

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A HANDSOME MAN.

THE VIRTUE OF A SAINT TRAVELLING ACROSS SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

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Resumo: *Este artigo tem como objetivo estudar a função da imagem de São Cristóvão com cabeça de cão nas representações setecentistas da Roménia Ortodoxa. A investigação estabelece a relação entre as representações zoomórficas existentes e a nova hagiografia criada pela tradição popular, que circulou pela Valáquia depois de 1700. Esta lenda converteu o monstro horrendo do herói hagiográfico na figura que voluntariamente abdica da beleza física, uma mudança semântica que tem como objetivo reforçar a virtude de São Cristóvão. O artigo foca-se no contexto desta invulgar representação visual dentro dos espaços religiosos, bem como no papel exemplar que o santo assume no caminho da contemplação das virtudes cristãs.*

Palavras-chave: *São Cristóvão; Iconografia romena; Arte pós-bizantina; Século XVIII; Virtude cristã; Zoomorfismo.*

Abstract: *The present paper aims to investigate the function of the dog-headed image of Saint Christopher among the Romanian Orthodox representations of the 18th century. The research will address the relationship between the existing zoomorphic representations and a new hagiography created by the popular lore, which circulated in Wallachia after 1700. This legend converted the monstrous ugliness of the hagiographic hero into his voluntary relinquishment of physical beauty, a semantic change intended to stress Saint Christopher's virtue. The article will focus on the role of this unusual visual representation within the religious edifice, as well as on the saint's exemplarity which operates in triggering the contemplation of Christian virtues.*

Keywords: *Saint Christopher; Romanian iconography; Post-Byzantine art; 18th century; Christian virtue; Zoomorphism.*

1. SAINT CHRISTOPHER IN MEDIEVAL ROMANIAN ICONOGRAPHY

Over the long 18th century, the territories now included within Romania's borders evolved under a different political context. After 150 years of autonomous governance, Transylvania became part of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1691¹. On the other hand, Moldavia and Wallachia which had fallen under Ottoman domination in the 15th century found themselves in a hybrid situation until the modern era: they knew both political-military and economic dependence (with financial obligations and trading restrictions), and a certain degree of autonomy, which allowed Christian princes to rule the respective principalities and maintain the «rights and freedoms of the countries»².

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¹ BERNATH, 1994: 57.

² MAXIM, 2001 *apud* MURGESCU, 2010: 31.

In these three regions, during the medieval period, the mural painting of Roman-Catholic and subsequently Greek-Orthodox places of worship assimilated the representations of Saint Christopher. The dissemination of this figure among the churches in this part of Europe is often (but not always) dependent on the religious denomination. In Transylvania, a principality of great religious and ethnic diversity, the figure of the giant Christ-bearer was present in Roman-Catholic iconography as early as mid-13th century³. By the second half of the 16th century, it had been circulating and adorned both interior and exterior mural paintings of churches, and various other artifacts (sculptures, altarpieces, terracotta tiles, etc). In Moldavia, the same iconographic type is known to have adorned the façades of medieval Latin edifices, such as the belfry of the Catholic church in Baia⁴. It must have inspired on the eastern exterior wall painting of the Orthodox church in the same town, decorated in 1541.

Unlike Transylvanian and Moldavian church painting, the art of Wallachia — south of the Carpathians — was introduced to the figure of Saint Christopher only in the 17th century. Depicted in Wallachian mural paintings as the *Christ bearer*, the martyr is no longer oversized as he appears in Catholic churches, but his representations become proportionate with the dimensions of Orthodox architecture of this principality (Fig. 1). From the 18th century onwards, Wallachian churches also display his zoomorphic representation under discussion here. It belongs to the iconographic type of the cynocephalus — the *dog-headed saint*, known to exist since the early Byzantine era⁵. The following presentation is the result of on-site research conducted over the last two decades into the Orthodox edifices standing on the territory of the former Wallachian principality, painted between 1694 and 1821⁶. The intention of this article is to examine the function of the dog-headed image of Saint Christopher among the Romanian Orthodox representations of the 18th century as well as the relationship between the zoomorphic appearance of the saint and the virtues ascribed to him in the written and Romanian oral sources.

