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**The Flight into Egypt - Virgin Mary as Christ-Bearer  
Iconographic Models in Romanian Mural Paintings of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

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This study is focused on a prominent topic from both medieval and modern Christian iconography, found in the Catholic, as well as in the Orthodox world. From the works of Giotto (1304-1306), Duccio di Buoninsegna (1308-1311), Fra Angelico (1451-1452) to those of Martin Schongauer (1488-1491) and Albrecht Dürer (1495-1496), until Caravaggio (1597) and Murillo (1650), the subject made its way towards entering the paradigm of the greatest universal sacred artworks. For the current analysis, based on the field research conducted during several years in Romanian Orthodox churches, I chose to concentrate on the painted edifices of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries that were at the time part of Wallachia. In Eastern Europe, the predefined recommendations from post-Byzantine painting manuals sometimes created confusion about the type of composition. Thus many Romanian painters were unclear if the scene should be placed in the narthex or in the porch, as part of the *Akathist of the Blessed Virgin* or of another iconographic sequence. The current article aims to examine the artists' motivations and to identify patterns generated by painting handbooks. This analysis also searches for connections between canonical and apocryphal Gospels in the above-mentioned geographical area and time span. The perspective will be a comparative one, bringing face to face the important representations of the subject from modern Romanian culture, in parallel with medieval Romanian patterns and examples from Greek, Macedonian, and Serbian art. The solutions imagined by these artists in solving iconographical and stylistic challenges will also be inquired into. Finally, I will explore the significance behind the theophoric image of Mary, the bearer of Christ, as is highlighted in the providential journey to Egypt, the types of relations with other characters from the visual composition (Jesus, St Joseph, the angel, St James the Less), as well as the connections of the Flight into Egypt topic with other scenes, part of the *Marian Cycle* from Wallachian Orthodox art.

**Keywords:** Flight into Egypt, apocrypha, iconography, Virgin Mary, Christ-bearer, Wallachia, church, mural painting

In *The Erl-King*, published in the early 1970s,<sup>1</sup> Michel Tournier employs - through the voice of the narrator - the term *phorie*, a French noun deriving its substance from the Greek suffix *phoros* - “bearer/carrier”. By *phorie*, the French author designates one's aptitude for carrying, or bearing someone else lovingly and enthusiastically. The notion had inspired him from the famous version of St Christopher's *Life* included in *Legenda Aurea*, the medieval hagiographic anthology compiled by Giacomo (Jacobus de) Varagine. Tapping into these two notorious sources, the present paper will focus upon one member of this family of bearers - the Virgin Mary in her maternal role, as Jesus' protector, in the iconographic representation of the Flight into Egypt in the religious mural art of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Our investigation will also consider the connections created, within the respective scene and beyond it, with other *Christ-bearers*. The research work underlying this analysis was carried out over the last years, investigating Orthodox places of worship across Oltenia and Wallachia, in the southern part of today's Romania.

**The Flight into Egypt - theological grounds  
Between canonical writings and apocrypha**

Theologically, the Flight into Egypt depicts an episode in the early years of Christ's life. Of all the canonical gospels, only the one according to Matthew mentions this moment in the childhood of Jesus, and the exile that

saved his life from the wrath of Herod the Great. The second chapter in Matthew's account contains elements that would later provide the subject matter of other religious narratives, as well as Christian iconography.

"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Mt. 2:13-15)<sup>2</sup>

Theologians have attributed the absence of details concerning Jesus' mother, to the "centrality of the Christological content in the gospels" as well as the modesty of Mary, who fully assumed her "secondary" position in relation to the Son of God. This, however, has in no way diminished her prestige; her presence has also been maintained in the Christian conscience, through oral tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Matthew presents Joseph as a bearer of his betrothed and the mother-to-be of God. This flight into Egypt, a safe haven for Jews since the times of Aaron and Moses,<sup>4</sup> a land that had steadfastly expected a saviour,<sup>5</sup> is also mentioned in some apocryphal gospels. They provide details on the age of Jesus, the golden triad - the infant Jesus, Mary and Joseph -, the persons accompanying them, the hardships met along the way as well as their encounters. According to the *Life of Joseph the Carpenter*, a text dating from the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century, a maidservant named Salome joined the travelers, and all those forced to leave the Holy Land spent one year in exile.<sup>6</sup> *The Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas* states that Jesus was two years old at the time of the family's departure, thus he was no longer a babe, which is in agreement with the manner in which some European icons depict him. Unlike the version recorded by the apostle Matthew, here the return from Egypt is prompted by the angel's appearing before Mary, not Joseph, to announce to her that the one who sought the death of her son had perished.<sup>7</sup> Another source, the *Arabic Gospel of the Saviour's Infancy*, includes the story of the great idol that recognizes the true God in the child carried so lovingly by a young woman and a man of extremely advanced age.<sup>8</sup> The same gospel also presents a different version of the time spent away from the Holy Land, namely three years.<sup>9</sup>

The same episode is revisited by theologians not merely held in high regard, but downright venerated by the Orthodox churches. Thus Epiphanius the Monk, Maximus the Confessor and Symeon Metaphrastes mention it, each dwelling on it more or less extensively in their accounts of the Holy Virgin's life. Epiphanius states that Joseph's sons and daughters from a first marriage accompanied the Holy Family during their journey imposed by the historical context.<sup>10</sup> He also notes that Joseph was not supposed to marry the Holy Virgin, but only to act as her protector. His staff had bloomed when Zaccharias, the father of John the Baptist, had prayed that God should reveal which of the twelve rods taken from the priest kinsmen of the Virgin belonged to the one chosen to accompany her on her mission.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the time passed between the two journeys, the one taking them to Egypt and their return, this version indicates a longer duration: five years spent in exile. Symeon provides no details, but only mentions the three dreams of Joseph, including the one recalling them home, a dream recorded in the Gospel of Matthew as well.<sup>12</sup> Maximus the Confessor, however, offers a more elaborate account, evoking the moment when the demons of Egypt are cast away, as the prophet Isaiah had anticipated (Mt. 19:1).<sup>13</sup>

