

THE BREAD OF THE LORD'S FACE. THE EUCHARISTIC MANDYLION OF THE NOETIC ARK IN ALBA IULIA AND THE LITURGICAL MEMORY OF THE HOLY FACE

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Abstract: The icon is a noetic art, a visual sacrament, a call for the communion of the eyes. This is the truth that the Church of Saints John (the Baptist, the Theologian and Chrysostom) and of Saints Brancoveanu the Martyrs tries to impersonate. This church, called *the Noetic Ark in Alba Iulia*, is one of the most audacious and creative plastic approaches of the architectural and iconographic tradition in contemporary Orthodoxy.

The iconic central seal is represented by the mega-icon of the *mandylion* above the entrance, which presents a theological, Taboric and eschatological concentration or focalization on the Lord's Face and on the image of the entrance of the faithful in heaven, in procession, together with the angels, idea expressed explicitly through the text rendered above it, taken from the prayer of the Little Entrance.

The building was thought in the sense of an archetypal simplicity and of reducing to an iconographic essence the strong signs included in the core of some liturgical texts chosen from the consecration service: the Lord's Face (the facade), the triumphant Lamb (the altar) and the cherubims of the tabernacle (laterally). Above the entrance door and below the mega-scene of the *Dormition of the Theotokos* is represented the liturgical conjunction of the days of 15 and 16 of August, through the *Brancoveanu martyrical mandylion*, which comprises the iconographic expression of twinning the face of the martyrs with the Face of Christ, the Martyr of the

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martyrs.

The present study aims at constituting a contextual presentation of the mystery of the Lord's Face, in the liturgical memory of the Church, starting from the concrete example of the eucharistic *mandylion* in Alba Iulia, which concentrates an innovator iconological endeavour.

Keynotes: *audacious architecture, traditional paintings, Alba Iulia, 'noetic Ark'.*

1. The Noetic Ark and the Eucharistic Mandylion. The Façade turned into a Face and the Church, eucharistic matrix

The whole mutual search of God and man, presented in the biblical books can after all be summed up in two mysteries that render the mystagogic components of the personal divine-human reality called Jesus Christ: His Name and His Face. Calling His Holy Name and longing for His Face are also condensed forms of the Christian spirituality. The icon is a noetic ark, a visual sacrament, a call for the eyes to take communion, to appease the longing for the archetypal and eschatological Face. This is the truth that the Church of Saints John (the Baptist, the Theologian and Chrysostom) and of Saints Brancoveanu the Martyrs tries to impersonate, starting from the very entrance, decorated with a majestic eucharistic mandylion. This church, called *the Noetic Ark in Alba Iulia*¹, is one of the most audacious and creative plastic approaches of the architectural and iconographic tradition in contemporary Orthodoxy.

2. The exterior eucharistic mandylion, implicitly eucharistic

The Façade of the church becomes an immense Face, a vibrant iconic space. The present study aims at presenting contextually the mystery of the Lord's Face in the liturgical memory of the Church, starting from the concrete example of the eucharistic mandylion in Alba Iulia, in the two versions, exterior and interior, which concentrate an innovator iconologic endeavour. The original relations between the different levels of the plastic metaphorization in the process of making this church suggest a paschal passage from Arche-Type to Arche-Face

¹ Ioan POPA/Jan NICOLAE, *Arca noetica de la Alba Iulia*, The Orthodox Romanian Parish Cartier Nou II, Alba Iulia, 2016.

and Arche-Text, that is, the three Incarnations of the Logos: in creation, in Christ, in the Scripture. The great amount of text that accompanies the iconographic display suggests a liturgical memory, a spatial and temporal resonance. Both inside and outside, the iconological syntax is limited to a eucharistic mandylion, placed centrally as a hermeneutical key of the entire discourse. Inside, between the two apses, just like two thematic poles or ends of a papyrus scroll or a liturgical and exegetical manuscript, expands the *rotulus* or the *volumen* of the Kingdom, the iconic and logological messaging of the Kingdom of the unset light, the Arche-Image and the Arche-Text. The lack of strict graphic delimitations of the scenes depicted suggests an iconic unity and a participation of the signs at the same mysterious reality. At the same time, it is suggested a recapitulation in Christ of the signs and symbols, between α and ω , starting from the very exterior images.

