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The Ancient of Days: from the Son of Man to the Only-Begotten. Exegetical Reflections in Orthodox Iconography

Abstract

Who is the Ancient of Days? Most of the Eastern Church Fathers who comment on the passage in Daniel (7.9-14) interpreted (in the light of Revelation 1.10-18) the elderly figure as a prophetic revelation of the Son before His physical incarnation. In Orthodox Christian hymns and iconography, the Ancient of Days is sometimes identified with God the Father, but most properly, in accordance with Orthodox theology, He is identified with God the Son – Jesus Christ. Under Rome’s scholastic influence, it has historically been used to theologially justify images of God the Father, alone or in



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various forms of what is called the New Testament Trinity. These images and their theological justification have become so common in the Orthodox nowadays world, (almost) nobody questions them. As such, Eastern Christian art will sometimes portray Jesus Christ as an old man – the Ancient of Days, to show symbolically that He existed from all eternity (together with the Father and the Holy Spirit), and sometimes as a young man, or wise baby, to portray Him as He was incarnate. This study represents a research on the history of the reflexivity of biblical-dogmatic and liturgical-hymnographic interpretations in the orthodox iconography of the Ancient of Days, an explanatory journey through the history of the iconicity of the divine name of the Ancient of Days. In conclusion, even if the iconography is still seen as an *ancillae theologiae*, it anagogically reproduces through colors what dogmatics and hymnology strengthen through writing and hearing - the doctrine of the Orthodox Church.

Keywords

Ancient of Days, iconography, the book of Daniel, exegesis, Orthodoxy, frescoes

1 Introduction

Both the expression "The Ancient of Days"¹ and its iconographic circumscription still arouse doubts, discussions and subjective interpretations, feeding the theologoumenons and the exegetical dissection of the Uncircumscribed by human comprehensibility, without assigning a conclusion, especially if one ignores the principle of eternity (timelessness) which defines both the

¹ Aramaic *Atik Yomin*; Greek *Palaiós ton Imerón*; Latin Vulgata *Antiquus Dierum*; Slavonic *Vetkhii Denmi*.

uniqueness / unity and the divine threehypostasis. How could God define Himself with a term that somewhat threatens the eternity of the deity (being "Old" denotes a time, a temporal coordination) and another that more habitually minimizes the character of God's *Ens perfectissimus* ("day", even if it has an eschatological connotation, is it a biblical temporal measure ranging from hours to an eon)? We can reveal in this case a *contradictio in adjecto*. And yet...

In this case, the „day” accentuated by the plural „days” suggests everlastingness, eternity, as Blessed Augustine states: „Thy day today is eternity. [...] Thou have made all times and before all times Thou are, and there was not a time when there was no time.”²

2 „The Ancient of Days” – Short Scriptural Substantiation

Therefore, „The Ancient of Days” is present from everlastingness – „old”, to eternity – „days”, and „eternity is not time, nor part of time, because it is immeasurable.”³ In the Holy Scriptures we find this name used in the book of Daniel (*Dan.* 7.9-14) and in Revelation of St. John the Theologian (*Rev.* 1.10-18). The description is – in both situations and not only – anthropomorphized, giving the suggestion of body, embodied, human. Daniel saw a vision, of course, just like St. John, but the Old Testament is always interpreted in the revealed light of the New; the questions or ambiguities concerning shaded in the Old

² Blessed Augustine, *Confessiones (Confessions)*, XI, XIV (17), (transl. Prof. dr. docent Nicolae Barbu, Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing house, 1994), p. 340.

³ Saint Gregory the Theologian, apud Nikolai Mihailovici Tarabukin, *The meaning of the icon* (transl. and afterword by Vladimir Bulat, edited by Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas, Bucharest: Sophia Publishing house, 2008), p. 57.

Testament, need to be interpreted in Christ's light, revealed, new in the Church, because any Old Testament theophany is in fact a Christophany. Some exegetes, iconologists, and theological commentators (especially neo-Protestants) believe that this revealed Person is an image of God the Father, based on the statements of many Church Fathers and church writers, but the balance of Holy Tradition leans toward identifying both as the Son of Man as well as "Ancient of Days" – co-eternal in everlastingness with the Father and the Spirit.

