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An Iconographic Theme Disseminated North of the Carpathians: Saint Christopher in Romanian Mural Painting of Southern Transylvania (1760–1835)

Rozprzestrzenianie się tematu ikonograficznego na północ od Karpat: św. Krzysztof w rumuńskim malarstwie ściennym południowej Transylwanii (1760–1835)

Summary: This paper aims to examine the context in which an iconographic topic, namely, the visual representations of Saint Christopher, was disseminated from the south to the north of the Carpathian Mountains, in the second half of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. In order to identify the circulation routes of the theme, I will investigate the artistic and spiritual relationship between the Romanian communities from southern Transylvania and those from Wallachia. The present analysis will also include the confessional solidarity between the Orthodox groups from both sides of the Carpathians and its role in the creation and transmission of a homogenous religious iconographic program.

Key words: Carpathian Mountains, Saint Christopher, Romanian iconography, 18th–19th century, confessional identity, cultural transfer

Translated by Author

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiony jest kontekst rozprzestrzeniania się przedstawień ikonograficznych św. Krzysztofa z południa ku północy Karpat w drugiej połowie XVIII i początkach XIX wieku. Aby zidentyfikować drogi rozchodzenia się ikonografii rozpatruję artystyczne i duchowe powiązania pomiędzy społecznościami rumuńskimi z południowej Transylwanii oraz podobnymi społecznościami osiadłymi na Wołoszczyźnie. Analiza obejmuje również zagadnienia związane ze wspólnotą prawosławnej ludności po obu stronach Karpat oraz rolę tej wspólnoty w powstaniu i rozprzestrzenianiu się jednolitego programu ikonografii religijnej.

Słowa klucze: Karpaty, św. Krzysztof, ikonografia rumuńska, XVIII/XIX w., tożsamość wyznaniowa, transfer kulturowy

Tłumaczenie: Klaudyna Michałowicz

Introduction

Artistic representations of Saint Christopher, so highly popular and widely circulated across the Roman-Catholic cultural areas during the Middle Ages, failed to enjoy similar vogue in the post-Byzantine Orthodox realm. The theme was introduced to the Romanian communities of Wallachia and Transylvania as late as the early modern era. As indicated in a previous paper, iconographic types spread throughout the Orthodox area along a south-north axis – that is, from Wallachia into Transylvania (Marin Barutcieff 2014). The present study investigates the circulation of Saint Christopher's images in the Romanian communities within a transition region, located in southern Transylvania, at the foot of Southern Carpathians. The region under scrutiny lies between two major cities of medieval and modern Transylvania: Sibiu and Brașov, both close to the border with Wallachia. The Romanian population designated this territory as the Lands of Bârsa (Țara Bârsei) and Făgăraș (Țara Făgărașului). The administrative organization of the respective territory, as part of the Habsburg Empire, was revised during the second half of the 18th century (1764–1783), under the reigns of Maria Theresa and Joseph II. Following this reorganization, it came to include part of *Romanian Regiment 1* (dubbed *Wallachian*) with the districts of Făgăraș and Brașov, as well as the county seat of Sibiu (Nicoară 2001: 14).

The present study concerns Saint Christopher's iconography in southern Transylvania, as it emerged during the second half of the 18th century and the early decades of the 19th century. The investigation will address the context shaped by the relationships of religious and cultural solidarity established between the Romanian communities on either side of the Carpathians. The situation of Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania, whose denomination was merely "tolerated" alongside the state-supported and authorized denominations (the four so-called "religio recepta": Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism and Unitarianism) until 1781,[1] prompted them to be constantly looking to the ecclesiastical institution of Wallachia. Under these circumstances a cultural transfer occurred, not only in the spiritual realm but also in the arts' realm as well.

Innovating in 18th century Wallachia: the emergence and dissemination of an art style

In the history of Wallachian art, the first two decades of the 18th century are the time when the *Brâncoveanu art style* (also known as Brancovenesque) acquired and crystallized

[1] These four confessions were reconfirmed by the *Leopoldine Diploma*, issued in 1691. By the Patent of Toleration issued by Emperor Joseph II in 1781, Romanians were granted the right to build churches and were legally permitted to hold "private religious exercises" (cf. Dumitran 2007: 55).

its characteristic traits, having emerged during the last decade of the previous century. The author of this cultural, aesthetic and spiritual project was Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, ruler of Wallachia between 1688 and 1714. Geographically, this style was born in the subcarpathian region of Vâlcea, at Hurezi Monastery, where the prince undertook to revive coenobitic monasticism.