The iconic central seal is represented by the mega-icon of the *mandylion* above the entrance, which presents a theological, Taboric and eschatological concentration or focalization on the Lord's Face and on the image of the entrance of the faithful in heaven, in procession, together with the angels, idea expressed explicitly through the text rendered above it, taken from the prayer of the Little Entrance. The radiant face of the Lord contrasts with the white of the exterior walls, investing the church with the function of wrapping the mystery. The Lord's Face is the image of the Church and its representation on the concave entrance façade is also connected to a corporal metaphor related to the freshness of the postmodern architectural idea of *face-houses* and to the one of personalising the building². The façade does not represent an ideological extroversion, but an engagement of the doxological and eucharistic experience inside, to which it tries to convert the state of the person entering the place, recovering programmatically the eschatological dimension of the cult, and first of all of its golden core, the divine Liturgy³.

² Augustin IOAN, *Visul lui Ezechiel. Corp, geometrie și spațiu sacru*, București Anastasia, 1996, p. 89-90.

³ Karl Christian FELMY, "Verdrängung der eschatologischen Dimension der byzantinischen göttlichen Liturgie und ihre Folgen", in K. C. FELMY, *Diskos. Glaube, Erfahrung und Kirche in der neuen orthodoxe Theologie*, Gesammelte Aufsätze, hrsg. Von H. Ohme und J. Schneider, Erlangen, 2003 (see rom.transl. by Picu Ocoleanu,

3. The interior Mandylion, explicitly eucharistic

Above the entrance door and below the mega-scene of the *Dormition of the Theotokos* is represented the liturgical conjunction of the days of 15 and 16 of August, through the *Brancoveanu martyrial mandylion*, which comprises the iconographic expression of twinning the face of the martyrs with the Face of Christ, the Martyr of the martyrs. The procession of the Church's martyrs between Saints Christophorus and Ignatius Theophorus develops in advance a genuine eucharistic theology of martyrdom, rendering visually the concept of eucharistic matrix of the Church. The representation of the communion of Saint Mary the Egyptian in this context represents an urge to take the communion for every believer who participates actively in the liturgical life, so as to acquire the true Face of Christ. The iconographic composition of the western wall was concentrated on four major scenes: up the *Nativity* and the *Presentation of the Theotokos*, having at the center the illustration of a verse in psalm 44 ("Upon thy right hand did stand the queen, in raiment of woven gold arrayed in divers colours"), a unique scene in Romanian iconography, adapted after the well-known mosaic model of Jacopo Torriti (1295-1296) at the Basilica Santa Maria Maggiore (1295), discreetly autochthonized, through the shape and decoration of the throne (the solar rosette and the sign of the moon). Above the main entrance, the scene of the *Dormition of the Theotokos* has an ample expansion, disposed on the height of two usual registers, having an equally important theological approach, which highlights both the Pascha dimension of the Church, as well as the connection of this feast to the Areopagitic *Corpus*⁴,

(ed.), *Teologie și spiritualitate în gândirea Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, Craiova, Mitropolia Olteniei, 2009, p. 78-89); Jan Nicolae, "«...spre liturghia slavei Tale». Criza mistagogiei în Biserică de la catehezele mistagogice la comentariul liturgic - Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul și lecțiile ei catehetice", in *Libertate și responsabilitate. Inițiative și limite în dialogul religios*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea, 2009, p. 488-513.