We can say that God the Son is the *terminus a quo* of the salvation of mankind through the incarnation, but at the same time it is the *terminus ad quem* of all creation for eternity, as the Dionysian exhortation shows:

„Pay attention to praise in word God – The One with many names and as Almighty and as the Ancient of Days. [...] as the Ancient of Days God is praised because He is both the age and the time of all and is before the days and before the age and the time. In the holy visions of the divine appearance he is imagined both as an old man and as a young man. The old man also shows him as being from the beginning; young, as if not aging.”⁴

3 „The Ancient of Days” – Short Patristic Substantiation

Patristic interpretations can be differentiated into two categories: those who identify the Ancient of Days with the Father, and the other, those who identify Him with the Son. Most of the Church Fathers (especially those of the IVth century, who faced Christological heresies) identify the Ancient of Days with the Father, and the Son of Man with Christ, thus arguing the deity,

⁴ Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, X (transl. by Dumitru Stăniloae, Bucharest: Paideia Publishing House, 1996), p. 170.

co-eternity and equality between the two Hypostases, but they do not make the divine name "The Ancient of Days" an exclusive one of the Father, but they also attribute it to the co-Eternal Son, but without confusing in a monarchist way the hypostatic attributes. So patrology has an ambiguous look: some glimpse the Father (e.g., St. Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* and *On the Antichrist*; Lactantius, *The Divine Institutions* and *The Summary of the Divine Institutions (Epitomes)*; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*; Blessed Augustine, *On the Trinity*; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Excerpts from the Prophets Jeremiah, Baruch, and Daniel*); and, others see the Son (Methodius of Olympus, *Writings*; St. John Chrysostom, *Sermons on the Royal Feasts* and *Speeches of Praise to the Saints*; Blessed Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*).

4 „The Ancient of Days” – Hymnological Iconization

These patristic exegeses are also lyrically reflected in the hymnography of the Church; The "lyrical flowers" that adorn the cultic corolla of the Church are opinions and confessions of the melodists (John of Damascus, Anatoly, Germanus, Theophan, Joseph, Roman, etc.).

The Church glorifies the old man in the image of the Father:

„The triune Light of a Lord was secretly revealed to Daniel, seeing Christ as judge coming to the Father, and the Spirit before showing him the vision.”⁵

... but also of the Son:

⁵ *** *The Great Octoechos*, Songs of the Resurrection on the Fifth Voice, Sunday. Midnight office, *Canon of the Holy Trinity*, 4th Song, composition of St. John of Damascus, p. 348.

„The Ancient of days, Who long ago gave the Law of Moses in Sinai, today as an Child is seen ...”.⁶

„The Ancient of Days becoming Childembodied, is brought to the church by the Virgin Mother, fulfilling the ordinance of His Law ...”.⁷

„The Ancient of Days descended in Thy holy womb, like the rain on wool, most pure, and the new Adam appeared to be the Lover of men.”⁸

„Young Child Thou hast begotten us the Ancient of Days, Pure Virgin, utterly blameless, the One who with His divine passion has renewed the old human nature”.⁹

„Getting rid of the natural laws, Virgin, Thou gave birth to pure above nature, Young Child on earth, the One who is the giver of the law and the Ancient of days, the understanding heaven of the Maker of all ...”.¹⁰

5 The Iconography of „the Ancient of Days”. Evolution

In the conception of both biblical and patristic exegetes, iconography – or rather iconology – was accepted as a simple *ancillae theologiae*. But iconology is theology *par excellence*, and “icon theologians are as important as the theologians of the word. Too often we limit the word theologian to thinkers, to

6 *** *The Menaion of February*, The Greeting of the Lord – February 2nd, *Lity*, 1st voice, verse composed by Anatoly, p. 21.

7 *** *The Menaion of February*, The Greeting of the Lord – February 2nd, *Lity*, 5th voice, *And now...*, verse composed by Germanus, p. 22.

8 *** *The Menaion of February*, St. Hierarch Polycarp of Smyrna – February 23rd, *Matins*, 5th voice, *And now...*, p. 220.

9 *** *The Great Octoechos*, Songs of the Resurrection on the 5th voice, Friday. *Matins*, *The Canon of the Cross*, Song 1, *...of the Mother and the Cross*, composition of Joseph, p. 407.