³ The oldest representation identified so far in Transylvania is the one on the southern wall of Cricău church, painted in mid-13th century. On the dating of paintings in this Transylvanian church, *vide* KISS, 2012: 296.

⁴ In an article published in 1975, Vasile Drăguț identified traces of St Christopher's figure on the southern wall of the belfry. Cf. DRĂGUȚ, 1975: 60. However, when the author of the present paper visited it in 2008, no portions of the old fresco were visible any more.

⁵ Two reliefs dating from early Byzantine period were found during the archaeological campaigns in Asia Minor in late 19th century. Their description is available in STRZYGOWSKI, 1898: 57-63. Also mentioned in AMEISENOWA, 1949: 43.

⁶ In 1694 was completed the painting of the katholikon of Hurezi monastery — a foundation of Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714). From this edifice, a new type of iconographic program began to disseminate throughout the 18th-19th centuries among the Orthodox churches in Wallachia and subsequently Transylvania and Banat. The other chronological benchmark is the Uprising of 1821, a political event that triggered the changes bringing about the modern era in Romanian society. *Vide* HITCHINS, 1996: 141-197.



Fig. 1. Saint Christopher. Mural painting from 1698. The Princely Church of Târgoviște⁷



Fig. 2. Saint Christopher. Mural painting from 1711. Gregory of Dekapolis Church, former Păpușa Skete

2. A NOVELTY IN ROMANIAN PAINTING POST-1700: THE *DOG-HEADED SAINT*

In an 1935 article entitled *The Dog-Headed Saint*⁸, Maria Goleescu addressed the zoomorphic representations of Saint Christopher she had discovered in Vâlcea county — an area known for its sustained ecclesiastical and artistic effervescence throughout the 17th-18th centuries⁹. Prompted by certain indications provided by this historian, in the year 2000, the author of the present study began investigating on-site a number of places of worship, with a view to identifying the Romanian representations of Saint Christopher and their sources¹⁰.

Chronologically, the earliest zoomorphic depictions of Saint Christopher on Romanian territory are those of canine physiognomy¹¹. The oldest among the corpus of images surveyed is the saint's figure found in the church of Păpușa Skete. In early 18th century, when dog-headed representations of Saint Christopher were imported into Wallachian sacred art, the principality was being ruled by Constantin

⁷ The author of all the photographs is Silvia Marin Barutcieff.

⁸ GOLESCU, 1935: 30-36.

⁹ Vâlcea county belonged to Oltenia, a region where the aforementioned Hurezi Monastery also stands. In 1711, under the rule of Constantin Brâncoveanu, Oltenia was part of Wallachia. The region's capital was Râmnic, one of the oldest urban centres in this principality. RĂDVAN, 2011: 293.

¹⁰ Research conducted between 2000 and 2020 into the Romanian territory has revealed the existence of 13 iconographic types of Saint Christopher. *Vide* MARIN BARUTCIEFF, 2014: 145-238.

¹¹ The mural painting in Moldavia has two composite (anthropomorphic and zoomorphic) representations dating from the 16th century, which contain the dog head. In Wallachia, beside the cynocephalus, there are many instances where the saint's head looks lamb-like, and also others where he seems to resemble an ogre (in Romanian culture, the ogre's appearance has zoomorphic elements). *Vide* MARIN BARUTCIEFF, 2014: 145-238.

Brâncoveanu. Since the early years of his reign, the prince began a program of spiritual revival of the principality, which included the restoration and construction of churches and monasteries. At Hurezi, in Vâlcea county, the ruler commissioned in 1690 an architectural ensemble intended as family burial site. It was centered around the katholikon, decorated by a team led by Constantinos, painter from Epirus, who had arrived in Wallachia a decade earlier.