⁴Jan NICOLAE, "Pathei mathos: învățarea prin pătimire a celor dumnezeiești sau Sfinții Dionisie și Ierotei în contextul hagiografic, omiletic, immografic și icono-logic al sărbătorii Adormirii Maicii Domnului", in Picu Ocoleanu (coord.), *Teologie și filosofie în opera Sfântului Dionisie Areopagitul*, [Studia Theologica 3], Craiova, Mitropolia Olteniei, 2012, p. 215-264.

that is, with the Syrian-Palestinian tradition (Saints Dionysius and Hierotheos being portrayed as “apostles of the Theotokos, together with the hymnographers John Damascene and Cosmas of Maiuma). Above the entrance door and below the mega-scene of the *Dormition of the Theotokos* is represented the liturgical conjunction of the days of 15 and 16 of August, through the *Brancoveanu martyrical mandylion*, rendering iconographically the twinning of the face of the martyrs with the Face of Christ through eucharistic perichoresis. In a spiritual way, by honoring the Face of the Lord, the day of August 16 signifies the eternal joy of the faithful for the beauty of the Bridegroom and that more authentic way of taking communion having the Lord face to face.

The church in Alba Iulia, based on the sacrifice of a priest’s family, materializes the thought of martyrical Romanity. We have the testimony of presbyter *Montanus*, Dacian-Roman saint confessor in the lands near the Danube, in 304, in the time of Diocletian, together with his presbytera *Maxima*, these being the first sacerdotal pair, presbyter and presbytera, known to oriental Romanity. At the same time, the prophecy this martyr makes, on the rise of a faithful people represents a landmark of the greatness of the Christianized Romanity. The prophetic and martyric message creates a symmetry with the Eucharistic synthesis at the table of oblation (the eucharistic ethnicity) in the sense of a Eucharistic dynamics and of an effusion of the spiritual richness of the nations in the ecumenical pleroma of the Church.

The whole iconographic program valorizes the most important landmarks in the philokalic, eucharistic and spiritual renaissance of modern Orthodoxy (St Nicodemus the Hagiorite), but also the impulses coming from the liturgical movement in the twentieth century. The iconography of the western wall uses the symbol and the elaborated allegory, through the appearance of St. Martyr Christopher with a lamb’s head, a suggestion with a strong biblical connotation, but also with autochthonous cultural connotations (the ballad of Mioritza), highlighting the remarkable research of Silvia Marin Barutcieff⁵. The southern side of the western wall ends with the group of *the Holy Maccabean Martyrs and*

⁵Silvia MARIN-BARUTCIEFF, *Hristofor: chipurile unui sfânt fără chip*, Cluj-Napoca, Mega, 2014.

their mother Solomonia, which close the line of the last period of the Old Testament and open the procession of the martyrs of the Church. Next to the entrance door, *St. Zosimas*, the one that reveals to us the life of St. Mary the Egyptian, represented immediately next to the main access in the church, receiving the Holy Communion, an urge to take the communion for every believer who participates actively in the liturgical life, so as to acquire the true Face of Christ. A great confessor and apostolic father of the Church is *St. Martyr and Hierarch Ignatius the Theophorus* (†107), the eucharistic face of the bishop par excellence, martyred in Rome, in the arena, lacerated by hungry lions, developing in anticipation a true eucharistic theology of martyrdom⁶, which had to be integrated in the ample eucharistic display in this church: “I am God’s grain, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found the pure bread of Christ”⁷. Actually, this whole hagiographical register near the doxological entrance door renders visually the concept of eucharistic matrix of the Church. In the northern area, the line of the holy women opens with *St. Maxima* – the presbytera, *St. Theodora of Sihla*, *St. Parasceve of Iași* and *St. Martyr Philophteia of Curtea de Argeș*, continuing to the west with *Saint Martyrs Sophia* and her three daughters, *Elpis*, *Pistis* and *Agapis*, which impersonate allegorically the eucharistic foundation and consistency of virtues.

The Noetic Ark in Alba Iulia puts forward a radical conversion in the century of nihilism through a poetics and apologetics (1 Peter 3, 15) of beauty, by revealing the profound rationality of the trinitarian love, more powerful, mysterious and paradoxical than the speculative or calculating reason, specific to metaphysics and to sciences⁸. Beyond the temptation of the simplistic diabolization of the century or of isolation, the Logos utters through these walls - membrane, in accordance with the thoughts of the founders, the resonance of the music of the mystery, according to an order of beauty. The way in which this church was made, by conjugating the work of several people (founder, priest, architect,

⁶ IRINEU Slătineanu, “Martiriul ca jertfă euharistică”, in Picu Ocoleanu/Radu Preda (ed.), *Viață liturgică și etos comunitar. Preliminarii la o teologie socială ortodoxă*, Craiova, Mitropolia Olteniei, 2007, p. 15-31.

