

Iconography. Icon of the Last Judgment

Abstract of Doctoral Thesis

Introduction

We have decided to study this subject as it is of great interest with the icon painters, and knowing that in the post-communist specialty literature (books that study icons from the technological point of view) there isn't any rich exposition of this subject from the visual point of view.

Our thesis develops into two large chapters and various sub-chapters; the former analysis issues of the iconographic program of the icon of the Last Judgment, and the latter refers to the entire process of executing an icon in the traditional (canonical)¹ technique.

We have chosen the traditional technique as it provides us an impenetrable treasure most of the times, which it is a pity to be buried and forgotten; this technique constitutes the basis for the re-vitalization of the liturgical life through icon. An incorrectly executed icon in the ecclesiastical area may endanger the truths of faith in the church, while a well painted icon relevantly elevates the quality of the church service.

As for the icon technique, we have chosen the traditional techniques of representing the icon from various masters, which we shall present in our thesis both from the point of view of the written signs and through photographical material, thus facilitating the understanding of the icon execution.

A. Iconography

A.1. The icon of the Last Judgment. Genesis and evolution

We must emphasize the fact that the Last Judgment theme first appears in the Byzantine area, and from there it spreads all over the West, where it reaches its climax in the XVI-th century with Michelangelo's fresco in the Sixtine Chapel².

¹ Canon means „Spiritual experience of the seeing and representing the spiritual world”, Rafail Karelin, Nikolai Gusev, Mihail Dunaev, *Îndrumar iconografic*, editura Sophia, București, 2007, vol. I, p. 363.

² Rosa Giorgi, *Angeli e Demoni*, Mondadori Electa, Milano, 2003, p. 206.

During the first centuries, the themes referring to the Universal Judgment are diverse. Such a representation we find at Hosios David in Salonic (end of the IV-th century), and from the same period (IV-th century) also dates Kosmas Indicopleustes' manuscript, in which Jesus Christ is depicted as a Judge, and underneath, those who revive before presenting themselves at the judgment.³ The Alexandrine Kosmas Indicopleustes accomplishes the transition from the profane miniature to the sacred one through the (Christian) Typography drawn up between 536 and 547.⁴

During the VII – XI centuries the mosaic in Basilica Santa Maria Assunta (in Torcello island) is made, which is a scene of great complexity, executed by Venetian masters according to Byzantine examples, being representative until today among the icons of the Last Judgment.

For the XII-th century we mention the ensemble at Vladimir, where there still exist fragments with portraits of the saint Apostles from the last Judgment fresco.⁵

Another important representation in defining the Last Judgment iconography comes from the Dochiariou Monastery in the Holy Mountain of Athos, icon that is in fact the oldest representation in Athos, and defines the iconographical canon.⁶

In Mount Sinai, at the Saint Catherine's Monastery, we find an icon painted on four registers, which confirm the coherence and correctness of the execution of the iconographical program, strictly respected in all the mentioned areas.

The monumental fresco of the Last Judgment in Constantinople – Chora, today Kariye Djami, reveals both the high level of artistic excellence proved by the masters who executed the painting, and their spiritual level in understanding and experiencing prayer.

In the XV-th century, in Moscow, Russia, a copy of the Last Judgment icon is painted, after the original brought from Byzantium, copy which was offered to the prince in Tver, in 1399.

³ Frédéric Tristan, *Primele imagini creștine. De la simbol la icoană, secolele II-VI*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 2002, p. 368.

⁴ André Michel, *Histoire de l'Art. Tome I Des Débuts de l'Art Chrétien à la fin de la Période Romane; Première Partie*, Paris, 1926, p. 214.

⁵ I.D. Ștefănescu, *Iconografia artei bizantine și a picturii feudale românești*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1973, p. 34.

⁶ Dionysus of Fournas is the one who describes at large the manner in which the scene must be painted; he lived in Mount Athos.

Until that period, the Last Judgment icon conserves its development on four registers; however, beginning with the following centuries, a new register appears (the fifth one, placed above the icon), where the Ancient of Days is represented, the heavenly Jerusalem – in some of Saint David’s prophecies.

