

## **Iconography and Memory**

### **Images of priests in the Romanian painting of Sibiu area, in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries**

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#### **Abstract:**

Beyond the primary function it fulfills, that of artistically expressing religious concepts and being a concrete manifestation of the faithful's piety, Christian iconography has acquired, over a long historical development, a new dimension: that of being evocative of the past. Most churches and icons that decorate their interior are in fact proofs of gestures of penance and acts of devotion from those who, making them possible, have hoped that, in this way, they will not be forgotten and that their prayers will rekindle, again and again, in the prayers worshipers coming after them, just as icon lamps are relighted and candles are renewed in the candlesticks of altars.

Often, names found in votive inscriptions have been associated with faces of founders, reproduced by painters after real models, not shaped by their „imagination”. Those having survived the passage of time contribute to the great work of reconstruction that historical science aims to achieve, working primarily with written documents, where they exist, but also with, “everything that the ingenuity of the historian allows him to use in order to produce honey, in the absence of ordinary flowers”, as pointed out by Lucien Febvre.

Our aim is to reclaim some such iconographic documents which may serve, in combination with other sources, to a richer and more expressive reconstruction of Transylvanian clergy's condition in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

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**Keywords:**

Transylvanian priests; Popa Ivan the Painter; Nistor Dascalul the painter; Peter the Painter from Topârcea; Dimitrie Dunitriu the painter; Ioan of Boița the painter; painter John Costandea

The oldest portrait of a priest in the region of Sibiu, acknowledged so far, is found in the votive painting of the “Holy Archangels” church from Ocna Sibiului (Fig. 1), part of the overall mural ensemble completed in 1723, unsigned but however attributed, according to the latest research, to painters Popa Ivan and Nistor Dascalul from Rășinari<sup>1</sup>.

The Church was founded by prince Constantin Brancoveanu, who built it on the foundation of a previous Orthodox worship edifice, which was under the same name of the “Archangels” ever since its founding, in 1595, by Mihai the Brave. Having been, most likely, a wooden building, the old church was destroyed in a fire that occurred in 1696<sup>2</sup>.

The inscription next to the figures depicted in the votive painting of the current church indicates, as founder, the name of “Prince Constandin Basarab Brancoveanu” and “Popa Iion ot Vizocnă”, as its sub prefect, that is as administrator of the money donated by the Wallachian prince and representative of the latter in finding builders and supervising works.

The reason that prompted Constantin Brancoveanu to perform that founding act, beyond the borders of his country, is related, as pointed out by researcher Saveta-Florica Pop, to the “situation whereby the prince made contact with the community of Ocna ... in 1690, when he installed Tököly as prince of Transylvania<sup>3</sup>, when “he started from there, from Cîrstiiianul and went down beyond Sibiu, and reached Ocna”<sup>4</sup>. It is the moment when, as further indicated by the researcher mentioned above, priest Ioan, a character who supports, in the votive painting, along with Constantin Brancoveanu, the model of the church, could welcome the Wallachian prince as a guest, a circumstance in which he could talk about the

<sup>1</sup> Saveta-Florica Pop, Elena-Daniela Cucui, Ana Dumitran, „Zugravul Nistor Dascalul din Rășinari”, in Consiliul Județean Alba, Asociația Culturală Sarmizegetusa, *Nemus*, year V (2010), no. 9-10, Altip Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2010, pp. 67, 68.

<sup>2</sup> Corneliu Creangă, „Contribuția lui Constantin Brâncoveanu la zidirea unei biserici în Ocna Sibiului”, in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, Year XI, January-March, 1966, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Ștefan Meteș, *Istoria bisericii și a vieții religioase a românilor din Transilvania și Ungaria*, Vol. I, Sibiu, 1935, pp. 365-366

<sup>4</sup> Radu Greceanu, *Istoria domniei lui Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu Voievod (1688- 1714)*, București, p.85, *apud*, Saveta-Florica Pop, „Pictura murala a bisericii lui Mihai Viteazul de la Ocna Sibiului” in *Conservarea și Restaurarea Patrimoniului Cultural*, Vol. IX, Iasi, 2009, TRINITAS Publishing House, Iași, p.135, n. 42.

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troubles of Ocna's community. Probably that occasion generated the restoration of the church built by the predecessor of the great ruler, though only when the priest was short of money, a few years later, in 1696, he had gone to Wallachia to meet Constantin Basarab, who gave him "1000 Hungarian coins"<sup>5</sup> and the restoration work lasted between 1696-1699. The donation of the Wallachian ruler was supplemented by the contributions of the faithful in Ocna, who borrowed, for that purpose from one of the wealthy inhabitants of Ocna"<sup>6</sup>.

However, we should point out, in relation to this reconstruction of the facts, that in 1690, when Constantin Brancoveanu was in Ocna, the church of Mihai the Brave was still there and was certainly visited by the ruler. And only its destruction, a few years later, in the fire of 1696, determined the situation when priest Ioan took the road of Wallachia, to ask for support in the reconstruction of the church, from the one who, just a little while earlier, had stopped in the village and had entrusted the people of Ocna of the support he was determined to ensure to the Romanian Church in Transylvania. When the Romanian community in Ocna Sibiului was widowed of the old place of worship, the Wallachian ruler helped them to build a new church, a more durable one, with brick and stone walls.

As indicated by the inscription preserved in the votive painting, the building of the new church had already been completed in the first year of the eighteenth century: "Constantin Basarab Brancoveanu made this church, which was raised in the year 1701 and painted in 1723. And Popa Iion of Ocna was administrator". As indicated above, the church was painted by the masters of Rasinari, Popa Ivan and Nistor Dascalu, who painted the portraits of the two founders.