Located in the vicinity of Hurezi Monastery, Păpușa skete was founded in 1711 as a monastic dependency of Bistrița, another major monastery in the area. The small church of this skete was decorated in 1711 by hieromonk Iosif, together with Teodosie and Hranite¹². The zoomorphic image of Christopher appeared in the mural painting of Păpușa after 1680-1710, a period when anthropomorphic representations of the saint (in his Christ-bearer form) had multiplied. The dissemination of a new variant, the zoomorphic one, was slow between 1712 and 1750, to become more sustained later, which evinced the mutations occurring in collective imagination.

The painting of the porch along the western wall includes the figure of Martyr Christopher. Wearing military attire, the saint carries a spear in his left hand and a cross in his right hand¹³. His body, seen frontally, has human form, but his head shown in profile has canine traits (Fig. 2). This combination between the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic characteristics pertains to a pictorial tradition evinced by post-Byzantine icons circulating throughout south-eastern Europe. A dog's muzzle protruding from a young man's face appears in many instances in the 17th-19th centuries¹⁴. The zoomorphic aspect is often softened by the long tresses flowing on his shoulders, as can be seen at Păpușa skete. A very similar representation can be found at St Nicholas church in Moscopole. The 1726 painting, authored by David from Selenica, Constantin and Christo¹⁵, shows Christopher with the same canine head and long wavy hair down his back. With his remarkable works at Mount Athos monasteries, in Kastoria and Thessaloniki, David was one

¹² The construction of Păpușa skete was commissioned by archimandrite Ștefan of Bistrița Monastery. It is one of the churchly foundations established under Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu as part of his project of cultural and spiritual revival of Wallachia. The group of artists working on the churches in Vâlcea county between 1690 and 1720 was later known as *School of Hurezi* (Rom. *Școala de la Hurezi*). They produced a new artistic style (the Brancoveanu/Brancovan style), disseminated after 1720 across Oltenia and Wallachia, as well in the nearby Transylvania. For the description and commentaries on the main monuments and the artists who decorated them, *vide* POPA *et al.*, 2008.

¹³ The martyr's cross appears in many of the representations pertaining to this iconographic type, as can be seen at Olănești, Topliceni-Drăghiești, Bodești-Drăgănești, Câmpulung, Căinenii Mici.

¹⁴ Such icons are part of the permanent exhibition of the Icon Museum in Recklinghausen: inventory number 205, late 17th-mid 18th c., northern Russia; inventory number 376, mid-18th century, Greece; inventory number 377, 1734, Greece. For the description and commentaries on St Christopher icons in this German museum, *vide* BOCK, 1997. More pictures of the cynocephalus version in Greek and Russian art are provided in GAIDOZ, 1924: 200-201; LOESCHKE, 1955: 42, 51-53, 63; KRETZENBACHER, 1968: 60, 73, 75. An icon dating from late 17th-early 18th c. of St Christopher in military attire, with a fierce dog head, long hair, open muzzle with red tongue sticking out and sharp teeth can be seen at the Arkhangelsk Museum. Photo in *Icons of Northern Russia*, 2007: 327, fig. 180.

¹⁵ For information on St Nicholas church in Moscopole, as well as other edifices in this town, *vide* ROUSSEVA, 2006: 166.

of the artists whose contribution was essential in propagating a number of iconographic themes and stylistic elements among 18th-century churches¹⁶, some of them displaying the zoomorphic figure of St Christopher.

Across the Romanian territory, the fresco of Păpușa first influenced the region of Vâlcea, and subsequently reverberated throughout Oltenia and Wallachia — as prove the mural paintings of Olănești, Câmpulung, Topliceni-Drăghiești, Bodești-Drăgănești (Fig. 3), Sibiciu de Sus, Urșani, Căinenii Mici dating from the 18th century (*vide* Annex). This iconographic type continued to circulate (alongside other zoomorphic variants) until late 19th century, not only around Wallachia but also in Transylvania and, to a lesser extent, in Moldavia¹⁷. The saint's animal figure, in his canine variant, merged with one of his anthropomorphic versions (the Christ-bearer), and thus a hybrid type was created in the Romanian sacred art of the 18th century¹⁸. In these visual representations, prior to 1821, the martyr has a dog's muzzle and his head turned to the right¹⁹ (Ostrov, Voloiacu) or to the left (Topliceni-Drăghiești — Fig. 4, Băbiciu, Caracal, Tetoiu). He has a man's body and he carries Jesus on his left arm. The combination of two variants into a new one is the result of the influence of models disseminated during that period throughout south-eastern Europe²⁰.



