the Valley of Josaphat; entering the times of offences that caused the day of Terrible Judgment into the register; bringing the Book of Seven Ages by Archangel Michael; examining of the book by Christ.
3. The commencement of the Judgment – breaking the rule of sin; angels placing the *Etimasia* throne in the valley of Josaphat, bringing the Holy Cross and the commencement announced by trumpeting angels.

4. Defeating the Devil by sending angels to the abyss of hell.
5. Resurrecting the dead and separating the righteous (sheep) from the sinners (goats) by the Saviour.
6. The emerging of the river of fire between East and West; the sinners are condemned to everlasting fire¹⁸.

A considerable piece of this composition, although not the largest part is taken up by Moses, who points to Christ with his right hand, and with his left pointing to the verses of the Bible that were not obeyed by the damned. The representation of other nations and faiths in this regard did not constitute a different series, but rather constituted one of the elements included in the canonical themes illustrating the most important events in the history and theology of Christianity. According to researchers (scholars), the painters of Moldavian wooden churches following the Byzantine canon have introduced distinctive changes in those representations¹⁹. In place of groups condemned for their sins against Christian morality, new peoples and faiths have appeared. We can group them into a few categories. The category that is most important are the people considered *pagans* by Christians – Turks, Tatars and Arabs (Saracens) who arrived in Moldavia from the foreign, barbarian East, as it was believed. Other groups distinguished among the damned were the *infidels*. One of the factions were the Jews who, according to common knowledge, did not believe in Christ and refused the canon of the New Testament. The third group of the *other nations* was composed of the *heretics*, which included Armenians and Latin rite Catholics, who acted against the canons of ecumenical councils at different times in history, and – after the schism of the one and only Church of Christ – denied Christianity of the earliest centuries.

The iconography of the damned appearing on the walls of Bukovina wooden churches does not only include groups, but also individual people. Some of them were identified as high rank clergymen such as Catholic bishops and Armenian metropolitans placed among Latin rite Catholics and Armenians. By analyzing the inscription above representations one could see who the portrayed were. The *Last Judgment* icons, apart from individual Turks in the mouth of a dragon and in the river of fire, included leaders of the *great Christian heresies* (Arius and Nestorius), the biblical and historical opponents and persecutors of Christianity living in the first ages (Herod the Great, Caiaphas, Julian the Apostate, Trajan Decius) as well as the prophet Muhammad – the leader of nations with the symbol of crescent.

The sources of the iconography of the damned in the Last Judgment icons

It is recognized that in the oldest known representations of the *Last Judgment* in Christian art no specific nations and faiths were depicted; the

place was reserved for sinners acting against Christian morality²⁰. The origins of this element in the canon of Christian iconography are not fully known. N. Garidis noted that representations of condemned nations in the icons of the *Last Judgment*, including Jews or Muslims, appeared for the first time at the turn of the 12th century in the Byzantine art from the area of Mount Sinai, Greece, Serbia, Macedonia and Rus²¹. After the schism of Christianity in the year 1054 and after the Latin rite Catholics destroyed Constantinople in 1204, Catholic representatives were introduced into the *Last Judgment* icons. In the late Middle Ages, in the Byzantine – as well as Slavic countries, a tradition appeared to place the nations and faiths neighbouring the given lands as well as those Eastern nations threatening Christians in that area of the icon. The form partly followed the paradigm of previous centuries, however, individual and small updates, related to the history of the region, were also presented²².

The thought itself, referring to those *other nations and faiths* judged at *the end of time*, was established in art much later, appearing during the introduction of new religions in Christian literary texts. Iconography of the *Last Judgment* is based on canonical biblical texts as well as on Christian Apocrypha. The major source for that icon were the sermons of St. Ephrem the Syrian (4th century), not the original version, but its later copies including all of the elements of the topic (Kłosińska) as well as sermons, hagiography and popular folklore features relating to the question of afterlife visions. The folk motifs greatly influenced the representation of hell portrayed in the icon of the *Last Judgment*²³. The tradition of stigmatizing the foreign faith worshippers, also being one of the fundamentals of iconography, can be found in the liturgical texts of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Synodicon of Orthodoxy, from the liturgical book of Triodon, used in the Orthodox Church in the period before and during the Great Lent, is being read on the first Sunday of the Great Lent called the The Triumph of Orthodoxy²⁴. It also includes anathematisms referring to holy images and canons established by the Second Council of Nicaea (787 year). The 8th canon of the Council declares not to let Hebrews, who observe the Sabbath and other Jewish customs, be accepted in the church unless they convert in sincerity. Those anathematisms also refer to Christians, who refuse to acknowledge the dual – godly and human – nature of Christ (Arianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism), as well as iconoclasm and those who reject the entire written as well as unwritten church tradition²⁵. In time, the worshippers of those faiths found their place in the icons. It also appears that some of the sources for the *Last Judgment* iconography could have been drawn from the literary work of St. Niphon of Constantia, a monk living in the 4th century, titled *The Vision of the terrible Judgment Day*²⁶. Its copies were popular in the area of Mount Athos as well as on the Byzantine – Slavic and Romanian lands in the 16th century. This source was rediscovered only in 1970 by one of the monks in the Dionision monastery located on the Holy Mount of

