

**ON THE WAY TO REDEMPTION.  
THE PASSION AND DEATH OF THE MARTYR  
IN ROMANIAN HAGIOGRAPHY  
BETWEEN THE 17<sup>th</sup> AND THE 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES**

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*And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to  
go with thee, both into prison, and to death.  
(St. Luke 22: 33)*

For the entire Christian world, which I refer to in my study, *martyrdom* takes into account those people who having lived in accordance with the precepts of the New Testament, suffer a violent death, caused by someone who belongs to a different cult. Martyrdom is “the highest form of Christian holiness”<sup>1</sup>; this kind of death that the saint receives ensures his or her immediate acceptance in heaven<sup>2</sup>. The *Revelation of Saint John the Divine* reveals the special status of the saint martyr: “And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (*Revel 7: 13-14*)

The development of the concept of *martyrdom* appears in the patristic age, which is reflected by the texts that were written starting with this age, which were granted special importance until the end of the Middle Ages. The Greek term *pathos*, with its Latin equivalent *passio*, at its origins, means suffering. A new significance, *passion*, is added to it over time, due to the many dramatic events which affect the Christian communities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Daniélou, *Biserica începuturilor de la origini până la sfârșitul secolului al III-lea* (*The Early Church. From its origins to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century*), transl. by Wilhelm Tauwinkl, București, Editura Universității, 2006, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> Claudio Moreschini, Enrico Norelli, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, vol. I – *De la Apostolul Pavel până la epoca lui Constantin cel Mare* (*The History of Ancient Greek and Latin Christian Literature*, vol. I – *From St. Paul the Apostle to the Age of Constantine the Great*), transl. by Hanibal Stănculescu, Gabriela Sauciuc, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2001, p. 419.

The oldest documentary evidences in which names of saint martyrs are mentioned are either texts which contain the attestation of some Christian community with respect to the violent death of one of its members, or official documents, that is an act which details the arrest, judging and condemnation of a Christian. These are completed with detailed notes of someone on the defendant's side, who took notes and commented on the event, in the hope that they can serve as a moral model for posterity. The accounts of some witnesses who were present at the scene of the martyrdom, which had been written with simplicity and Christian devoutness, are a great source of information, which provide a complete image of the passion.<sup>4</sup>

To what degree are the cited documents important to establishing a hagiographical genre?

In order to answer that question, we are forced to mention the distinction which was introduced in this type of research by Hippolyte Delehaye, between the *historical passion* (*la passion historique*) and the *epical passion* (*la passion épique*)<sup>5</sup>. The *historical passion* covers the documents we have already mentioned, the "first hand" that are highly objective, which contain realistic elements, which were written in a sombre style, texts which were validated, when they were written, by the Christian community to which their author belonged. The Letter to the Church in Smyrna, which was written by an eye witness, Marcian, less than a year after the martyrdom of Polycarp, the Bishop, was validated by the members of the Christian community, who witnessed its writing. The tone of the letter is subdued, the words come from the primitive liturgy, and there is no reference to miracles; all of these granted the letter an air of credibility.<sup>6</sup> To this example, we can also add the passion of the saints Perpetua and Felicitas, which had been written in 203 by Tertullian, the official document of the martyrdom of Saint Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, in 258, and some passions which were rewritten in the third century, Maximus', Carp's, Papi's and Agathonica's, which is also mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea. There are some true accounts from the age of the great persecutions, which refer to the historic quality of the characters and events: the trial of Saint Crispina, also mentioned by Saint Augustine, the passion in 304, in Salonic, of the saints Agape, Sionia and Irene, or the passion of Marcel the centurion, in 298, in Tangier.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, there are the texts which, based on the name of a saint martyr, develop a more or less credible series of events in his or her life. The so-called *epical passions* are characterised by a lavishness of details, temporal

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<sup>4</sup> René Aigrain, *L'hagiographie. Ses sources. Ses méthodes. Son histoire*, Bruxelles, Bureau de la Société des Bollandistes, 2000 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 132-136.