A masterpiece of universal notoriety is considered to be the Last Judgment painted on the west façade of the Voronet church (1547, see photo)⁷. Regarding the development of this composition, Sorin Dumitrescu is of the opinion that “the vast exterior icon painted on the west-side wall of the Voronet (*photo*) glorifies in the amplest manner the imminence of the fearful event of the end of the world. The premonitory force and the range of the providential content easily exceed the greatness of the Last Judgment, painted on the height of the vault of the parekklesion (1300) of the Constantinople Kariye Djami church.”⁸

A.2. The iconographic canon. Description of the iconographic registers

We can start – in explaining the iconographic registers – from the texts quoted from the Bible and from the description of the Last Judgment theme, made by hieromonk Dionysus of Fourná, in his book *Painter’s Manual* or *Hermeneia*.

One can notice the compatibility of the texts from the Old and New Testament with the iconographic registers of the Universal Judgment, but also with the visions of the church saints, who attest the iconographic program.

We have compared the texts from the Bible with the iconographic registers of the seven mentioned icons, proving in this manner the indestructible relationship between aesthetics and theology. In the case of iconography, aesthetics is used as an instrument to emphasize a scriptural truth revealed to the prophets and experienced by the evangelists, any diversion being only fruit of the human fantasy, leading to a distortion of the faith truths.

A.3. Representation of God the Father in the Last Judgment icon

⁷ V. Drăguț, cited works, p. 264.

⁸ Sorin Dumitrescu, *Chivotele lui Petru Rareș și modelul lor ceresc*, Ed. Anastasia, 2001, p. 109.

While in iconography the Savior is represented as a Judge in three different ways – symbolically: Etimasia, generalized: Deisis, and in complete display, in the Last Judgment –, God the Father appears in the Last judgment iconography only in the first register, according to the vision of the prophet Daniel. However, we observe that in the older representations – as those from basilica Santa Maria Assunta from Torcello, Dochiariou Monastery, the Last Judgment icon from Saint Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai, the fresco in the parekklesion from Kariye Djami, and the quoted icon in Moscow, God the Father (the Ancient of Days) does not appear. However, He appears in the Russian icons from the XVI-th century, or in the north of Moldavia (for example, in Voronet). We must also emphasize the fact that God the Father does not appear in older representations.

The strict prohibition of representing God was established in the Old Testament (Exodus 20, 4-5 and Deuteronomy 4, 11-15, 16-19); and because nobody has ever seen God, any kind of representation would be a fruit of human fantasy.

Thus, according to Saint John Damascene, the prohibition of representing the Father is based upon the fact that He has never been seen by anybody, and what we can see can never be represented, while what we see can be represented.

„It is obvious that at that time (in the Old Testament) one was prohibited to represent the Unseen God, but when we see the One without body becoming man for us, we can paint His human face. When the Unseen becomes seen through a body, then we can draw the semblance of He Who has shown Himself... draw it all – with word, with color, in books, and on wood”.⁹

Nowadays, the representation of the Ancient of Days is easily taken for the one of Christ the Savior before His embodiment, which is wrong. In this sense, we quote father Nicolae Neaga and father Liviu Vâlcea¹⁰, who beautifully explain (chapter 7, 13-14 from the book of prophet Daniel) the fact that the Son of Man is Christ Messiah. If He is Messiah, then the Ancient of Days is the representation of God the Father and not of Christ the Savior. Once we have settled this problem, the first register becomes uncanonical and impossible to represent, in the case of the icon at Sol’vyčcegodsk.

⁹ Sfântul Ioan Damaschin, *Al treilea cuvânt de apărare împotriva celor ce admonestază sfintele icoane*, 8.

¹⁰ Source: www.crestinortodox.ro, father Liviu Vâlcea.

“The Great Synod of Moscow” in 1666 – 1667, by canon 43, clearly ascertains the prohibition to represent God the Father as a grizzled old man, thus – in the case of the Russian XVI-th century icon already mentioned – of the Ancient of Days.

A.4. The Byzantine icon in the iconoclast period

The iconoclast period has two successive stages: 726 – 770 and 815 – 843.

The iconoclasm doctrine is to destroy any figurative representation, considering it insufficient to represent the divine.

It all begins with the exaggeration and deviation of the worship of religious images by iconodules. They gave up the right religious practice in using the iconographic image, and used it abusively.

The iconoclast movement enjoyed the support of various Byzantine emperors, the most fervent being Leon III Isaurian, Constantine V Copronim and Leon V the Armenian. During their reign, the Empire has known peaceful and prosper periods; however, spiritual and materially, Leon III was convinced of his vocation of reformer of Empire and church.

