SACRED PROTECTORS IN THE OLD REALM OF ROMANIAN IMAGINATION – SAINT PARASCHEVA[1]

Abstract: Saint Parascheva or Saint Friday (Saint Petca) entered the realm of imagination in old Romanian culture through canonical literature. The passage of this character from canonical to apocryphal literature is part of a transfer facilitated by the absence of distinctions between genres in ancient times. The common system of tracing the origins of the most widespread literary types – homilies, hagiographies, folk novels, chronographies, etc. – as well as the specific conditions of reception in ancient times has allowed the moving of the characters from one genre to another, without forcing the limits of plausibility required by certain reading habits and precarious scientific information. Such mutations are not visible predominantly in the case of historical characters that have become characters of an entertaining literature frequently using instruments of the fantastic as being significant when the characters derived from the historical space (see Alexander the Great) enter the fantastic realm, which has a long tradition in the literature of entertainment.
The work suggests a reception route, as well as a writing route that the canonical character Saint Parascheva traveled passing from religious to apocryphal and folklore literature.
Referring to the variant of the legend of Saint Friday from Codex Sturdzanus we would thus like to point out the patterns that facilitated the assimilation of this character in Romanian folklore and thence allowed its access to religious collective memory. Sticking to a route imposed by pre-established labels and stereotype formulae, the legend confirms the mechanisms of production and typology-rendering specific to folklore literature.
Keywords: folk literature, legend, mentalities, orthodoxy.

For almost four centuries, the religious patronage of Saint Paraschiva accepted by the Orthodox Church and recognized by the entire Orthodox community in the Balkans marks the gathering of an impressive number of believers in Moldavia, in Iaşi, on the 14th of October. The saint was initially identified in the realm of our imagination as a saint who makes miracles and a protector of territorial integrity.

Saint Paraschiva came to be revered by the authority of the metropolitan bishop called Varlaam, together with the names of the 'great saints' in *Cartea românească de învăţătură* (=Romanian Book of Teaching) (1643). The hagiographical homily was meant to emphasize the cultural and spiritual patronage of Vasile Lupu, by whose endeavor the holy relics were brought to Iaşi in 1641. *Învăţătura de viiaţa preacuvioasei maici noastre Parascheva* (The Teachings from the Life of Our Blessed Nun Parascheva) was a less-than-accurate translation of the book entitled *Viaţă a sfintei Parascheva cea Nouă* (Life of Saint Parascheva, modern version) written by Eftimie, the Patriarch of Târnova. A *life* of the sacred nun had been depicted by Superior Matthew of the Unction, from the Dealu Monastery (beginning of 17th century) after the same Bulgarian version, in Greek, in accordance with the style of the synaxaries. Other *lives* of the sacred nun will be depicted by Dosoftei, who printed, from 1682 to 1686, in Iaşi, in four volumes, *Viaţa şi petreacerea svinţilor* (*Sinaxar* sau *Proloagele tuturor svinţilor*) (Life and Passage of Saints) (Synaxary or Prologues of All Saints) or in Antim Ivireanul, in *Slujba Sfintei Paraschiva şi a Sfântului*

Grigore Decapolitul (Service of Saint Paraschiva and of Saint Gregory the Decapolite) (1692).

The liberty that the translators or the copyists took relative to the Eftimian prototype, the synaxaries or the liturgy book by either augmenting or eliminating certain fragments indicate a mentality and a popular taste that may give birth, by making use of their own narrative ways, to a different, predominantly oral circuit, which can be detected in Romanian folklore through the dissemination of the cult for sacred Friday in superstitions, carols, stories, etc., which at times loses the attributes of sacredness and develops an impressive polymorphic nature.

The apocryphal literature has registered these potentialities of the Christian miraculous realm transposed in the popular topos in the legend about Saint Friday. The best variant of this legend is kept in *Codicele Sturdzan* (Codex Sturdzanus) under the name of *Sfânta Petca* (Saint Petca).

Fragmentary or integral variants of *Legendele Sfintei Vineri* (Legends of Saint Friday) have already been attested or discovered. Comparative philological analysis done on the existing variants has led to the conclusion that the Sturdzan apocryphal text and the text preserved under the library registration number ms. rom. 4182 BAR (Romanian manuscript no 4182, in the Library of the Romanian Academy) belonging to a priest called Urs from Cotiglet (1676) derive from an intermediate copy of a first Romanian translation. The fragmentary variant discovered in the region of Braşov by N. Iorga in the final part of one of Coresi's Psalters and the variant preserved in the Romanian manuscript ms. rom. 577 BAR are based on another intermediate copy of the same translation (cf. *Codex*, p. 125).

On the basis of certain linguistic (see the name cτα πgτκα) and content data, N. Cartojan stated that the lost prototype of the Sturdzan variant was translated from Slavonic, where it had entered through Greek from *Vieţile sfinţilor* (Lives of Saints) and *Mineie* (Liturgy Books).

Versions of the *lives* of the saint, different from the aforementioned ones (that do not include the final prayer) are registered in the Slavonic-Romanian *Mineie* (Liturgy Books) translated by Radu Greceanu according to the Greek synaxary, and in the *Minei* (Liturgy Book) from Râmnic translated by Filaret (in 1780) respectively, with the latter laying the foundation of all subsequent liturgy books (see N. Cartojan, p. 205).