10 *** *Triodion*, 5th Sunday of Lent, *Matins*, 9th Song, *...of the Mother of God*, composition by Anatoly, p. 472.

authors and forget the analogous role of iconographers whose responsibility is just as heavy.”¹¹ The icon is mysteriously linked to theandry, the Gospel and the Liturgy, as a reflection of the divine reality, so that the icon can be called *the deuterotypos of the prototype* (the second type of the prototype). Only in Romanian the iconographer *paints* an icon; in Greek (*graphein*) he *writes* an icon, and in Russian (*pisati*) he also *writes* an icon, thus writing the “Bible of the unschooled.” In this context it can be stated that “... the sacred text, the image and the patristic commentary form a dynamic network of meaning and interpretation.”¹²

5.1 Egipt (Sinai). 7th Century

Chronologically speaking, the first iconographic representation of the Ancient of Days to date is the icon “Christ - The Ancient of Days”, from the beginning of the seventh century, tempera on wood, 76x53.5x2.3 cm, the museum of Monastery St. Catherine – Sinai): Christ is rendered old, with white hair (cf. *Dan.* 7.9; *Rev.* 1.14), but he is entitled “Emmanuel” (cf. *Mt.* 1.23; *Isa.* 7.14) – type of Christological representation depicting a young, beardless, infant or adolescent Christ. He reigns on a rainbow (cf. *Rev.* 4.3), and His feet rest on the prestige of the earth (cf. *Isa.* 66.1; *Mt.* 5.35).¹³ The ellipsoidal-vertical shape of the dark halo, sprinkled with six-pointed stars, makes it possible to render four cherubim “with many eyes” in the four corners of the icon. His golden-ocher robes are volumetrically illuminated with gold lines, and

¹¹ Stéphane Bigham, *The icon in the Orthodox tradition* (transl. Diana Preda, Cornel Apostol, Oradea: Theosis Publishing house, 2016), p. 57.

¹² Maximos Constans, *The Art of Seeing. Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography* (transl. from English by Dragoș Dâscă, Iași: Doxologia Publishing house, 2017), p. 188.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 89.

the halo is cruciferous¹⁴, thus the identification with Jesus Christ is undeniable.¹⁵ This icon is the only representation of the Ancient of Days before the iconoclastic period that has reached the present day.

5.2 Miniatures in Byzantine Manuscripts

Images of the Ancient of Days have been developed by miniaturists in various manuscripts, the oldest of which are dated to the 11th century. For example, a Byzantine manuscript in the Library of the University of Cambridge, dated 1297, adorned with miniatures (tempera on parchment), has one that shows Jesus as the Ancient of Days, along with the symbols of the Evangelists. The inscription on the page is divided not only between the left and right sides, but also the writer arranged it strangely, the legibility of reading the writing being more difficult.

5.3 Greece. XI-XIII Centuries

The oldest Greek fresco representation of Christ – The Ancient of Days is found in Greece, in Chalki Naxos, at the church of "St. George Diasoridis" (11th century). Although still unrestored, the fresco depicts Him in a rhomboidal "glory" with shades of red, surrounded by the symbols of the Evangelists, dressed in the classic red / blue color, with barely noticeable cruciferous halo and with a slightly legible *IC XC* inscription; Christ holds a *rotulus* in His left hand.

Going north, to the 12th century church "Saint Stephen", in Kastoria, we see Jesus Christ represented, which is denoted by the inscription *IC XC*, arranged above the Ὁ ΠΑΛΕΌC ἩΜΕΡῶΝ.

¹⁴ crucigerous/cruciferous halo = lat. *aureola cruciger*

¹⁵ The cruciferous halo is the expression of passion and crucifixion; it cannot be applied to any Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, but only to the Savior Christ, as an attribute of the assumed passion.

The character has the cruciferous halo, without the inscription The One Who Is (Θ̅Ω̅Ν)¹⁶, the vestments are pale green (*hyton*) and ocher-golden (*himation*), with a *klav*¹⁷ sienna on himation, and in his left hand he holds a wrapped phylactery.