Fig. 3. Saint Christopher. Mural painting from 1780 (?). The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple from Bodești-Drăgănești



Fig. 4. Saint Christopher. Mural painting from 1760. Dormition of the Mother of God Church from Topliceni-Drăghiești

¹⁶ ROUSSEVA, 2006: 166.

¹⁷ There are more recent occurrences dating from late 20th century, but they are not typical of today's sacred art.

¹⁸ Romanian iconography knows several hybrid versions, at the intersection between zoomorphic and anthropomorphic features, but the present paper dwells only on those displaying canine facial traits.

¹⁹ The right side of the hero.

²⁰ A number of Greek icons attest to the existence of this prototype. The Icon Museum in Recklinghausen has a copy dating from mid-18th century, which substantiates the iconographic contamination between the cynocephalus type and the Christ-bearer type: inventory number 373, reproduced in BOCK, 1997: fig. 3, 17. A similar Bulgarian icon dating from 1800 is part of the collection of the Icon Museum in Frankfurt. Photo reproduced in the catalogue of *Feuer und Geist*, 2008.

3. TEXT, IMAGE, AND ORAL CULTURE: HAGIOGRAPHIC METAMORPHOSES

The cynocephalus representations of Saint Christopher have a long history in Greek Christianity. Their presence in relief sculptures is recorded as early as the 5th-7th centuries²¹ and also after the second Iconoclast period (814-843); however, during the 10th-12th centuries, the anthropomorphic type seems to be preferred by the painters²². Later on, across the Balkans and the neighbour areas, the post-Byzantine art perpetuated enthusiastically the beastly appearance (Arpera, Lindos, Cekančevo²³). Such images are based on Greek text, which underwent interpolations before being translated into Latin²⁴. This text presents Christopher as a young man hailing from the land of the cynocephali, captured by the Roman military and forced to become a soldier and take part in battles «into the *numerus Marmaritarum*»²⁵. The Romanian printed and manuscript texts derived from Greek sources also contain the elements reflected in iconography. They describe Christopher as a terrifying giant, having a dog head and boar tusks, incapable of articulate speech. Seized by the imperial guards, the young man is brought to a trial in the presence of the emperor and, after a succession of tortures from which he is saved through divine intervention, he receives martyric death by beheading²⁶.

Although the oldest hagiographic version in Romanian language dates from late 17th century, the visual imagery related to St Christopher must have reached Wallachia through the itinerant painters, as was the case with many other themes of religious art. His 1711 icon at Păpușa Skete demonstrates it had entered monastic milieus. Most likely, this image imported in Romanian mural painting was accompanied by an oral hagiographic version, differing from those circulated by written sources and aimed at accounting for the martyr's unusual appearance.

21 Byzantine reliefs of cynocephalus St Christopher were discovered in Asia Minor at the end of the 19th century (STRZYGOWSKI, 1898: 58-59) and after 1980 in Viniça, Macedonia (DIMITROVA, 2012: 232).

22 Anthropomorphic representations of St Christopher, with the appearance of a young man and long tresses on his shoulders, are recorded in Byzantine art. Such figures can be found in Cappadocia, at Tokali 1 (10th century), Cemil and Yusuf Koç (13th century) or in Cyprus, at Moutoullas (1280). Cf. on-site research of 2009 and 2011, respectively. For St Christopher in Cappadocian mural painting *vide* THIERRY, 1977: 192; JOLIVET-LÉVY, 1991: 13, 72, 96, 157. In some Byzantine and post-Byzantine paintings, the martyr sports long hair. *Vide* the icon of Protaton katholikon (16th century). MILLET, 1927: 51.