Saint John Damascene, who lived in Saint Sava Monastery in Jerusalem, was very determined about the iconoclasm. His work entitled *Three treaties against the iconoclasts* is of great importance, as it strengthens the conviction that the holy icons can be painted and honored.

In 754 the Council of Hieria was assembled, where 335 bishops signed a treaty against the worship of religious images. Empress Irene, together with patriarch Tarasius, gathered the VII-th council, which was designated to cancel the resolutions of the iconoclast council of 754, and to definitively proclaim the victory against the iconoclasts about their images and worship.

After this period of ecclesiastical peace, the second period of Byzantine iconoclasm begins, which takes place between 815 and 843. Leon V the Armenian cancels the decision of the Council of Nicaea (787) and starts the theological battle against the iconomachs, whose representatives are Patriarch Nikephoros and Saint Theodore the Studite. They elaborate “The final iconological Synthesis of Byzantine

theology”¹¹. Saint Theodore the Studite writes the three “antiheretical” treatises, giving in this way an orthodox answer to iconoclasm.

At March 11-th 842, in the first Sunday of the Great Lent, the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Synods have reaffirmed, re-establishing the worship of religious images (icons) and casting anathema on the iconoclasts.

B. Materials and techniques

1. Wood

a) Selecting, cutting and preparing the wood

Wood is the most widespread material, after pergament and paper, because it is light and can be easily processed, the artist (painter) obtaining flat surfaces, perfect for painting. This support has been used by Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and other painters.

The Last Judgment icon – the object of our research – is painted on a panel of linden wood, which (as we shall see) was cut, joined and treated according both to the requirements of the Byzantine erminies, and to the contemporary writings completing them.

b) Joining the wood panel

This phase has special significance, being handled very seriously by the artists of ancient times, from whom we learn. We have noticed – site-seeing in museums (for example the *Byzantine Museum in Thessaloniki*, *Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow*, *National Museum of Art of Romania*) the old masters’ icons – various types of joining the wooden panels. This information has proven to be extremely useful in rediscovering and re-affirming the traditional values. In this sense, we have succeeded in finding a carpenter who knows how to apply this particular kind of joining the wooden panel, used in iconography.

The wooden panel is formed of 6 wooden strips, fixed one to another by cold glue and pressed for a week. The exterior strips and the centre strip are narrower, and the others wider; in this way, it is prevented an irregular distortion of the wood in time, in

¹¹ Teodor Studitul, *Iisus Hristos, prototip al icoanei sale*, p. 26.

case that this one is stored / deposited in an unsuitable place, with a high degree of humidity.

c) Glues used for preparing the wooden panel

Glues are of two types: of animal origin and of vegetal origin. In this case, the wooden panel is glued with animal glues, which are of various types: bone glue, fish glue, rabbit skin glue, alimentary gelatine:

- bone glue is made of cartilages and bovine bones, through boiling and cooling in different forms;
- fish glue is usually obtained of the swim bladder and of bones;
- rabbit (skin) glue is made of rabbit collagen.

At the glue bath of the wooden panel we have used rabbit glue – in concentration of 150 grams in 1 liter of water –, the glue filling every pore against any agent of destruction, as woodworms or humidity. Seasoning and treating the wood in glue bath all over its parts assures us that it will be long lasting, approximately 200 years, if the wood is kept in warm and dry rooms.

d) Applying the linen cloth on the wood surface

Another efficient method to consolidate the wood is applying the linen cloth/canvas onto the frontal surface of the wooden panel, method used since Antiquity. Back then, they used to put a cloth sufficiently thick, as the industrial manufacturing of fine tissues was impossible at that time. Nowadays, we successfully use fine cotton (gauze), linen or hemp (canavas).

2. Primers

Primer is an intermediate layer between the wooden support and pigments. It represents the surface itself the pigments are applied on. Its fragility redounds directly upon the color layer: the decomposition of the primer means losing the painting.

Old time primers were made of the same elements we use today: gesso, chalk, animal glues, vegetal glues, egg yolk and honey.

Present day primers: the painters usually prepare a certain type of primer for a certain type of support and a certain type of technical procedure.

Types of primers. Primers can be of various types:

- primer with bone glue, rabbit glue or fish glue;
- alimentary gelatine.

