Ideology, Symbolism and Representation through Byzantine Art

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Abstract:A research about symbolism and representation in the world of the Byzantine leads us to the identification of an aesthetic doctrine based both on the ideas of the important thinkers of the time and also on the artistic representations, which have created constitutive beliefs for memory and for social identity. We identify in this regard the ideological conceptions that have structured the collective mentality and determined the crystallization and the imposition of a cultural paradigm.An important role in this sense was played by the plastic representations of Byzantine art. One of the essential themes of this Byzantine art is to illustrate some aspects of the visible and invisible world. The Byzantine artistic representation does not reproduce or imitate earthly patterns, but tends to transcend the human world and to approach the divine. The subject of Byzantine art becomes the idea of the eternal and immutable world, which opens only to the soul or the mind, a world different from that of the perceptible phenomena of the senses. The perception of the human being changes: the human body begins to become more and more devalued, and the idea of the soul, whose perfection consists in delivering body and salvation, is glorified. We are talking about completing a theme that will contribute to shaping the Christian doctrine and will have an overwhelming role in the formation and structuring of the collective mentality for several centuries.

Keywords: ideology; images - symbol; Byzantine art; symbolism; hieratism; transcendent world; dogmatism.

Introduction

The beginnings of Byzantine art are related to the Milan edict promulgated by the Roman emperors Gaius Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus, known as Constantine the Great and Flavius Galerius Valerius Licinianus Licinius, in 313, allowing Christianity to become a public religion and implicitly to Christian art to manifest itself and evolve.

Byzantine art will know the climax in the 6th century during the Emperor Justinian (527-565), and will develop in certain forms within the Eastern Roman Empire until the 15th century the moment of the Conquest of Constantinople:

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Byzantine civilization largely owes its fundamental features to the political and religious structures of the Empire from which it takes its name. It is therefore legitimate to inscribe the development of the plastic arts, which constituted its most spectacular and most appealing expression, between the dates of the foundation and the collapse of Constantinople, the capital of this Empire: November 324 - May 29, 1453[2].

This was based on a synthesis of Greek artistic elements, with African and Asian influences, manifested in iconography, embroidery, mosaic and polychrome decoration. Thus, we can say that Byzantine art has originated ancient Christian art with elements of Mediterranean and the Near East cultures.

On the one hand, an important role in defining the culture and vision of the Byzantine artistic was the Orient. This influence materialized in the vision of the world, in the aesthetic conception and in the genres of art adopted. The Near East is the one that brings with it a new world view, different from that of the classical world. Thus, Iranian Mazdaism implies the idea of a universe divided into two irreconcilable powers: good and evil, light and darkness. On the other hand, the Mithraism gives the human being the solution of salvation in a future world. Under these influences, the classical tradition that promotes the harmonious unity of the human being breaks, the earthly world is no longer considered a foundation of beauty, but becomes a headquarters of evil. The perception of the human being changes: the human body begins to become more and more devalued, and the idea of the soul, whose perfection consists in delivering body and salvation, is glorified. These ideas with profound religious implications, which materialized in the philosophical currents of the time, influenced the artistic creation as a normative aesthetic doctrine. For these concepts served to the ideology of the masses. Thus, it is believed that evil can only be defeated by grace and by serving "the order of a distinct world" to that in which man dwells, namely the divine world, and all the effort of the human individual has to be deposited to serve the divine world as best as possible and to prepare for the Later Life. We can say that in this sense, by emphasizing the distinction between good and evil and by the fear that it is desired to inculcate, it was intended to create a dependence that transforms the human being into a fragile and unstable one.According to Paul Evdokimov, we can say that the idea of evil provokes a sense of dependence on the elements that the human being ignores, does not understand or does not want to understand, the human being bears these elements in the depths of one's soul and they affect one's balance, making one fragile and unstable[3]. On this ground is the opposition

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[2] Ch. Delvoye, *Arta bizantină[Byzantine Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976, p. 21.
[3] P. Evdochimov, *Vârsele vieții spirituale[The Ages of Spiritual Life]*, Christiana Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 75 - 76.

between the heavenly and the earthly and the proclamation of the primacy of spiritual life, in order to subordinate the individual.One's interest moves from the earthly, worldly, materiality, to the divine, to the transcendent. This transcendence brings with it a *dismissal*, in the sense that the human individual is dispossessed of the material, the preoccupation for materiality is annihilated, one has to deal with the spiritual, the soul, in order to fulfill the ultimate goal, which is salvation.