23 The representations of Arpera (Cyprus) and Lindos (Rhodes) date from the 18th century. A photo of Arpera can be seen in WALTER, 2003: fig. 42. For Cekančevo (19th century) *vide* KRETZENBACHER, 1968: 75.

24 The Greek versions are inventoried in *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Græca* (BHG 309-311), 1909: 46. The BHL 1764 contains a similar story as the BHG 309 text, which is considered the earliest variant of the legend. WOODS, 1994: 183; RACINE, 2006: 115. See also H. Usener, *Acta S. Marinae et S. Christophori*, 1886, 55-76.

25 WOODS, 1994: 170.

26 DOSOFTEI, *Viața și petrecerea svinților*, III, 1686, f. 438v. The printed hagiographic collection of Dosoftei, Metropolitan of Moldavia, appeared between 1682 and 1686. Saint Christopher's life is recorded in the third volume, published in 1686. It is the oldest Romanian printed source related to this martyr. The earliest Romanian preserved manuscript including this account can be found at the Library of the Romanian Academy (B.A.R. 339). This hagiographic text was published for the first time in 2002. *Vide* *Viața Sfântului Hristofor [The Life of Saint Christopher]*, 2002: 9-44.

According to the new hagiographic variant, Christopher is a handsome young man who deploras the constant attention he receives from women. Wishing to dedicate his life to Christ and to become a hermit, the young man prays that he should lose his attractiveness and is granted an animal figure. This version circulated and is still circulating orally in certain communities of south-eastern Europe. In the 20th century, the Austrian scholars Franz Spunda and Leopold von Kretzenbacher heard this tale at Mount Athos, again in the monastic milieu²⁷. It was propagated along the cultural trajectory which assimilated Saint Christopher's zoomorphic figure on the territories of Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia-Macedonia, etc. The author of the present paper has repeatedly encountered it in Romania, during the first two decades of the 21st century. This story about the humble young man relinquishing his beauty was heard either in monastic environments (Cozia Monastery, Căldărușani Monastery²⁸) or in the proximity of places of worship displaying the figure of the zoomorphic saint (Ciofrângeni, Hârșești, Giulești, Rășinari, Chetrești²⁹). Interrogated in which circumstances they learned about the legend, most lay people mentioned a religious context, notably the sermons listened during the liturgical service. In comparison with the canonical *Life of St Christopher*, remembered on 9 May in liturgical books, including today's *Synaxaria*, already available to the clergy, this folkloric version was probably the only one familiar to ordinary people³⁰. In the interwar period, Maria Goleescu wrote about the church of Turcești-Lespedea village (1839), where she had not only seen Christopher's bestiary figure, but also his tale in the popular version, succinctly written in the lower tier of the painting³¹. Introducing the text within the painting at Turcești demonstrated the need for more explanations than necessary in the case of other saints portrayed on the church's walls — a necessity entailed by the strange appearance of Christopher. On the other hand, the aforementioned painting attested to the familiarity of (at least some) artists or priests with this legend in 19th-century Oltenia, a region with a greater number of zoomorphic representations of Saint Christopher.

²⁷ SPUNDA, 1962: 50-51; KRETZENBACHER, 1968: 61. An earlier mention of the zoomorphic face at Mount Athos appears in the article of Adolphe N. Didron. *Vide* DIDRON, 1860: 279-280.

²⁸ The icon museum of Căldărușani Monastery holds an icon of cynocephalus Christopher, painted on wooden panel, after 1850.

²⁹ The villages mentioned here are situated in the three historical provinces where the author has conducted on-site research — Wallachia, Transylvania, Moldavia —, indicating how successful this hagiographic version has been.

³⁰ We must also note that Saint Christopher is not a very famous hagiographic character in today's Romanian culture. However, this version has been circulating in the areas where his zoomorphic representations can be found.