⁷ ST. IGNATIUS, *Epistola către Romani*, IV, *apud* Irineu Slătineanu, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

builder, painter, sculptor, stone mason, liturgical goldsmith, textilist etc.) through the divine providence, represents in itself a rational service, proper to the Logos, for the conversion of the world by the beauty of the Sacrifice of the Logos made man. The Church materializes and assumes morphologically and iconologically the mission of conversion through the brightness of the beauty of the Logos:

“The idea that lay at the foundation of this unusual work is that «the ancient novelty» of the preaching of the Church is incompatible to the stereotype of any kind, including the architectonic one, and overcoming the dead end of stylistic tautology can be a sign of metanoia at the level of the spiritual life of the Orthodox ecclesia”⁹.

The ecclesial building amalgamates in its structure the subtle volumetry of a nave-tabernacle with the anthropological symbolism of conversion. The cruciform receptacle of the church becomes a vessel of light, a space of glorification and of the transparency of a beauty organized iconographically, a palace of the divine feast. The wing of the guardian angel of the church calls gently in the archetypal inlet of the threshold, which contains itself a rich maternal symbolism (womb, cave), paradisiacal/protological (protective matrix) and eschatological (wavy rock, shadowy mountain). The relation between the strong body of the church and the floating roof seems to render the rest or the shadowing of the Holy Spirit over the body of Christ. The shape of the church, similar to an Athonite cell, suggests a matrix space of the renaissance in Spirit, a magnificent bird, a rock waving towards the eschaton, symbol of the gestation of the new creation, of a spiritualized space by the liturgical mystery celebrated inside it.

The iconographic project is concentrated on a typological and symbolical iconography, inserted on the essential idea of a resonance box of the liturgical mystery, of a metaphor-space of the liturgical and diachronic pulsation (Christ, the Heart and Head of the Church, as in the theology of St. Nicholas Cabasilas), a theological element as binder between the mystagogical reflection, the architectural form and the iconographical display: the undulation of the membrane wall keeps this

⁹ Augustin IOAN, '*Retrofuturism*': *cum se (mai) pot construi biserici astăzi?*, commentary taken from the forum www.crestinortodox.ro/forum/showthread.php?t (accessed August 29, 2011).

eucharistic music of the divine-human heart, the thematic and morphological articulations being made at the middle level inside the church, that of the iconostasis. The yellow parchment background displayed inside suggests the honey of the glory, the Latin *serenitas*, the savor of the eschatological light and peace. The Noetic Ark is an apiary full of the honey of the Kingdom. The Noetic Ark is an iconic tabernacle situated in the womb of tradition and it fructifies the iconographic ecumenical heritage of the Christian millennium. Although the architect had conceived the exterior as an uninterrupted *continuum* destined to an iconographic display similar to the ones of the well-known Moldavian churches, the special form of the edifice required in the end a re-thinking process, in the sense of the archetypal simplicity and of reducing to an iconographic essential the powerful signs included in the core of some liturgical texts chosen from the service of the consecration of churches, displayed under the form of a *grafitti* band, on three rows, in the upper side under the window: the Face of the Lord (the façade), the triumphant Lamb (the altar) and the cherubims of the tabernacle (laterally).

The passage from the morphology of this unique architectural edifice to its embellishment is a passage from archetypes to iconic archetypology. The archetypal fluid architecture created by Dorin Ștefan is valorized by the iconographic program based on the theology of the signs and seals (the Mother of the Sign, the Sign of Jonah, the Christological signs and names between alpha and omega), on the paschal, baptismal and eucharistic typology. The prominence of the fluid sculpturality of the architectural corpus, which enters a creative dialogue with the sacred architecture of Corbusier as well as with modern minimalism and with the formal medieval Athonite austerity, led to the choice of the iconic seals inside.