Athos and in 1988 St. Niphon of Constantia was included in the Greek Orthodox Sinaxar taking the day of 23 December. Dumitrescu thinks that the Constantinople Patriarch contributed to using this source to paint the wooden churches of Bukovina. St. Niphon (1434 -1440 until 1508), who, upon the invitation of the Hospodar Radu IV the Great, spent 1503 – 1505 in Wallachia and adjourned to Mount Athos afterwards where he died in the Dionision monastery in 1508. The content of work at that time referring to two events that are to take place at *the end of times* (*The Last Judgment and The Great Heavenly Rejoicing*) corresponds in great part to the iconographic program of Moldavian wooden churches that embraces twelve main themes. In the late Middle Ages this text was known in the circles of monk-painters of Athos, and then in Wallachia and Moldavia as well²⁷.

When analyzing certain details of the *Last Judgment* in Moldavian wooden churches it is worth to note several similarities with the text of St. Niphon. In the *Vision of the Terrible Judgment Day* Moses appears with the Gospel. We can also see infidel Jews. That vision describes Christ – the Judge of the World calling St. Michael to place the throne in the valley of Josaphat, announcing the judgment of sinners among whom he lists idolaters, heretics and enemies of Christ. We can see distinct references to controversies within early century Christianity that led to the origin of the so-called pre-Chalcedonian churches:

„I shall judge those, who worshipped idols and rejected me, their Creator. And those who worship stones and trees that I created for their needs. I shall crush them all like “earthenware vessels (vases)”. I shall also punish my enemies, heretics, who dared to separate me from my father by their deeds; who dared to place the Comforter Spirit among the ordinary mortals. Woe to them, as they don’t know how terrible hell that awaits them is”²⁸.

Among the nations of sinners, called by their names in the vision of St. Niphon, Christ calls the nation of Jews. It is then not a coincidence that their depictions were placed among condemned nations in the first place:

„I shall also judge the Jews who crucified me and did not believe in my divinity... The time of my payback and revenge has come! I shall judge, examine and severely punish the Jewish nation, who are spoiled and treacherous, as they did not repent. I have given them time to repent, but they have disrespected it; now the time for revenge has come”²⁹.

In Moldavian wooden churches, the Last judgment icons depict other infidels painted right behind Jews. They most often portray Turks, Tartars and Arabs, and sometimes unorthodox Christians such as Armenians and Latin rite Catholics. It depicted all those who historically threatened the independence and unity of religious Moldavia. Their representations belong to old Byzantine iconographic tradition. It is modeled on old historically transformed Christian texts. It is also worth to note that the people so far ignored by scholars, such as emperors (kings), monks and laymen are included in the icon as well. They do not represent specific nations, as it was hitherto thought. They may be an iconographic depiction of the words of Christ found in the *Vision of St. Niphon* and other texts. Their representations are placed right behind the heretics. This corresponds to the order of condemned named by Christ.

„[...] the others were found on the left side of the Judge. They were mostly Jews, rulers, church dignitaries, priests, emperors and a great number of monks and laymen. They stood ashamed, despairing over their ruin. Their faces were foul and they wept from the depths of their souls, which were full of sorrow. There was a mournful spirit among everyone and no comfort was found”³⁰.

When searching for the origins of the damned nations' emergence in Moldavian wooden churches iconography it is not possible to disregard other Christian texts known in Byzantium and the Balkans – particularly the Apocrypha. The images of *others* – the damned appear in Slavic copies of the work: *The Journey of the Mother of God among the Torments*, known in the Romanian land at least since the 16th century. The work portrays the Mother of God descending into Hell. She asks the Archangel Michael to take her to a place where sinners suffer the greatest torments. In the *River of Fire*, Mary sees the torments of Jews condemned for crucifying Christ.³¹ The *Life of St. Basil the New* was a text created in the 10th century in Byzantium that emerged in the 17th century in Moldavia. It greatly influenced the formation of folk knowledge in reference to the journey of the soul after death. This happened not only within Romania, but also in other Orthodox countries. In the third part of the work titled *The Vision of the Horrible Judgment*, the student of St. Basil, St. Gregory is taken by an angel to the heavens. There he sees Jesus Christ undertaking the judgment of sinners. The Jews are to be judged first – they are divided into groups – those living before Christ (less guilty); those living in the times of Christ's birth and work until the end of the world; those worshipping idols and outlaw Ismaelites. Then other sinners rejecting the teachings of Christ are listed among Christian factions. These appear right behind Jews in the icon of the *Last Judgment* in the wooden churches of Bukovina. That work also lists the patriarchs, metropolitan bishops, bishops, archimandrites,