The Byzantine representation does not reproduce or imitate earthly patterns, but tends to transcend the human world and to approach the divine. Thus, instead of the beautiful sensual encounter in nature or everyday life, Byzantine art proposes the idea of the Absolute Beauty of the divine world, which is the source of beautiful sensuality. In this respect, we can say that the main attribute promoted by the new aesthetics is "abstraction". The abstract Byzantine vision differs from the Hellenistic-Roman one that is naturalistic, as its purpose is to make the rendering of the intelligible rather than the visible[4]. For Byzantine art moves away from the representations of classical art that tried to imitate reality as truthfully as possible and abandons it in favor of a symbolic approach. In comparison to the artworks of early Christianity, in which we still encounter elements of realism in Roman art, Byzantine art proposes a flatter, more abstract symbolic style, which focuses on the highlighting of spirituality[5]. The aesthetics of Byzantine art give greater attention to detail and ornaments and is inspired by the issue of the Christian world. Abstraction is the privilege of a dual de-individualization. On the one hand, de-individualization involves the highlighting of spirituality, which brings with it a departure from corporality, materiality and a divine approach, to the transcendent world. On the other hand, de-individualization is the result of ignorance, in the Socratic sense, which makes the human individual easy to control and manipulate.

In Byzantine iconography, holy people and events were rendered on wood, cloth, wall, or other material, and there was a standardization of the forms of holy persons. Byzantine painters used three techniques, which are encaustic, tempera and fresco: "It seems that in the 6th century it was already encaustic for the holy paintings and the representation of the figures, those of the long-ago *en vogue* in Egypt (Fayum)"[6]. If encaustics required the use of wax as the solvent of color, in the case of tempera, the solvent of the color was an organic matter, mostly egg white, and the fresco, which was the most resistant to weathering, involved the dissolution of the colors with water and their application on plaster of wet lime.

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[4] G. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics,* John Murray Publishing House,London, 1965, p. 19.
[5] A. Grabar, "Plotin et les origins de l'esthétique médiévale", in vol. *L'Art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1968.
[6] P. Constantinescu-Iaşi, *Istoria artei bizantine[The History of Byzantine Art]*, "Viaţa românească" Publishing House, Iaşi, 1927, p. 71.

The rendered characters were represented entirely or as a bust. In the representation of the figure, the eyes were the most interesting, their representation sending to the symbolism of the inner side - *the eyes of the soul*. The disproportionately large eyes highlighted the idea of spirituality, and alluded to the inward. Plotin spoke of the fact that «the eye of the body» was substituted by the «inner eye» and that "«the intellectual vision», surpassing not only the data of the senses, but also the rational discourse, permitted the enthusiasm and self-oblivion to touch ecstasy which allowed the ineffable and indescribable contemplation of the Being" [7] . This inwardness can be interpreted with a double meaning. For beyond the contemplation of exploiting the deepest aspects of the human being, we can speak of a so-called profane aspect of contemplation, materialized by indoctrination. This is a false contemplation, in the situation where contemplation becomes a necessity, a must, a *modus vivendi* not found, apprehensive.

The face of the Biblical characters was surrounded by a circular nimbus, very clearly drawn, made of gold or ocher, and which signified holiness. The nose was long and thin, the lips lacked carnality, the hands and the legs as well and they were also larger than their natural dimension, and the fingers were long and thin joined in the prayer gesture, all of which constituted a specific hieratism of Byzantine iconography. In the same sense were the garments covering the whole body, being devoid of naturalness and geometrically presented to leave room for spiritual beauty and to induce the absence of corporality: "the garments and the bodies have lost their volume and weight. It could be said that the folds are as though they are hung on the heads, but retain the full importance of portraits"[8]. Moreover, in the same agreement, the colors of the vestments were pale, extinguished to express sobriety and inner mastery. In the general framework of the pale and shadowy artworks, the Virgin Mary was illustrated with the blue tunic and the red omophorion, and Jesus Christ with a blue hiatus and a red tunic.In fact, this type of approach imposes a model; the representation of Biblical characters incites the idea of breaking the carnality, materiality, earthly preoccupations, once again emphasizing the importance of the spiritual in front of matter.