If the portrait of the prince founder, killed by the Turks in 1714, was reproduced from memory, or more probably it was copied after one of the models the two painters could admire in the numerous effigies of the prince, illustrating the printed documents he had sponsored<sup>7</sup>, or in votive paintings from churches and

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<sup>5</sup> Ioan Broju, *Biserica din Ocna Sibiului – 1600 sau 1701?*, Sibiu, 1892, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Saveta-Florica Pop, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Nicolae Iorga, from whom we have the first appreciation related to the votive portrait of Constantin Brancoveanu, found it unrealistic, when he had identified it, in 1906, in the church from Ocna Sibiului „amidst the fresh lime, a portrait of Brancoveanu, painted by a poor local craftsman, after imagination, with Hungarian caplac, long mustaches and a loose white beard” (Nicolae Iorga, *Neamul românesc în Ardeal și Țara Ungurească*, vol. I, București, „Minerva”, 1906, p. 178). The same Nicolae Iorga published, two decades later, another portrait of the Prince. Wearing on the head a similar caplac with that represented by the two painters from Rășinari. The image was a photographic reproduction after the illustrated page of a manuscript or a printed document, from a work yet unidentified but nevertheless attributed by the historian to Metropolitan Bishop Antim Ivireanul. Iorga had identified that photo on the occasion of a visit to Breaza castle, who had belonged to Constantin Basarab Brancoveanu, a follower of the martyr Prince (Nicolae Iorga, „Portrete și lucruri

Brancovenian monasteries beyond the Carpathians', in the case of Priest Ioan, (Figure 2) we can admit that the image was done after the live image, reproducing directly the features of the one who was still the parish priest of Ocna's community and the one who had contracted the painting of the church. Priest Ioan was also the one who ordered, for the church, in 1724, "two royal icons and an altar screen that are now preserved in the museum of the parish"<sup>8</sup>, signed and dated by painter Pop Ivan from Rășinari.

The recent restoration of the fresco, including the space of the votive painting, allows a good reception of the image of the second character in the composition. The face of the sexagenarian priest reflects a surprising strength, through the eyes that open brightly under the black and firmly arched eyebrows, in the middle of the face invaded by harsh beard and sharp mustaches, getting beyond the contour of the cheeks and the rich hair that comes out of the grip of the cap and over the shoulders, in a lion-like mane. He also wears furred surplice and mantle, rich clothes which make him look like a Wallachian boyar, an unexpected element in the representation of a Romanian priest from a Transylvanian small town. This is one of the reasons that determined some interpreters of the painting to attribute to this rather extravagant character a different identity than the one directly suggested by the text of the dedication.

Summarizing the opinions expressed by such researchers, in the order of their contributions' publication, we can see that Ioan Broju believed, in 1892<sup>9</sup>, that the character reproduced in the right side of the painting would be one of Constantin Brâncoveanu's sons, disregarding, in a curious way, or maybe because the image was less readable at that moment, the reality that none of the prince's sons had reached the advanced age of the character whose identity they tried to determine. Some years later, researcher Corneliu Creanga appreciated, in a study published in 1966, that the respective portrait was the representation of the priest identified by the painters with the name written next to the image, that is "priest Ioan from Ocna"<sup>10</sup>.

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domnești nou-descoperite", in *Academia Română, Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice, Series III, Colume IX, Mem. 5*, București, Cultura Națională Publishing House, 1928, pp. 221, IV, fig. 5).

<sup>As</sup> regards the costume of the prince, as illustrated in Ocna, a mantle embroidered with dark fur, worn over a yellow surplice, also embroidered, with sleeves ornated with buttons and belted just as in the image of Brancoveanu in the votive painting completed by Pârvu Mutu in the church of Mamu monastery, in 1699.

<sup>8</sup> Marius Porumb, *Dicționar de pictură veche din Transilvania, sec. XIII-XVIII*, Romanian Academy publishing House, București, 1998, p. 272

<sup>9</sup> Ioan Broju, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Corneliu Creangă, „Contribuția lui Constantin Brâncoveanu la zidirea unei biserici în Ocna Sibiului”, in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, XI, 1966, nr. 1-3, p. 153.

In relation to this last identification of the character, with the priest from the period when the church was built and decorated with icons and mural painting, historian Vasile Drăguț considered it a mere supposition, “infirmated by both the clothes he was wearing and the fact that he holds the model of the church, together with Constantin Brâncoveanu”, though he considered it obvious the fact that the represented person “could be another prince, no other than Mihai the Brave, the first founder of the church?”<sup>11</sup> The supposition was adopted and firmly supported later by Marius Porumb, who acknowledged the merit of Vasile Drăguț to “demonstrate, with solid and convincing arguments, that the image represented Mihai the Brave, the founder, and Constantin Brâncoveanu, the restorer”<sup>12</sup>.

The most recent references to the issue belong to art historian Tereza Sinigalia<sup>13</sup> and researcher Saveta-Florica Pop, who seem to subscribe to the identification done by Corneliu Creanga, according to whom the character next to Constantin Brâncoveanu, in the votive painting, would be priest Ioan. According to Florica-Saveta Pop, at the moment when the portraits from Ocna were painted, there were some other such instances in the painting from Wallachia, when the sub-prefects of large building sites and of the decoration of the monasteries founded by Brâncoveanu, such as, for instance, the case of archimandrite Ioan of Hurez, had the right to be represented among the portraits showing the ones who, with effort and competence, managed to materialize such monumental projects: architects, builder masters, carpenters, stone masons or painters<sup>14</sup>.