From Kastoria, it is necessary to mention the first representation from the Orthodox space of the Holy Trinity in the form later called *Paternity*¹⁸, fresco from the church "Panaghia Koumbelidikis" (1260-1280). The description absolves us of any comment and interpretation: in an almond glory with shades of pale green, the Father rests – The Ancient of Days (but with a cruciferous halo) dressed in cream-white *hyton* and pale pink *himation*, at whose lap He holds of shoulders on the mature Christ, the One who has in his hands a luminous halo in which is outlined the dove – Spirit sitting. This anthropo-zoomorphic type recalls and precedes the much better known icon of *Paternity* in Novgorod (late 14th century). "... Both the Father and the Spirit escape any representation"¹⁹, but by becoming human, the Son contemplatively reflects the image of the Father and that of the Holy Spirit, for "the Son is the only One who can make the Father seen to some extent."²⁰ Looking at the icon of Christ, we can contemplate the icon of the unity of the Holy

¹⁶ Ioannis Romanides, *Orthodox Patristic Dogmatics: a Concise Exposition* (transl. Dragoș Dâscă, Sibiu: Ecclesiastes Publishing house, 2010), p. 47: "The name of *the One Who is*, for example, appearing in the aura of the icon of Christ. [...] is of Christ."

¹⁷ *klav* slv. = golden or purple stripe, specific to angels, prophets, and apostles as "sent".

¹⁸ It seems that the iconographic model of the representation is represented by a miniature from a codex of the Vienna Library (*Codex Supplement Graeca* 52) from the 11th– 12th centuries, where it illustrates the text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

¹⁹ Michel Quenot, *The Resurrection and the Icon* (transl. and pref. Rev. Dr. Vasile Răducă, Bucharest: Christiana Publishing house, 1999), p. 233.

²⁰ Stéphane Bigham, *Idem*, p. 39.

Trinity, Christ being the divine-human perfection of the image of the Holy Trinity; through the incarnation of the Son "the uncircumcised may be described and the unrepresentable may be rendered by iconic illustration, by virtue of the flesh of the Embodied ..." ²¹.

But returning to the subject in this case, we must again mention another iconographic aberration of the representation of the Holy Trinity, also from Kastoria, which could be called the *Holy Trinity – trimorphic*. The first trimorphic Trinity (anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, alike) is not (as one might think) in the West, but is illustrated in a 13th century fresco in the church of "Saint George" in Omorfoekklisia where, for the sake of restoring his Trinitarian unity an iconographic "ostrich-camel" emerged: a body that blesses the ambidextrous, with the frontal face of the Ancient of Days– the Father, from "next to" appearing the face of Emanuel (on the left side of the viewer) and a dove (on the side right), each with its own halo. Thus, we see that in Kastoria, Trinitarian dogmatics was interpreted by the "zographers" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in their own opinion, exaggerating the possibility of rendering Trinitarian traits or hypostatic attributes, to the limits of iconographic clumsiness, heresy, flirting with the hideous and the grotesque artistic.

5.4 Northern Macedonia. XIII-XIV Centuries

In Ohrid we find perhaps the most important example of paleological iconography outside Greece: the mural of the church "Panaghia Peribleptos" ²². A small illustration attracts our

²¹ John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics. An Aesthetic Theology* (transl. from Engl. by Cristian Vechiu, Oradea: Ratio et Revelatio Publishing house, 2018), p. 147.

²² Constantin Claudiu Cotan, *O istorie a Bisericii Ortodoxe Slave* (Iași: Vasiliana '98 Publishing House, 2009), p. 147.

interest: The Ancient of Days painted on the plinth vault in the western part of the nave of the church. He depicts an aged Christ, with an earth-colored hyton (without a klav) and an ocher-gold himation with golden lines, holding a Gospel book in His left hand. The halo is simple, with no inscribed cross and no inscription. Everything in a three-tinted blue circle, the deeper shade of which can only be read – 'Ο ΠΑΛΕΨΟΣ ΗΜΕΡΨΝ (The Ancient of Days), but without *IC XC*. Researcher and iconologist Constantine Cavarnos urges the unpainting of the Ancient of Days, not even in the (more) correct form of the image of the aged Jesus Christ, because it is a forcing of Daniel's vision, and historically-scripturally, the Son of Man did not reach old age, but nor as an image of the Father, because it is an allegorical distortion of the Son's face, and an anthropomorphic appearance is attributed to the Father possible only through the incarnation (as of the Hypostasis of the Son).²³

At the church "Saint Pantelimon" in Gorno Nerezi – Karpoš, in an iconographic ensemble representative of the Byzantine art of Comnenus (1081-1185), we find the Ancient of Days circumscribed as *IC XC - SABAOTΨ*, where Christ has the nimbus without a cross inscribed, and the garments are of pastel, warm colors; the hyton has a klav. It should be noted that the half-open rotulus allows the inscription to be deciphered "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, full ..." (*Isa.* 6.3).