The Byzantine painters gave the same icon for several events at different times. They rendered objects schematically, simple and had more of a role of decoration or parting of the scenes. Clarity, reserve, balance and grace were the essential characteristics of the Christian sacred image in an icon. The Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were usually illustrated in the form of characters watching or writing the Gospel. They were painted in the central area of the main ship, or their figures appeared to

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[7]*Apud.* Ch. Delvoye, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
[8]Ch. Delvoye, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

be isolated in pendants, and John was the only one looking to his right and listening to the voice of an angel. Evangelists were also illustrated in iconography, in the form of symbols. Thus, John was symbolized by an eagle, Luke by a calf, Mark's figure was associated with a lion, and Matthew was the symbol of man.

The artistic representations of the Byzantine world have two tendencies: one symbolic and another anecdotal. The symbolic tendency is recovered from the world of Egypt, the land of hieroglyphs, and the anecdotal tendency is recovered from Syria and Palestine. It is a world that evokes images, symbols, secret keys and a historical story-telling dimension about the Gospel text, two worlds that are not excluded, but complementary and harmoniously blend into artistic representations of great originality, writing a stage in the history of universal arts. In this respect, G. Oprescu noted:

> The Church then uses a lot of images, some symbolic, some anecdotal, that is narrative, for the edification of Christians, and especially for the satisfaction of the need to understand the new teaching, those who recently embraced Christianity (the Neophites) ... Egypt, let's not forget, is the land of hieroglyphs. People feel the need of a symbolic language to awaken certain ideas or feelings. ... At the same time, however, when these signs, more graphic than artistic, propagated in Syria and Palestine, close to where Christianity was born, his followers wanted to represent the capital moments of the Savior's existence, to imagine He had everything connected with His life or His disciples. From here comes theanecdoticrepresentation of the divine[9].

The convergence of the two worlds, symbolic and narrative, outlines, on the one hand, a philosophical and aesthetic doctrine necessary for comprehension, and on the other hand an ideological doctrine necessary for the enslavement and submission of the masses. This ideological doctrine is manifested at a noological level, generating what Karl Mannheim called *total ideologies*[10] that will impose the form and overall framework of a new way of thinking, aiming to "complete that fundamental reconstruction of the whole horizon of a social group"[11]. We could speak in this respect of generating a new paradigm of real-world reporting, which has religion as its central point, but understood in the sense proposed by Ludwig Feuerbach, in *The Essence of Christianity*, namely religion as distortion - dissimulation of reality[12].Ideology thus becomes a general process through which everyday praxis is falsified by an imaginary representation that people create about it. The fact that a false image is actually born is because action is imaginatively

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[9] G. Oprescu, *Manual de istoria artei. Evul Mediu [Textbook of the History of Art. The Middle Ages]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1985, pp. 68 - 69.
[10] K. Mannheim, *Ideologie et utopie*, Librairie Marcel Riviere, Paris, 1956, pp. 42 - 47.
[11]*Ibidem*, p. 47.
[12]*Apud*.P. Ricoeur, *Eseuri de hermeneutică[Essays of Hermeneutics]*, vol. II: „De la text la acțiune"["From text to action"], Echinox Publishing House, Cluj, 1999, pp. 358 - 365.

modeled by a kind of symbolic mediation which, being perverted, produces a deformed image of life.

Illustration models of the transcendent world - a first stage of Byzantine art

The founding of the second capital of the Roman Empire at Constantinople, based on the old Byzantium, naturally led to the birth of an eclectic and brilliant cultural and artistic center. For "the place chosen by Constantine the Great was not even better: at the mouth of the Bosphorus, where Asia meets Europe through their centers of civilization, where the streams of culture come from Mesopotamia and Syria and Anatolia with the Greek or Western Roman ones"[13].