However, we should revise the arguments on which attributing a princely identity for the second character in the votive composition were based. Vasile Drăguț had pointed out that “the identification is based on the formal resemblance between the character discussed and Mihai the Brave, not only due to the big round cap worn, but also by the rich beard and hair, the aquiline nose and energetic features, as shown in documents from that epoch”<sup>15</sup>. However, there are some inadequacies in this association with the figure of Mihai the Brave. It is true that the big cap, even if not worn on one side, could be one of the known features associated with the Wallachian prince; however, we should not disregard,

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<sup>11</sup> Vasile Drăguț, „Un portret necunoscut al lui Mihai Viteazul. Însemnări privind biserica din Ocna Sibiului”, in *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice*, year XLI, no. 4, București, 1972, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> Marius Porumb, *Pictura românească din Transilvania*, I. (sec. XIV-XVII), Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1981, p. 74; idem, *Dicționar de pictură veche din Transilvania*, p. 272; idem, *Un veac de pictură românească din Transilvania. Secolul XVIII*, Meridiane Publishing House, București 2003, p. 12, 43-44.

<sup>13</sup> Tereza Sinigalia, *Mihai Viteazul ctitor*, București, 2001, p. 35, *apud*, Florica-Saveta Pop, *op. cit.*, p.39, n. 67.

<sup>14</sup> Saveta-Florica Pop, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Vasile Drăguț, *op.cit.*

as mentioned before, that an impressively rich hair comes out of the cap and over the shoulders, with carefully arranged locks. It appears to be an image resulting from direct observation and the reflection of a necessary feature when the artists decided to reflect a physical feature. In other words, painters Ivan and Nistor used no convention of representation, but rendered the character looking at his characteristic features, looking directly at the model standing in front of them. In addition, the portraits in the epoch that depicted Mihai the Prince reflect the image of a man who, when represented with the head uncovered, is particularized by “the enormously high forehead, obviously bare, but with a rich hair on the temples”<sup>16</sup>, though cut shortly, up under the back of the head. Only in one case, preserved in a Romanian church, that is in the votive painting from the narthex of the church from Caluiu monastery, Mihai has long hair, though thin and going down to the base of the throat.

Continuing the way of thinking used by Vasile Drăguț in interpreting the votive painting in Ocna Sibiului, Marius Porumb considered it appropriate in unravelling the identity of another character, painted in a similar iconographic stance (Figure 3), in the narthex of the former Bishopric church of the Orthodox monastery from Geoagiu de Sus (Alba county)<sup>17</sup>.

As part of the overview on the old Romanian painting in Transylvania, published in 1981, academician Marius Porumb described the content of the painting from Geoagiu de Sus in the following way: ‘on the Western wall (of the narthex) a votive painting is still preserved, representing a prince who holds the model of the church. Next to it, an inscription in Romanian, written with Cyrillic characters, has the following content: «[Pe]tru Archpriest of Carlovu founder of the church. Rucopiseș Popa Ivan Zugrav i Nistor. (1724)<sup>18</sup> Mș. May 5 days[e]». Obviously, the inscription does not refer to the character represented in the painting, that one being a prince, not a priest, dressed with a mantle lined with sable and pinned in

<sup>16</sup> Nicolae Iorga, „Portrete și lucruri domnești nou-descoperite”, p. 220, sketch I, fig. 2.

<sup>17</sup> This church was built in the seventeenth century, with the support of the Wallachian prince Radu from Afumați, but the monastery where it was built was destroyed by Habsburgic authorities, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the place of worship being later taken over by the Greek-Catholic church, who owned it until 1792, when the Romanian community in the town returned to the Orthodox religion. See *Șematismul veneratului cler al Arhidiecezei metropolitane Greco-catolice române de Alba Iulia și Făgăraș, pe anul 1900 de la Sânta Unire 200*, Blaj, Tipografia Seminarului Arhidiecezan, p. 122; for the history of this place of worship see also T. Ciuruș, „Biserica mănăstirii din Geoagiu de Sus. Contribuție la istoricul ei”, in *Apulum*, II, 1943-1945, p. 407-411; Suzana Andea, A. Andea, „Date noi privind bisericile din Geoagiu de Sus în secolul al XVIII-lea”, in *Ars Transsilvaniae*, volume III, Cluj-Napoca, 1993, pp. 175-184.

<sup>18</sup> The year 1724, written with Cyrillic numbers in the inscription has been omitted by the author.

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the front part, worn on the shoulders under which the mantle is held around the waist with a belt<sup>19</sup>. The prince, with his energetic features, wears beard and mustache that mingle, as well as long hair. The head seems to be covered by a rich cap, only the lower part of it being visible. The identification of the founder with Mihai the Brave is also based on the formal resemblance of the character in the votive painting from Geoagiu de Sus with the representation of the prince in documents from that epoch, but also with his figure in the painting of the church in Ocna Sibiului<sup>20</sup>. The historian returned, several years later, to the same image from Geoagiu de Sus, making corrections only to the mistaken reading of the name of the archpriest who mentioned the inscription “[Dumi]tru”, instead of „[Pe]tru”<sup>21</sup> and maintaining the point of view according to which the painter from 1724 would have willingly omitted, as it happened a year before, at the church from Ocna Sibiului, writing next to the paintings the name of prince Mihai, to avoid generating” the resentment of Transylvanian authorities”<sup>22</sup>.

We should keep in mind, from this description, that the character in the votive painting is definitely a founder, being represented in the specific attitude of the one who presents the ark of the church. However, we know that the church from Geoagiu de Sus was not founded by Mihai the Brave, but probably by Radu from Afumați.

The founder in the votive painting has no physiognomic resemblance to prince Mihai’s features, as we know them. The man in the painting from Geoagiu de Sus has long silky hair, longer than the shoulders’ level. The beard is also long and the mustaches are not curved upwards and sharp at the ends but go down to the corners of the mouth, emphasizing the pale figure of the man with long and delicate features. In conclusion, the painter has drawn a figure with sober and distinguished features and a rather meditative expression, thus dissimilar to the voluntary spirit reflected by Mihai the Brave’s portraits, resembling more a priest than a warrior.

We should also note that there is no correspondence, but rather an obvious contrast between the portrait in Geoagiu de Sus and the face painted by the same artists, Ivan and Nistor, only one year before, in the church from Ocna Sibiului. What could be the explanation for the conspicuous dissimilarity between two portraits meant to evoke the same historical character?