At the 12th century church "Saint George" of the monastery in Kurbinovo (Prespa), on a frieze of the inner pediment of the western wall, we find the image, in a medallion flanked by seraphims and angels, of the Ancient of Days with the features of the Son, sitting on a beautifully adorned throne, with pale pink and beautifully draped green robes, with a rotulus in His left

²³ Cf. Constantin Cavarnos, *Guide to Byzantine Iconography* (transl. by Anca Popescu, Bucharest: Sophia Publishing house, 2005), p. 176.

hand and His right hand away from the body blessing, with a cruciferous halo, but without any visible inscription.

5.5 Serbia. XIII-XV Centuries

Moving to the northwest, we find the image of Christ – the Ancient of Days – also in a fresco in Serbia (painting dated 1250-1260), at the Church of the Holy Apostles of the Patriarchal Monastery Peć, Kosovo, and located above the door of entrance to the narthex. Jesus is surnamed in Slavonic as ВЕТХИ ДЕНМИ – *Vetkhi Denmi* – “The Ancient of Days”. In rhomboidal glory²⁴ placed in the round halo is the inscription *The One Who is* (ΟΨΝ), and in four circles to the left and to the right are the abbreviated letters ICXC. Written in white, in smaller characters, on both sides, is the Isaiah inscription СВЯТЬ СВЯТЬ СВЯТЬ ГОСПОДЬ САВАОФ ИСПОЛНЬ НЕБО И ЗЕМЛЯ СЛАВЫ ТВОЕЯ – “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the heavens and the earth are full of Thy glory!” which in the Slavic-speaking Churches is called *Трисвятая песнь*–*Trisvyataya pesn*, meaning *Trisagion* (The Threefold Holy Song). The Ancient of Days wears clothes in the classic colors of the Savior (red-maroon hyton / blue himation), the hyton has a klav, and in His left hand there is a double-wrapped rotulus.

Also in Peć there is another representation of the Son – the Ancient of Days, smaller in development and located above the vault of the nave of the church of the Holy Apostles. Also here, the face of Christ is aged, the clothes have representative colors, with klav and rotulus in the left hand, but without cruciferous halo (only with the inscription *The One Who is* – ΟΨΝ profiled

²⁴ Grigorie Krug, *The Thoughts of an Iconographer about the Meaning and Purpose of Icons*, (transl. Carmen and Florin Caragiu, Bucharest: Sophia Publishing house, 2002), p. 73: “The crown consists of two areas: one of the brightness of the fire, which bears witness to the Deity of the Lord, the other dark green (or black with bluish reflections), signifying the incomprehensible darkness of the Deity.”

on a reddish rhombus) and with the simple name of the character: *IC XC*, which is "bordered" by a rainbow of red and green shades, and framed by seraphim.

At the Žiča Monastery, among the frescoes preserved from the time of Tsar Stefan Uroš (1282-1321), on a concave edge of the chapel, we find a modest image of the Ancient of Days, with a crossless halo, overlapping rhombuses or triangles, with simple inscription *IC XC*, with ochre / red-brown clothing and a parchment wrapped in the left hand.²⁵

5.6 Cyprus. XII-XVI Centuries

At Lagoudera is the church "Panagia tou Araka", painted in 1192 by Theodor Apevdis; among its frescoes is an image of the Ancient of Days, flanked by two angels with loros, blessing ambidextrously the Mother of God – Oranta, painted in a niche. The representation is clumsy: the clothes are simple, white, adorned with a brown klav; the face is not that of the aged Christ, and the halo is adorned with a triangle and a Christ cross.

A singular representation of the Holy Trinity is found in Souskiou, Cyprus, in the Paphos district; it is the church of the hermitage "Palaio Egkleistro", from the 13th century. On the dome of the nave is the Holy Trinity in a circle that limits a square glory with bluish hues, superimposed on another with red-brown hues; in these gradients are circumscribed the busts of *IC XC* mature and *IC XC* – The Ancient of Days, One with red-blue clothes (with klav), Another with bright clothes, white with gray drawings, Both have rotulus in the left hand, have cruciferous halos and have the white inscription *IC XC*; also to the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove standing (with open wings) on a closed

²⁵ Constantin Claudiu Cotan, *Introducere în studiul istoriei creștinismului* (Bucharest: University Publishing House, 2017), pp. 61-74.