priests, deacons and Christian monks as the damned and condemned to the everlasting fire. Images that draw the viewer's attention are the characters of Diocletian and Maximian, placed among the prosecutors of Christianity, painted in the river of fire in the *Last Judgment* icons of Moldavian wooden churches³².

The representation of the Damned Nations in the icons of the Last Judgment are analogous to the religious texts known in the late Middle Ages, which trace their origins back to Christianity. The only nation that is mentioned in those texts is that of the Jews. They are collectively condemned for rejecting Jesus Christ and crucifying Him.³³ The appearance of other nations in the icons of the *Last Judgment* is explained by the "promises" put into the Christ's mouth, quoted by various Christian writers in religious texts, referring to the punishment that will, in the future, be inflicted on all the sinners, e.g. pagans, infidels, heretics and idolaters. The images of specific nations to be damned (apart from Jews) in the icons of Moldavian wooden churches were first the result of controversies within Christianity of early ages, and later of the dangers that Byzantium and the Slavic-byzantine world posed – namely historical issues as well as those existing within culture, therefore Turks, Tartars and Arabs have been vastly represented while the schismatics, Armenians and Latin rite Catholics much less and not in all the churches. The condemned Armenians brilliantly correspond to the words of Christ from the *Vision of St. Niphon* referring to judging those who reject the three divine incarnations of God, although their name is not mentioned explicitly.³⁴ The representations of nations in the *Last Judgment*, similarly to religious texts, were placed within the area attributed to hell next to the images of Christians – the condemned sinners that rejected the teachings of Christ. The original notion of *the others* then referred to the universal affinity to the world of sinners, which comprised of infidel and heretic nations as well as Christians who did not follow the teachings of Christ. The icon candidly conveyed the religious and eschatological significance of the idea of belonging to us and in contrast to *the others*. *Fellow kin* through their actions (good deeds) and persistence in the Christian faith (sometimes Orthodox) shall be redeemed. *The others* – sinners – will not stand the ordeal of fire and shall be damned forever.

The damned on Last Judgment icons in Transylvania

It is worth to note that the custom of placing *Last Judgment* icons on frescoes of wooden church walls with images of the damned which emerged in Moldavia, later on became popular in other parts of Romania, such as Wallachia and Transylvania. In Wallachia it had appeared in many of the region's sanctuaries, however, it was not as complicated and detailed as the compositions dating back to medieval Moldavia. In Last Judgments of Cozia, Bucovaț, Topolnița or Hurezi, icon painters did not

develop the idea beyond the traditional, scarce groups of damned that were previously known from Moldavian area – Jews, Turks and Tartars³⁵. Numerous frescoes were damaged, even in recent times as an effect of contemporary restorations, which makes it impossible to thoroughly compare the theme of the damned in many historical sanctuaries³⁶.

This composition, however, emerged in many wooden churches of Wallachia, especially in the area of the so-called historical Maramureş. It introduced new, historically transformed details of *the damned*. Local families had been building wooden houses from the 16th to 19th centuries. They had also funded the development of Orthodox churches³⁷. In the 18th century many of them were decorated with internal polychrome as well as with representations of the *Last Judgment* in their iconographic program³⁸. There are eight most significant sanctuaries in villages that were included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, located in: Budeşti, Deseşti, Bârsana, Poienile Izei, Ieud Deal, Şurdeşti, Plopiş and Rogoz.