Under the influence of the court of Constantinople, Byzantine art becomes the official art, an imperial art of Oriental inspiration: "The characteristics of the new Byzantine art are two which are more important: it is an official and oriental art"[14].Thus, in the representation of the clothes of the painted or mosaic figures, the garments from the yard are copied, and the figures are portrayed and individualized, and illustrate members of the imperial family or important figures of the time, who are portrayed "in the picture of a saint or a personage of religious scene" [15].Moreover, "as compared to the glory of the imperial court, they reached heavenly pumps, unbelievably bright to the righteous"[16].

The Imperial character of Byzantine art is one of the distinctive features of this type of Christian art in comparison with the other two, Romanesque art and Gothic art:

Its essential function was to exalt the supernatural majesty of the emperor and the church, to create the sumptuous framework in which their liturgies were held, to illustrate by images the divine nature of their mission, to provide the objects necessary for the celebration of the ritual. It is not an art of reason and reality, but of transcendence and of ostentation, an art that has to overwhelm and inspire respect for the subjects, believers and neighboring peoples[17].

Painting and mosaic are two of the ways of showing the Byzantine artistic genius. Mural painting was accomplished through two techniques: the mosaic of coloured glass pieces and fresco. The mosaic responded to the demands of the art of evoking spiritual essences through the mediation of figurative representations, therefore it was necessary to reveal forms that are

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[13] Ch. Delvoye, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[14]*Ibidem*, p. 15.
[15]*Ibidem*.
[16]*Ibidem*.
[17]*Ibidem*, p. 28.

increasingly devoid of matter, fleshly, earthly ones. As far as fresco technique is concerned, it involved the reproduction of volumes by simplifying, stylizing and flattening the shapes.

The mosaic made during the first period of imposing Byzantine art is of oriental inspiration: "it was claimed that the first Christian art owes much to Rome. It turned out ... that in the first three centuries there was an Oriental revival of old traditions that rose above the Hellenistic influence" [18], Byzantine art being formed "from the crossing of Egyptian, Syrian and Greek art"[19].There are borrowed decorative elements from ancient Hellenistic art such as branches, flowers or pots, which are embedded in Christian narrative themes, which correspond to the trends of the time. Biblical scenes are illustrated alongside various oriental insights: bulls, lions, dolphins, ducks, phoenix birds, flowers and corners of irregular angles, but also portraits of Byzantine rulers, all offering a homogeneous environment whose luminous background enhances the feeling of expansion and dematerialization. The mosaics in the San Vitale Church in Ravenna are the most illustrative of this.

The purpose of Byzantine art was to recreate the supernatural world, defined "by a strict Orthodoxy, and having to meet the well-defined requirements of the clientèle"[20], and "those who practiced it were far from enjoying the freedom that today's artists. ... The subjects were often proposed to the smallest detail; they were forced to follow the patterns"[21]. Hieratism, solemnity and simplicity were the essential characteristics of Byzantine painting during this period. The human figures, prototyped, were enlarged and placed at the center of the composition. The colours suggested a mystical and transcendent world. Thus, white was used to recreate the idea of light and purity, gold to create a beam of light, blue and red were the colors characteristic of the rendering of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, and the green was used to illustrate St. John the Baptist.

One of the essential themes found in Byzantine art is the illustration of some aspects of the visible and invisible world. In this respect, we find on the one hand a tendency towards flattening, the elimination of volume and symmetry, when it comes to illustrating historical characters whose existence was real, it cannot be challenged or is dogmatically asserted, and on the other hand, an ostentatious tendency towards corporality when it comes to beings considered to be crystallized by the divine[22]. When we relate to the first category, we are talking about illustrations such as those of the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ, the apostles, evangelists, or saints, who send out

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[18]P. Constantinescu - Iași, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[19]*Ibidem*.
[20] Ch. Delvoye, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
[21]*Ibidem*, pp. 28 - 29.
[22] Cornea, Andrei, *Ecclesiocraţia. Mentalităţi culturale şi forme artistice în epoca romano-bizantină [Ecclesiocracy. Cultural Mentalities and Artistic Forms in the Roman-Byzantine Epoch]*, (300 - 800), Teora Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, pp. 113 - 114.

decorporalized images to suggest spirituality. The second category includes illustrations of the Holy Spirit or angels who receive body shapes as precise and accurate as possible, as in the case of angels, or other, such as the representation of the Holy Spirit in the form of a pigeon. We can identify in this respect a stylistic inversion designed to glorify the beyond world and its importance, once again emphasizing the fact that the human being must be more concerned with one's evolution towards accessing the world beyond the materiality of life on earth. Humanity, carnality belong to the earthly world, which is nothing but a place where the human being can reach perfection, where one can prepare for the true life that is beyond this world, being a world of spirituality.