<sup>5</sup> Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, Bruxelles, Bureau de la Société des Bollandistes, 1921.

<sup>6</sup> René Aigrain, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 210-215.

and spatial inconsistencies, the introduction of some fictive characters, overstating the miraculous nature of things and excessive rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the documents which represent the object of study of hagiography contain rigorous information, they were written at the time of the dramatic events or shortly after they had happened, while other documents are full of the hagiographer's comments, re-phrasings, completions, extraordinary turns of the plot, patterns taken from popular culture. It was normal for the epical type to become more prominent, with the passing of time and moving further away from the moment of the historical moment, in order to satisfy a demand for fiction coming from the audience. The more the stories circulated, the more the historical fact was covered under multiple layers of fiction. The narrative discourse is refined; the construct is more heterogeneous, encompassing elements from theology, history, literature, folklore, and iconography. The hagiographical genre, in its epic form, is in itself a proof of the incomplete metamorphosis it underwent. It is like you decided to change your identity, having no intention to give up on your old habits. The result is, without a doubt, a hybrid. This is why reading the hagiographical texts is a process of unveiling this "body", that of lifting one cultural veil after the other. To look at this genre from an exclusively literary perspective is impossible, we are dealing with texts of an implied literary value, as we have already mentioned. The attempt to separate the literary from the non-literary is futile, in this context.

A more recent classification of the genre distinguishes between the *early hagiography*, which includes the *Acts and Passions*, and *late hagiography*, which deals with the saint's biography.<sup>9</sup> Some elements from the first genre can be recognised in the second one: the narrative structure, the discourses of the main characters, the commemorative style.<sup>10</sup>

For a researcher in the field of culture, who is more interested in the mechanisms of construction, ideology, symbolism, etc, the *late hagiography* represents a more interesting object of study. On the other hand, the *historical passion*, although it is in accordance with the historical truth, only manages to rise up to the condition of "an imperfect type of hagiography".<sup>11</sup>

In the Romanian area, with its young literature, we can only speak of *late hagiography*. The earliest work that belongs to the genre would be the one written by Gavriil Uric, who, in 1439, was probably influenced by the new arrival of the relics of Saint John the New in the capital of Moldavia, and who added the saint's passion in a codex, among other lives of saints and panegyrics.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the text was written in Slavonic and the Romanian account of the hagiography would be written only two centuries later. After the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 140, 208.

<sup>9</sup> Claudio Moreschini, Enrico Norelli, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 418.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 418-419.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 418.

<sup>12</sup> Dan Horia Mazilu, *Recitind literatura română veche (Re-reading Early Romanian Literature)*, vol. II, București, Editura Universității, 1998, p. 193.

contribution of the bishop Barlaam in 1643, whose *Romanian Book of Teachings* contains some lives of saints, in extended accounts, translated from Slavonic, an account of the *Prologues* is translated, in 1675, at Cozia. This manuscript was on the reading list for the monks in the monastery of Oltenia until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

*The lives and passing of saints*, which was published in Iasi, between 1682 and 1686, in four volumes (the last volume was not finished), bishop Dosoftei's extraordinary "attempt", is based on Greek and Slav sources. The *Prologues* of the high official of the Church in Moldavia would ensure the spreading of the "histories" of saints throughout the Romanian territory, which is demonstrated by the great number of manuscripts based on his writing. From this moment on, the way our hagiography took was a circular one, as one can conclude, on the basis of Cătălina Velculescu's observations: "The Prologues of the bishop of Moldavia, which were taken over by Mitrofan of Buzău, then by Chesarie Râmniceanu, have become entries in the Church saints calendars (their point of origin) mainly in the printed ones, which ensured a wide and lengthy circulation".<sup>14</sup>