These types of primers are compatible with the icon's technique, and the primer recipes vary from school to school in their percentages.

a) *Preparation of the primer*

There are two possible methods of preparing the primer, both being efficient and lasting in time.

The first method is especially for the beginners, as it is easier to control the percentage between chalk and glue.

The second one is recommended to those who already have experience, because the report between chalk and glue can be controlled in accordance with the iconographer's desire, for the support to be more or less absorbent.¹²

b) *Applying the primer*

After preparing the primer, it is cooled and applied onto the wooden panel in various layers¹³, until the canvas fixed to the wooden panel is entirely covered.

The primer can also be applied when cold; this is possible if the glue is very qualitative¹⁴.

c) *Polishing/Burnishing the primer*

Usually, the primer is polished with sandpaper when dry, method widely spread with the contemporary artists, however insufficient to obtain a very smooth working surface. Based on our experience, we are of the opinion that after preparing and drying the primer on the wooden panel surface, we take a jar of water where we dip our hand, and we circularly polish the primer, until it softens under the effect of water. Then we can easily spread it again and again, until it is absorbed by the wooden panel, and the surplus is removed with up-and-down movements.

3. Drawing

a) *Instruments used for Byzantine drawing*

¹² A very important aspect in the execution of the painting and of the polishing time preferred by each artist consists of the personalization of the primer's recipe.

¹³ From 6 to 12 layers, every 5 hours.

¹⁴ A traditionally prepared wood has a great resistance in time.

The instrument the artist uses is the essential thing of the drawing. Since ancient times, the graphite, coal and brush have been used as fundamental instruments for the execution of models. Drawing is essential for the icon, therefore the iconographer has to know the means by which his work can be achieved.

b) *Rhythm and proportions in drawing*

In iconography, unlike in lay art, certain drawing rules are used, which are entirely different as principle. This fact can be observed even from the types of lines used by iconographers. Of course there are a number of similarities between lay art and Byzantine religious art, however the ecclesial Byzantine art has managed to create masterpieces which fascinate us up to the present day.

Old iconographers were extremely moved with the liturgical life and had a direct participation in improving and helping make perfect the ecclesial art.¹⁵

The saints' faces in icons are conceived according to this scheme of intersecting lines; the face's movement is aimed towards a direction, and the look towards the opposite direction¹⁶. The effect upon the observer is maximal, as he feels watched by the saint in the icon, no matter his positioning in the ecclesial space. This effect is encountered in all icons from churches¹⁷; practically, the believer is covered and sheltered with the saints' looks, feeling integrated into and not excluded from the liturgical life. "The human soul feels almost physically that the icon is surrounded by a field of divine forces and energies."¹⁸

c) *Methods of drawing the face in the orthodox icon*

¹⁵ This kind of art does not serve the aesthetics, but it expresses a truth of faith; that is why the iconographers were considered in ancient times veritable martyrs of Christ.

¹⁶ The issue of dynamic frontality is beautifully presented in the book of professor Georgios Kordis, *Ritmul in pictura bizantina*, editura Bizantină, București, 2008, p. 42 – 43, where he also explains the rhythm resulted from using the scheme in X, which the masters of the sacred art knew to put in practice so well.

¹⁷ "In the icon, faces are still and static. But this coldness hides inside a huge inner dynamism. They say that absolute speed has to be perceived as the lack of movement, because there are not any points of calculus for this speed. That is why the static dimension of the representations in the icon is its inner movement, is the eternal enthusiasm of the soul towards God, it is exceeding time itself as the lack of movement in time and space, as life in other dimensions", Rafail Karelin, Nikolai Gusev, Mihail Dunaev, *Îndrumar iconografic*, cited works, p. 315.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 314.

The frontality of the face in iconography can be of two types, one static and another dynamic; the static frontality is used especially in the iconoclast period, and the dynamic one in the Paleolog period.¹⁹

The dynamic frontality uses the curve axes²⁰, being one of the best methods of drawing a face in an icon, as this one relates very well with the observer.

e) *The inverse perspective*

If in the face drawing we use dynamic frontality, for the execution of the buildings (which accompany an icon) we shall practice another type of perspective. It is known that in occidental art the linear perspective is applied, while in Byzantine (oriental) iconographic art the inverse perspective is used.