The polychrome of St. Nicholas's wooden church in Budeşti-Susani, founded in 1628 is an excellent example of change introduced in the depiction of the damned. This can be seen when reading the Church Slavonic inscription located above the imperial doors. According to another inscription located in the north east corner of the church, in 1760, following an order given by Pope Ionaş,³⁹ it was decorated with polychrome by Alexander Ponehalschi, a painter considered to be an important artistic individuality of the 18th century in the area of Maramureş. Even today, very little detail of his life is known. Almost no sources referring to his person were preserved. Most scholars, analyzing the sound of his name tend to link his origins to Poland⁴⁰. It is known that in the second half of the 18th century the painter settled in Maramureş, pursuing intense artistic activity in the post-Byzantine tradition. He might have also been organizing itinerant workshops⁴¹. He painted images found in Călineşti-Căeni, Berbeşti, Budeşti-Susani, Sârbi-Susani, Deseşti, Ieud-Deal. They are considered to be the most significant historical examples in the region. They are also considered to be models representing cultural changes in mentality and peculiarities in the way of thinking within the period.

Images found in Budeşti, painted as very expressive “small miniatures”, possess inscriptions in Slavonic and Romanian languages⁴². There is a large image of the *Last Judgment* in the pre-nave, on the western wall, where the damned nations were painted in two rows. The damned nations are depicted in a traditional way, although very vividly and the people are the ones we already know from Moldavia: Jews, Armenians, Turks and Tatars and standing out dark skinned Arabs. Placing neighbouring Protestant Germanic dwellers within the picture was a new trend introduced with this painting.

The *Last Judgment* from Desești is a very complex and interesting icon. The wooden church was built at about 1770 in the valley of the River Mara under the auspices of St. Paraskieva, in the western part of village, near the cemetery⁴³. The interior of the church had been covered by frescoes in 1780. Still, the painter remains unknown until this day. Some scholars claim that it was covered with polychrome by Radu Munteanu from the Ungureni village (Tara Lapusului) together with his assistant Gheorghe Zugravu. This work would have been carried out upon the request of local women and with payment offered by them⁴⁴. Others, by conducting formal and stylistic analysis, denote the paintings to be Alexander Ponehalschi's⁴⁵. The most important iconographic composition of this sanctuary is the icon of *The Last Judgment* placed on all the walls of the sanctuary. On the south wall we can see the damned – Jews, Turks, Tatars, Germans and a new element in representations – the French.

However, it is hard to find any written sources referring to the iconography of the French and German in *The Last Judgment*. In this case it was rather the cultural reality and the history of the region that influenced changes within the details of iconographic canon. “The current affairs” within iconography of the nations condemned to hell were related to a difficult situation of the Orthodox religion in the region and the necessity to continually confront many nations and faiths dwelling in the vicinity. It is common knowledge that Reformation ideas from Western Europe started seeping into Transylvania in the second half of the 16th century. This had greatly complicated the religious situation of the region; many of the Transylvanian Saxons became Lutheran and Hungarians and Székelys became Calvinist and Unitarians. Transylvania became a region of many faiths where several branches of Protestantism were dominant. The Orthodox religion became a minority here and its members had often been persecuted. The unfavorable standing of the Eastern Church had changed only when Michael the Brave (1599–1601) came into rule and guaranteed the Orthodox faith freedom in their religious beliefs. The Hospodar founded new churches and monasteries. This including a metropolitan cathedral and the residence of the metropolitan bishop in Alba Iulia and churches in Făgăraș, Lujerdiu and Ocna Sibiului that were being painted with polychrome⁴⁶. In 1688 Transylvania was occupied by the Habsburg army and became a part of Austria. Leopold I's decision stated that three nations – Hungarians, Saxons and Székelys were free to settle in the area. The freedom of faith was granted to: Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinist and Unitarians. Campaigns conducted by the Jesuits, encouraging members of the Orthodox faith to convert to Roman Catholicism or to accept the union led to the signing of the Proclamation of Unity with Rome in Alba Iulia, in 1697⁴⁷. Following this event the Orthodox faith was barely tolerated. Moreover, controversies between Unitarians and Orthodox Christians in the matter of acquiring wooden churches made many believers go back and forth between the rites. It is

not surprising that we can find references to religious history and conflicts of the region previously included in the iconographic canon present in iconographic representations from Maramureş churches.

What happened after communism?

Communism did not support painting wall icons within Romanian sanctuaries. That time did not see new wooden churches or new frescoes on their walls. Though, the development of new churches and restorations of old sanctuaries began right after Ceausescu's fall, on the wave of religious rebirth in Romania in the nineties of the 20th century. At that time the canon of icon painting also began a new life. It included many contemporary themes. Cultural transformation was also reflected in the new faces of the damned painted on the icons of *The Last Judgment*.