As for the extended variants, they appear in Romanian codexes in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The next century also records some attempts, of which only one is finalised, by the hierodeacon Stephen, from the Monastery of Neamt.<sup>15</sup> He tried to translate *the lives of saints* from Slavonic, integrally, and he wrote 12 volumes, which were edited in the same monastery, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Apart from the so-called *canonical literature*, which includes all the texts previously mentioned, sacred biographies also have *apocryphal accounts*, which are present in vernacular books. In order to meet the people's horizon of expectations, these have gone through different stages of a process of separation from the rest of the hagiographical collection.<sup>16</sup> This is the case of George, Eustace Placidus, Paraskevi, Alexis, Macarios the Roman and so on, whose lives were especially attractive to the audience. We have to look at the changes in this genre from the perspective of oral transmission as well, because it is a fundamental feature of medieval culture, which is determined by the lack of formal education (illiteracy), in the first place. Thus, these biographies reach the public through intermediaries, that is, a narrow category of people, which is mainly represented by monks and the clergy.

If we consider the conclusions I have reached in my reasoning so far, we cannot consider the Romanian texts, which are part of the group of texts submitted to analysis, as literary configurations, but we can look at them from

<sup>13</sup> Cătălina Velculescu, *Cărți populare și cultură românească (Popular books and Romanian culture)*, București, 1984, p. 76-77.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Horia Mazilu, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>16</sup> N. Cartoian, *Cărțile populare în literatura românească (Popular books in Romanian Literature)*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1974, vol. I, p. 175.

the perspective of “implied literary value”<sup>17</sup>, or “the vocation of the extraordinary”<sup>18</sup>, as it is defined by Eugen Negrici *The Involuntary Expressiveness*. I will mostly deal with the passions of twenty martyrs, although our analysis started with a greater number of hagiographies. Some of them are highly popular in Romanian old culture, which is reflected in the iconography of the time – Artemius, Cyprian, George, Catherine of Alexandria, Eustace Placidus, Charalambos, Christina, Ignatius of Antioch, Margaret of Antioch, Mercurius, Menas, Stephen, Triphon, Barbara, some of who are more widely known in Western Europe – Agatha, Lucia, Sebastian – others were selected for the study because of the extraordinary plot of the narrative – Phocas or Barbarus.<sup>19</sup>

In general, the hagiographical plot contains instructions (which are more or less precise) as to the geography and temporal dimensions of the events, characters and hagiographical typologies, the battle between the forces of good and evil, which are divided in manichaean fashion, the martyrs’ prosecution, their torture, their death, some implications about *the other world* and the thaumaturgy in its different forms.

I will only deal with the sequences of the martyr’s passion and death, as well as the configuration of the Paradise, in the hagiographer’s vision.

### I. Thresholds of martyrdom

In what followed after the biblical, patristic and liturgical writings, one can notice the popular mentality with respect to *the thresholds of heavens*.<sup>20</sup> People, who have always been interested in what happens with the soul after death, have granted special attention to all the “productions” which offered a hypothesis on the matter. In traditional Romanian culture, the interest in the thresholds that the soul crosses on its way to the *afterworld* is manifest in a great number of texts and images that circulated between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Romanian variants, there are 24 thresholds, which correspond to the same number of sins. The soul, guided by the guardian angel, crosses one threshold after the other,

<sup>17</sup> Eugen Negrici, *Expresivitatea involuntară (The Involuntary Expressiveness)*, București, Editura Universală, 2000 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), “The Immanence of Literature”, p. 421.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 421 a.s.o.

<sup>19</sup> We used the short accounts by Dosoftei, *Viața și petrecerea svinților (The Lives and Passing of Saints)* / February, April, September; *Mineiele de la Buzău (The Church Calendars from Buzău)*, 1698 / April, July; *Mineiele de la Râmnic (The Church Calendar from Râmnicu Vâlcea)*, 1778 (October) and 1780 (November and April), as well as the extended accounts in *The Lives of Saints in Neamț*, 1812-1813 (May, July, October, November, December). We also used some of the edited texts Varlaam, *Cazania*, ed. by Jacques Byck, Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, București, 1943. These were compared, as necessary, with any of the following external sources: *Vies des Saints*, d’après les Bollandistes, VI-è éd., tome VII, Paris, 1866; *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, revised by Herbert Thurston & Donald Attwater, Westminster, 1956, vol. I-IV; Jacques Voragine, *La Légende dorée. Edition critique dans la révision de 1467 par Jean Batallier, d’après la traduction de Jean de Vignay (1333-1348) de la Legenda aurea (c. 1261-1266) publiée par Brenda Dunn-Lardeau*, Paris, Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Nicolae Cartoian, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 202-214.

where there are angels and demons who await it with the scales. The devils bring black books where there are all the sins that the person committed in life, and the angels have a scroll of good deeds. Both sides contest for the weight of the deeds, trying to tip the scales one way or the other, thus directing the soul towards heaven or hell.