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<sup>19</sup> Corina Nicolescu, *Istoria costumului de curte în țările române*, Scientific Publishing House, București, 1970, p. 244-245.

<sup>20</sup> Marius Porumb, *Pictura românească din Transilvania*, I., p. 75,76.

<sup>21</sup> The correct reading of the inscription requires few changes in relation to the transcription published: „[DUMI]TRU ARCHPRIEST OF CARLOVAR [F]OUNDER OF THE CHURCH. RUCOPISEȚ POPA IVAN PAINTER I NISTOR. 1724 MST. MAY 5 DAY[S]”.

<sup>22</sup> Idem, *Un veac de pictură românească din Transilvania. Secolul XVIII*, p. 44.

It would be reasonable to admit therefore that, as in the case of the portrait from Ocna Sibiului, the represented person might be the one whose name was written by painters next to the image.

Starting with 1698, the parish church from Geoagiu de Sus came into the possession of the Greek Catholics, up until 1758 or, according to some other opinions, until 1792<sup>23</sup>, when the community returned to the Orthodox religion. In this time span, more exactly in 1724, the building was restored and the mural painting renewed by the care of Dumitru, the Greek Catholic archpriest of Alba Iulia or Carlovar, this last name that appears in the inscription representing in fact the Romanian transcription of the German name for Balgrad, Karsburg.

We have no other information about this founder, except the fact that he became archpriest after 1700, the year when his predecessor Petru was signing, as arch presbyter, the synodic documents for the organization of the new Greek Catholic Church of Transylvania<sup>24</sup>, but before 1714, when we find Dumitru as archpriest and member of the elective synod that gathered to appoint a successor for bishop Atanasie Anghel<sup>25</sup>.

The gesture of introducing a representation of his own figure, in the hypostasis of the founder, within the program of images in a church, should not be considered surprising in the case of a personality with such an important place in the hierarchy of the Church in Transylvania, as the archpriest of Alba Iulia was and therefore should not be considered curious in the case of a priest who became administrator of a church founded by a prince, as it happened in Ocna Sibiului.

In fact, as we shall see further on, examples of such images, whose role was to evoke over time the contribution of some priests to the foundation and decoration of churches, will continue to appear throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

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Returning to Sibiu region, there is evidence that, in the wooden church from Broșteni (Sibiu county), there used to be painted, at the beginning of the last century, above the door that opened to the narthex, the portraits of nine founders of the worship place, from 1743, “all members of Neagoe family”<sup>26</sup>, starting with the

<sup>23</sup> Șematismul 1900, p. 122.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

<sup>25</sup> Silviu Dragomir, *Istoria dezrobirii religioase a românilor din Ardeal în secolul XVIII*, vol. I, Sibiu, 1920, Second Edition, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2002, p. 142; Greta Monica Miron, „...poruncește, scoală-te, du-te, propoveduește...”. *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania. Cler și enoriași (1697-1782)*, Cluj-Napoca 2004, p. 122, n. 196.

<sup>26</sup> Șematismul 1900, pp. 189-190.



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Greek Catholic archpriest Man Neagoe. Meanwhile the worship place ruined, the mural painting being almost entirely lost, except some fragments preserved in the apse of the altar, covered with lime.

Another example of votive representation can only be supposed, in connection to the presence, even today in Rășinari, on the southern wall of the narthex in "Saint Paraskevi" church, of an unusual image, of children Alaman and Bucur, the nephews of priest Șerb (Figure 4). Above the figures of the two children, the painter Grigorie Ranite and his son Ioan, the authors of the painting, introduced, in 1761, a text containing the name of the priest Șerb, his wife and their four children<sup>27</sup>, all having the quality of benefactors for the painting of the wall that used to separate, originally, the nave from the narthex, until its demolition, in the nineteenth century, necessary for the building of the steel-lattice mast. The explanation for the placement of the two young people's portraits among the icons of the narthex, in close proximity to that painted wall, can be only because these used to complete, in fact, the series of founders' figures, belonging to the same family, a series that, easy to be supposed, might have been opened exactly by priest Șerb, which was lost when the wall that served as support for the painting was demolished.

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However, not only the groups of mural painting, in the old churches from Transylvania, still preserve images of some servants of the altars in the region. Beginning with the nineteenth century, painted representations of some priests appear on a specific type of portative icons, such as votive triptychs and, more and more often, their images can be found transposed in the manner of portraits as such, commanded to the painters of the church, of whom, towards the half of the century, practitioners of that new, separate genre of modern art have been chosen.

An example of such a votive triptych<sup>28</sup> is the one commanded by the founders of the Orthodox church "Saint John the Baptist" from Ocna Sibiului (dedicated in

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<sup>27</sup> The members of priest Șerb's family from Rășinari included some of the most enthusiastic benefactors of the newly raised church. Thus, on the upper side of the southern façade, next to the *Deisis* scene, it can be read that this was paid by Șărb spouses. Priest Șerb's children were among the donors for the external mural painting. Next to the large icon of Archangel Michael (southern façade, at the base) among donors were mentioned brothers Bucur and Stanca. Later on, they paid for some of the icons in the church. For instance, that representing Saint Nicholas has the following dedication formula: "This icon was paid by Bucur, son of priest Șerb and by his wife Ana, for eternal remembrance, 1763 G(rigorie) P(ainter)" cf. Emilian Cioran, „Biserica cu hramul Cuvioasa Paraschiva din Rășinari” (The church dedicated to Saint paraskevi from Rășinari), în *Omagiu Înalt Prea Sfinției Sale Dr. Nicolae Bălan Mitropolitul Ardealului, la 20 de ani de arhipăstorire*, Sibiu, 1940, p. 332.