³¹ GOLESCU, 1935: 34. Regrettably, the text explaining the zoomorphic figure has been destroyed in the meanwhile, due to interventions on the mural decoration. Cf. on-site research carried out in 2002 and 2010.

4. UGLINESS AND BEAUTY: A TASTE FOR CONTRASTING ELEMENTS IN *THE LIFE OF SAINT CHRISTOPHER*

In keeping with their Greek sources, Romanian written versions of the hagiography insist on the physical ugliness of the protagonist³². Every time he appears, his countenance stuns and frightens the people and it is only his persuasive speaking — a consequence of the Christian baptism, as the hagiographer points out — that is able to dispel the discomfort Christopher never fails to cause. His peculiar physiognomy made him known early on as a surprising figure, straddling the line between the human and the animal realms. From the paintings of the 5th-6th centuries, to those post-1800, so numerous in Orthodox art, the dog-headed martyr never ceased to capture people's imagination. The aggressive facial expression, with menacing teeth³³ bared (Topliceni-Drăghiești, Ostrov — Fig. 5, Căinenii Mici, Voloiacu, Tetoiu — Fig. 6), was often softened by the painters' decision to create instead a serene, meek and gentle face, reminiscent of a lamb³⁴. Conversion thus occurs on several levels. First, there is the linguistic level, with the change of name (from Reprebus/Reprebos/Reprobus = the cursed one, to Christopher) mentioned in the Greek original, then there is the hagiographic metamorphosis by which the ugly man is replaced with a handsome yet humble young man. Not least, the metamorphosis undergone by the giant cynocephalus is manifest in his transformation into a lamb-headed man, a feature more appropriate for a Christian saint (Fig. 7). The original ugliness of the character is revisited, and turned into a beauty that is necessary for didactic purposes. The repulsive appearance mentioned in the Greek and Latin texts is replaced by attractiveness voluntarily given up. This symbolic conceptual conversion — *ugliness* into *beauty* — probably occurred in the early modern period, when the zoomorphic images of Saint Christopher reappear in Orthodox art, and proves the need for a recontextualization of the saint's virtue. It is all the more important since the original version of the legend emphasizes the *active dimension of saintliness* (the holy man fights for the sake of his Christian creed, and the violence of tortures is commensurate with the fervor of the martyr's declarations of the faith), while the later tale, orally disseminated in Romanian culture, shifts emphasis to *contemplative life*. As this latter version circulated in monastic milieus, as noted the Austrian scholars in mid-20th century,

³² Vide for instance the mentions included by Metropolitan Dosoftei in his hagiographic anthology, DOSOFTEI, *Viața și petrecerea svinților*, III, 1686, f. 438v.

³³ This representation belongs to a productive ancient tradition of cynocephalic figures. They are mentioned in the writings of Ctesias, in the book *Alexandria* (a collection of legends on Alexander the Great), and in the works of Pliny. WHITE, 1991: 28-29; BLOCK FRIEDMAN, 2000: 15.

³⁴ In the overall iconographic body, most zoomorphic representations in Romanian sacred art reveal a penchant for the lamb head. The option of painters or of the priests supervising their work was determined by the symbolic significance of this animal, associated with Christ. The lamb appearance of the Christ-bearer indicates his love for the One he serves and worships.



Fig. 5. Saint Christopher. Mural painting from 1787. Saint Nicholas Church from Ostrov



Fig. 6. Saint Christopher. Mural painting from 1820. Saint Demetrius Church from Tetoiu

the theme of renouncing beauty came to be employed in monastic communities as an example for fostering spiritual fortitude. By leaving the world and becoming a Christopher himself, the monk who has his name changed following a new baptism also needs to acquire a «new face», like the young man in the legend.