Contemporary icon painters, as well as their predecessors, cover the interior as well as the exterior walls with polychrome. Though, in post-communist times not many art masters knew of the iconographic canon of wooden church painting. Therefore many of the themes presented in sanctuaries contradict Christian theology. They astonish scholars and followers of Orthodox canon as well as ordinary worshippers. Contemporary historical events and cultural trends contributed to the new life of the old mythological division into *us* and *the others*. This controversy pointed to people and symbols within contemporary culture, which can be identified in various group configurations. Despite apparent differences and new content in the images, cultural anthropologists treat them as a great connection between the basic division of surrounding reality and confrontation of two points of view: *ours' and the others'*. This opposition pointed to characters and symbols in contemporary culture used for people to identify with them within various group structures. Despite apparent differences and new content regarding group representations, in cultural anthropologists' minds they are an excellent image of the basic division of the surrounding cultural reality and confrontation of the two points of view: *ours* and *theirs*. Just like in Medieval Europe's *Last Judgment* where the enemies of Moldavia – Turks, Tartars and Jews were being devoured by the devils, so it is today, only their place has been taken by representatives of the greatest totalitarian systems of the 20th century – the Nazis, Bolsheviks, contemporary terrorists or much hated Romanian politicians (Ion Iliescu, Nicolae Văcăroiu, Adrian Năstase).

The iconography of St. Nicholas wooden church in Lupşa is a good example of that cultural trend. It was founded in 1429 by the boyar Stanislaus from the family of Knez Cîndea. In 1820 it was acquired by Unitarians and in the mid-19th century it returned to the Orthodox monks. In 1992, after years of brutal communism, Andrei – the Orthodox bishop for Alba Iulia assigned the church to be a seat for a new monk

brotherhood. The church had been renovated since 1993 and in 1997 a *Last Judgment* fresco⁴⁸ was painted on its exterior wall. Nicolae Sava, the author of the painting, painted it upon a request of a local priest. This image of judgment has an extraordinary element – the damned painted behind Moses represent Nazis and Bolsheviks. Dressed in historical uniforms they hold flags portraying swastikas and official symbols of communism – hammer and sickle. The figures of Hitler and Stalin are placed in the abyss of hell⁴⁹. The damned Nazis and Bolsheviks were the idea of the artist himself, who wanted to point to the two most powerful ideologies of the 20th century that played a destructive role in the history of humanity. As it follows, their worshippers should be placed in hell⁵⁰. A similar road was taken by the author of the restored *Last Judgment* image in one of the oldest Wallachia monasteries – Tismana, whose polychrome was renovated in 1994. The church painting artist – Grigore Popescu from Câmpulung Muscel – widened the spectrum of the damned introducing armies of Pharisees, atheists and pagans as well as Lenin and Stalin placed in the river of everlasting fire.

Another meaningful and notorious example of the damned was a character painted in a Military Chapel in Timisoara. This event was widely commented in reference to Romanian canon. The chapel was ornamented in September 2011 by a married couple of painters – Ion and Ana Bădilă. The frescoes represented the devil impersonated by the world most notorious terrorist – Osama bin Laden with a pitchfork in his hand and flying a Boeing towards the twin towers. This historical event dating back to September 2001 was placed within the iconographic canon. It was to serve as a reminder from then on regarding who played the role of the damned in contemporary culture. The painters of the church claimed that the origin of the idea was influenced by the mass media. Whilst working with the fresco images the artists observed a specific way in which the terrorist was portrayed on television. According to them the whole world embraced the idea of Osama bin Laden being the incarnation of apocalypse and the creator of hell on Earth. They then assumed that a terrorist would best represent the evil of the Earth and that placing him in hell would be transferring contemporary history into the place of worship. Since bin Laden “unleashed hell” in New York, the devil can as well be impersonated by a terrorist!⁵¹ Curiously enough, a priest caring for the wax chapel – Vasile Bica was greatly distressed by the fact of having an image of one of the most hunted terrorists in his sanctuary. Nobody was allowed to photograph the images. Under his guidance the commanders of the military garrison in Timisoara are considering the possibility of covering the reprehensible frescoes with other images as they are claimed to be painted against the Orthodox painting canon⁵². The Bădilă family painted yet another icon in Timisoara, which is also controversial. In Sts. Peter and Paul Greek Catholic Church the painters introduced the president of Romania, Ion Iliescu as the devil burning in the everlasting fire. The

painters assumed that if Iliescu represents the former communists he should be damned and burned in the everlasting fire, just like them⁵³.

The image of others in the Last Judgment icons of Romanian Orthodox churches thus changes with history and with cultural transformations. The Byzantine canon is only used as a guide. It is constantly being updated by representative elements of contemporary times – culture and region. On the one hand Romanians paint the damned as those represented adversely in canonical and apocryphal Christian sources (Jews), on the other as those, following the negative political and national mythology (Turks, Tartars, Poles and Hungarians) provided by the Orthodox Church and authorities. Moreover, the process of creating an icon and an approach to understanding its details is influenced by adverse images of specific nations, faiths and their representatives existing within contemporary Romanian culture. Anyone can become the damned on the Last Judgment icon – a next-door neighbor of strange ethnicity, a worshipper of different faith or even a close friend who has become a public enemy due to political and national mythology or individual faults.