Although initially the church was conceived so as to be embellished with fresco and mosaic on the exterior as well, eventually, its special sculptural shape difficult to read under a layer of fresco, made everything be re-thought, reaching the final formula of the mega-icon of the Arche-Face (*Mandylion*) at the entrance, on the curved façade above the door, under the form of a ship sail or of a tapestry icon banner (à la Horia Bernea), surmounted by a *grafitti* with the entrance prayer - "Blessed is the entry of Thy holy ones always, now and ever and unto the

ages of ages”. This surrounds the whole edifice, integrating, according to the model of the entrance *Mandyllion* a decorative figure, a cherubim on each lateral apse and the triumphant Lamb, on the apse of the altar. The texts chosen to decorate the exterior frieze are significant fragments from the service of the consecration of churches, meant to illustrate its meaning of house of the glory of the Trinitarian Lord and of sparkle of the beauty of the *Logos*. The edifice is a resonance box, a box of liturgical perspective, but also a *black box* of essential texts in the sense of comprising its own liturgical memory.

The music of the bells is connected to the function of the church as resonator of the liturgical mystery, illustrated in a series of iconographic signs and in a mysterious musical osmosis between the inside and the outside: the altar in the scene of the Communion of the Apostles, the thrones and the musical pedestals, the canopy of the Dormition of the Theotokos, the undulation and the musical rhythm of waters and theophanies, the wings of the angels in the shape of lyres, the octagonal musical score of the Heruvikon and of the Trisagion, the the Alleluia above the entrance, the music of the seals of the book on which is the triumphant Lamb, and last but not least, the musical resonance suggested by the exterior *grafitti* band in the service of consecration, which unites the eucharistic Liturgy to the cosmic Liturgy.

The ornament at the entrance door connects to the eschatological theme of the Face of the Lord: on the two leaves of the door are represented in bronze two angels carrying the sun and the moon on their foreheads, and the ornament comprises biblical and liturgical writings: “new Heaven; new Earth; Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia”; the central nucleus of the great doxology. The decoration of the entrance door comprises on the inside two angels with the trumpets of the Apocalypse on the two door leaves, sealed with the texts: “Alpha and Omega” and “the King of Kings and the Lord of the Lords. Amen. Alleluia” from the Book of the apocalypse, emphasizing the entering of the community of the Church as new Israel in the imperial space of the divine feast. But perhaps the most powerful theological suggestion of the two representations of the mandylion in the Noetic Ark in Alba Iulia is the eucharistic seal IC XC NI KA, the sigil on the Prospora used on the icon, connected to the amazing fact that the priests at the Temple took out the Golden Table with the Bread of the Presence so that the pilgrims could see it on the occasion

of the three feasts (Pascha, Pentecost, the Feast of the Tabernacles), raising it and uttering the prophetic words: “Behold, God's love for you!”, thus creating the experience of a public theophany: “In other words, showing pilgrims the Showbread (Exodus 25,30), the priests at the Temple fulfilled the Law which commanded them to see the face of the Lord”¹⁰.

4. The liturgical memory of the Lord's Face in the Church

The feast of Transfiguration, paradigm par excellence of the iconographic experience of theosis finds here a wonderful extension in the feast of the Holy Face of the Lord on August 16th, after the Dormition of the Theotokos, when the churches of Byzantine tradition commemorate each year the Translation of the Icon Not-Made-by-Hands of our Lord from Edessa to Constantinople¹¹, an event which occurred in 944 AD, in the time of emperor Romanos Lekapenos. The Synaxarion¹² of the day took the form of an ample “narratio de imagine edessena”¹³, attributed to the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and constitutes, together with the homily of Gregory the Referendum¹⁴, the main sources on the constantinopolitan celebration at the middle of the

¹⁰ Brant PITRE, *Misterul Cinei de pe urmă. Isus și rădăcinile iudaice ale Euharistiei*, Romanian translation by Monica Broșteanu, București, Humanitas, 2016, p. 154 ș.u.