In this context, the icon depicting a human body with the head of a dog or another animal (Fig. 8) proves, in the terms of Gil Bartholeyns and Thomas Golsenne, its *effectiveness* by «producing the desired result»³⁵. In this case, the unusual aspect of the saint seen in the places of worship or icons displayed either in the church or in monks' cells operates as an exhortation to relinquish social identity, so that by contemplation the monastic is able to become united with the divine. There is not sufficient evidence to indicate that the zoomorphic figures under discussion, circulating across Wallachia over the 18th-19th centuries, are the result of any special devotion to Saint Christopher. However, the fact that after 1750 and especially after 1800, collective interest in this representation intensified, mainly within the rural communities in the Subcarpathian area, demonstrates that the legend was employed in religious preaching in order to foster piety, modesty, propriety, self-restraint, celibacy and other Christian virtues.

³⁵ BARTHOLEYNS, GOLSENNE, 2010: 24.



Fig. 7. Saint Christopher. Mural painting from 1797. Saint Trinity Church of Valea Monastery



Fig. 8. Saint Christopher. Mural painting from 1805-1808. The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple from Urşani

5. THE VIRTUES OF A HAGIOGRAPHIC HERO: CONCLUSIONS

The geographic position of Wallachia, as well as its religious affinities with the Orthodox world south of the Danube, encouraged sustained cultural exchanges between the Greek and Romanian communities in south-eastern Europe. The numerous donations and monastic foundations extended by Romanian rulers to Mount Athos prompted Greek artists to travel to the Romanian Principalities after 1453, as a haven for those fleeing the territories conquered by the Turks.

The modernization of Romanian society, starting during the final decades of the 18th century, was also manifest in the new approach to this iconographic theme. Thus one can assert that, within the Romanian corpus of representations of Saint Christopher, with a significant number of typological variants, the increasing interest in the zoomorphic form at the expense of the anthropomorphic one marks the transition from medieval to modern era. This phenomenon occurs in the context of the proliferation of churches with exterior mural painting, which include some lay subjects.

The popular tale of the young man who voluntarily accepts deformity in order to save his soul stimulated the dissemination of the zoomorphic representation across Orthodox communities. In an anthropological study addressing the human face, David Le Breton termed disfigurement «a handicap of appearance», a loss of

one's place within the social network³⁶. By desiring a non-human face and acting on it, the *dog-headed saint* places himself in the horizon of symbolic death. The young man renounces his seductive appearance in order to be reborn in another dimension. Not coincidentally, this version — emerging in the Greek monastic circles — was successful in a similar monastic environment in Romania. Converting anthropomorphism into zoomorphism prefigures the conversion of the monk, his change in status and the beginning of a life which implies relinquishing the previous one.

Once upon a time there was a handsome man. This could be the opening words of Saint Christopher's legend, still circulating among Orthodox churches in the south-east of Europe. Invoked in preaching after 1712 as a rhetorical device with a view to the moral improvement of community members, the tale of the young man renouncing his handsomeness contributed, if not to increasing devotion, at least to intensifying interest in the image of St Christopher and in the virtues his story extols.

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ANNEX

Representations of Saint Christopher dog-headed (also with a hybrid version — dog-headed and Christ-bearer)

- 1711, Păpușa Skete (dog-headed)
- 1718-1725, repainted in 1999, Olănești — Sfântul Nicolae (dog-headed)
- 1760, Topliceni-Drăghiești (dog-headed)
- 1779, Câmpulung-Șubești (dog-headed)
- 1779, repainted after 2000, Preajba (dog-headed)
- 1780?, Bodești-Drăgănești (dog-headed)
- 1787, Ostrov (dog-headed and Christ-bearer)
- 1796, Sibiciu de Sus (dog-headed)
- 1805-1808, Urșani (dog-headed)
- 1808, Căinenii Mici — Sfinții Voievozi (dog-headed)
- 1810, Voloiac (dog-headed and Christ-bearer)
- 1808, repainted in 1997, Băbiciu-Preajba (dog-headed and Christ-bearer)
- 1820, Caracal — Toți Sfinții (dog-headed and Christ-bearer)
- 1820, Tetoiu (dog-headed and Christ-bearer)