NOTES:

¹ Melchisedec Ștefănescu, *Tratat despre cinstirea și închinarea icoanelor în Biserica Ortodoxă și despre icoanele făcătoare de minuni din România* (Galați: Partener, 2010), 10; Ioanichie Bălan, *Sfintele Icoane Făcătoare de Minuni din România* (Roman: Editura Episcopiei Romanului, 1999), 17-22, 145-147, 156.

² Erwin Panofsky, *Studia z historii sztuki* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1971), 58.

³ Ernst Gombrich, *Sztuka i złudzenie. O psychologii przedstawienia obrazowego* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), 188.

⁴ Ernst Gombrich, *Sztuka i złudzenie. O psychologii przedstawienia obrazowego* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), 202.

⁵ Dawid Freedberg, *Potęga wizerunków. Studia z historii i teorii oddziaływania* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005), 27.

⁶ Robin Cormack, *Malowanie duszy. Ikony, maski pośmiertne i całuny* (Kraków: Universitas, 1999), 15-32.

⁷ Paul Evdokimow, *Prawosławie* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1986), 288; Paweł Florenski, *Ikonoostas i inne szkice* (Białystok: Bractwo Młodzieży Prawosławnej w Polsce, 1997), 41.

⁸ Robin Cormack, *Malowanie duszy. Ikony, maski pośmiertne i całuny* (Kraków: Universitas, 1999), 43.

⁹ Robin Cormack, *Malowanie duszy. Ikony, maski pośmiertne i całuny* (Kraków: Universitas, 1999), *passim*.

¹⁰ Ewa Kocój, *Świątynie, postacie, ikony. Malowane cerkwie i monastyny Bukowiny Południowej w wyobrażeniach rumuńskich* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2006), 29-61.

¹¹ Gheorghe Balș, *Bisericile lui Ștefan cel Mare* (București: Cartea românească, 1926), 12-13; Gheorghe Balș, *Bisericile și mănăstirile moldovenești din veacul al XVI-lea*

(București: Cultura națională, 1928); Vasile Grecu, "Eine Belagerung Konstantinopels in der rumänische Kirchenmalerei," *Bizantion* I (1924): 278; Vasile Grecu, "Influențe sârbești în vechea iconografie bisericească a Moldovei," *Codrul Cosminului* IX (1935): 239-240.

¹² Krista Zach, "Verpflanzung eines südtiroler Brauches in die Moldau des Petru Rareș," *Revue Etudes Sud-Est Europeenes* 4 (1978): 671-685.

¹³ Vasile Drăguț, "Picturi murale exterioare în Transilvania," *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei*, Seria Artă Plastică, 12, 1 (1965): 75-102.

¹⁴ Gheorghe Balș, *Bisericile lui Ștefan cel Mare*, (București: Cartea românească, 1926), 23-56.

¹⁵ Irineu Crăciunaș Suceveanul, "Bisericile cu pictură exterioară din Moldova (I)", *Mitropolia Moldovei și Suceavei*, 7-9 (1969): 406-444; Irineu Crăciunaș Suceveanul, "Bisericile cu pictură exterioară păstrată parțial", *Mitropolia Moldovei și Suceavei* 3-6 (1970): 133-153; Irineu Crăciunaș Suceveanul, "Temele iconografice reprezentate în pictură exterioară din Moldova. Noțiuni introductive", *Mitropolia Moldovei și Suceavei*, 9-12 (1971): 631-644.

¹⁶ Sorin Ulea, "Originea și semnificația ideologica a picturii exterioare moldovenești (I)", *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei*, 1 (1963): 57-91; Sorin Ulea, "Originea și semnificația ideologica a picturii exterioare moldovenești (II)", *Studii și Cercetări de - Istoria Artei*, Seria Artă Plastică, 1 (1972): 37-53.

¹⁷ Sorin Dumitrescu, *Chivotele lui Petru Rareș și modelul lor ceresc* (București: Editura Anastasia, 2004), 81-380.

¹⁸ Sorin Dumitrescu, *Chivotele lui Petru Rareș și modelul lor ceresc* (București: Editura Anastasia, 2004), 91.