The linear perspective reports itself to the horizon, which is finite, as it connects with the earth²¹, while the inverse perspective – not having a horizon to report to – emphasizes the faith depths related to God's world (a world also revealed through the icon).²²

f) *Drawing with brush, ink, pigment and coal*

This technique is widely used since old times until today, giving the artist the possibility to prove his abilities and to reveal his knowledge based on experience.

Drawing with the brush is encountered all over the technological process of an icon, from proplasmos to the last line²³; we may say that it represents the iconographer's mark, because just like a person can not be exactly like another, in the same way one painter's drawing is not identical to another's; however, they both express the same faith truth and this fact binds them in spirit and truth.

¹⁹ See „Introducere”, sub-chapters „Frontalitatea”, „Chipul”, „Prototipurile”, in Constantine Cavarinos, *Ghid de iconografie bizantină*, editura Sophia, București, 2005, p. 17 – 18.

²⁰ For an ampler presentation on the issue of the dynamic frontality with curved axes, see Georgeos Kordis, *Ritmul in pictura bizantina*, cited works, sub-chapters „Ce este linia pentru sistemul picturii bizantine?”, „Trăsăturile caracteristice ale liniei bizantine” și „Despre compoziție în tradiția bizantină”, p. 23 – 93.

²¹ All the objects in the composition report to the horizon line.

²² For an ampler presentation, see Pavel Florenski, *Iconostasul*, editura Anastasia, București, 1994, chapter „Perspectiva inversă”, p. 73 – 133; Michel Quenot, *Nevoia de icoană – de vorbă cu meșterul iconar Pavel Busalaev*, editura Sophia, București, chapter „Atemporalitatea icoanei”, p. 38 – 45; Constantine Cavarinos, *Ghid de iconografie bizantină*, cited works, „Introducere”, sub-chap. „Perspectiva inversă și cea psihologică”, p. 25; Dionisie din Furna, *Erminia picturii bizantine*, cited works, „Partea întâi. Îndrumări asupra picturii. Tempera-ulei-frescă”, sub-chap. „Zugrăvirea în tempera. 1. Cum se scot copiile și se fac izvoade”, p. 27.

²³ One of the reasons for which the painting of an icon can also be called *writing* is because it is about a certain calligraphy and accuracy of the detail.

4. Gilding

a) *Poliment gilding (gold plating)*

The term *poliment* is of French origin and derives from *to polish*. This technique requires a lot of experience and attention from the practitioner.

There are three types of poliment, the ochre one, the red one and the black one, this last one being used only at the gilding of the gold leaf. The most spread type is the yellow²⁴ one, being used currently²⁵ by the majority of the iconographers, as it has almost the same color as the gold leaf and does not create a chromatic discord. There are several types of recipes. We shall detail two of them, the Russian school type and the Greek school one; we consider that these ones are compatible to the materials that we can buy today.

b) *Mordant gilding*

This technique is widely spread today, having certain advantages from the technological point of view.

Mordant is of various types, out of which the water mordants, the alcohol and oil-based ones are the most spread today. Water-based and alcohol-based mixtion have the advantage of drying much easier and more, they can be applied using the brush, while the oil-based mixtion gets dry harder and it applies on the surface with the hand, by circular movements, so that we obtain an even surface. Every mordant requires a certain time to dry²⁶, depending on its preparation. After drying, the gold leaf can be applied in a single layer, unlike the poliment gilding, where we have to apply 2 layers.

c) *Assista*

In the case of certain icons (for example, Mother of God with the Child, Jesus Christ Pantocrator), lines of golden light are used on the vestment. These are not applied directly on the primer, but on a layer of rasped chalk. Afterwards, we draw the lines with 15 minutes alcohol mordant; after drying we apply the gold leaf.

²⁴ This type of poliment is very easy to use, having good qualities.

²⁵ Today it is produced by Charbonelle.

²⁶ Seasoning time: water mixtion – 5 minutes, alcohol mixtion - 30 minutes, and oil mixtion – 3 or 12 hours.