We mentioned the popular belief in the *thresholds of heavens*, considering that it can constitute a model for the interpretation of the saint martyr's passions. If the soul of the dead has to cross the "ordeal" of the thresholds in order to gain its place in heaven, the martyr also comes across some thresholds in his or her dramatic existence, and these direct them to the *via sacra*. We don't know if these thresholds of martyrdom are as many as for the ordinary soul, but they are certainly memorable for the audience.

As if to get out of the strictness of the canon, the hagiographer compensates for the short, predictable descriptions of the character, by writing more about the series of passions, which are put down in writing in a naturalist style. Imagination does not surpass the real, if we consider the fact that the persecutions of Christians were indeed very cruel, as they were recorded in history books, like the ones written by Eusebius of Caesarea or by his predecessors, Seneca, Suetonius and Tacitus. The philosophers of late Antiquity recount the beheading, throwing to wild beasts, burning, and crucifixion, amongst other horrible torments.<sup>21</sup> In *The Book of the Martyrs in Palestine*, Eusebius describes in detail the horrendous torments to which the Christians were subjected: Peter of Nicomedia is tortured until his bones show, and afterwards the remains are covered in melted steel mixed with salt, and then they are burnt on a grill. In Cappadocia, the accused have their legs broken, in Mesopotamia, they are hung by their legs over a fire, in Egypt, their noses, ears and hands are cut away.<sup>22</sup>

The epical passions follow a pattern, actually imposed by historical passions, which is reinforced by introducing some elements of fiction. Under the influence of some impressive testimonials and documents, hagiography deals with similar events by extending them over to other saints. The torture starts with hitting the saint with different instruments: the flail (Mercurius), sticks and dried ox ligaments (George), staffs (Sebastian, Marina, St. John the New of Suceava), rocks (Charalambos). Sometimes the beating becomes extreme and the saint dies crushed under stones (the archdeacon Stephen). The series of tortures gravitates around a nucleus of three procedures: steel, water and fire. The first type includes cutting the tongue out (Menas and Christine), pulling the teeth out (Fevronia)<sup>23</sup>, pulling the eyes out (Tatiana), hook up the mouth (Charalambos), cutting the breasts (Christina, Juliana, Tatiana, Agatha, Pistis, the daughter of Sophia), being stung with arrows (Sebastian), crushing under the wheel (Catherine of Alexandria, George), wearing iron shoes with

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 146.

<sup>22</sup> Hippolyte Delehayé, *op. cit.*, p. 274-277.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 281.

nails inside (George, Triphon, Conon), tearing skin with iron hooks (Charalambos, Glicheria, Margaret of Antioch), crushing their heads with clubs (Barbara), hanging by four rakes (Mercurius), poking with the spear, as it happened to Jesus, (Demetrius). If those terrible tortures do not prove to be “efficient”, the torturers choose the forces of nature. Some martyrs are thrown in wells or in the sea, after having been attached with a rope to a heavy rock. Christine and Margaret of Antioch have to pass this “threshold of water”. The martyrs Cyprian and Justine are thrown in a cauldron of boiling water. Sometimes fire is used directly as means of torture, and boiling substances are poured on their bodies – water, wax, pitch, lead (Christine), hot oil and pitch (Agatha). Other methods are also used, like hot iron helmet (George), burning torches (Margaret of Antioch, Menas, Triphon), burning in the oven or in a furnace (Catherine of Alexandria, Charalambos).