The ecclesiastical edifices built and decorated between 1692–1705 on Brâncoveanu's estates, were followed by several others: Mamul Monastery (1699), Polovragi Monastery (1703), Cozia Monastery (1704–1707); Surpatele Monastery (1706–1707), the old skete of Fedeleșoiu (painted after 1708), Govora Monastery (1711–1712); Păpușa skete (1711–1712); Sărăcinești Monastery (1717–1718), St George church in Ocnele Mari, as well as Iezer skete (1720).

The mural painting of Hurezi was conducted under the supervision of the Greek-born master iconographer Constantinos, an artist who had arrived from Epirus and had already gained great notoriety by decorating in 1683 an important church founded by Lady Maria – the wife of Șerban Cantacuzino, Wallachia's ruler at the time (Iancovescu: 45).

Assisted by Ioan, his fellow worker in the principality's capital city, Constantinos teamed up with four other Romanian painters (Andrei, Stan, Neagoe and Ioachim); they are collectively known in today's art historiography as representatives of the *School of Hurezi*.

The style of the mural decoration developed between 1692 and 1720 characteristically displays a detailed arrangement of the painted area into compartments containing a great number of narrative compositions, and decorations of Baroque inspiration. Features such as the amount of details in the narrative scenes (unprecedented in the Romanian sacred art), the vivaciousness of compositions, largely due to the introduction of details derived from apocryphal literature (Popa 1986: 15), the presence of legends and models brought by Constantinos from Greece, or taken from Ukrainian and Russian books and etchings that were circulating at the time (Iancovescu 2008: 101–106), had a long-lasting impact on the Romanian iconography developed after the tragic demise of Constantin Brâncoveanu.[2] The tiers with geometric and phytomorphic ornaments present in the stylistic discourse of Hurezi, were subsequently taken over by the decoration of the churches built in Vâlcea after 1720. While the Brancovenesque iconography debuted at Hurezi had roots in the tradition of art monuments dating from the times of Prince

[2] Constantin Brâncoveanu, dethroned in 1714, was executed at Constantinople on 15 August, in the same year, together with his four sons: Constantin, Ștefan, Radu and Matei, having refused to convert to Islam. In 1992, the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church canonized them, setting their feast date to be celebrated on 16 August.

Matei Basarab,[3] it was also quite innovative, by mingling elements of the autochtonous iconography with Greek ones. Such innovations lie, for instance, in the extended space allocated to the *Marian cycle* and the *cycle of the great feasts*, and the increased number of *military saints* (Popa, Iancovescu 2008: 50). The scene of the *Last Judgment*, introduced in the mural art of Wallachia after 1650, joined the iconographic repertoire of the painters who decorated the Brancovenesque edifices. The moralizing dimension, visible in the depiction of sinful monks in the fiery pit of hell, was subsumed to the project of rekindling and reorganizing the coenobitic monastic life in the principality, on which the Romanian ruler had embarked and regarded as one of his priorities (Popa 2008: 22). The mural representations: in the narthex – the *hymns and odes* of the *Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos*; in the exonarthex – the apostles' martyric deaths, the eschatological parables (*The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Speck and the Log*), and the *Ecumenical Councils Cycle*; on the refectory facade – the *Protection of the Mother of God* (*Pokrov*), illustrating the triumph of the Ekklesia – all are expressions of a highly coherent and refined dogmatic and aesthetic vision. This vision underlay not only the iconographic programmes within the principality but, beginning with the second half of the 18th century, it crossed the mountains and reached Transylvania. The painters invited from Oltenia by their Orthodox and Greek-Catholic fellow artists,[4] brought with them the stylistic and iconographic elements of Brancovenesque art and employed them with the monuments in the Land of Făgăraș and Mărginimea Sibiului, from where local apprentices took them farther into central and northern Transylvania.