### **Early accounts: geographic and denominational peculiarities**

Iconographic representations of the Flight into Egypt date from around the middle of the first Christian millennium. During the early centuries, the iconography dedicated to Jesus' foster-father tended to focus on other elements and little attention was paid to this episode.<sup>14</sup> However, in the second half of the first millennium, such visual representations emerge. A 6<sup>th</sup>-century medallion (*Adana?*)<sup>15</sup> displays in its middle section a rendering of the providential journey that saved the Holy Family. Next to it, on the left, one can discern the scene of the *Nativity*. This juxtaposition is accounted for by Alexander Schmemmann's remark that very early on, the veneration of the Mother of God became associated with the Nativity cycle.<sup>16</sup> In the Christian East, devotion to the Mother of God

grew increasingly intense, prompting the 13<sup>th</sup>-century decision to dedicate the month of August to her, celebrating her with daily processions and liturgies throughout the capital of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>17</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup>-century composition is centered on Mary as the first bearer of the Divine Son, a representation logically entailed by her capacity as Theotokos - Birth-Giver of God. The one who bore the Light of the World in her womb is also the one holding Jesus in her arms along the path of exile and on the way to safety. Seated on a mule, with the divine Son on her lap, the Virgin is accompanied by Joseph who points to a dome - a visual metaphor for the destination of their journey. Only these three figures appear in the icon, making up the "earthly Trinity". In her study on this subject-matter, Gertrud Schiller remarked upon this early type of representation, where the companions of the Holy Family are missing.<sup>18</sup> Later too, in Romanic art at a time when the representations of the Flight multiply<sup>19</sup> (fig. 1), while the interest in the childhood of Jesus increases,<sup>20</sup> travel companions appear only occasionally. The theme is present in manuscript art as well: illuminated manuscripts held by the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich (the Latin codex 15 903, Salzburg, c. 1150 and the Latin codex 835, Oxford, 1200-1210)<sup>21</sup> evince the growing interest of iconographers. In the West, the popularity of this theme reaches its height in the late Middle Ages (see, for instance, the portal of St Lorenz Cathedral in Nürnberg from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, or the work of a sculptor in the Upper Rhine area, 1510-1520).<sup>22</sup> The increased interest must have been partly owed to the *Legenda aurea* which, in the chapter dedicated by Varagine to the memory of the innocents killed at the order of Herod, briefly mentions the episode of the flight into Egypt.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, across the Byzantine world as well, the Mother of God is perceived as a shelter for Christ. The Theotokos - Christ-Bearer is one of the predilect titles of Mary, regarded mainly as the "birth-giver of God", and "dwelling place of the Lord", as the supplicatory canons call her in the Orthodox East.<sup>24</sup>

Held in her lap, as we see in the mural paintings of Cappadocia (the Church of Belisirma, 10<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>25</sup> Çavuşin, 10<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>26</sup> or El Nazar, Göreme, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> c.),<sup>27</sup> or even subsequently, in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century (the icon now part of Benaki Museum's collection), the Divine Son appears as a young man, not as a child and certainly nothing like an infant. In some sanctuaries, such as the Dark church (Karanlık Kilisesi, 11<sup>th</sup> century?)<sup>28</sup> and Tokali (10<sup>th</sup> century; fig. 2), both located at Göreme, he is not present in the painting. The Virgin's lap, or later her arms (see the Syrian icon of 1740, painted by Michael of Damascus)<sup>29</sup> form the place where the Son of God can be carried safely and tenderly. The lap is thus an everted womb, turned inside out or seen from the outside, a true ark of salvation, correlative to the Old Testament ark of deliverance. In the latter church mentioned above, the colors of Mary's vestment are better preserved and more clearly visible: red and blue, the former - a color of glory, according to some,<sup>30</sup> or of the Virgin's human nature according to others,<sup>31</sup> and the latter - a color of heaven.<sup>32</sup> Gold is added as the color of immortality, shining in the three stars that decorate her *himation* and indicating her virginity before, during and after the birth of Christ.<sup>33</sup> Whereas Latin manuscripts provide the image of male *theophoria* since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in Byzantium it becomes established in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It might point, however, to the second part of this journey - the return from Egypt, when the precious Son had grown and no longer needed to be carried by His mother. The difficulties of the journey are now faced by the old carpenter, fully assuming his paternal role.

The scene, as preserved in the 14<sup>th</sup>-century mosaic of Chora church,<sup>34</sup> inspired the mural painting of the princely church Sfântul Nicolae Domnesc (St Nicholas' church) at Curtea de Argeş (1364-1365).<sup>35</sup> Less than a decade earlier (1356-1360), the fresco of the church in Matejić<sup>36</sup> shows Joseph on his way to Egypt, thus during the first part of the providential journey. A similar scene appears at Dečani, as part of the mural painting dating from 1335-1350. In the two latter churches, iconographers rendered a complex scene, probably drawing on the *Arabic Gospel of the Saviour's Infancy*, showing the idols crumbling in recognition of the sacred authority which Jesus embodies.