From the 5th century, the cycle of the passions of Jesus Christ begins to be illustrated in iconography, more and more frequently. It is the first time when the artist even represents the scene of the Crucifixion, illustrating the idea of cruel crucifixion. Also, the themes of David's history (frescoes from Bauit[23]) and scenes with the Last Judgment are also created.

During this first period of development of Byzantine art, the models of the main characters that will form the representations of Christian art in general begin to be fixed. For example, Jesus appears in two hypostases: "a young beardless person, as a Greek hero under the influence of Hellenistic art and a mature one, with a black beard, as it was conceived in Syria; at the beginning, both types appear, later the Byzantine monumental art prefers the second, further emphasizing His solemn character"[24]. Regarding the features of the Virgin Mary, these have been fixed in several ways:

«Theotokos» becomes serious, with a long face, an impressive attitude; «Hodigitria» standing up, holding the child on one of the arms, the other stretched to the prayer; «Blachernitissa» is the bust, with the arms in the position of praying, having Jesus on Her chest in medallion; «Kyriotissa» standing up, clutching the baby to Her chest; others reproduce variants: sitting on the throne and blessing or standing without a baby, breastfeeding - all retaining the same features of the face[25].

Also during this period, the representations of the prophets, archangels, evangelists or apostles are fixed. Thus, the prophets are rendered "like old men with long hair and beards"[26]; archangels such as the "winged Ancient Victories"[27], some apostles such as Saints Peter, Paul, Andrew or John the Baptist "with bone face and black hair disordered"[28].

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[23]P. Constantinescu - Iași, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
[24]*Ibidem*.
[25]*Ibidem*.
[26]*Ibidem*.
[27]*Ibidem*.
[28]*Ibidem*.

Alongside religious themes and motifs, Byzantine artists introduce into their compositions elements inspired by the Hellenistic picturesque and naturalism, the solemnity of the historical and monumental style, or the decorative elements of Oriental inspiration. Although the Byzantine artist is still influenced by the world of antiquity, he is the foremost preacher of religion, the ideological factor of his time:

> "The artist is penetrated by the influence of antiquity, which arises from the nobility of attitudes, the elegance of the costumes, the order of the compositions; but his great merit was to give triumphant religion a self-evident plastic manifestation, with tendencies of uniformity because of the theological character[29]."

Under the influence of the religious phenomenon, Byzantine painting focused on illustrating Biblical characters and rendering their figures through association with humans. Thus, the ideal prototypes were formed, the images being largely the same. Theories such as the incarnation, the passions and Resurrection of Christ, the obsession of sin and the fear of death are highlighted by the majority of visual artists. Artistic language becomes simple and accessible to believers, for art created during this period is destined for the majority. We assist to the completion of a subject that will contribute to the shaping of Christian doctrine and will have an overwhelming role in the formation and structuring of the collective mind centered onseveral centuries.

Glorification of the Emperor's image during the Byzantine iconoclasm

During the 8th - 9th centuries, a period known as Byzantine iconoclasm, because of the ban of icons in churches, the artists focused on the execution of the pavement and parietal mosaics, highlighting the image of the emperors. The glorification of their actions becomes an important feature of the period, on the walls of the churches being caught in different hypostases, along with their predecessors, families, followers to the throne.

This period reflectsthe decadence in the development of Byzantine art due to the tense situation in the area and the struggles for supremacy:

> "It was the time when, on the one hand, Persia and the Slavs were constantly attacking the state, and Islam was beginning to expand its domination over the more eccentric provinces, that is in Asia Minor and Egypt, and on the other hand, in Constantinople itself, the Iconoclast movement started, with some emperors and the church pointing against the cult of icons, the images of the world in the churches[30]."