Cultural sensitivity and religious solidarity in Romanian communities south and north of the Carpathians

Relationships maintained among the artists of Romanian communities in Transylvania and Wallachia were governed by a general sense of solidarity, manifest at various levels. The heterogeneous religious landscape characteristic to Transylvania, which was known for its diversity as early as the second half of the 16th century, received a new denomination towards the end of the following century: the Greek-Catholic Church (the Romanian Church United with Rome). The establishment of this new denomination in 1697, reconfirmed in 1700, divided the Romanian communities in Transylvania (Teodor 2002: 167).

[3] Matei Basarab, ruler of Wallachia between 1632–1654, was one of the princes most concerned with the cultural and art life. Under his long reign, the state flourished, which contributed to the development of art and culture. The art patronage offered by the prince, his family and the local aristocracy (boyars) resulted in a marked stylistic and iconographic unity which preceded the era of Brâncoveanu (Moisescu 2002: 10–11).

[4] In 1736, Grigore Ranite painted the iconostasis of the Greek-Catholic cathedral in Blaj, having been invited by bishop Inochentie Micu (Dumitran 2010: 88).

The region of interest for the present study is located in the south of Transylvania, at the foot of Southern and Eastern Carpathians, spanning the area with Sibiu and Brașov at its western, respectively eastern ends. The political history of medieval and modern Transylvania knew several stages. During the 11th–16th centuries, the region was part of the Kingdom of Hungary; in the 16th –17th centuries, it turned into an autonomous principality, then in late 17th century it became part of the Habsburg Empire. Brașov, the most important city and also the most populous one during the 15th–16th centuries, was followed by Sibiu, the second largest and the best fortified of the walled cities (Rădvan 2011: 78–80). Both of them, as royal cities, were inhabited by German-origin dwellers (Saxons), while Romanians began to be accepted in the suburbs only in the modern era (Nicoară 2001: 15; Rădvan 2011: 80). Between these two cities lies the town of Făgăraș. This territory, along the axis Sibiu – Făgăraș – Brașov, was reluctant towards the union with Rome; Greek-Catholic ecclesiastical authorities' attempt to gain the upper hand met with firm resistence, encouraged by the commercial relationships maintained by the lands of Făgăraș and Bârsa (Țara Făgărașului[5] and Țara Bârsei[6]) with Wallachia, as well as the fact that Romanian rulers owned estates there (Miron 2004: 77–78).

Pressures due to the population's adherence to Orthodoxy led to a compromise: the Greek-Catholic bishop enjoyed administrative and juridical authority, while the spiritual authority was retained by the Metropolis of Ungrovlachia. As Oltenia came under Habsburg jurisdiction (1718) this put, a decade later, the Orthodox in the respective area under the authority of the Bishopric of Râmnic (Miron 2004: 79–80). During the second half of the century, after Oltenia had returned to Wallachia, Orthodox priests would continue to travel south of the Carpathians in order to be ordained.[7] A conscription dating from 1767 indicates that 25 out of the 33 clergy members of Făgărăș had been ordained there (Cristache-Panait 1970: 31).

The foundation and donation documents concluded between 1760–1835 also evince the same denominational solidarity. Who were those entitled to build worship places in the Lands of Făgăraș and Bârsa and which was their social standing?

Before the Patent of Toleration issued in 1781 by Emperor Joseph II, most Romanian churches were made of wood. The exceptions were those churches founded by Romanian rulers and boyars, who were granted not only the right to commission the construction

[5] The Land of Făgăraș (Țara Făgărașului), also the Land of Olt (Țara Oltului) is a depression at the border of Transylvania; in its southern part stand the Mountains of Făgăraș and Perșani, and at the north there is the plateau of Târnave; the River Olt flows through this region.

[6] The Land of Bârsa (Țara Bârsei) is a depression inside the Carpathians' arc; it constitutes the eastern part of Brașov depression.