Just as it had previously happened in the first century of Christianity, the saint martyrs have to confront wild beasts, as is the case with Saints Mamas and Julian, or Saint Basil the New. Tirs was thrown in the sea, locked in a basket full of scorpions and vipers<sup>24</sup>, Christine had to go against snakes. Saint John the New from Suceava was tied with a rope to an untamed horse and dragged through the city for the people to see. Triphon has to go through a blizzard of snow, hung on a wild horse.

Exposing the body in the agora (marketplace) serves the same punitive purpose. It was necessary for the pain to reach all the levels of the anatomy of martyrdom, thus including the psychological torment. Extreme cold or heat are associated with the invasion of privacy and are materialized in the forced exposure of their naked bodies. Saint Barbara is being “walked through the city, naked”, but she suffers this ordeal of being shown to the public bare skinned with dignity, but also feeling helpless in front of hiding the remains of the original sin from the eyes of the audience. Naked, with blood dripping from their bodies, Saints Margaret of Antioch and Agatha bear this brutal treatment patiently, without complaining. Some torturers are more enthusiastic about tormenting the virgins who kept their virginity for the “celestial bridegroom”; nullifying the *alterity* of the sex goes together with the attempt to erase the *alterity* of religion. The virgin martyrs have their breasts cut out, as a punishment because they had resisted the pursuit of the male community; besides the obvious physical handicap, the text implies a psychological handicap as well. The same meaning can be derived from cutting the hair off about Tatiana, of whom we learn that she got through a huge blazing fire unharmed, and so the torturers thought that her magical *charms* (look up the meaning of the word) reside in her hair.

Besides these generic tortures, the biographer also inserts some downright surprising elements. Denounced by her fiancé to the consul of Syracuse, Lucia has to go through the same tortures as the rest of the virgins; because her faith

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<sup>24</sup> Nicolae Cartoian, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 180.

does not sway, she has to suffer a different kind of ordeal: she is isolated in a brothel and threatened to be continuously raped until to death. The men who hurry to take her to the place of the horrible ordeal are surprised to find out that the girl cannot be moved, despite the desperate efforts which imply more men and a certain number of oxen. Her physical resilience, the firmness of the body are interpreted as proof of witchcraft, so the last minute solution to suppress her magical abilities – which is puzzling in itself – is to pour urine on the virgin.

The supplices are the most important detail when it comes to identify and single out the martyrdom, which can be noticed, especially, at the confluence of the text and the image. Margaret of Antioch is locked in a cell with her torturer, Olibrius. One night, she is visited by the devil, but the saint banishes him with the sign of the cross and a prayer. In the literary accounts of the West, which are depicted in the entire medieval iconography, the devil looks like a dragon which spits fire and which is defeated by the saint, who threatens him with a sword.<sup>25</sup> This representation can be seen, starting with the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in Moldavia, and in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Muntenia and Transylvania. The devil can be found in images in Romanian churches, having been painted as he looks in traditional culture. The saint grabs his hair and hits him with a hammer, according to both the stories and the Eastern variant of the hagiography:

„Și să făcu cutremur mare cât să cutremură temnița. Iară un dzmeu pornindu-se de oareunde și șuerând tare, târându-se, să părea că va să dea foc sfintei. Dici, spărându-să ea foarte și îngrozindu-se, ruga pre Dumnezeu. Și așa acel groaznic zmeu să arată în chip de câine. Iară sfânta, luându-l de păr și găsind un ciocan, îl bătu pre cap și preste spinare până îl slăbi”.<sup>26</sup>

Sebastian, the military martyr from the Praetorian Guard, is a similar case. The arrows used in his supplice have become his emblem, although they are not the ones which deal the final blow to the saint. The saint's image is singled out by the presence of the arrows in all his representations in the Middle Ages, when he is depicted as a noble who has some arrows in his hand, and in the Renaissance, when the artists painted him nude, with his body pierced by arrows.

What we can see in the form of the supplice is a kind of penitence which was supposed to humiliate the “candidate” to holiness, “the equivalent to one of the proofs of degradation imposed by the Judge”.<sup>27</sup> The flesh is torn to bits, the released soul hovers above, on its way towards the much wanted Promised Land.