### Across Wallachia: an iconographic periplus through the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries

The 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup>-century iconography in the Romanian principality of Wallachia preserves some older local patterns quite rigorously, while also being innovative to a certain extent. The visual representations of the Flight

into Egypt become widespread across the region during this period, where it is increasingly frequent as they advance towards the Modern Age. The growing popularity of the scene in the iconography following 1800 might be due, amongst other things, to the dissemination of the *Painter's Guide* (the *Hermeneia*) authored by Dionysius of Fournas. Written between 1719-1733,<sup>37</sup> this manual relied heavily on the *Gospel according to Matthew*; most likely the increasingly frequent occurrence of the scene owes much to this source, a quite recent one at the respective time. The *Hermeneia* mentions the episode of Matthew's Gospel twice.

According to the recommendations of Dionysius, iconography can depict either one of two themes, entitled *The Flight into Egypt* and *Shining in Egypt (The Light of Truth)*. Based on these prescriptions, the pictorial representations could or should include two distinct directions, corresponding to two significant liturgical cycles: the *Christological cycle* (the Holy Family during the flight into Egypt) and the *Marian cycle* respectively (Mary, the holy infant and Joseph, once arrived in the land of safety, with Jesus acknowledged as God).<sup>38</sup> Despite the formal similarities, the points of emphasis differ in each of the two variants.

According to the body of data of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>39</sup> the most frequent iconographic pattern is the one present in the narthex of the church in Păușești Măglași-Chiciora.<sup>40</sup> Dominated by the Mother of God, due to her central position, the composition stresses her authority as the bearer of Christ. Wrapped in swaddling clothes, Jesus appears as an infant. Seated on a white horse (?) - a solar symbol denoting authority and wisdom (similar to some of the Cappadocian representations or the painting in the narthex of the Kalenič Monastery, 1407-1413),<sup>41</sup> Mary's gaze is turned towards Joseph, who is following her. A fourth male character, a young man, leads the group of holy travelers, holding the bridle of the Virgin's mule, exactly as the Greek manual of iconography recommends. The Romanian mural painting contains no inscription to reveal his identity. However, he is not an anonymous figure, for he can be recognized by comparing the scene with older Byzantine patterns, such as Cappadocian paintings displaying similar illustrations of the theme. This young man, walking ahead of the Holy Family, is himself related to the three characters: he is James,<sup>42</sup> the first bishop of Jerusalem, also known as James the Less or James the Righteous. The scene can be identified by examining the inscription: *Lighting in Egypt the lamp of truth, Thou didst cast out the darkness of falsehood*, which refers the viewers to *eikos 6* in the *Akathist Hymn of the Annunciation*. The position of the scene inside the narthex, within the cycle dedicated to the Mother of God, leads to the same conclusion (Polovragi; fig. 3). However, Dionysius had prescribed that for the respective representation, the mule should be held by the bridle not by James, but by an angel (the one having visited Joseph in his dream).

By including the angelic messenger the painter indicates, in keeping with the apocryphal gospels, that the inhabitants of Egypt acknowledge Jesus as God. Nineteenth-century iconography generally resorts to older patterns, but tends to hybridize elements. The second variant prescribed by Dionysius' manual (*Hermeneia*) can be found at the church of Miercani.<sup>43</sup> There, however, the angelic figure appears in a different context, as a messenger of the Divine Providence, not leading the Virgin. Painters, however, introduced him before the cortège, as a true messenger and a guide of the persecuted (Fârtățești, Cremenari, Giulești [fig. 4]). At Tetoiu, he was placed beside Joseph, leading the horse instead of James (who is not present in the picture). There are also churches where this iconographic scene is more complex, including five characters - the greatest number attested so far within the Romanian territory (Hurezani, Cremenari - fig. 5, Giulești, Fârtățești).

The painter's manual also indicates that the two iconographic contexts must include a building, suggesting to the viewers the proximity of a city. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century iconography, the city is present only in the painting of some churches (Cremenari, Fârtățești, Giulești, Horezu-Târg, Mănăilești,<sup>44</sup> Urdari, Urșani) and absent in others (Căzănești, Cerăt, Coșoveni, Coșofenii din Față,<sup>45</sup> Dobrușa, Dozești, Genuneni [fig. 6], Hurezani, Ionești, Peșteana de Jos-Aninoasa, Prigoria, Tetoiu). One can identify similarities with previous cases, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century; the painting of most sanctuaries contains symbolic indicators of the urban space (Bărbătești-Bodești, Breasta, București-Colțea and București-Negustori, Govora, Preajba de Câmp, Polovragi - the *katholikon*, Sărăcinești, Teiu, Păușești Măglași-Chiciora, Zorlești).<sup>46</sup> The city in the picture is intended to represent one of the halting places along the journey, as narrated by the *Arabic Gospel of the Saviour's Infancy*, where Jesus publicly performed *hagiotherapy*.<sup>47</sup> Equally



1 Bronze relief, Church of San Zeno, Verona, Italy, c. 1138



2 Mural painting, Tokali Church 1, Göreme, Cappadocia, 10<sup>th</sup> c.



3 Mural painting, Church of Polovragi Monastery, Gorj County, Romania, 1703



4 Mural painting Church of Giulești, Fântârești, Vâlcea County, Romania, 1832



5 Mural painting Church of Cremenari, Galicea, Vâlcea County, Romania, 1828



6 Mural painting Church of Genuneni, Frâncești, Vâlcea County, Romania, 1801



notable are the monuments of Urdari (1836) and Miercani (1843; fig. 7), where the route of the travelers unfolds between two cities, one as a departure point and the other as their place of arrival, as a visual expression of the journey between two communities. Older illustrations (17<sup>th</sup>-century Arnota, Dobreni and 16<sup>th</sup>-century Tismana) also indicate possible outstanding sources of inspiration for the painters of the modern period.<sup>48</sup>

At the *katholikon* of Mamul Monastery the walls were repainted in 1842, covering the 1699 fresco authored by Marin and Pârvu Mutu. The painting of some edifices (Păușești Măglași-Chiciora and Căzănești)<sup>49</sup> shows the Virgin carrying a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, whereas at Mamul, Jesus is shown as a child not an infant, in keeping with the Greek Cappadocian pattern. The white mule bearing the Virgin is nowhere mentioned in the *Gospel according to Matthew*, but it appears in most visual representations (fig. 8), probably as a counterpart of the mule ridden by Christ for his entry into Jerusalem.