[7] The Romanians dwelling in southern Transylvania would travel to Wallachia not only along the roads recorded in documents, but also by less-known paths across the mountains (cf. Sabău 1996: 231).

of churches, but also to have them made of durable building materials (brick, stone). The Land of Făgăraș has a number of such churches dating from the15th–17th centuries,[8] whose architecture evinces the influence of the Wallachian ones across the mountains. In 1694, when Transylvania was part of the Habsburg Empire (1687), Constantin Brâncoveanu petitioned Prince Michael Apafi, for permission to erect a masonry church in the town of Făgăraș. This place of worship, completed in 1697 (Cristache-Panait 1981: 175), offered an example in terms of sacred architecture and painting, to be followed by other churches in southern Transylvania. The same Wallachian prince founded the churches at Sâmbăta de Sus (1700–1701) and Poiana Mărului, 1707 (Greceanu 1970: 38), both in the architectural style bearing his name. In 1709, Ștefan Cantacuzino, a future ruler of Wallachia (1714–1716), established the church at Vaida Recea (Cristache-Panait 1970: 31).

After 1775 and especially after 1781, the number of foundations increased. Churches were erected by merchants, on the one hand, and by the communities of towns and villages on the other hand. The most prominent merchants in the Brașov area, actively advocating adherence to Orthodoxy (Miron 2004: 78), were church founders in the last quarter of the 18th century and the next. For instance, in 1769, the Orthodox Church in Prejmer was built with the support of merchants Ioan Vlad, Nicolae, Dimitrie, Vasile Brat. The church in Râșnov, which, according to tradition, dates from the 14th century, was first enlarged in 1773, with the contribution of merchants Ioan and Radu Boghici, dwellers of Brașov. 50 years later, it was further enlarged, and its iconographic programme was inspired by the Brancovenesque church in Făgăraș (Jenei 2010: 613–615). The same Ioan Boghici commissioned in 1779 the building of a church in Tohanu Nou and paid for the Sovereign icons on the iconostasis (Porumb 1998: 425). Another merchant, a resident of Șchei named Dimitrie Scurtu, funded the construction of the church in Veneția de Jos, which started in 1790 and ended probably a few years later (Literat 1996: 23); in 1795, master Neculae Ciurcu and his wife Despa, also financed the building of the church in Cristian (Porumb 1998: 90).

Entire communities also provided their contributions, at times substantial ones, to the building or decoration of worship places. This occurred increasingly frequently after the second half of the 18th century, as is the case of the church in Dârste (1783–1797), Șercăița (1798) or of the painting at Sâmbăta de Jos (altar, nave, narthex – 1806; exonarthex – 1814). Among the donors were many clergymen, or persons close to the church. Around the same time, hagi[9] Radu Inașu, *epitropos* (steward) of the Romanian church in Șchei added an exonarthex to the chapel dedicated to the Annunciation (Porumb 2003: 33). In 1786,

[8] Vișlea de Jos (15th c.?), Voivodenii Mari (around 1500), Săsciori (17th c.), Comăna de Jos (17th c.), Comăna de Sus (around 1600) (cf. Greceanu 1970: 34).

[9] Appellation granted to persons who had undertaken a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

the former hegumen of Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery founded a church built in the eastern part of the village (Sabău 1996: 246), while priest Stoica Popovici and his wife Bucura, paid for the painting of the church in Cristian (1821).

In some of these instances, the painters – either coming from Wallachia or residents of southern Transylvania, drawing their inspiration from the Brancovenesque art, which thus transcended geographical and political boundaries – integrated the figure of Saint Christopher.

The dissemination of St Christopher's theme in the iconography of southern Transylvania. A case study

Saint Christopher's representations joined the iconography of Romanian churches north of the Carpathians, after mid-18th century. The credit for the introduction of the first Orthodox iconographic version in Transylvania is due to a talented artist: Grigore Ranite, the son of another notorious painter, namely Hranite, one of the iconographers of Hurezi.[10] Grigore was not the only one of Hranite's sons to embrace his father's craft. The second son, Gheorghe, was also a reputed painter and the two brothers were often invited to work together. Actually, in old Romanian culture, iconographic and stylistic elements were frequently circulated via family relations. Documents record that the two Ranite brothers painted in Oltenia, at Glogova (1734),[11] and Râmeț skete (1741–1742), in Banat and also worked for Serbian churches in Hungary (Porumb 2003: 58).