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[29]Petre Constantinescu - Iaşi, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
[30] George Oprescu, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

On the other hand, due to the leaps and bounds of the cult of the icons, there was a danger that the monasteries would begin to occupy a powerful role in the state against the imperial dynasties:

> "The cult of the icons had made a tremendous momentum during the sad events that preceded Isauri, the crowd often looking for salvation in miraculous icons, whose holy face is confused with the venerable object itself. There were icons that laughed or wept, others who spoke or even went; they were offered all kinds of sacrifices and worship, waiting from them for the most curious facts - a true idolatry. ... Then the Isauri emperors, eager to revive the empire, did not see this passage of their miraculous icon-owners - a monastery could play a large role in the state through the influence of an icon; in the monasteries there had been thousands of monks who lived in this trade, and who thus escaped from the duties of defending their homeland that were in great need of soldiers[31]."

The Ecumenical Council of 753 will formally condemn the cult of any form of representation of any religious figure. In this context, a series of frescoes, wood icons, miniatures and mosaics such as those from Blacherne or the Church of Saint Sophia will be destroyed. Moreover, some icon painters, due to the fact that they did not deny these forms of idolatrous representation, became martyrs. We observe that there are some profound changes in the ideology of the Christian empire, as a result of the disparity between political reality and the preachedtheoretical dimension. Although Christian aesthetic and philosophical doctrines have been considered a symbol of legitimacy and social authority, we are now witnessing a theological crisis that will deepen the line of fracture which already exists between the Constantinopolitan and Roman churches and which will bring about a political dimension of the conflict. We will thus witness a long process through which the Papacy will try to emerge from the moral and political authority of the Byzantine Empire.

In the context in which the painting of icons was forbidden, the Byzantines appropriated the mosaic as a decorative art. The mosaic, a decorative technique known since the 3rd millennium BC, with two variants, pavement and parietal, and created by assembling small pieces of stone, tiles or colored glass, took the place of religious paintings that were forbidden by the Synod of Elvira, from the 4th century. For the pavementmosaic, they used hard rocks, such as marble, diorite and porphyry, cut differently and also small rocks, with one of the surfaces being polished and different colors. For the parietal mosaic, stained glass and gold and silver cubes were broken and fixed in the mortar on the wall with the outward splash, being protected by a colorless glass, creating a play of lights and fascinating optical effects.

The miniatures are another form of artistic manifestation of the iconoclastic period. In this respect, there is a concern to illustrate the

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[31]PetreConstantinescu - Iași, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

scientific manuscripts, observing the revival of ancient tradition and oriental influence. A *Ptolemy* from the beginning of the 9th century, which is preserved in the Vatican, illustrates only profane images: "stars represented by animals on a blue globe, 12 half-naked figures represent the months of the year, the sun has a gold crown, at the corners one can see the images of day and night"[32]. From the same period, a Greek Gospel from which the human figure is completely missing is preserved at the National Library of Paris, illustrated with images "depicting large adorned letters, medallions with flowers, fruits or birds, architectures"[33]. Or, a work by Gregory of Nazianz, which is kept at the Ambrosiana Library in Milan, is illustrated with allegorical and mythological topics, with several episodes of the Old Testament. Fragments of Old Testament topics were also found in a manuscript with fragments of the Fathers of the Church, preserved in the National Library, but these are anecdotal and refer to contemporary events related to the life of the charlatan physicians, athletes, or painters[34]. Also, two products of the Studion School in Constantinople, the *ChludofPsaltery*and *Physiologus*, are a testimony of the theological allegorical representations that took place in the 9th century in the monastic miniaturization schools concealed from the anger of the iconoclasts. Thus, the *Chludof Psaltery* illustrates both ancient topics and the Old and New Testament subjects of symbolic and moral character. In *Physiologus*, there are realistic illustrations of animals, as well as symbolic illustrations:

> with theological allegorical scenes or related to the quarrel of the icons; here, the influence of ancient art is stronger, there are many personifications of the day, nymphs, centaurs, mermaids and admirable Alexandrian genre scenes; an important part includes illustrations of the life of the Church's Parents[35].