For the journey, iconographers felt the need to provide the Theotokos with a different means of travelling than the meek, righteous Joseph and young James. The donkey usually has no positive connotations in animal symbolism,<sup>50</sup> as it is generally associated with deplorable stubbornness. But by placing Mary with Christ on the back of a donkey, on her way to Egypt, iconographers pointed to the ability that the new Divine King has to tame archaic, dark powers. The beast thus becomes a symbol of humility,<sup>51</sup> in contrast with the notion of proud authority suggested by the horse.

The visitors of Oltenia churches will sometimes come across a rather unexpected, surprising representation: the direction of travel, usually from left to right within the picture, has been reversed thus suggesting not the flight into Egypt, but the return from exile. The paintings at Coșoveni, Prigoria and Hurezani suggest either a possible error on the part of the painter, or the existence of a distinct pattern such as the one found in a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Galician icon,<sup>52</sup> with Mary breastfeeding the infant (Galaktotrophousa). At Hurezani and Prigoria, the angel of God watches from a cloud, placed at the center of the picture. He is the guide leading the holy family, and his capacity as an adviser is best emphasized visually in the painting of Prigoria, where his spiritual proximity to Joseph is expressed through the symmetry of their gestures.

Unlike other churches, where the episode is included in one of the compartments illustrating the *Akathist Hymn*, the iconography of these two churches displays it separately, due to the limited space, and thus the visibility and importance of the scene is emphasized. Returning to 18<sup>th</sup>-century iconography, we note the absence of the angel in the composition (Breasta [fig. 9], Almăj, Dealul Cornii). I have identified similarities with older edifices by considering another church in the area (that of Arnota Monastery), painted in 1644. In the painting of Teiu (post 1752; fig. 10), James regains the helo he had in Cappadocian monuments of the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. So far, our corpus of data records two instances of this type (Teiu and Dozești) in the area of Oltenia.

An 18<sup>th</sup>-century painting in the same region contains echoes of the *Arabic Gospel of the Saviour's Infancy* and eikos 6 of the *Akathist Hymn of the Annunciation*. At Sărăcinești Monastery (1717-1718)<sup>53</sup> as well as Negustori church in Bucharest, the painting shows the Egyptian town where Joseph, Mary and the infant enter; one can see the idols fallen from the walls (fig. 11), pointing to the testimony of the healed child who tells his father how Jesus's swaddling clothes, hung out to dry, had saved him from the demons that had been tormenting him.<sup>54</sup> At Bodeni, the 1750 fresco depicts not the Mother of God, but Joseph as the *Christophoros*, bearer of the divine child. The same version can be found at Colțea church in Bucharest, in the porch painted in 1702, where the scene appears in an unusual place. This pattern had been previously employed in the painting commissioned by Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu for the *katholikon* of Hurezi (1694). Joseph the *theophoros* - bearer of the Lord – is reminiscent of the Chora mosaic in Constantinople, which influenced the painting of Curtea de Argeș dating from the same century, as well as the painting of Dečani (1335-1350), where James is rendered as a boy, pulling a brown mule,<sup>55</sup> with one hand and carrying a basket in the other.

Placing the scene in the porch rarely occurs in Romanian iconography. This is the case with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century painting at Govora (1711), where it adjoins the themes of *Jesus Sleeping* and the *Protection of the Mother of God*, the latter a very popular one in the region of Vâlcea. The iconography of Govora no longer contains a direct reference to the *Akathist hymn*; the inscription "When Joseph fled with the baby and his mother into Egypt" as well as



7 Wall painting, Church of Miercani, Uda, Argeş County, Romania, 1843



8 Mural painting Church of Strâmba-Jiu Monastery, Gorj County, 1793



9 Wall painting, Church of Breasta, Dolj County, Romania, 1784.



10 Wall painting, Church of Teiu, Galicea, Vâlcea County, Romania, after 1752



11 Wall painting, Negustori church, Bucharest, Romania, 18<sup>th</sup> century



12 Wall painting, Church of Govora Monastery, Vâlcea County, Romania, 1711





13 Wall painting, Church of Dobreni, Vărăști, Giurgiu County, Romania, 1648

\* All photos are by S. Marin Barutcieff

the visual syntax prompt us to interpret the scene as a synthesis between the representations of the main holy characters of the two cycles - the *Christological* and the *Marian* ones (fig. 12).

In our pursuit of the variations of this iconographic theme, often showing the Mother of God as a bearer of Christ, we turned our attention to Dobreni church (1646-1648), founded by *serdar* (commander of the army) Constantin Șerban, later a ruler of Wallachia. Here we find one of the oldest Wallachian compositions, where the roles have been reversed and it is the humble carpenter who bears Christ on his shoulders.