5. Pigments

a) *Pigments used in iconography*

Depending on school (area), different types of colors are used, usually natural colors, obtained from minerals or plants.²⁷

Based on our practical experience, we consider that it is very easy for the iconars to simplify their chromatic palette, reducing the color number.²⁸

We do not want to detail every ancient school method of obtaining the colors, but we want to focus on tetrachromacy, which is found in Constantinopolitan and Macedonian schools, and which is still used in some iconographic Greek schools.²⁹

The technique is called tetrachromacy as it uses four pigments: two colors and two non-colors; the colors are red and ochre, and the non-colors are white and black. In order to obtain a chromatic equilibrium we have to use a certain type of red and ochre – as colors, and also a certain type of white and black – as non-colors.

b) *Chromatic experiment – tetrachromacy*

This experiment explains better the nuances and tones resulting from mixing the four pigments. Taking into consideration that we have two warm colors and two non-colors, we may also obtain cold colors (blue, green, violet). Colors can be obtained by the physical mixture, on the palette, but also by an optical color mixture on the painted surface, when we meet a simultaneous contrast.³⁰

It is extremely important for all to understand this chromatic report, because in this way we avoid using all kinds of synthetic pigments, which destroy the chromatic unity and the icon's simplicity.

c) *Superpositions and chromatic transparencies*

In iconography, since ancient times until today chromatic transparencies are used, through color superpositions. In this way, the more the color is placed on the surface in fine layers, the more luminosity and expressivity it gets.

²⁷ "Pigments and colors in the icon are not mere colors, but rhythms of the hymn the soul sings to God", in Rafail Karelin, Nikolai Gusev, Mihail Dunaev, *Îndrumar iconografic*, cited works, p. 314.

²⁸ "Comparatively, the iconographers from old times used a reduced number of colors, which were not repeated in one and the same iconographic subject. The interaction of the colors, and the drawing itself, are synthetically perceived in the icon, similar to a whole, and are received in the soul through a sole mystic experience", in Constantine Cavarnos, *Ghid de iconografie bizantină*, cited works, p. 312.

²⁹ See the school of prof. univ. dr. Georgeos Kordis, where we took exactly this technique of painting icons.

³⁰ The optical mixture is effectuated by the eye through synthesis.

Thus we can explain the chromatic coherence from the monumental works of the ancient iconographers.³¹

6. Byzantine painting

b) *Order in painting*

In Byzantine painting, unlike other representation techniques, we have to think in layers, from dark to light, that is: proplasmos, glykasmos, semi-carnation, carnation, light and accent.³² This manner to conceive an icon is in perfect harmony with the inverse perspective; it all comes towards the observer (meeting him), in this way opening to him the possibility to communicate with the prototype.³³

c) *Painting the buildings*

After the process of gilding and incision of drawing, we pass to the painting stage. We begin from exterior towards interior.

After their drawing, the buildings are covered with an ochre layer; then, we renew the drawing and we outline the shadow areas.

d) *Painting of the garments*

The saints' garments in the icons are executed in a special technique: the lights are put as blades which reduce from dark to light. These blades have a special calligraphy and they can be different from one school to another. In our case, we used the type of vestment from the Macedonian or Constantinopolitan schools, this type distinguishing by the harmony of the blades' chromatic tones and by the coherence of drawing.³⁴

e) *Painting the Byzantine face*

In order to paint the Byzantine face, we begin from dark to light; however the difference lies in more layers of color, which fade by fine lines. The first layer is the

³¹ For example, basilica Santa Maria Assunta (Torcello): the Last Judgment; at Kariye Djami (Constantinopol): the Last Judgment.

³² See Daniel V. Thompson jr., *Practica picturii în tempera*, cited works, chap. VI. „Pictura”, sub-chap. „Ordinea pictării”, p. 163.

³³ See for this Michel Quenot's phrase „Icoana, fereastră spre absolut” (homonymous title).

³⁴ “Sometimes there are drops of light on the faces and vestments of the saints. This is not related to the volumetric representation of the characters, and is not a reflection of an exterior source of light, but they are symbols of the eternal light, of the un-created divine energies, which the saints' souls unify with. This light comes neither from outside nor from exterior, but it is an extra-spatial light. Eternal life is a tireless progression towards God, through the eternal communion with the divine light. The drops of light are visual signs of the communication to God, where the saints in the icon find.”, in Rafail Karelin, Nikolai Gusev, Mihail Dunaev, *Îndrumar iconografic*, cited works, p. 312 – 313.

proplasma, the second – the glykasma, the third – the semi-carnation, the fourth – the carnation, the fifth – the light and the sixth – the accent. Each color layer has its own chromatic formula:

- proplasma: ochre + black³⁵;
- glykasma: proplasma + white;
- semi-carnation: ochre + red + white;
- carnation: semi-carnation + white;
- light: carnation + white;
- accent: white.