¹¹ Ștefan IONESCU BERECHET, „TO AΓION ΜΑΝΔΗΛΙΟΝ: istoria unei Tradiții”, in *Studii Teologice*, no. 2/2010, p. 109-185; Mark GUSCIN, *The Image of Edessa*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2009.

¹² “Memoria in translationem imaginis Domini”, *Menologii Anonymi Byzantini saeculi X quae supersunt* (ed. Bas.Latyšev, Petropoli 1911), p. 282-285.

¹³ Ernst von DOBSCHÜTZ, *Christusbilder. Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende. (Texte u. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 3)*, Leipzig, 1899, p. 39-45, p. 138-249, p. 102-196; Hans BELTING, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, C.H. Beck Verlag, München, 2006, p. 208-224.

¹⁴ André-Marie DUBARLE, “L’ homélie de Grégoire le Référendaire pour la réception de l’ image de l’ Edesse”, in *Revue des études byzantines*, vol. 55, Paris, 1997, p. 5-51. Bernard FLUSIN, “L’empereur hagiographe. Remarques sur le rôle des premiers empereurs macédoniens dans le culte des saints”, în *L’empereur hagiographe. Culte des saints et monarchie byzantine et post-byzantine*, Textes réunis et prescutés par Petre Guran, New Europe College – Institut d’études avancées & Institut des Études Sud-Est Européennes de l’Académie Roumaine, *Revue des Études Sud Est Européennes*, Colegiul Nou Europă, 2001, p. 29-54; p. 48.

tenth century, dedicated to one of the most enigmatic and controversial Christian relics: the miraculous impression of the Face of the Lord on a mandylion, a towel sent to king Abgar V of Edessa with an epistle in order to cure him of leprosy. The image not made by human hands became a protector (*palladion*) of the city of Edessa, together with the epistle accompanying it, being hidden in the wall of the gate by the local bishop after the abjuration of faith of Manu VI, the nephew of Abgar. The mandylion was at one time found, at the beginning of the sixth century, having a miraculous role in defending the citadel against the Persian assault in 544. According to tradition, the icon was also impressed on the brick behind which it had been hidden, being later taken over in iconography in this double form: mandylion and keramion¹⁵. The fact that this relic was preserved in the territory of the Arab empire, guarded it against the havoc of iconoclasm, but it became coveted by the Byzantine emperors, a century after the triumph of the veneration of icons. Hence, this translation of the mandylion is part of a long series of transfers of the relics of Christ and of the saints, through which the Byzantine emperors aimed at increasing their prestige. Particularly emperor Constantin VII Porphyrogenitus, called a hagiograph emperor, who composed himself hagiographic works, inventorized by P. Lemerle¹⁶, among which we ought to mention, besides the narrative on the translation of the mandylion, a few others: the speech on the translation of the relics of Saint John Chrysostom, the homily on the chains of Saint Peter, the panegyric on the translation of the relics of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. The hagiographic narrative dedicated to the translation of the mandylion, a compilation which tries to limber the contradictions between the various stories, is marked, as it was remarked by specialists, by a powerful ideological aspect, revealed by the providential coincidence between the arrival of the image of Christ and the return of Constantin VII Porphyrogenitus on the imperial throne. The imperial ambition wished to turn Constantinople into a new Jerusalem by collecting the most important Christian relics. Deacon Gregory the Referendum at the church of Hagia Sophia, the author of the homily on

¹⁵ Vasile MANEA, *Icoana lui Hristos cea neșăcută de mână*, Cluj-Napoca, Patmos, 2011, p. 57 ș.u.

¹⁶ P. LEMERLE, *Le premier humanisme byzantin*, Paris, 1971, p. 270-272.

the celebration of August 16th, was also a treasurer and keeper of these imperial relics.