Affinities with medieval Serbian-Macedonian iconography are obvious.<sup>56</sup> As in the case of Matejić, the official father, Joseph (Lk. 3:23) holds his son above his head. Whereas in the Macedonian churches, as well as Kalenić, there are several characters accompanying the holy family, according to some apocrypha and to Epiphanius the Monk, at Dobreni we can see only James, as is usual in Romanian iconography. Here, however, we find elements of the same apocryphal text - a crowned female character, bending over the walls of a grand city. The woman stretches out her hands towards Christ, imploring his healing power for help. Most likely the detail points to the healing of a child struck by leprosy whose mother, the wife of a ruler over several cities, beseeched the Lord to cure her son.<sup>57</sup>

In the church of Matejić, the elaborate scene includes a number of male and female characters, attending the feast in honor of Joseph and his family. The episode, placed in the narthex of this Romanian edifice,<sup>58</sup> is quite singular - Mary is no longer the only bearer of the divine Son to travel on the back of a horse, but Joseph, the good carpenter, also rides another, more humble-looking animal. It is difficult to identify it accurately because, unfortunately, the alterations in the original architecture of the church have partially covered the painting. One thing is certain - the anonymous painter intended to stress the differences in the status of the two bearers of Christ, a device frequently employed in medieval Catholic art.<sup>59</sup> Mary's travelling gear includes the noblest animal - *le palefroi*, as the French call it<sup>60</sup> - employed by aristocracy throughout the Middle Ages. On the other hand, Western culture stressed in both visual and literary realms (medieval theatre) the lower, secondary status of Joseph, whose condition ranges from a less visible place in compositions, to a target of irony.<sup>61</sup> In the medieval period, providing the "righteous Joseph" (Mt. 1:19), and not only his betrothed, with an animal to ride (a horse, a donkey) during his journey to Egypt, as Benedetta Chiesi remarked in one of her texts,<sup>62</sup> was meant to acknowledge the prestige of a character enjoyed at a particular time in a particular community. The artist of Dobreni seems to have found this to be absolutely necessary. It is a twofold act of bearing - alongside Mary, Joseph becomes a Christ-bearer himself. Borne in their turn by the horse - a phoric animal *par excellence*, according to the narrator in *The Erl-King*<sup>63</sup> - they set off on their salvific journey. As if to assert this communion of bearers, the painter introduced yet another *bearer of God and lover of Christ* in the narthex - Saint Christopher, in the first such Wallachian representation out of the eleven identified in Romanian Principalities so far. Three bearers of Christ profess being phoric with euphoria.



## Conclusion

Based on the considerations above, we note that the Marian stance (bearing the divine child), prompted the emergence - across the adjoining areas - of other visual representations of bearer couples. Between 1750-1850, we find in many of the edifices of the respective Romanian territory, that the pairs of bearers rendered iconographically (Saint Anne - the Holy Virgin Mary, Saint Elisabeth - Saint John the Baptist, Saint Christopher - Christ, etc.) are more numerous than in the previous period. Thus, alongside the consecration operated by the bloodshed in martyrdom, there is also the consecration through love and commitment, which adds the contemplative dimension to the active side of Christianity. Regarding the pairs of bearers in the episode of the Flight into Egypt (first the Virgin bearing the infant, then Saint Joseph carrying Jesus), they illustrate the increasing occurrence - a trend manifest especially in the mural painting of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - evincing, as did other iconographic patterns as well, a more marked inclination for narrativity.

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- 1 M. TOURNIER, *Regele arinilor (The Erl-King)*, Romanian translation by B. SAVU-NEUVILLE, postface by I. MANOLESCU, Bucharest, Univers, 2003.
  - 2 Verse 15 of the second chapter points to the prophecy of Hosea, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1).
  - 3 I.I. ICĂ JR. "Viețile Maicii Domnului – sinteze narative ale tradițiilor mariologice ale Bisericii" ("The Lives of the Theotokos - narrative syntheses of Marian traditions of the Church"), in: E. MONAHUL-S. METAFRASTUL-M. MĂRTURISITORUL, *Nașterea, viața și adormirea Maicii Domnului. Trei vieți bizantine* (Epiphanius the Monk, Symeon Metaphrastes, Maximus the Confessor, *The Nativity, Life and Dormition of the Theotokos. Three Byzantine Lives*), second edition, Romanian translation and postface by deacon I.I. ICĂ JR., Sibiu, Deisis, 2007, pp. 267-268.
  - 4 L. RÉAU, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, Paris, Presse universitaire de France, 1957, tom II, p. 274.
  - 5 In her insightful analysis of the Gospels, N. Manoilescu Dinu noted that Osiris had anticipated Christ as a conqueror of death. See N. MANOILESCU DINU, *Iisus Hristos Mântuitorul în lumina Sfintelor Evanghelii (Saviour Jesus Christ in the Light of the Holy Gospels)*, Bucharest, Editura Bizantină, 2001, vol. 1, p. 97.
  - 6 "Viața lui Iosif tâmplarul" ("The Life of Joseph the Carpenter"), in: *Evanghelii apocrife (Apocryphal Gospels)*, third edition, C. BĂDILIȚĂ (ed.), Iași, Polirom, 2002, p. 65.
  - 7 "Evanghelia lui Pseudo-Toma" ("The Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas"), in: *Evanghelii apocrife*, pp. 95-96.
  - 8 "Evanghelia arabă a copilăriei Mântuitorului" ("The Arabic Gospel of the Saviour's Infancy"), in: *Evanghelii apocrife*, p. 106.
  - 9 *Ibid.*
  - 10 E. MONAHUL-S. METAFRASTUL-M. MĂRTURISITORUL, *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 117.
  - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 116. See the verse containing the prophecy: "Behold, the Lord rideth on a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt. And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt." (*Isaiah 19: 1*)
  - 14 F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine. De la simbol la icoană. Secolele II-VI (The Earliest Christian Pictures. From Symbol to Icon. 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, Romanian translation by E. BUCULEI-A. BOROȘ, Bucharest, Meridiane, 2002, p. 262.
  - 15 The respective medallion, dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, is part of the collection of the Museum of Archaeology in Istanbul. A reproduction can be found in D. TALBOT RICE, *The Art of Byzantium*, London, Thames&Hudson, 1959, p. 66.
  - 16 A. SCHMEMMANN, *Introducere în teologia liturgică (Introduction to Liturgical Theology)*, Bucharest, Sophia, 2002, p. 248.
  - 17 T. VELMANS, *La peinture murale byzantine à la fin du Moyen Age*, I, Paris, Klincksieck, *Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques*, XI, 1977, p. 111 apud V. BEDROS, "Periplul sufletului către lumea cealaltă în tradiția bizantină. Glose pe marginea unor imagini din pictura postbizantină moldovenescă" ("The soul's periplus to the afterlife, according to Byzantine tradition. Commentaries on images of Moldavian postbyzantine painting"), in: *Călători și călătorii. A privi, a descoperi (Travel and Travellers. Contemplating and Discovering)*, vol. 1 "Incursiuni în istorie și artă", C. BOGDAN-S. MARIN BARUTCIEFF (eds.), Bucharest, Editura Universității din București, p. 65.