<sup>28</sup> Ioana Cristache Panait, „Zugravul Petru de la Topârcea (Sibiu county)”, în *Academia Română, Institutul de Arheologie și Istoria Artei Cluj Napoca, Artă, Istorie, Cultură. Studii în onoarea lui Marius Porumb*, Nereamia Napocae Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 291.

1810). Not only the unusually large dimensions are surprising at this triptych-dip-tych (Figure 5), but also the introduction of an ample figurative composition, with votive character, in the field of the central panel, right above the scroll where the series of worthy of remembrance persons from Ocna, who had contributed, in 1810, to the founding of the monumental church, were registered. The image renders, in a veridical way, the southern façade of the religious edifice mentioned above, with the slender belfry, closed with a sharp helmet, with the external walls of the nave endowed with blind arcades, placed on two overlapping registers, a decorative manner specific to church architecture in Wallachia, and with a tile-covered roof.

Even more striking is the original manner in which the votive theme has been approached by the famous painter Petru from Topârcea, the author of this very interesting work, is the representation, next to the image of the foundation from Ocna Sibiului, of the two parish priests who strove for the building and decoration of the church (Figure 6). Although he made sure that the persons represented in the painting can be identified, by marking the name next to each representation: “priest Teodor and priest Ioan”<sup>29</sup>, the painter was not equally careful to emphasize a physiognomic differentiation, in the case of the two portraits. Both men have their hair and beards cut in the same way, only the belts of the lawn, yellow in the case of Teodor and black at Ioan introduce a differentiating element, necessary for the painting, or maybe just to indicate a difference of rank between the two.

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The most representative artistic personality for the church art in the region of Sibiu, in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, was a peregrine painter, Dimitrie Dimitriu<sup>30</sup>. Coming to Transylvania from Bucharest, after passing through Ramnicu Valcea, he stayed for a longer period of time in Sibiu, where he organized his workshop, as in his icons that city was mentioned as the residence place of the artist.

He did his apprenticeship as painter of churches and painter of portraits in the workshops of monasteries around Bucharest, Cernica, Călădarușani and Pasărea. The iconographic models he used were also very close to the ones we see in the work of one of his contemporaries, another painter from Bucharest, Nicolae Polcovnicul (1788-1842), of whom we know that he did his formation at the same school of painting where, later on, Gheorghe Tattarescu and Nicolae Grigorescu were apprentices.

<sup>29</sup> More exactly, priest Ioan Ciovică, parish priest between 1793 and 1824 and priest Toader Lungu (1802-1835).

<sup>30</sup> A sketch of the artistic biography of Dinitrie Dimitriu can be seen at : I. Abrudan, „Dimitrie Dimitriu, the Painter from Wallachia”, *Acta Musei Brukenthal* VII.2, Sibiu, 2012, pp. 333-352.

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His work includes a series of icons that formed the painted décor of some altar screens, painted for several churches in the region of Olt and Marginimea Sibiului, or even for some in the city on Cibin river, but also some portraits of priests or distinguished persons from the communities of villages he travelled through, which are even more relevant from the perspective of the theme approached here.

The last work contracted by Dimitrie the painter in the area mentioned above was consecrated to the “Holy Trinity” church of Rășinari (dedicated in 1815). Until 1830, there used to be there an altar screen made of brick, with icons painted by Ioan of Poplaca, which the inhabitants of Rășinari decided to replace with a wooden iconostasis, sumptuously decorated with sculpted and gilded ornaments. The completion of the iconographic group was committed to Dimitrie Dimitriu. We know that at least the royal icons were painted in Râmnicu Vâlcea, in 1834. For the completion of the other numerous scenes, we believe that the artist moved his workshop right in Rășinari, where he seems to have lived for a while, though with interruptions, between 1832 and 1835. From that period date the four portraits we have from him, among which two represent priests.

The first portrait, from the series completed by Dimitriu in Rășinari seems to represent an homage to a venerable member of the Orthodox clergy. The gesture of the travelling painter may be interpreted in this case as a reward, in return for the good accommodation he enjoyed, probably in the parish house. Dean Emilian Cioran<sup>31</sup> gave this information to the historian Ștefan Meteș, who considers that Dimitriu, the talented painter from Wallachia, had painted, in 1832 “the beautiful face of priest Iacob Izrail from Rașinari” (Meteș 1929, 129, n.13). According to the same historian, the portrait belonged to Goga family. Attached, it seems, to that picture, which represented his great-grandfather on the maternal side<sup>32</sup> to who the poet was so fond in his childhood, he took it with himself, keeping it for a while in the residence he built in Ciucea<sup>33</sup>.

What we could find out up to now as regards the fate of the painting is that it no longer belongs to the fine art collection in the castle, which in the meantime has become a memorial museum<sup>34</sup>. We found, however, in the old house of Goga

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129, n. 13.

<sup>32</sup> The son of Iacob, Ioan Isdrailă, was also priest in Rășinari and the father of Maria Isdrailă, who married Ioan Bratul, a nephew of Daniil Popovici Barcianu. They gave birth to Aurelia Paraschiva, the future wife of priest Iosif Goga. These two are the parents of poet Octavian Goga (Constantin Popa, *Rășinari. Istoria și civilizația unui sat din Mărginimea Sibiului*, Sibiu, 2007, p. 94, n. 315)

<sup>33</sup> Ștefan Meteș, „Din istoria artei religioase române, I. Zugravii bisericilor române”, in *Anuarul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice, Transilvania, 1926-1928*, Cluj, 1929 p. 130.

<sup>34</sup> See the list of mobile cultural artefacts in the collection of “O. Goga” Museum from Ciucea, classified in the Cultural National Patrimony and found in the evidence of CIMEC.

family in Rășinari, a portrait (Fig. 12) that seems to correspond to the description given by Ștefan Meteș. We could therefore presume, at some point, that the painting was placed among the old furniture objects inside the house on the Street of Priests.