<sup>25</sup> See *Vie des Saints* d'après les Bollandistes, p. 457; *Butler's Lives of the Saints, cited*, vol. III, p. 152; Agnes B. C. Dunbar, *A Dictionary of Saintly Women*, London, 1905, p. 11-12.

<sup>26</sup> “And the earth was shaking and the walls of the cellar were trembling. There was a dragon coming from nowhere and hissing, crawling, it looked like it wanted to set the saint on fire. Thus, she was very frightened and even terrified, she prayed to the Lord. And the horrible dragon took the form of a dog. And the saint grabbed its hair and reached for a hammer, hit it on the head and back until it lost its strength”. *Mineiul pe luna iulie (The Church Calendar for July)*, Buzău, 1698, p. 59<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> René de Solier, *Arta și imaginarul (Art and the Imaginary)*, transl. by Marina and Leonid Dimov, București, Editura Meridiane, 1978, p. 89.

## II. The Last Step before Eternity

### II.1. The Death of the Martyr

I can conclude, on the bases of the text of the hagiographies, that the lives of the saints are governed by the four elements: earth, water, fire and air. The martyrs were born, just as any human being, from the clay their forefather Adam was created, they fight water and fire throughout their miraculous existence and they are lifted to the sky when they die. Their path is always ascending, and the ordeals of water and fire are obligatory “steps” towards redemption.

Before going to heavens, the saint martyr’s *body* dies in the place where he used to live. If the passions are so varied, the end comes in the same manner: the beheading of the saint. In the synaxarium scenes inside churches, death by beheading is represented in a canonical image: the saint, on his or her knees, is overshadowed by the executioner, who holds the sword lifted in the air; the head of the martyr lies at their feet. Those who do not die of the sword are thrown to the wild beasts (Euphymia<sup>28</sup> or Ignatius Theophorus are eaten by the lions at the circus in Rome), have their nails pulled off (Charitina)<sup>29</sup> or are killed by fire (Nicetius the Roman).<sup>30</sup> The martyrs Pelagia of Antioch and Theodor Tyron end in the same manner. Eustace Placidus and his family are killed in the oven, but their death is determined by the structure of the hagiography, in which the supplices are milder – only one episode refers to their deaths – in comparison with other “productions” of the genre.<sup>31</sup> Having survived the wounds inflicted by the arrows, and being mercifully cared for by the widow Irina, Sebastian moves *on* to the other realm, in a very aggressive manner: not only is he beheaded, but his whole body will be cut to pieces by blade. He is slaughtered like a lamb, one which will join the mystical herd. In a striking way, violence is the one which accompanies martyrs to their resting place. Finally, all of them will reach the peace and content they pursued.

### II.2. Participants at the burial

After death, their bodies are usually thrown outside the city walls, or at the outskirts of the city. The Christians who witnessed the events, take their bodies furtively, at dusk, for them not to be eaten by wild beasts, they take the holy remains and bury them far away from the city. Unmasking the identity of these individuals is not a *sine qua non* feature of the genre. Only sometimes does the hagiographer mention the names of the burial party, the ones who conserve the memory of the martyr. Saint Stephen’s body is taken away from Jerusalem and buried near Caphar Gamala, by some men who were sent for him by Gamaliel and his son Avelvie. Galina, daughter of the emperor Severus, takes the body of

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<sup>28</sup> Dionisie of Furna, *Erminia picturii bizantine (The Manual of Byzantine Painting)*, ed. by C. Săndulescu-Verna, București, Editura Sofia, 2000, p. 185.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 185.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 187.

<sup>31</sup> Nicolae Cartoian, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 185.

Charalambos, veils it with “clean, delicate, scented cloth”, anoints it with “expensive oil” and puts it in a golden coffin. The remains of saints Barbara and Juliane are saved by Galelian, while a woman, whose name is Rufina, buries the remains of Cyprian, Justine and Theoctist. Arista, dean of the church in Antioch, takes the remains of the saint, anoints them and sends them away to Constantinople. In the night that followed Saint Sebastian’s death, he showed herself in Lucinia’s dream and he guides her to the mud well in which he had been thrown. Following the saint’s instructions, she takes the crushed body and lays it at the entrance to the catacombs in Rome, next to the tombs of the apostles.