- 18 G. SCHILLER, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. 1, Gütersloh, Mohn Verlag, 1966, p. 128.
- 19 See the bronze relief at *Hildesheim*, cathedral, 1015 and the stone relief with scene of *Slaughter of Innocents* and *Flight into Egypt*, 11<sup>th</sup> century, permanent collection of Archeological Museum, Zadar (Personal field research in 2016). Another ivory relief, at *Salerno*, cathedral, 1084 (Cf. R. TOMAN-A. BEDNORZ, *Arte romanica. Architettura. Scultura. Pittura*, Italian translation by A. PANACCIONE, Milano, Tandem, 2008, pp. 354, 362). Here the Holy Family has travel companions. Another ivory relief, dating from the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> c., the Museum of Medieval Art of *Bologna*; *Köln*, St. Maria im Kapitol, 11<sup>th</sup> c.; *Verona*, San Zeno, cca 1138; *Arles*, St. Trophime, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (Personal field research in 2007-2011). Also, the bronze gates of *Novgorod* cathedral, crafted by a German workshop; the capital in the church of *Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire Abbey* (a sketch in P. RIPERT, *Le bestiaire des cathédrales, Imagerie de la statuaire médiévale. Symbolique des monstres, gargouilles et autres chimères*, Paris, De Vecchi, 2010, p. 138); capital in the choir of *Autun* cathedral; relief on a baptismal font in *Verona*, San Giovanni in Fonte. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the *Flight into Egypt* can be seen at *Chartres*, Notre-Dame and *Paris*, Notre-Dame (Personal field research in 2012-2016).
- 20 M. PACAUT-J. ROSSIAUD, *Epoca romanică (The Romanesque Period)*, Romanian translation by V. PROTOPOESCU, Bucharest, Meridiane, 1982, p. 193.
- 21 The two manuscripts of the theophoric journey, where God is carried in the arms or on the shoulder in the hypostasis of the Son. Photos of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek codices in the Marburg archive.
- 22 On display in the temporary exhibition *Between Venus and Luther. Cranach's Media of Seduction*. The exhibition was hosted from 21 May 2015-22 May 2016, by Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg. Here the composition evokes the episode in *Pseudo-Matthew's Gospel*, with the palm tree shading the Holy Family from the sun. Jesus asks the tree to bend down, so that his mother may pick its fruit. Mentions of this account in G. SCHILLER, *op. cit.*, 1966, p. 128 and F. TRISTAN, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 263.
- 23 J. DE VORAGINE, *La Légende dorée*, trad. du lat. par T. DE WYZEWA, Paris, Seuil, 1998; pp. 58-59.
- 24 *Cinstitul Paraclis al Preasfintei Născătoare de Dumnezeu, alcătuire a fericitului împărat Kir Teodor Lascar (The Service of the Paraklesis to the Most Holy Theotokos, a poem of the Blessed Emperor Kir Theodore Lascaris)*, Bucharest, EIBMBOR, 1998, p. 363.
- 25 C. JOLIVET-LÉVY, commented on this composition, remarking the tenderness suggested by Mary's cheek placed next to the cheek of her son. The same stance, with different physical distance between the two faces, in Kiliçlar church (*Göreme*, 29). See "The Bahattin Samanlıği Kilisesi at Belisirma (Cappadocia) revisited", in: *Byzantine Art. Recent studies. Essays in honor of Lois Drewer*, L. DREWER-C. HOURIHANE (ed.), Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009, p. 101.
- 26 N. THIERRY, "Haut Moyen-Âge en Cappadoce: les églises de la région de Çavuşin", in: *Revue des Études Slaves*, tome 54, 3, 1982, pp. 505-508. My gratitude to Ferda Barut for the discussions about Cappadocian monuments.
- 27 According to on-site research carried out in the two churches in Cappadocia, August 2009.
- 28 A.W. EPSTEIN, "Rock-cut Chapels in Göreme Valley, Cappadocia: The Yılanlı Group and the Column Churches", in: *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 24, 1975, pp. 115-134.
- 29 Photo of the icon reproduced in Mère A.M. DE LA CROIX-F.X. EMERY, *Icônes arabes. Mystères d'Orient*, Paris, Éditions Grégoriennes, 2006, p. 123.
- 30 N. VELIMIROVICH, *Răspunsuri la întrebări ale lumii de astăzi: scrisori misionare (Answers to Today's Questions: Missionary Letters)*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2002, p. 58.
- 31 R. GIORGI, *Saints in Art*, S. ZUFFI (ed.), T.M. HARTMANN (trans.), Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003, p. 206. Investigating the history of color in Western medieval symbolism, M. Pastoureau stated that, starting with the 12<sup>th</sup> century, blue became the color of choice for the Marian vestment. Blue starts to be regularly employed for the vestment of the Virgin, especially her mantle. It replaces other, darker shades (black, purple, green), as a mourning color lighter than those of previous centuries. See M. PASTOUREAU, *Albastru. Istoria unei culori (Blue. The History of a Color)*, Romanian translation by Em. GALAICU-PĂUN, Chişinău, Cartier, 2006, pp. 44-45.
- 32 The Paraklesis Service terms *Theotokos* "the gateway to Heaven". Cf. *Cinstitul Paraclis*, p. 362.
- 33 N. VELIMIROVICH, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 58.
- 34 The scene appears alongside *The Dream of Joseph*.
- 35 Photo reproduced in: D. BARBU, *Pictura murală din Țara Românească în secolul al XIV-lea (Mural Painting in 14<sup>th</sup>-Century Wallachia)*, Bucharest, Meridiane, 1986, fig. 32.
- 36 Picture reproduced in: V.J. DURİĆ, *Byzantinischen Fresken in Jugoslawien*, Munich, Hirmer, 1971, fig. 69.
- 37 C. PILLAT, *Variațiuni pe teme date în arta medievală românească (Variations on Prescribed Themes in Romanian Medieval Art)*, Bucharest, Vremea, 2003, p. 91.