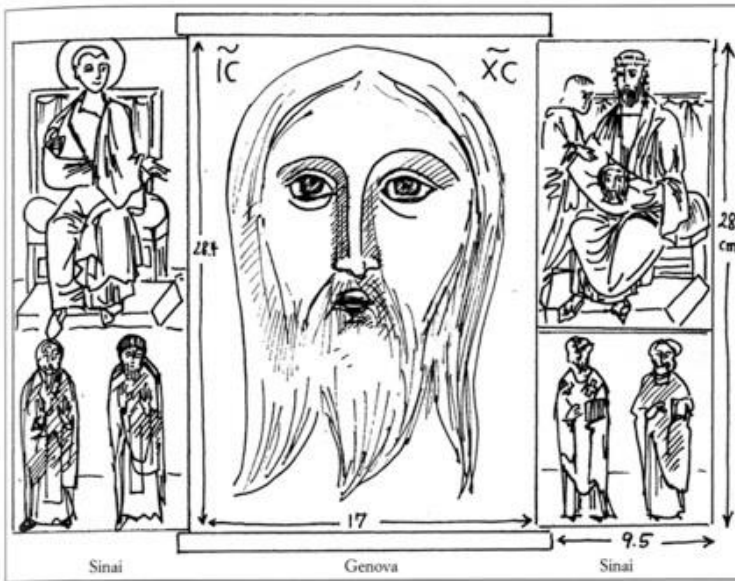
The image not made by human hands was carried in a public procession in the evening of August 15, in a tabernacle compared with that of the Old Covenant, it was brought at night in the church of Our Lady of Vlacheria, and on August 16 it was carried on a galley around the city in order to guard and protect the people, it was placed symbolically in turns on the altar of Hagia Sophia and on the throne, and finally it was put in the chapel of the Lighthouse (Pharos) in the imperial palace, where it remained until 1204, when during the fourth crusade it was apparently stolen along with other liturgical objects and holy relics. The miraculous icon (*acheiropoietia*) was treasured and considered not an ordinary image displayed to everyone's vision and honor, but a royal relic with a thaumaturgic and protector role, given by its quality of print and seal (*theion aposphragisma tou prosopou sou* Ode 5 of the Byzantine office¹⁷) of the Lord's Face, a strong evidence of the concrete reality of the Incarnation. The wonderful icon brought along the multiplication of gifts when they moved it from the small town of Edessa to the great city of New Rome. According to tradition, St. Tadeus or Haddai, one of the 72 disciples of the Lord, was invited by St. Thomas to convert the people of Edessa.

In a famous icon from the collection of Saint Catherine monastery on Mount Sinai, Ananias is depicted entrusting the image of Acheropita to King Abgar of Edessa. According to K. Weitzmann, King Abgar is represented with Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus' treaty of 944, identified as the author of *Narratio de Imagine edessena*. The icon in Sinai could be one of the first reproductions of the Saint Mandylion in Constantinople. The artist represented him big with fringed edges. The icon is composed of two panels accompanying the central panel of a triptych. Hans Belting notices the correlation of the measure of the cedar panel of the Mandylion in Genoa¹⁸.

¹⁷ E. von DOBSCHÜTZ, *Christusbilder. Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*, Leipzig, 1899, p. 120-126.

¹⁸ Hans BELTING, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte ...*, p. 212; Sorin DUMITRESCU, *Noi și icoana (I)*, București, Anastasia, 2010.

Both of the hagiographic documents evoked, *narratio de imagine Edessena* and the homily of Gregory the Referendum recalls how the image of the Lord's Face was imprinted miraculously on a towel, on which the Savior wiped His face with after washing it with water in order to help the painter Ananias, the messenger of King Abgar to capture his image, or the sweat turned into blood during the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. The kenotic image of God had a Taboric effect on King Abgar, who suffered in a different way what had suffered those who saw the brilliant form (*tén astrápsasan morphén*) on Tabor”.