Gospel, above them – also with a cruciferous halo and white inscription *IC XC* (sic!).

In Pelendri, in the Troodos Mountains, at the church of the Holy Cross there are frescoes from the 14th century. Here, in the western aisle (bay), in a circle with red shades, the Ancient of Days blesses with both hands, has ocher-gold robes, the halo is cruciferous, and the inscription *IC XC – Ο ΠΑΛΕΟC ΗΜΕΡΩΝ* explains and gives meaning to the image.

The western influences that penetrated Cyprus (the Crusaders and then the Venetians) are also observed in iconography, in the rendering of the Ancient of Days. Thus, in the upper part of the holy doors of a 16th century iconostasis in Monagri, Limassol district, even if the halo is cruciferous, so Christic, nothing else reminds or sends to the image of Christ, neither the earth coloured clothes nor the face of the pious old man, nor the "globe" in the left hand, a globe that will be found in the images of the Father (Sabaoth) in most representations in the East, starting with the seventeenth century.

5.7 Romania. XIV-XVI Centuries

In Transylvania, at the recently restored church from Densus dedicated to "Saint Nicholas", apparently dating from the XII-XIII centuries, there are frescoes from 1443 (attributed to a Stephen). On a pillar in the nave we see represented (pretty naive and domestic) *the Holy Trinity*: The Ancient of days (identifiable in context with the Father and entitled *Tsar Savaoth*) is rendered bust, holding in His arms Christ –Immanuel (with the inscription *IC XC*, wearing a shirt with traditional motifs), and above the head of the "Father" stands the Holy Spirit – dove; all three have cruciferous halos, without the inscription *ΟΩΝ*. Unfortunately, it is the only illustration from Transylvania before the 16th century, which has reached us.

In Wallachia, we find the most refined illustration of the Ancient of Days at the hospital's church of the Bistrița Monastery, Vâlcea. In the frescoes dated 1520, above the iconostasis (so in the conch

of the altar) is represented Christ – the Ancient of Days in three circles of different shapes and colors (worn by flying angels), in bright green modulated drawing clothes, with hyton with ocher klav, with cruciferous halo without the classic inscription, with parchment in the left hand; in one of the circles the surname *ВЕТХИ ДЕХМИ* is legible, and in another the name *IC XC*.

From the XVII-XVIII centuries there are the most diverse representations of the Ancient of Days: at Hurezi, Filipeștii de Pădure, Biserica Doamnei, Gura Motrului, Cozia, Govora, Polovragi, Surpatele, Tismana, Târgoviște and others²⁶, but This One, even if it is accompanied by some elements identifiable with Christ (cruciferous nimbus, the inscription *IC XC*, klav ...), it is only an iconization of the Father, often surnamed not *the Ancient of Days*, but *(the Lord) Sabaoth*; thus the decline of iconography and the western and heterogeneous influences being, unfortunately, indisputable.

The apogee of the representations of the Ancient of Days on our lands is found in Moldova. From the reign of Stephen the Great, the centuries have passed to new pictorial ensembles and of a special value in ascertaining the evolution in time of the representation in this case. The Ancient of Days is painted in the window sill of the western window on the south wall of the nave of the church "St. Nicolae" from Rădăuți (before 1489), but here appears the cruciferous halo with the inscription *Ο'ΩΝ*, in addition to the inscription *ВЕТХИ ДЕХМИ*, the identifiable with Christ being more accentuated. At the church of Saint Nicholas in Bălinești, in the fresco dated 1494-1499, the Ancient of Days is painted on the walls of the open porch, in a circle with red gradients (with simple halo, with a barely visible inscription

²⁶ Constantin Claudiu Cotan, Religious tourist destinations in the Diocese of Buzău, in *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies* (JRLS), no. 20 (2020), (pp. 300-308).

ВЕТХИ ДЕХМИ, but without *IC XC*, with luminous garments and rotulus), and on the arch above the iconostasis, in a medallion between medallions with Prophets (copying as if completely the model used in the porch). And at the church of the Popăuți - Botoșani monastery, in the frescoes from 1497, in a window sill of the narthex, there is a modest image of the Ancient of Days (without inscriptions and other elements of detail).