In fresco, the iconoclastic movement resumed the decorative motifs of Paleo-Christian art: trees, birds, animals, vines, avoiding the human figurative element. Thus, "religious scenes are destroyed and they are replaced by picturesque scenes from the race course, nature scenes or portraits of iconoclastic emperors and their favorites"[36]. For the emperors have exploited this period and have valorized it for their own glorification:

> But even the iconoclastic art is not devoid of interest. Emperors eager for spiritual glory, have ordained their palaces and other works of art to be raised, as they have come to the taste of antiquity and realism; the profane art setting a current opposite to the monastic, theological, traditional and severe[37].

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[32]P. Constantinescu - Iaşi, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
[33]*Ibidem*.
[34]*Ibidem*, p. 102.
[35]*Ibidem*.
[36]*Ibidem*, pp. 96 - 97.
[37]*Ibidem*, p. 96.

In this regard, we assist in a substitution and transmutation of the object of veneration. For the cult of icons is gradually replaced by that of the emperor, the leader, who is the representative of the divinity on the earth. And to reinforce this aspect, the representations must indicate glorification. Thus, a semantic inversion takes place in the sense that representation is no longer associated with humility, earthly and material separation, ascension to spirituality, but it must highlight greatness, fasting, create images - symbol for the crowd, for humanity, images - symbol of power.

These aspects will lead to a revival of the Alexandrian spirit, which will be an important element for the strengthening of the old Byzantine current. The realistic character of the art promoted in this period brings forward issues of symbolic images and of the visible and intelligible, which will lead to a new artistic vision, Liturgical and dogmatic, which will be imposed in the following centuries of manifestation of Byzantine art.

The world of aspirations to mysticism and asceticism

The cult of icons began to be restored in the 9th century, and the mosaic takes on the role of clarifying the fundamental dogmas. The mosaic images, representing apostles, prophets, messengers, heralds, angels, Jesus Christ, or Virgin Mary, began to be portrayed on curved surfaces. Beginning with the 12th and 13th centuries, mosaics will display inexpressive faces and strained movements on dark green, dark gray and brown. If in the first period of Byzantine art, the mosaic was executed on a blue background, in the second period the artists propose a golden background.*The Last Judgment* and *the Descending of the Cross* become the most popular themes of this period. The Church of St. Sophia in Kiev, the Cathedral of Torcello and the mosaic buildings in Sicily during the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries are representative of this.

There are differences between the Byzantine mosaic created in the West and that created in the East, differences that come from the influences of migratory peoples. We also encounter specific Islamic reasons, such as the representation of various animals, plants, garlands, weapons, gardens or geometric shapes.

In the second period of Byzantine art, the pictorial and mosaic decorations began to distance themselves from the narrative character and acquired a Liturgical and dogmatic aspect.This created a *Weltanschauung* composed of a single chain of dialectical judgments[38], which contributed to the foundation of the absolute truth about the relationship between the two worlds: the visible and the invisible, the material and the spirituality.

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[38] P. Florenski, *Dogmatică și dogmatism. Studii și eseuri teologice [Dogmatics and Dogmatism. Theological Studies and Essays]*, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 51.

In addition to the rendering of religious themes, dramatic episodes with significant details, such as: broken bodies, the head that falls on the shoulder, angels that fly crying, in the last decades of Byzantine art, they began to be illustrated, all in order to create fear for sin among the masses. Human figures, without volume, are illustrated on a gold background. The dilated pupils of the represented characters were fixed away, and their large eyes reflected spirituality and contrast with the inner self. Their garments were rigid and his dark face and expressiveness expressed the anxiety of the soul that wanted to emerge from a tormenting struggle with the body to free itself from a jolting tension. Plotin speaks in this respect of the exaltation of the virtue of "the disease and the suffering which, by making the man conscious of the weakness of his body, urges him to cultivate his spiritual life"[39], which the Byzantine philosophy proposes in contrast to the ideal of vitality and of athletic beauty proposed by the artists of ancient Greece.

Frontality and immobility are the essential characteristics of the Byzantine style, carried out in the last period of development of this artistic stream. However, they serve the ideological purpose of the time, the plastic artist's conformance and the canons with which he must comply and which are embodied in true artistic codes:

While the ancients tended to intellectualize and chose «to please», the Byzantines tended towardsspirituality and emotion. They have stylized elements - such as frontality or immobility - that have been, not once, the effect of clumsiness in folk or provincial arts. By breaking with «academicism» and antique illusionism and by succeeding in the inner vision, their art proclaims the art of our time, but with this profound difference that instead of giving the creator the most complete freedom, she claimed a certain conformism to the prototypes and consideredit a fundamental necessity of communion between the artist and the public[40].