Their souls are lifted towards the sky in glory, their much tormented bodies return to the soil from which they came, the act of burying the saint brings the normal individual closer to the saint, and opens up a way to communion.

### III.3. Accompanying Martyrs

Saints never die alone. Their word has the power to build, and their mission is according to the metamorphoses they have been through. In the epical plot of the hagiography, we always find, among polemics, the apology of Christianity and of the passion, many conversions, and other martyrs. The hagiographer lets the reader understand that there are some people who “support” the saint, and that there are some accounts within their biographies as well. They usually come from different social and professional layers. They are ordinary people, who are the beneficiaries of the wonders performed by the saint (Glicherie, whose ox had been resurrected by Saint George) or other members of the family (Theopistis, Agapius and Theopistos, the wife and sons of Eustace Placidus or Theodosia, mother of Procopius). They are followed by former clerks in authority who had participated in the tortures before converting to Christianity (Porfirius and Bapto in *The Life of Saint Charalambos*), people from the imperial administration or the army, officers or soldiers (Marcelin and Marc for Saint Sebastian, who is joined in death by Tranghilin, Nicostrat, Claudius, Castor a.s.o.) or even high officials (*Bacchus in The Life of Saint Barbarus*). Unable to rise to the theological height of Catherine of Alexandria, fifty philosophers convert to Christianity and are killed in fire. The Empress Alexandra is killed by sword, following Saint George. There is also a special category of accompanying martyrs, who have also become saints, with their own commemorative day: Nestor died with Demetrius, Juliana was killed with Barbara, Cyprian was accompanied in death by the virgin Justine and by Theoctist. The Garden of Heaven welcomes indiscriminately all those who left the world and followed Christ.

### II. 4. Up above, at Heaven’s door

Reading through the lives of saints and martyrs, we can form an idea about the way the *afterlife* is imagined. Antithesis is the dominant figure of style as

well and, if the Inferno is associated with eternal pain and suffering, darkness, stench and sorrow, Heaven is a place full of light, flowers, fruit and nice smelling trees, where life goes on under the rule of sweetness.<sup>32</sup> Saint Sebastian, in a stimulating speech on love, faith and redemption, describes the image of Paradise:

„Deaca aici vă mângâie pre voi casele acéste de piatră frumoase, cu cât mai vârtos vă vor mângâia pre voi frumusețele curților celor de sus, unde mésele strălucesc de aur curat, unde cămările sânt zidite din pietri scumpe, cu mǎrgăritari împodobite, cu slavă strălucite; unde-s grădinile de-a pururea înflorite cu flori neveștejite, unde-s cîmpi verzi și îndestulați cu izvoară de ape dulci; unde văzduhul totdeauna bine amestecat, vânturile vieții cu bună mireazmă negrăită bine mirolesc simțirilor, unde-i ziua cea neînserată și lumina cea neapusă și bucuria cea nefărșită. Acolo nu iaste suspinare, nici întristare, nici scârbă, nici un féliul de nepodoabă și spurcăciune urâtă vederii, nici oarecare putoare cu rea mirosire, nici auzire a unui glas de întristare și de plângere și de înfricoșare. Ci toate se văd frumoase, toate mirolesc ca niște aromate, toate să aud veselitoare. Acolo cântă neîncetat cétele îngerilor și ale arhanghelilor cu un glas slăvind pe Împăratul cel fără de moarte”.<sup>33</sup>