7. Varnishing

Varnishes are liquid transparent solutions, lightly colored, obtained by dissolving resins, gums or other substances in certain solvents and which solidify in contact with air.

Hard resin varnishes, usually made of copal, are expensive and are rarely used; however, these resins are extremely good for varnishing the icon. Their advantages consist of their suppleness, resistance to humidity and dryness; they are durable, they do not crackle and they increase the nuances' depth. They have special qualities, as they easily dissolve, they are elastic, easy to prepare and very resistant in time.³⁶

A good varnish has the following qualities:

- stability to light and air;
- resistance to heat and temperature variations;
- resistance to humidity and dryness;
- physical and chemical neutrality towards pigments;
- reversibility.

Conclusion

As it arises from our research, we can notice an evolution in time of the Last Judgment theme from the manuscript to the icon stage, developed on various registers.

³⁵ In case the proplasma is warm, we can add a little red.

³⁶ Manila copal varnish represents until today the best solution for varnishing the contemporary icons.

Among the seven icons that we have mentioned in our thesis, the best composition from the aesthetic and theological point of view is the representation of the Judgment at Torcello, Basilica Santa Maria Assunta (VII – XI centuries), being a frame of reference for iconographers.³⁷

Without minimizing the importance of the other representations of the Last Judgment, we are of the opinion that the one in Basilica Santa Maria Assunta, through its impeccable composition, moderate and sober chromatic, and its complete liturgical message, makes the most of the eschatological event of great importance for Christianity. We can also notice the compositional unity and the coherence of the iconographical program in all the seven icons (with small differences among them), regardless of the schools they come from. This happens thanks to hieromonk Dionysus of Fourni, who describes in his book (*Painters Manual* or *Hermeneia*) the method we are to use in painting the complex scene of the Last Judgment.³⁸

Another important aspect would be the compatibility among the visions of the church fathers (Saint Niphon of Constantia, Saint John Damascene, Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Saint Andrew of Caesarea etc.) and the iconographic plan of the Universal Judgment icon. Reading these writings, we can minutely understand what happens in each iconographic register. We confess that these readings helped us spiritually along the icon painting process.

The icons from Torcello, Sinai, Kariye Djami are balanced (unitary) from the chromatic point of view, compared to the other mentioned icons; we are inclined to think that the masters who had painted them used a reduced chromatic palette, following the technique described in the chapter “Pigments”, sub-chapter “Chromatic experiment - tetrachromacy”. This fact can be observed in the icons we have executed, which sustain this idea.

We have to observe that the older icons are more authentic, developing on four and not on five registers, as more recent representations. In XVI-th century icons the register where God the Father is represented appears; on this line, following our study, we have noticed the definite restriction of this kind of representation, decided by the

³⁷ In the Last Judgment icon that we have painted we used the composition of the Torcello icon.

³⁸ At Dochiariou Monastery is being settled the iconographic canon in its actual form.

Council of a Hundred Chapters in Moscow, reason for which we gave up this register in the icon we have executed.

Technologically, as we can notice in our thesis, the materials icons are made of are extremely important, knowing that “every substance has its own education and specific action on man”³⁹. That is why we forcefully state that an icon has to be composed by materials carefully selected by the iconographer from the three kingdoms: mineral, vegetal and animal.

At the same time, we think that the issue of dynamic frontality with curve axes opens new horizons for research. We refer here to the energy fields which result from this dynamic frontality and the way in which the observer (the Christian believer) relates to the saints represented in the icons and frescoes from the ecclesial space. Therefore, the importance of knowing the drawing, color and composition issues are proved not only from an aesthetic perspective, but also from their understanding from an ecclesial perspective, through the liturgical practice.

“Living in the church, mystic endowment, artistic capacity and skillfulness, and the most important thing, grace’s presence in our heart, they all give the iconographer the possibility to discern the holiness from un-holiness, the churchly thing from the outsider, truth from lie.”⁴⁰

Being like a minister of church, the iconographer has to become conscious of his importance in the ecclesial body and his overwhelming responsibility in executing the most authentic painting.

“Honoring the icons is a dogma, a truth revealed by God, but at the same time it is assigned to the structure of the world creation and philosophy of the face itself.”⁴¹

³⁹ *Îndrumar iconografic*, cited works, p. 362.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 344.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 351.