From the desire to move away from the world of the carnality, to liberate from materiality and to approach the artistic representation as much as possible to the spirituality, Byzantine artists sometimes prey to conventional schematics that also have repercussions on the quality of the artistic act:

Anchorite figures are already painted in a rough and tough style, with character attitudes often rigorous and rigid. When the painter wishes to represent the crowd, he does not know how to introduce life and variety. Group the figures in large, regular masses, so that only the symmetrical edges can be seen[41].

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[39]*Apud.* Ch. Delvoye, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
[40] Ch. Delvoye, *op. cit.*, pp. 112 - 113.
[41] Ch. Bayet, *Arta bizantină*, Editura Scorilo, Craiova, 1999, p. 102.

More often "the execution of human figures appears clumsy or inaccurate. The proportions of the body are no longer preserved, which is elongated and narrowed"[42].

There are two tendencies in the representation of the saints: the soldier saints and the ascetic saints. By contrasting their forms of representation, they recall the diversity of elements of Byzantine art - the great influence of ancient concepts, but also the strong influence of monastic ideas:

> The types of saints in the manuscripts of the times indicate the trends of the two Byzantine arts, one descending from antiquity, and the other from the monastery. The first represents the warrior saints like the Greek Ephebes. Through the regular features of the face, through the elegance and suppleness of their body, they are part of the family of beautiful adolescents of the Panateneans. In front of them, the ascetic saints with elongated and collapsed limbs, with harsh features, like carved in wood, remember that many parents of the church condemned beauty. They are of another race. ... However, the soldiersaints and theascetic saints appear next to each other ... and can still be found today on the walls of the Byzantine churches[43].

The choice of a small number of subjects, in contrast to the narrative abundance specific to the period of the 4th - 7th centuries, the harmony of the compositions, the serene solemnity of the attitudes of the illustrated characters, the abstraction force of the drawing and the impression of monumentality are some of the characteristic features of the last stage of the development of Byzantine style, all of which were designed to contribute to producing a profound impression of spiritualization and transcendence that would transform Byzantine art at this stage, as George Oprescu pointed out, in the "regulatory art of Europe" [44]. Through it, as well as through philosophical ideas propagated by important thinkers of the time, an oratory of the public discourse will be born, which, in the service of legitimizing the time authorities, will generate a "justifying" ideology[45], a control system based on an ideological functioning meant to legitimize the claim of authority.

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[42] Ch. Bayet, *op. cit.,* p. 103.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 110.
[44] G. Oprescu, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
[45] P. Ricoeur, *op. cit*, pp. 358 - 365.

Conclusions :

Formed under different influences, Byzantine art was imposed by its own ways of representation and managed to preserve its value to the present day. In the early Byzantium, the central concern was that of proposing and perfecting models of transcendent world illustration. In this sense, themes and religious motives prevail, but the Byzantine artists introduce into their compositions also elements inspired by the picturesque and Hellenistic naturalism, along with the solemnity of the historical and monumental style or of the oriental inspirational elements. All these aspects are put together to create an appropriate propaganda and political and ideological coagulation tool. In this respect, the symbolic images, with their stylistic specificity, propose new ways of approach in relation to the two planes around which the ideology of the weatheris being built: the plan of the intelligible and the visible.

The iconoclastic period, with specific turbulence and decadence, will bring a confusion state regarding the two plans, important milestones for Byzantine Christian ideology. The iconoclastic crisis is determined by the fact that the intelligible and the visible come to be confused, the symbolic images are transformed into images with corporal referent. Thus, there is a process of semantic inversion that will have a fundamental role in structuring the collective mentality.

The second period of flowering of Byzantine art will bring with it a distinction from the narrative character of art, thus acquiring a Liturgical and dogmatic aspect. This will evolve towards a mystical and symbolic side that excites but at the same time elevates the spirit to the revelation of the unknown, of the transcendent, approaching it to the divine world, and departing it from the corporality, earthly and materiality.

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