The Peter Rareș's reign is the most prolific in terms of Moldovan church painting. Thus, at the church of the Probota monastery (1532)²⁷, The old one is shown on the altar, on the keystone of a vaulted arch, in the medallion, next to the medallions of Christ – Pantokrator (Almighty), the Holy Spirit in the prefiguration of the dove on *the Throne of Etimasia*, and of the Prophets. The Ancient of Days (who here suggests the Father) wears bright garments with a klav, has the cruciferous halo and is indicated by the Slavonic inscription *ВЕТХИ ДЕХМИ*. Also in Probota, in the porch, is represented the vast composition of *the Last Judgment*; in the upper part of the composition (in the center of the vault) an iconographic register unfolds in which two angels appear closing like a scroll (cf. *Rev.* 6.14), the history of the world and the ages, and in the center of this upper register appears the anthropomorphic figure of the Ancient of Days²⁸. The color of the garments is the classic one of Christ, the rotulus is indispensable in the left hand, the cruciferous halo also has the star in eight

²⁷ We find the same iconographic idea at the Coșula monastery – Botoșani (1537-1538).

²⁸ We also find such a representation on the eastern wall of the porch of Moldovița (1537; The garments are pale pink / green-gray, with traditional ornamental motifs, and the inscription is limited only to *IC XC*) and on the western outer wall of Coșula (1538; The garments are ocher / red, the cruciferous nimbus and has only the writing *IC XC*) and that of Voroneț (1547; The garments are ocher / gray, the klav is missing and the inscription is in Slavonic – *ВЕТХИ ДЕХМИ*). However, we do not find the image of the Ancient of Days in the composition of *the Last Judgment* from the porch of Humor, dating from the same period.

corners, and the Greek inscription *IC XC – Ο ΠΑΛΕΨΟC ΨΜΕΡΨΝ* is legible. At Humor, Moldovița, Coșula, on the intrados of the skew arch above the stage of *the Annunciation*, is represented the image of the Ancient of Days, simple (at Coșula), with Slavonic inscription (at Humor) and even a clumsy Trinity – *Paternity* (at Moldovița): The "Father" with Christ the Child in His arms, sending the Spirit – dove to the Virgin Mary. In the exterior painting from Probotă, Humor and Moldovița (but also in Sucevița, in the illustration of the "western" *Coronation of the Virgin*), in the iconography of *the Akathist Hymn*, The Ancient of Days is synonymous with the Father in the Holy Trinity – New Testament scene, where He wears the face to an old man dressed in bright clothes, unlike the Son's features. At the church "St. Gheorghe" of the monastery of St. John the New – Suceava (1517-1522), The Ancient of Days is painted three times: in the altar, it is rendered in glory, dressed in white-green hyton (without klav) and white-ocher himation (with popular ornaments), the nimbus is cruciferous (but it also has a star in eight corners), and next to it it is written in Greek *IC XC – Ο ΠΑΛΕΨΟC ΨΜΕΡΨΝ*; in the nave (in the window sill of the southern window), it is rendered in small dimensions, in a circle with bluish gradients, with white-red / white-ocher clothes, without klav, with cruciferous halo with *ΨΝ*, and only with the inscription *Ο ΠΑΛΕΨΟC ΨΜΕΡΨΝ*; in the porch, in the calotte, it is depicted in a glory with eight corners (decorated with seraphims), in bright garments (with klav), with cruciferous halo, but without any visible inscription.

Already starting with the 16th century, the image of the Ancient of Days is identified with God – The Father (Dionysius of Fournă in his *Hermeneia* officially promoted to the iconographers the identification with God – The Father, urging the use of the

inscription 'Ο ἈΝΑΡΧΟΣ ΠΑΤΗΡ – 'Ο ΠΑΛΕΨΟC ἩΜΕΡῶ²⁹) first by removing the cruciferous halo (and the inscription IC XC), then by replacing the cruciferous halo with an eight-cornered halo – *the star of Melchizedek or the star of Bethlehem* – (at St. John the New in Suceava, Probota, Voroneț, etc.).