- 38 Pattern 1: "Hills and the Most Holy Virgin with the Infant, sitting on a mule and looking back at Joseph, who carries the staff with his vestment on the shoulder; and a young man leading the mule by the bridle, carrying a basket and looking back at the Most Holy Virgin. Ahead of them, a city and on its walls idols fall and crumble". Cf. D. din FURNA, *Erminia picturii bizantine* (D. of FOURNA, *Manual of Byzantine Painting*), Bucharest, Sophia, 2000, p. 102. Pattern 2: "Shining in Egypt (the Light of Truth). All elements of the *Flight into Egypt*. (Night sky with clouds, mountains, land and trees bending, in the distance a city adjoined by trees; and the Most Holy Virgin holding Christ in her arms sits on the mule, with a gourd attached to the saddle; ahead of the mule, an angel pulling it by the bridle)". *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 39 Research work in progress; the body of data needs completing.
- 40 The mural painting of the inside dates from 1789; its authors are Andrei, hieromonk Dimitrie and Dumitru. R. CREȚEANU, „Zugravii din județul Vâlcea” (“Painters of Vâlcea County”), in: *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor (Museums and Monuments Review)*, year XLIX, no. 2, 1980, pp. 89-91. See *Inscripții medievale și din epoca modernă a României. Județul istoric Vâlcea (sec. XIV-1848) (Inscriptions of the Medieval and Modern Period in Romania. The Historical County of Vâlcea, 14<sup>th</sup> c. - 1848)*, C. BĂLAN (ed.), Bucharest, Editura Academiei Române, 2005, p. 757.
- 41 A sketch of the fresco produced by the Moravian School, early 15<sup>th</sup> c., in the work of the same author. *Ibid.*, drawing 114, p. 155.
- 42 James' identity differs in Christian traditions. Roman-Catholics deem him the son of Joseph from a previous marriage before his betrothal to the Virgin, "brother of the Lord" (D.H. FARMER, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, arguments and articles dedicated to Romanian saints by R. RUS-M.C. UDMA-E. BURLACU (trans.), Bucharest, Univers Enciclopedic, 1999, p. 267); the Orthodox assert he is Jesus' cousin, son of Mary wife of Cleopas, "the Lord's kinsman" (I. MIRCEA, *Dicționar al Noului Testament (New Testament Dictionary)*, Bucharest, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1995, p. 212).
- 43 Although the scene belongs to the second pattern indicated by Dionysius, the inscription reminds of the first variant.
- 44 In early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the painting was renewed covering the old iconographic program.
- 45 In 2008, the year of our visit to the church, the fresco was in a state of decay, so that some of the iconographic elements are unclear.
- 46 Absent at *Almăj* (Dolj, 1789), *Strâmba-Jiu* (monastery in Gorj, 1793) and *Dealul Cornii* (Vâlcea, 1797?), the latter most likely due to 21<sup>st</sup>-century repainting.
- 47 A. H. Bredero terms *hagiotherapy* the most emotional aspect in the veneration of saints. Relics heal the sick, protect cities and towns under their patronage, drive away evil spirits. In this respect sainthood imitates the works of Christ. See A.H. BREDERO, *Christendom and Christianity in the Middle Ages. The Relations between Religion, Church, and Society*, B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1994, pp. 159-160.
- 48 At Tismana Monastery, the composition was introduced by Dobromir of Târgoviște in the synaxarion, in order to break the monotony of iconographic representation. Cf. C.L. DUMITRESCU, *Pictura murală din Țara Românească în veacul al XVI-lea (Mural Painting in 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Wallachia)*, Bucharest, Meridiane, 1978, pp. 19, 77-78.
- 49 Sf. Gheorghe and Sf. Dumitru (St. George and St. Demetrios) Church in *Căzănești*, Vâlcea, built between 1808 and 1810, by treasurer Filip; painted in 1810, by deacon Anghel from Dozești, Manole and Constantin from Craiova. Cf. *Inscripții medievale și din epoca modernă a României*, p. 802; R. CREȚEANU, *op. cit.*, 1980, p. 89.
- 50 *Dicționar de simboluri (Dictionary of Symbols)*, J. CHEVALIER-A. GHEERBRANT (eds.), Romanian translation by M. SLĂVESCU-L. ZOICAȘ, vol. II, Bucharest, Artemis, 1995, p. 279.
- 51 In the Roman-Catholic tradition, the mule is considered by some theologians as a stupid, idle animal (Gregory the Great), a vehicle of luxury (Pietro Capuano), while others regard it as a symbol of humility and wisdom (St Melito). See P. RIPERT's commentary on the distance between the modesty of the donkey and the ostentatious pride of the horse, *op. cit.*, 2010, pp. 138-139.
- 52 Galician icon, 17<sup>th</sup> c., reproduced in the album *Православная икона России, Украины и Беларуси*, Москва, 2008, pp. 82-83. Similar paintings, with the travellers progressing from right to left, can be found in Western art as well. See for instance the sculpture in St. Peter Abbey of Moissac, the work of the so-called Master of Frankfurt, (1503-1506, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart) or some of the engravings by Albrecht Dürer.
- 53 See C. POPA "Biserica Adormirea Maicii Domnului a Schitului Sărăcinești" ("The Church of The Dormition of Theotokos, Sărăcinești skete"), in: C. POPA-I. IANCOVESCU-E. NEGRĂU-V. BEDROS, *Repertoriul picturii murale brâncovenești: județul Vâlcea (The Repertoire of Brancovan Mural Painting: Vâlcea County)*, vol. 1, Bucharest, UNARTE, 2008, p. 409.