¹⁹ Władysław Podlacha, *Malowidła ścienne w cerkwiach Bukowiny* (Lwów: Towarzystwo dla Popierania Nauki Polskiej, 1912), 139; Sorin Ulea, "Originea și semnificația ideologica a picturii exterioare moldovenești (I)", *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei*, 1 (1963): 57-91.

²⁰ Władysław Podlacha, *Malowidła ścienne w cerkwiach Bukowiny* (Lwów: Towarzystwo dla Popierania Nauki Polskiej, 1912), 138-139.

²¹ Miltos Garidis, "La représentation des „nations” dans la peinture post-bizantine", *Bizantion*, 39 (1969 [1970]), 86-103.

²² Miltos Garidis, "La représentation des „nations” dans la peinture post-bizantine", *Bizantion*, 39 (1969 [1970]), 86-103.

²³ Aron Guriewicz, *Problemy średniowiecznej kultury ludowej* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987), 174-175.

²⁴ The anathemas are being read only in cathedrals, Boris Bobrinskoy, *Życie liturgiczne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów, 2004), 95.

²⁵ *Ecumenical Councils documents. Greek, Latin, Polish texts, volume I* (325 - 787), ed. Arkadiusz Baron and Henryk Pietras (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 2003), 341, 357-360; Aleksy Znosko, *Kanony Kościoła Prawosławnego* (Hajnówka: Wydawnictwo Bratczyk, 2001), 114 - 115. The text of The Synodicon of Orthodoxy itself, referring to the Council's decrees in most part of the anathemas against the heretics, changed over the years and it also depended on the area where it was copied. Thus in various copies of the text we can find various heretics.

²⁶ Sfântului Nifon al Constanțianei, "Vedenia supra Înfricoșatei Judecăți a Sfântului Ierarh Nifon, Episcopul Constanțianei, sec. IV", in Sorin Dumitrescu, *Chivotele lui Petru Rareș și modelul lor ceresc* (București: Editura Anastasia, 2001), 317-339.

²⁷ For more on this saint see: Nicolae M. Popescu, "Nifon II Patriarhul Constantinopolului", *Analele Academiei Române, Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, Series II, 35 (1914): 8-31; Mircea Păcurariu, *Sfinți daco-romani și români* (Iași: Trinitas 2000), 186-190; Sorin Dumitrescu, *Chivotele lui Petru Rareș și modelul lor ceresc* (București: Editura Anastasia, 2001), 81-313.

²⁸ Sfântului Nifon al Constanțianei, *Viața și Învățăturile Sfântului Nifon al Constanțianei* (București: Editura Anastasia, 2002), 100.

²⁹ Sfântului Nifon al Constanțianei, *Viața și Învățăturile Sfântului Nifon al Constanțianei* (București: Editura Anastasia, 2002), 100.

³⁰ Sfântului Nifon al Constanțianei, "Vedenia supra Înfricoșatei Judecăți a Sfântului Ierarh Nifon, Episcopul Constanțianei, sec. IV", in Sorin Dumitrescu, *Chivotele lui Petru Rareș și modelul lor ceresc* (București: Editura Anastasia, 2001), 321.

³¹ Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, *Cuvente den bătrâni. Cărțile poporane ale românilor în secolul XVI* (București: Editura didactică și pedagogică, 1984), 256.

³² The Life of St. Basil the New. The Romanian versions are to be found in the Library of Romanian Academy under the number 1064 (from the year 1742).

³³ The tradition is also found in *Hermeneia, Mount Athos Painter's Guide* written by the Athos monk, Dionysus of Fourni, which is a type of a manual for icon painting in the post-Byzantine era. The work comes from the 18th century, however, it advocates the method of painting the damned, which is analogous to the older literary sources. We can even try a hypothesis that this text collects the iconographic tradition dispersed in many literary Christian sources, Dionizjusz z Furny, *Hermeneja, czyli objaśnienie sztuki malarzkiej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2003), 175.

³⁴ Sfântului Nifon al Constanțianei, *Viața și Învățăturile Sfântului Nifon al Constanțianei* (București: Editura Anastasia, 2002), 100.

³⁵ Due to the lack of space in this article as well as unvaried examples I shall omit describing specific wooden churches in Wallachia.

³⁶ Such circumstances were in question in Tismana - the oldest monastery of Wallachia. The wall polychrome painted in 1564 by Dobromir z Târgoviște was damaged in the 18th century. In 1776 the sanctuary was repainted with new frescoes by an artist Dimitrie Diaconu. After the renovation in 1994, performed by a painter Grigore Popescu, the polychrome of Last Judgment was restored in an entirely different way, which eradicated the details of the original composition.