It is known that Iacob Izrail (Izdrail) was a parish priest in Rășinari, between 1761 and 1809<sup>35</sup>. His name was mentioned in 1815, officiating in the group of priests, led by Bishop Vasile Moga, the consecration service of Holy Trinity Church in Rășinari<sup>36</sup>. Son of the Orthodox priest Man (Maniu) Izdrail (1733-1784), he succeeded the latter in the ministry, being ordained, in 1761, by Gregory, bishop of Râmnic<sup>37</sup>. Being an old friend of priest Man, Grigorie Socoteanu, once he became bishop, in 1749, took Iacob with him to Râmnic, being careful so as the young man would get a good education and later, in 1754, married him with Stana, daughter of the Orthodox priest in Sadu, in the church of Sărăcinești monastery<sup>38</sup>. When he left to study at Râmnic, Iacob must have been aged about ten to fifteen years, maybe even older, considering that in 1748, he signed as Iacob deacon<sup>39</sup> on the pages of a Homily. In addition, Bishop Grigorie wrote in a letter to Dionisie Novacovici that during “the past riots”, he was hosted, for half a year, in the house of priest Man in Rășinari, and that Iacob was then a small child<sup>40</sup>. Historian Marius Porumb believes that the “riot” mentioned by Grigore was in fact the Russian-Austrian-Turkish war of 1735-1739<sup>41</sup>. Therefore, we may fix, in relative terms, Iacob’s date of birth, early in the fourth decade of the eighteenth century. That being so, in 1832, when the portrait that probably represents Iacob Izdrail is dated, the priest must have been almost one hundred years. Maybe it is worth mentioning here, to prevent any confusion about Iacob’s old age, that he was not the only centenary priest of the time, as the archpriest Coman Bârsan also moved into eternity in 1804, but not before reaching the age of 105.

The painter depicted the face of the venerable priest Iacob in such a way that it resembles the features of the biblical patriarch, with beard and long hair, bleached like the wool, by the years that passed over him. The book held high on the character’s chest becomes a sign of the high vocation to which he devoted seven decades of his long life. Dressed with over-cassock, padded and lined along

<sup>35</sup> Constantin Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>36</sup> Emilian Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> N. Iorga, *Studii și documente*, IV, p. 89; *apud*, Ștefan Meteș, *Relațiile bisericii românești ortodoxe din Ardeal cu Principatele Române în veacul al XVIII-lea*, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> N. Iorga, *Studii și documente*, II, București, 1906, p. 155, no. 531.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> Marius Porumb, *Un veac de Pictură românească din Transilvania, secolul XVIII*, p. 46, n. 26.

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the edges with white lamb fur, to compensate for the weakness of the body, old Iacob, following the parable of the Good Shepherd, guided his flock on the paths of justice, as right is in the picture the path that ascends the hill “from among the crosses” and leads towards the church, recently consecrated. Its proud silhouette can be seen through the open window on a wall in the room where Iacob poses. The painter created a fictional background, because, from where the house built by Iacob’s father, priest Maniu Izdrail, the big church could not be seen. However, that placement has a symbolic value, corresponding to the votive attitude adopted by Iacob who, as it is known, was concerned with completing the construction of the worship place.

The assumption that Dimitriu was hosted in the home of Izdrail family was confirmed when I was offered the opportunity to see, by the courtesy of its current owners<sup>42</sup>, another original portrait (Fig. 13), painted in oil on canvas, representing the son of Iacob, the priest from Rășinari Ioan Izdrail, the great-grandfather, as mentioned before, of the poet born in Rășinari. It was really a revelation, because the way in which the appearance of exquisite beauty and spiritual subtlety was rendered and, especially, the way in which the purity of the young priest’s eyes was caught left no doubt that I beheld another work, unsigned, of the painter Dimitrie Dimitriu. On a canvas, of not more than 30 × 25 cm, the artist represented the figure, the bust, of the priest wearing a cassock and a clerical belt, cut so as to close along the chest with a long row of buttons. The left arm is left down along the body, while the right hand, slightly disproportionate in relation to the rest of the figure, holds a little book with green cover, which the character seems to have stopped reading just a moment before, to raise his head and look in the direction suggested by the painter.

On the back panel of the painting in oil there are some interesting clues. On one side of the wooden frame the figures of the year 1834 are inlaid, and on the back of the canvas two pieces of paper with handwritten notes were glued, the first containing a record of a trivial fact, while the second, with more important content, includes information concerning the identity of the character portrayed, as well as the name of the persons who inherited the painting, up to the moment of the respective recording. In the first text, written in ink, the following words can be read: “The shop started to sell to the Germans on 20/X 897 October 20 aged 15

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<sup>42</sup> The last owner of the painting is Mrs. Maria Răspop, the wife of Mircea Răspop (1929-2009), the son of the famous merchant from Sibiu Ioan Răspop (1892-1951) and of Anița Răspop (1900-1941), born Izdrailă, who inherited the painting from her maternal grandmother, Constanța, the wife of an important merchant from Rășinari, Iacob Isdrailă (1856-1941), nicknamed “Chelaru”. They are all direct descendants of the priest from Rășinari who lived during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and had the name Izdrail.

½ years”. The second note reads as follows: “Father Ioan Isdrail, parish priest in Rășinari in 1834 (In the same line, but on the breadth of the sheet, noted in other handwriting, probably more recently: Father Ioan Isdrailă deceased in 1837). [When] he died his son Nicolae Isdrailă remained but he also died in 1890, and it remained as souvenir to the son of Nicolae Isdrailă, the eldest one Ioan Isdrailu at the death of his parents, his father and his mothers, with Ioan Isdrailă who died on 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1899 and it remained to his son Nicolaie”.