Between 1738 and 1739, Grigore was invited to decorate the Annunciation chapel attached to the Romanian church in Şcheii Braşovului (Porumb 1994: 68). Unfortunately, the mural painting he produced is no longer extant, which makes it impossible to know whether it included the figure of Saint Christopher. However, he did depict the Saint later, in 1760, at Răşinari, close to the city of Sibiu, where he painted together with his son Ioan. While Grigore Ranite was decorating the chapel of Râmnic bishopric, his apprentices and disciples were Iacov and Stan, sons of the priest Man of Răşinari; they subsequently worked both in central Transylvania and in Wallachia (Crețeanu 1980: 95). A note found on a liturgical book states that in 1754, while he was working for the Bishopric of Râmnic, Iacov was married at Sărăcinești Monastery, with Ranite as his godfather (Porumb 2003: 45).

[10] Hranite painted at Ștefan skete, belonging to the Monastery founded by Constantin Brâncoveanu (Dumitran 2010: 83).

[11] Grigore Ranite and Gheorghe Ranite painted in a church whose construction had been started by boyar Matei Glogoveanu, imperial counsellor since 1732, a time when Oltenia was under Austrian rule (Vasilescu 1928: 158).

This spiritual kinship and the reputation enjoyed by Grigore Ranite brought him to Mărginimea Sibiului, where he decorated the inner walls of the church in Rășinari.[12] On the southern wall of the nave, his painting included the figure of Christopher, as an iconographic version in complete agreement with the pastoral concerns of the Romanian community: a *military martyr with lamb head* (fig. 1). A similar representation had been introduced in 1738, by Gheorghe Ranite, in the church of Polovragi Monastery's infirmary[13] (fig. 2). The theme was a recent addition to the artistic repertoire of Wallachia; the earliest zoomorphic representation in the mural painting in this principality was that of Păpușa skete, where Hranite – the two artists' father – had been working between 1711–1712.

The position of the Lands of Bârsa and Făgăraș, in the geographic proximity of Wallachia, as well as the fact that some Romanian princes owned estates there, and intensive trade was conducted between the two regions, all stimulated the cultural transfer through the continued activity of certain Romanian painters on both sides of the Carpathians. They also played an important role by establishing painting workshops in Transylvania, thus disseminating the artistic repertoire of Wallachia.

In the Brancovenesque church Saint Nicholas in Făgăraș, unpainted until 1720, the son of Preda from Câmpulung, named after his father who had previously worked at Hurezi,[14] decorated the altar and the nave. The narthex remained unadorned until 1772, when it was painted thanks to the financial support offered by tanner Nițu Pătrașcu (Cristache-Panait 1981: 176). In the upper tier of the narthex, on the southern wall, dog-headed Saint Christopher is shown receiving the angel's blessing, according to the model provided by Romanian hagiography (fig. 3). The cynocephalus figure, with remote origins in a 4th-century Greek text (Woods 1994: 174; Marin Barutcieff 2014: 42), was also chosen in painting several other edifices in the area. In the Land of Făgăraș, it appeared five decades later, at Voivodenii Mici (1821), in a hybrid iconographic version: the *zoomorphic Christ-bearer* (fig. 4). In 1791, Gaftanail left an inscription in the church of Mărgineni, noting that he had completed the painting.[15] In the narthex, on the northern wall, Christopher's zoomorphic representation catches the viewers' eye. His gaze is directed towards

[12] Cuvioasa Paraschiva (Blessed Paraskevi) church in Rășinari was built in 1752–1758, at the expense of the Greek-Catholic bishop Petru Pavel Aron.

[13] To date, I have not identified any other zoomorphic representation in the lamb-headed version, dating between the painting of Polovragi infirmary (1738) and that at Rășinari (1760).

[14] Preda from Câmpulung is recorded as a painter of the chapel of Hurezi monastery (1697), together with Marin and also of the infirmary church within the same monastic ensemble (1699), together with Nicola and Efrem (cf. Crețeanu 1980: 94).

[15] The Greek-Catholic church in Mărgineni (inscription published by Valeriu Literat, an inter-war researcher, whose work was printed only in the 1990s) (cf. Literat 1996: 57).