³⁷ Alexandru Baboș, *Tracing a Sacred Building Tradition, Wooden Churches, Carpenters and Founders in Maramureș until the turn of the 18th century* (Norrköping: Lunds Universitet, 2004), *passim*.

³⁸ Another painter who worked on the polychromes for wooden churches was George from Dragomirești and Radu Munteanu, already active in the 19th century. Each of them introduced interesting elements into the scenes of hell and afterlife. Unfortunately in recent years numerous frescoes are being renovated and as an effect of renovation works many details of the original polychrome are being lost.

Sometimes the erased spaces are filled in with entirely different images (Bârsana, Șurdești).

³⁹ Grigore Man, *Biserici de lemn din Maramures* (Baia Mare: Proema, 2007), 80-84.

⁴⁰ Marius Porumb, *Un veac de pictură românească din Transilvania, sec. XVIII* (București: Meridiane, 2003), 98; Marius Porumb, *Dicționar de pictură veche românească din Transilvania, sec. XIII-XVIII* (București: Dacia, 1998), 295.

⁴¹ Anca Pop-Bratu, *Pictura murală maramureșeană meșteri zugravi și interferențe stilistice*

(București: Meridiane 1982), 23.

⁴² In the 19th century, and then in 1922 they were partly modified while the sanctuary was being renovated.

⁴³ Tit Bud, *Date istorice despre protopopiatele, parohiile și mănăstirile române din Maramureș din timpurile vechi și până în anul 1911*, (Gherla, 1911), 41; Joby Patterson, *Wooden Churches of the Carpathians. A Comparative Study* (New-York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 105.

⁴⁴ Anca Pop-Bratu, "Precizări în legătură cu activitatea unor zugravi de tradiție postbizantină în Maramureșul istoric", in *Pagini de veche artă românească, Institutul de Istoria Artei* (București: Editura Academiei R.S.R, 1981), 117; Raluca Betea, *Tîmpla bisericii de lemn din Desești*, http://istorie.uab.ro/publicatii/colectia_bcsc/bcss_14/5_raluca_betea.pdf

⁴⁵ Anca Pop-Bratu, "Precizări în legătură cu activitatea unor zugravi de tradiție postbizantină în Maramureșul istoric", in *Pagini de veche artă românească, Institutul de Istoria Artei* (București: Editura Academiei R.S.R, 1981), 90-120.

⁴⁶ Ștefan Meteș, *Istoria Bisericii și a vieții religioase a românilor din Transilvania și Ungaria* (Sibiu: Librăria Arhidiecezană, 1935), 168-182.

⁴⁷ Silviu Dragomir, "Românii din Transilvania și unirea cu Biserica Romei", *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 9-10 (1962): 863-937.

⁴⁸ Dorin Țimotea, "Naziști și comuniști pe ziduri de biserică", *Adevărul*, August 22, 2009, http://www.adevarul.ro/locale/alba_iulia/EXCLUSIV-Nazisti-Alba-comunisti-biserica_0_102590020.html

⁴⁹ Dorin Țimotea, "Naziști și comuniști, pictați pe zidul Mănăstirii Lupșa", *Adevărul*, August 30, 2009, http://www.adevarul.ro/actualitate/eveniment/Manastirii-Nazisti-Lupsa-comunisti-pictati_0_107389304.html

⁵⁰ Mihnea Măruță, "Naziștii și bolșevicii, condamnați la "iezerul de foc" într-o mănăstire ortodoxă din Apuseni", August 26, 2009, <http://mihneamaruta.ro/2009/08/26/nazistii-si-bolsevicii-condamnati-la-iezerul-de-foc-intr-o-manastire-ortodoxa-din-apuseni/>

⁵¹ Dorin Țimotea, "Naziști și comuniști, pictați pe zidul Mănăstirii Lupșa", *Adevărul*, August 30, 2009, http://www.adevarul.ro/actualitate/eveniment/Manastirii-Nazisti-Lupsa-comunisti-pictati_0_107389304.html

⁵² Renate Simion, "Osama bin Laden, pictat într-o biserică din Timișoara", *Newspad*, Mai 3, 2011, <http://www.newspad.ro/Osama-bin-Laden-pictat-intr-o-biserica-din-Timisoara-FOTO,414585.html>

⁵³ Florin Bichir, "Timișoara: Bin Laden pictat în Capela Armatei sub chip de drac!", *Lumea Credenței*, Octombrie 10 (27), 2005, http://www.lumeacredintei.com/sct_6/c_1/yy_2005/art_955/timioara_bin_lade_n_pictat_n_capela_armatei_sub_chip_de_drac.htm

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