The decline of theological importance in favor of aesthetics and allegorical innovations is present in the paintings of Sucevița (after 1586) and Dragomirna (1609), strongly influenced by miniaturistics and iconological novelties of Russian origin. Thus, the Ancient of Days, identifiable with The Father, we meet in Sucevița (and with small differences in Dragomirna) in three allegorical scenes: in the western aisle of the nave, in the illustration of the mariological hymn *He rejoices in Thou...*; in another approach to the hymn composition *He rejoices in Thou...* (having the inscription *And this prayer will save us*) which is found in the conch of the northern apse of the nave; and the third composition that reveals the Ancient of Days, is the one in the conch of the southern apse of the nave, which represents the iconic exposition of the Justinian's hymn *Only-Begotten...* (Antiphon II)³⁰. All three representations are allegorical, iconographic enforcements of plastic expression of dogmatic subjects who deserve contemplation and silence, rather than audacity and minimization of originality from innovative artists, thus not recommending such "attempts" close to the edge of heresy or blasphemy. In Sucevița we also find the image of the Ancient of Days (The Son) in the calotte of the porch: He has His clothes illuminated with golden stripes, the cruciferous nimbus with the inscription, and next to it is written in Slavonic IC XC – ΒΕΤΧΗ

²⁹ Cf. Constantin Cavarnos, *Idem*, p. 176; to be seen also Dionysius of Fournia, *The Hermineia of Byzantine Painting* (Bucharest: Sophia Publishing house, 2000), p. 261.

³⁰ To be seen Gabriel Herea, *Pilgrimage in the sacred space of Bucovina*, (Cluj-Napoca: Patmos Publishing house, 2010), p. 115.

ДЕХМИ. Also among the unfortunate iconographic innovations, we discover in the altar of the church of Dragomirna monastery, in the altar conch, the scene of *the Ascension of the Lord*, in which Christ ascends with the Body to heaven (cf. *Jn* 1.9-11), surrounded by glory and is “led” by holy angels to “rest” at the right hand of the Father – the Ancient of Days (cf. *Ps.* 109.1).

5.8 Georgia. XIII-XVI Centuries

At St. George's Church in Ubisi, Imereti, we find perhaps the most valuable pictorial ensemble in Georgia. There, the Georgian master Damian painted in the first half of the 14th century the Ancient of Days in a rhomboidal glory supported by seraphims, dressed in bright clothes, where the hyton has a klav highlighted chromatically; the nimbus is cruciferous, and the inscriptions *IC XC – Bat'ono Savaot'* (Lord Savaot) exempt us from any misinterpretation. At the Gelati monastery, (2nd half of the 16th century), the Ancient of Days is rendered with the physiognomy of the Son, sitting in an ellipsoidal glory bordered by red-green shades worn by angels in flight, in ocher-gold clothes, with cruciferous halo, and with the Ivorian inscription *Lord Savaot*.

Conclusions

Iconography reveals, explains and teaches in the same way as the patristic texts and / or the hymnological lyric of the Church, and is also subject to those mistakes that wander among the letters of the texts, mistakes that can deviate into schisms and heresies, and / or can be damaged by a wrong exegesis. The iconographic errors of the representation of the Ancient of Days do not take into account either the geographical area (although its identification with the Father is a priority in Russia and other slavonic countries) or the time period in which they were executed (the closer the representations are to today, the more the Father is undeniable). Some iconographers and iconologists

argue that it would be inappropriate for the glorification of the Father not to be able to circumscribe the Father in icons, but the pictorial rendering only of the Incarnate does not erode or damage the glory of the One who gives birth and proceeds, because, "believe me, honor To the Son is the glory of the Father; the more you give to the Only-Begotten, the more you will glorify the Father. The good Father does not hate the Son for glory, for all the glory of the Son is reflected in the Father."³¹

„May He [Christ] inspire us to recognize the nature of His divinity and His humanity, the unity of His hypostasis, the proper worship of the icon of His incarnation and the icons of His saints. May He make of us an icon of His truth, as in us here, as in a clear mirror, may His face be perceived.”³²

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³¹ Saint Niceta of Remesiana, *Works* (transl. from Latin, introd. and notes by Dr. Ovidiu Pop, Bucharest: Sophia Publishing house, 2009), p. 39.

³² Abu Qurra, *About the veneration of the Holy Icons* (transl. Lidia Rus, introd., notes, comments, indices by prof. Univ. Dr. Remus Rus, Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 2012), p. 171

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