The liturgical memory of the Church perpetuates the memory of the Mandylion in the Byzantine icons of the Holy Face and in the celebration of August 16, with its rich hymns. The liturgical feast of Lord's Face on August 16 develops the multiple meanings of the event (Ioan Ică jr.), but primarily it shows the dogmatic foundation of the image and its destination (L. Ouspensky), starting from the biblical readings of the full liturgical service (Old Testament readings of Vesper Deuteronomy 4; Dt 5; I Kings 7; theLiturgy: Col. 1:12-18; Luke 9:51-56

and 10:22-24).

Also, the Latin Christian hemisphere holds various copies of the Mandylion and a popular devotion dedicated to the Holy Face¹⁹, materialized in processions, pilgrimages, hymns like “*Salve sancta facies*”²⁰ and numerous hymns of honor²¹. In fact, the legend of King Abgar was largely propagated, including in the Romanian folk culture²².

Although the Romanian Menaion for the month of August contains a short service, the hymnographic canon renders the connections between the Holy Face of the Lord and the quality of the Son as ontological icon of the Father, anticipated on the face of Moses on Sinai, shown with brightness and strongly confessed through the Incarnation, the Transfiguration and the Ascension.

Following the ideas of the great iconologist L. Ouspensky, Father Ioan Ică jr. interprets the hymnographic canon of this theological feast: “by impressing His divine-human Face, the Lord authenticated the Incarnation, and through His Ascension he elevated the archetype of this impression in the bosom of the Father, giving us in exchange – up to the eschatological vision face to face – the resemblance of the archetype in the icon for veneration (*oikos*)”²³. Thus, the holy mandylion is represented as a treasury of the archetypal Beauty entrusted to the Church, the new Israel, in the iconic tabernacle of the new Covenant, in front of which Christian emperors jubilate and bounce, just like King David did once.

¹⁹*Dévotion à la sainte Face de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* avec prières, neuvaine, chemin de la croix à l'honneur de la sainte Face et la messe de la passion de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, 1887, by J.A. Langlais in Québec.

²⁰ John Oliver HAND, “*Salve sancta facies*: Some Thoughts on the Iconography of the *Head of Christ* by Petrus Christus”, in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, v. 27/1992, p. 7-18.

²¹ Joseph FABIANI, *Disertación histórico - dogmática sobre la sagrada reliquia de la SSma. Faz de Ntro. Sr. Jesu Christo, venerada en la ciudad de Alicante...*”, Murcia, 1763.

²² Nicolae CARTOJAN, “Legenda lui Abgar în literatura veche românească”, București, 1925, in *Convorbiri literare*, aprilie/1925, p. 243-261 (și extras); IDEM, *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, vol. I: Epoca influenței sud-slave, București, Casa Școalelor, 1929, p. 135-141.

²³ Ioan ICĂ jr, “Misterul Feței lui Hristos în Tradiția ortodoxă: Eikón-Prosópon-Icoană. Memoria istorică și liturgică a investirii unei tradiții: Sinodul VII ecumenic”, in *Omagiu Părintelui academician Dumitru Popescu*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea, 2005, p. 103.

Conclusions

Entering the Bread and appearing before the Lord. The iconographic program of the Noetic Ark, iconic tabernacle of the New Covenant, valorizes the liturgical memory of the day of August 16, and thus comprises, not by chance, the representation of the eucharistic mandylion in which the seal on the Showbread passes on the Lord's Face as an invitation to a continuous Eucharistic jubilation and to an epectatic ascent in the light of the eschatological Face of the Bridegroom of the Church.

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The 'Noetic Ark', Alba Iulia, photo -Vladimir Bulat, 2015



Eucharistic mandylion with the faces of the Saints Brancoveanu, the Noetic Ark, Alba Iulia, painter Ioan Popa, 2014



Immagine edessena. Madrid, The National Library of Spain, Codex Skylitzes, ms Vit. 26-2, *Synopsis Historiarum*, sec. XIII, f. 131



St. Taddueus; King Abgar receiving the mandylion; Saints Paul of Thebes and Anthony the Great; Saints Basil the Great and Ephrem the Syrian tempera on wood, the Syrian-Palestinian area, cca 940, St. Ekaterina Monastery , Mount Sinai.