Christ, whom he is carrying on his left shoulder, but his animal identity is difficult to ascertain: he has an equine appearance, resembling a horse. Another artist, named Teodor, collaborated on this mural painting. It is very likely that the son of this Teodor, who signed his name as Sava from Făgăraș, drew his inspiration from the mural ensemble of Mărgineni in painting two of the churches commissioned to him: in Calbor (1813) and Sâmbăta de Jos (1814). With the latter, the zoomorphic figure indisputably has a lamb's facial features; however, they are much harder to ascertain at Calbor. By analogy, one might perceive them as ovine, rather than canine.[16] At the beginning of the following century, Saint Christopher caught the interest of the artists in the Grecu family – several generations of painters who worked in the Land of Făgăraș and Hârtibaciului Valley, with descendants whose names were recorded well into the 20th century (Literat 1996: 193–196). The first generation included Nicolae and Alexandru, two brothers who undertook the decoration of the church in Sărata. Regrettably, the painting they had completed in 1810 underwent a poorly performed restoration, 200 years later (fig. 5). However, Christopher's figure has survived in the iconography of the narthex, on the western wall, with his Christ-bearer body and a dog's head. Maintaining the hybrid representation, the second generation of Grecu painters: Nicolae-the son and Gheorghe, created at Țichindeal, where they worked between 1815 and 1818, an aggressively-looking figure with a cynocephalus aspect and sharp teeth (fig. 6). They are also credited with the autorship of the painting of 1821, at Voivodenii Mici (Zintz 1986: 469).

The same iconographic types can be found in the Land of Bârsa, where Christopher was preferred during the last quarter of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th. The nave of the church in Râșnov displays a representation that is most likely among the oldest (1773), in the *cynocephalus version*, whereas the other edifices' iconographic programme contain the hybrid figure of the *zoomorphic Christ-bearer*. This is the case of Prejmer (1791), Sânpetru (post 1791), Dârste (1833).[17] A surprising iconographic type was derived from this version: that of the *ogre* (*căpcăun* – etymologically, *dog-headed monstre*). In keeping with folk beliefs shaping the collective imagination in the Land of Bârsa, he has a deformed face, half-human half-dog, with a long snout at the back of the head. It appeared at Tohanu Nou (post 1779?), and was multiplied during the 19th century by the mural decorations in southern Transylvania. This version can thus be found in the vicinity of Brașov, at Cristian (1821) (fig. 7), as well as in the Land of Făgăraș at Veneția de Jos (1801) (fig. 8); there Nicolae Bărbat from Turcheș adopted it and

[16] Following his 1930 visit to the church in Calbor, Valeriu Literat also considered Christopher's figure to be a lamb's (cf. Literat 1996: 206).

[17] At Dârste, the painting was restored in early 21st century. Quite likely, the lamb face actually used to be a dog's one, as in most churches in this region.

introduced it in the fresco painting of the church in Comăna de Jos (1826). The figure of this anthropophagous monster, in-between nature and culture, travelled across the mountains and can also be found in Wallachia, on the walls of the church in Cornu de Sus (1835).

An issue worth discussing is Saint Christopher's position within the syntax of the sacred space, in the region under investigation. To a great extent, but not without exception, it complies with the tradition of Brancovenesque style. The position of the oldest iconographic types to be found in Wallachia: the *Christ-bearer* (1648) and the *cynocephalus- martyr soldier* (1712) was resumed by the edifices in southern Transylvania. We note that his representation as a martyr-soldier (Rășinari, Veneția de Jos, Comăna de Jos, Voivodenii Mici, Cristian) is typically placed inside the nave, most of the times on the southern wall next to the military saints. However, when he is presented as the Christ-bearer in agreement with the *Legenda aurea*, as he can be seen in the Orthodox East as early as the Byzantine iconography, then he is placed within a transition space. This is where one finds his figure at Sărata and Țichindeal (on the western wall of the narthex) or Mărgineni (the narthex, on the northern side). His bare legs, under his rolled-up tunic, the concentric circles illustrating the movement of the rough waters the saint is crossing – all these highlight the eschatological dimension of the theme. For his fight against the dangers of water-crossing denotes Christopher's competence in bearing the One who entrusts Himself to him in the journey towards salvation. The eschatological dimension of this theme becomes even more obvious in the choice made in 1832 by painter Dimitrie, to depict Christopher on the brick gate to the courtyard of the church in Sebeșu de Sus, so that his image may exert its apotropaic function as soon as one sees it.