Another iconographic testimony could be added to the two precious ones mentioned, who was materially supported by a person that we could not identify unfortunately. However, there is a note written by Ștefan Meteș<sup>43</sup> regarding a portrait, completed by Petcu, a painter from Brașov, in 1854 and representing priest Ioan Bratu (1819-1878), from Rășinari, the maternal grandfather of the poet Octavian Goga, the one who became archpriest in the time of metropolitan Șaguna, to whom he was actually a close friend. He is the one who received poet Mihai Eminescu for three days in Rășinari, in September 1866. The portrait was housed, at the moment when Ștefan Meteș published his work on the painters of Romanian churches, in the house from Bucharest of Eugen Goga, the elder brother of the poet from Rășinari.

Ștefan Meteș mentioned, in the synthesis on Romanian religious art that he published in 1929, a piece of information coming from the metropolitan councilor in Sibiu, priest Andrei Gâlea, as regards the existence of another old portrait of a priest from Transylvania, in Porcești (today Turnu Roșu, Sibiu county). „A painter from Boița, states Meteș, left us the figure of the priest from this church (of Porcești, *e.m*), of priest Toma Filip sen... (born 1796 †1856), completed in 1834”. Father Gâlea, who was native from Porcești and author of a first monography dedicated to the church founded there by Matei Basarab, had seen the painting in the house of a grand granddaughter of priest Toma<sup>44</sup>.

That priest, who shepherded the Orthodox community of Porcești starting with 1821 and until the half of the nineteenth century, when he was succeeded by his son, Toma Filip the Young (1828-1870), was buried in the churchyard of the parish, the cross above his grave being erect even today, just behind the apse of the altar, at only one step distance from the wall of the church. His name is also mentioned in a diptych marked on a slab mounted in the altar, on the right wall of the table of oblation niche, and is connected to the expansion of the inner space of the old church towards the East, a work completed in 1829. At the same time another votive in the church porch was placed in the church, on which the contributions

<sup>43</sup> Ștefan Meteș, *op. cit.*, p. 130, n. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *ibidem*, p. 120, n. 11.

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of priests and worshippers to the completion of the building had been mentioned, indicating that “priest Toma Filip mentioned above strove more than all the others, providing for the necessary things for the building of the holy church, both with the expenses from his purse and his wise remonstrance that made many other people to spend and help, so he is rightfully the main and most important founder of this church”.

It is also known that, during the events of 1848, the lancers from Porcești were led, during armed confrontations, by their priest, Filip, who was forced, after the suppression of the revolution, to hide for a while in the woods near Porcești, so as not to be arrested.

By chance, the portrait (Figures 9, 10), whose existence was mentioned several decades before by Ștefan Meteș, was preserved and we could find recently, lost among the objects that form the patrimony of the venerable church. Moreover, the descendants of priest Toma Filip’s family, who seem to have donated the painting to the parish museum, also brought a second portrait, equally valuable, that represents Toma Filip - the young (Figures 11 and 12).

The presence of these two paintings in the church from Porcești – Turnu Roșu was signaled more than three decades before, in a study dedicated to icon masters from Boița, written by the author who signed the monography of the village, professor Ion Albescu. The information presented there is interesting, being the only one that we could identify so far, but the author did not manage to support it appropriately, a fact that makes us doubt their truthfulness. Here is what Ion Albescu stated. Starting from the identification, in the Orthodox church of Boița, of the royal icons signed by Isaia Monahul, a painter native of that village, dating from 1819, the researcher established that these were the last works known from that artist, after the respective year nothing being known in relation to his activity. What follows is of great interest to our aim, as it was stated that Isaia “prepared and allowed his brother Ioan to continue his work, who signed icons in Boița, Tălmăcel and Sadu, as well as a portrait of Toma Filip senior in Turnu Roșu (Porcești), activity done between 1822-1838. Ștefan Meteș wrote about that portrait in oil, found in the church of Turnu Roșu and dated 1834. Probably painter Ioan also done the portrait of priest Toma’s nephew, dated 1836, also found in the church of Turnu Roșu”<sup>45</sup>.

However, there are some inaccuracies in the data presented above. First, we are advised by the author to accept the attribution of the two paintings, without being given any reason, to the painter known as Ioan (Boicean) from Boița, who

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<sup>45</sup> Ioan Albescu, „Meșterii iconari de la Boița, jud. Sibiu”, in *Îndrumător bisericesc pe anul comun de la Hristos 1983*, year 131, Sibiu, Tiparul Tipografiei Eparhiale, 1983, p. 73.

apparently completed them in 1834 and 1836, respectively. However, there is another unmentioned detail, namely the fact that the first portrait, that of priest Toma Filip senior has, in the left corner down, a signature and the figures of a year that, due to the degradation of the painted stratum and the sediments of dust and soot are, at least for the time being, impossible to be deciphered. As regards the year, only the last figure, four, is certain. We can also observe that the signature was done with Latin characters, a curious situation for a period when, if the proposed dating would be correct, the writing with Cyrillic characters was still currently, if not exclusively used in Transylvania. This is proven by the Cyrillic signature left on one of the deacon doors of the church in Porcești, by the author of the painting, the artist Dimitrie Dimitriu, in 1831. Besides, the works preserved from painter Ioan of Boița, including his last known work, the cross painted in 1854 coming from the church in Avrig, were signed with Slavic characters.

Anyway, we can not accept what was stated as regards the possibility to attribute to the same painter Ioan from Boița the second portrait, that might have been painted in 1836. At that date, the future priest, whom we continue to consider the son and not the nephew of Toma Filip senior, as indicated by Ion Albescu, was only eight. Therefore, we appreciate that the portrait of the young man was done after the year of his ordination, after 1851, when he was already 23.