*The Lives of Saints* can also be seen as an appeal to all the separate senses, in which polar values are supreme. In the vision of archdeacon Stephen, which is narrated in the instance of a third person by the hagiographer, the adjective “sweet” accompanies most of the nouns, be they common or proper, thus having the intensifying effect of repetition on the reader. Death is sweet because it is the last threshold before the gates of heavens, which are opened by the “sweet” Jesus and the “sweetest Mother”. The heroes of the hagiography can hardly wait to reach the gates of the kingdom of heaven, and martyrdom is considered to be the right key to this door. There, they are invited to relish in the sweetness of Paradise, in their turn. But where is this *place*? Where is Paradise? This is a question that has the answer in the eyes of the saints. A proof is the eyes that are fixed in the direction from which redemption comes, that is, above. In the descent of the Bible and of the patristic books, the heaven which every mortal and saint dreams about is up above, in the higher atmosphere. The virgin Pelagia of Antioch, while praying to be rescued unblemished by her besiegers, raised her hands and eyes towards the merciful sky. Sometimes, a divine answer

<sup>32</sup> For more information, see the study by Nadia Ibrahim Fredrikson, *La douceur et l'amertume dans le langage spirituel des saveurs*, in “Vigiliae Christianae”, 57, 2003, p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> “If in this place what consoles you are beautiful stone houses, the more you will be pleased by the beauty of the houses and yards above, where the tables glitter with pure gold, where the store rooms have walls made of precious stones, adorned with pearls, in full glory; where the gardens are always in bloom and the flowers never wither, where the fields are always green and there are a lot of fresh water springs; where the air is always pure, the wind of life smells so sweet to the senses, where the day never ends and the sun never sets and happiness is eternal. There is no sorrow there, no sadness or spite, nothing unpleasant or ugly, there is no stench, no sad voice, no crying or reason to be scared. Everything is beautiful, everything smells nice, all the sounds are joyful. Hosts of angels and archangels always sing there, for the glory of the undying Emperor”. *Vieșile Sfinșilor de la Neam? (The Lives of Saints in Neam)*, December, p. 188<sup>v</sup>.

coincides with the granting of the penitent's wish. Sometimes it is obvious, Christ's voice comes down through the clouds, in order to encourage the ones who sacrifice themselves:

„Și iată un glas din nori s-au auzit zicând: «Bucură-te, Haralampie, luminătoriule al pământului și strălucitoriule al ceriului, părtașule al îngerilor, împreună viețuitorilor al prorocilor, priatene al apostolilor, împreună ostașule al mucenicilor și al vorbii mele vrédnicule! Am auzit rugăciunile tale și am priimit cuvintele buzelor tale, să fie cuvântul tău vindecare bolnavilor»”.<sup>34</sup>

The serene voice is answered with the look of the saint when seeing the Redeemer. Translating this episode at a visual level would result in portraits that are not looking back at the onlooker, but searching, mysteriously, upwards, towards a land that is not included in the painting:

„Au văzut și pre Hristos Iisus, Stăpânul și Domnul său stând, ca cum cu poftă ar fi așteptat venirea lui cătră sineși, până când din trup dezlegându-se degrab cătră dânsul va mérge, ca unde este Domnul acolo să fie și sluga lui. Și céia ce au văzut singur, pre acéia o au vestit și tuturor strigând cu mare glas: «Iată văz ceriurile deșchise și pre Fiul Omenesc stând de-a dreapta lui Dumnezeu»”.<sup>35</sup>

The glittering eyes voluptuously delight in the divine energy, and replenish it on the stunned audience. Probably many of the conversions from that time would have been the result of this miraculous propagation that hagiographers later tried to capture in their stories.

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<sup>34</sup> “And there was a voice coming from the clouds that said: «Rejoice, Charalambos, light of the earth and star of the sky, brother to angels, equal to the prophets, friend of the apostles, defender of the martyrs, worthy of my word. I have heard your prayers and felt the words coming out of your mouth, your word is a cure for the sick!»”. *Ibidem*, February, p. 71<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> “He also saw Jesus Christ, his Lord and Master standing, as if He had waited impatiently for his arrival, until he got separated from his body and hurried towards Him, because where the Lord is, the servant should be as well. And what he saw for himself, he told to the others in loud voice: «I can see the skies open and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Lord»”. *Ibidem*, December, p. 292<sup>r-v</sup>.