Conclusions

The figure of Saint Christopher reached the Romanian communities in southern Transylvania during the second half of the 18th century, in a contact area where the Habsburg Empire bordered Wallachia. It was a difficult time for the religious life in Transylvania, with frequent conversions to, and reconversions from the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic denominations.

1761 – the year when the first occurence of this representation in the mural painting of Mărginimea Sibiului is documented, is also the year when general Buccow's order to have Orthodox places of worship destroyed, was carried out.[18] This decision, first

[18] Between 1761–1767, in the Land of Făgăraș were destroyed not only Orthodox monasteries and churches, but also a number of Greek-Catholic ones: Comăna de Sus, Vaida Recea, Gura Văii (cf. Miron 2009: 413).

aplied in the Land of Făgăraș where ties between Transylvanian and Wallachian Orthodox communities were very strong (Miron 2009: 412), denotes the Habsburgs' intention to create a disciplined, centralized state, where religious divergences and the authority of dominant classes would be diminished. This policy also aimed to subvert the influence of Russia on the Orthodox population within the Ottoman Empire (Heppner 1999: 23).

Despite the religious solidarity manifest in the Romanian communities in the Lands of Făgăraș and Bârsa, and although many of his images are present in Orthodox churches, it cannot be asserted that Saint Christopher's figure belongs exclusively to the iconographic programmes of this denomination. Actually, as far as iconography is concerned, there are no differences between the Greek-Catholic and the Orthodox worship places. As already noted, there are Greek-Catholic churches (such as the one in Mărgineni), where this image is present, as well as artists (such as Grigore Ranite) who were commissioned mural paintings by Greek-Catholic hierarchs. This phenomenon of transgressing denominational boundaries in artistic milieus also occurred during the last quarter of the 18th century in central and northern Transylvania.

Even though we discuss about a *confessional solidarity* regarding the construction of churches, engaging those who are alike and who belong to the same in-group confession, the connections with the out-group are still cultivated. *Cultural sensitivity*, in the sense of confessional differences between communities that live in the same area, is diminished by belonging to one ethnicity as well as by maintaining the religious ritual from the time before the Union with Rome in the case of the Greek Catholics.

Although in Wallachia, the earliest iconographic type of Saint Christopher is anthropomorphic, in southern Transylvania his oldest representations are zoomorphic. The lamb-headed saint, shown in the nave of Rășinari church, was perceived as an appropriate image by a community living next to the Carpathians, with shepherding for its main occupation. At the other end of the geographical axis under discussion, in the sub-Carpathian Land of Bârsa, the iconographic version of the ogre – a popular one during the first four decades of the 19th century, reminds us of the interest held by the medieval populations of the Alps in the giant Christopher. Between the zoomorphic representations of the Carpathians, tapping into the ogre folk tales, and the images in the Bavarian Alps, based on the archetypal Wilder Mann, Saint Christopher's the iconographic destiny emerges as an extended cultural trajectory and suggests a fertile relationship between mountainous areas, which calls for in-depth investgation.

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Fig. 1 RĂȘINARI, mural painting from 1760. Photo by S.M. Barutcieff

Fig. 2 POLOVRAGI, mural painting from 1738. Photo by S.M. Barutcieff

Fig. 3 FĂGĂRAȘ, mural painting cca 1772. Photo by S.M. Barutcieff

Fig. 4 VOIVODENII MICI, mural painting from 1821. Photo by S.M. Barutcieff

Fig. 5 SĂRATA, mural painting from 1810. Photo by S.M. Barutcieff

Fig. 6 ȚICHINDEAL, mural painting from 1815–1818. Photo by S.M. Barutcieff

Fig. 7 CRISTIAN, mural painting from 1821. Photo by S.M. Barutcieff

Fig. 8 VENEȚIA DE JOS, mural painting from 1801. Photo by S.M. Barutcieff