There is also an easily noticeable difference in the painting manner, in the way the two portraits have been represented, which would indicate two different authors, or at least a rather important evolution in the style adopted by the same artist, in the period of time that separated the completion of the paintings,

Without eliminating completely the possibility that at least one painting may belong to Ioan from Boița, we cannot avoid the observation that, right near the indicated year, for the time being just as a supposition, as date of completion for the portrait of Toma Filip senior, 1832, Dimitrie Dimitriu, the painter of whose interest in the new field of portrait art was already mentioned in this paper, was in Porcești, in order to receive the command of painting for the church. This is just a suggestion worth taking into account in a deeper analysis, once these two precious artefacts will be restored. Until then we should take into account, besides their documentary value, the remarkable artistic qualities of the paintings in the manner they manage to evoke two spiritual presences, that give a distinctive note of a generation that founded the modern Romanian society of Transylvania.

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The collection of church art of the Orthodox deanery from Sălișteța Sibiului includes one of those rare works that have been preserved from the work of the Transylvanian artist Ioan Constande (1814-1880). The portrait (Figures 13, 14),



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painted in oil, on a panel of modest size, signed in the left bottom corner, as I. Kostande, 1849, represents the hieromonk David from Săliște. The monk, who was called, before monasticism, Dumitru Borcea (1772-1853), came “from a very old family of rich shepherds, with ramifications to the sixteenth century and whom Nicolae Iorga considered a descendant from a leader in the army of Mircea the Old, raised to the status of a nobleman and reaching the region when Almaș belonged to the great ruler. His family made an important contribution to the building of the big church from Săliște ... and in 1818 (himself) was chosen founder of this church”<sup>46</sup>

We know about this worthy and devout exponent of one of the most prominent village communities of Mărginimea Sibiului that he had two sons, who became priests in the village, Demetrius and Onisifor, and that when he remained widowed in his old age he was tonsured to monasticism, continuing however, to live in the village. “As we learn from the written Menaion in September: «That day, 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1851, Bishop Șaguna came to Săliște on Sunday and made Dumitru Borcea monk, who was an old founder of the church and gave him the monastic name David, made him monk in the royal lyrics, after the morning service», and later we find last note about him in the Protocol of the dead, volume IV, where it was written that “monk David, called Dumitru Borcea, died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of august 1853, and was buried by His Excellency Bishop Andreiu Șaguna and the priestly synod»”<sup>47</sup>.

The portrait presents him at the end of his life, with bald head and completely white hair and beard, wearing the traditional coat for this region, over what seems to be a monastic frock. With the index finger of his right hand he indicates, as a call to repentance, the book of Psalter, which he holds with the other hand, open at the page where we can see the image of David the prophet and the first verse of Psalm I can be read: “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take”.

Ioan Costande (1814-1880), the author of this portrait, remarkable both by the quality of rendering the living expression of spiritual depth that hieromonk David reached in his life and the value of document held by the painting, as it is evocative of a part in the history of a church in Transylvania, is considered the first Romanian academic artist from Transylvania. He was initiated into art first in his native village, Răhău (Alba county) by painter Simon Bâscă-Ciortan<sup>48</sup>. He learnt at the German gymnasium from Sebeș. After finishing his studies there he

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<sup>46</sup> Ioan Stănișor, „Uniți sub puterea credinței strămoșești”, in Toma Lupaș, Victor V. Grecu (editor and scientific coordinator), *Sălișteea Sibiului străveche vatră românească*, Sibiu, 1990, p.119.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, n. (\*).

<sup>48</sup> Ana Dumitran, „Repertoriul picturilor identificați în județul Alba până la mijlocul sec. XIX”, in *Patrimonium Apulense XII*, Alba Iulia 2012, p. 67.

received a scholarship to Pesta (1830-1832), to continue his academic education in the field of fine arts, and then to “Saint Anne” Academy of fine arts from Vienna (1832-1841)<sup>49</sup>. All his life he was a teacher of painting at Terezianum Institute in Sibiu<sup>50</sup>. As an artist, he expressed his views in various ways, as sculptor, painter and lithographer, and was affiliated to the first professional association of artists from Sibiu, grouped around the painter and photographer Theodor Glatz<sup>51</sup> and his involvement in the social and political life of the country was also important, being a participant the revolution of 1848, and among the founding supporters of the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and Culture - ASTRA. In fact, his works were included in the first collection of the Museum of the Association from Sibiu. We know too little about the artistic work of Ioan Costandea, which certainly fulfilled a militant role in the context of the national movement in Transylvania. In 1869, he had completed the lithography portraits of the heads of the peasant revolt from the Apuseni Mountains, Horia, Cloșca and Crișan<sup>52</sup>, and had made several portraits of the commilitones of 1848, led by Avram Iancu. As regards the master minds of “Astra”, he portrayed George Barițiu, Ioan Pușcariu and Metropolitan Alexandru Sterca Șuluțiu in lithographs. However, the best performed portrait is considered that of the Orthodox Bishop Vasile Moga (engraving performed with the needle)<sup>53</sup>.

In the same collection of Săliște another portrait is preserved (Figure 15), representing the son monk David, priest Dimitrie Borcea, whose author, who probably completed the work in the second half of the nineteenth, is still anonymous.

These two images complete, in a very inspired way, the gallery we tried to reconstruct, of portraits representing priests involved in the spiritual progress and national emancipation of the communities they headed with honor.

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<sup>49</sup> Iuliu Bielz, *Un cerc de pictori la Sibiu în jurul anului 1850*, Sibiu, 1958 (manuscript), *apud*, Rodica Irimie Fota, “Un artist transilvănean puțin cunoscut: Ioan Costandea”, în *Muzeul Brukenthal Sibiu, Studii și comunicări*, 1, *Galeria de Artă*, Sibiu, 1978, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> Ion Țurcanu, *Istoria românilor. Cu o privire mai largă asupra culturii române*, Istros Publishing House, Brăila, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Coriolan Petranu, *L'Art roumain de Transylvanie*, Vol. I Texts, Extrait de *La Transylvanie*, Bucharest, 1938, p. 60.

<sup>53</sup> Rodica Irimie Fota, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

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Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

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Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.