- 54 *Evangelii apocrife*, p. 106.
- 55 The art of both Christian traditions includes a brown equine carrier of the Holy Family. In the East, we note the 17<sup>th</sup>-c. Galician icon and, in the West, the mural painting at St Martin in Zillis, 12<sup>th</sup> c., or the work of Guido da Siena, c. 1275-1280, Lindenau Museum, *Altenburg*. For the latter, see J.A. CROWE-G.B. CAVALCASELLE-A. JAMESON, *Early Italian Painting*, New York, Parkstone Press International, 2011, p. 38.
- 56 The painter of Dobreni is still unknown.
- 57 The account about the leprous child: "The prince's wife then arose and entertained them, providing a great feast for Joseph among a large company of men. And the next day took perfumed water to wash the Lord Jesus, and afterwards poured the same water upon her son, whom she had brought with her, and her son was instantly cleansed from his leprosy. Then she sang thanks and unto God, and said, 'Blessed is the mother that bare thee, O Jesus! Dost thou thus cure men of the same nature with thyself, with the water with which thy body is washed!' She then offered very large gifts to the Lady Mary, and sent her away with all imaginable respect". See the *Arabic Gospel*, ed. cit., p. 109.
- 58 At *Dobreni* the 17<sup>th</sup>-century painting is still extant only in the narthex. Cf. research carried out in 2005 and 2015.
- 59 P. PAYAN, *Joseph. Une image de la paternité dans l'Occident médiéval*, Aubier, Flammarion, 2006, p. 240.
- 60 J. VERDON, *Voyager au Moyen Âge*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Paris, Perrin, 2007, pp. 44-45.
- 61 See the work of Melchior Broederlam, *The Presentation of Jesus to the Temple and the Flight into Egypt*, c. 1400, The Art Museum of Dijon, reproduced in R. MELLINKOFF, *Outcasts. Signs of otherness in Northern European art of the Late Middle Ages*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, University of California Press, 1993, vol. 2, fig. III.97 and fig. III.97 (detail).
- 62 B. CHIESI, "Le voyage matériel", in: A. ALCHUS-M. BORMAND-B. CHIESI-M. HUYNH, *Voyager au Moyen Âge*, Musée du Cluny-Musée National du Moyen Âge, 22 octobre 2014-23 février 2015, Paris, 2014, p. 42.
- 63 M. TOURNIER, *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 220.

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**Silvia Marin Barutcieff**

**Bijeg u Egipt: Djevica Marija kao Nositeljica Krista  
Ikonografski primjeri s rumunjskih zidnih slikam 18. i 19. stoljeća**

Ovaj tekst obrađuje istaknutu temu iz srednjovjekovne i moderne kršćanske ikonografije u katoličkom i pravoslavnom korpusu. Od djela Giotto (1304-1306), Duccio (1308-1311), Fra Angelico (1451-1452), Martina Schongauera (1488-1491) i Albrechta Dürera (1495-1496), pa do Caravaggia (1597) i Murilla (1650), ova je tema pronašla svoj put kao paradigma najvećih sakralnih djela. Za ovaj su rad, nastao kao rezultat istraživanja na terenu provedenih tijekom nekoliko godina u rumunjskim pravoslavnim crkvama, odabrane zidne slike crkava iz 18. i 19. stoljeća, koje su u to vrijeme bile na teritoriju Vlaške. U istočnoj su Europi, unaprijed definirane norme prikaza iz post-Bizantskih slikarskih priručnika, stvarale ponekad zabunu kod određenja tipa kompozicije. Tako su mnogi rumunjski slikari bili u nedoumici treba li scene postavljati u narteks ili trijem, kao dio *Akatista* Blaženoj Djevici ili nekog drugog ikonografskog programa. Ovaj rad ima za cilj proučiti umjetnikove motivacije te identificirati modele nastale prema slikarskom priručniku. Ova analiza, također, traži poveznicu između kanonskih i apokrifnih evanđelja u prikazima na spomenutom zemljopisnom području i u navedenom vremenskom razdoblju. U radu se koristi komparativna metodologija istraživanog sadržaja na izabranim značajnim primjerima moderne rumunjske umjetnosti u usporedbi sa srednjovjekovnim rumunjskim djelima i primjerima iz grčke, makedonske i srpske umjetnosti. Na koncu će se istražiti značaj teoforijskog prikaza Marije kao Kristove nositeljice, kako je istaknuto u providencijalnom putovanju u Egipt, odnosi između likova u vizualnoj kompoziciji (Krist, Sveti Josip, anđeo, Sveti Jakov Mlađi) te povezanost teme Bijega u Egipt s drugim temama, dijelovima marijanskog ciklusa iz vlaške pravoslavne umjetnosti.

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