A hagiographical legend pertaining to the cycle of martyrs, the Sturdzan variant of the apocryphal *Sfânta Petca* (Saint Petca) presents a complete scheme of the route that illustrates the passing of the heroine through clichés peculiar to folklore books. The heroine's *datum* will develop within a pre-eminently Christian space anticipated by the *initial framework*. The latter is individualized by the family with no children (consider the significance of the name of male character, the future father, 'an endearing (here with a sense that no longer exists nowadays: good) and clean Christian' – Agaton, in whose make-up one may easily decode the etymologically-included ethical principle by relating it to *kalos kai agathos*) as a pretext for the presentation of the heroine's actions, the prayers uttered 'at all times' and accompanied by the *promise* ('Give us too an offspring born from us, a little lad or lass! We shall then give it, body and soul, to Your Holiness,' *Codex*, p. 281, ensures the appearance of God's angel, who brings the news of the birth indicating the name of the heroine with a function of significance. The inserted oracular formula reveals the route of the heroine in accordance with onomastic determinations ('Let her name be Saint Friday and may she be born on Friday, and when you baptize her, may that be her name,' *Codex*, p. 281). The compression of the initiation time span and the fulfilling of the promise ('and she was taken at all times to pray in the church of our Lord and one year later

she became well-versed with the law of the Lord', p. 281; 'and when she was five years old, she said to herself (…)') anticipate, in harmony with the stereotypical succession of progressive actions, the journey and the tests ('It is not becoming for me to be and live only here, but it is befitting that I should go and preach the law of my Lord in all villages and fortresses,' *Codex*, p. 281).

The legend, made up of three distinct micro-narratives, covers the entirety of the route scheme on the basis of certain rules of contiguity and predictability subordinated to specific functional and thematic stereotypical instances, also some referring to content, in agreement with the hagiographical character. *Preaching*, as a reminiscence of the *debate*, attracts within the route scheme pairs of binary oppositions that will be neutralized by virtue of a complex of mediating actions that reveal the Christian realm of the miraculous: 'And then, at that time, a cloud came onto the sky and a great storm issued from the cloud, and it took a large rock into it and the wind carried it like a leaf and she flew. And then the angel of the Lord appeared before her and tore the ties from her hands and told her: <<Do not be afraid, but praise the glory of thy God.>>' (*Codex*, p. 282).

Each *oppositorum* character (Emperor Antioch, Emperor Atizma, and Emperor Aclip) will propose, by virtue of the saint's beauty, marriage to her in exchange for her giving up the Christian faith. The augmentative repetition with a magical efficiency (see especially the number three, involved in binary oppositions (three emperors, three proposals, three rejections, three miracles within the framework of the first micro-narrative, three days and three nights of ordeal within the framework of the last micro-narrative, etc.) amplifies the difficulty of the obstacles, thus contributing to the inclusion of the heroine in the typology of martyrs. The *rejection* through formulae of institutional cursing ('Cursed be the name of the one that speaks thus,' *Codex*, p. 282) unleashes in turn the wrath of all the emperors, leading to predicaments in which are introduced tests meant to highlight wondrous virtues. The successive tests resort to auxiliary elements belonging to the miraculous realm of the Christian faith and also, at certain times, to the realm of the fantastic with folk origins ('a very big dragon in which lived <…> the devil and all the unclean spirits.') (*Codex*, p. 285 and the following). The ordeals certify the faith of the character corroborating the torture and the faith in order to compose the final martyr-eulogy. The prayers and the example of Christian virtue that is offered save the character through divine intervention, which is the recognition of a status that is otherwise confirmed by its own miracles ('And Saint Friday was overwhelmed by pity and fell with her face to the ground and cried and the tears welled from her eyes and she anointed the eyes of that emperor and said: <<In the name of our Father, of His Son and of the Holy Spirit, see!>> And then that emperor saw.', *Codex*, p. 284) or a preaching discourse ('And she preached to them and many heard and believed and other people spread the word, both in the church and throughout the fortress.', *Codex*, p. 281). The fulfilling of the *mission* confirmed at the end of the two micro-narratives through the conversion to Christianity of the auxiliary characters ('And he bowed and Saint Friday took his tears, fetched water and baptized that emperor and all his servants and all the people in his kingdom.', *Codex*, p. 284) within the framework of the first two micro-narratives ensures the narrative ascendance and offers repeatability to the route according to the aforementioned parameters, which undergo the schematization of the literary type in which the apocryphal text was included. The lack of a happy ending in a terrestrial sense does not represent a deviation from the norm of hagiographic legends. Elements of the final prayer that are devoid of the sacred character will be found in the Romanian mythology, which places the character, as is seen in the quoted fragment, in the center of the weekly cycle as a taboo, punitive or healing spirit that supervises the unfolding of the fundamental

anthropological rhythms, from the rhythm of eating to the spiritual rhythm: '(…) I pray to thee, do Your duty and give Your greatness to those who shall give me for charity, the homage, liturgy and candle and who shall honor this day. Bless them, Lord, their homes, their offspring, their cornfields and all their animals! And may all evil and bewitched spirits flee from them! And may their souls be enlightened! And he who will not honor this day, the day of Great Friday, with charity and praying in the church, and he who will work on this day shall be cursed. And he who will honor this day and will fast for seven days before it, may he be healthy and may his sins be forgiven. And he who will not honor holy Friday, he who freely defiles it with meat, or cheese, on a Friday lacking absolution from fasting, by fornicating or by doing whichever sinful thing and action, or thieving, and his parents will not repent, may his throat be cursed like an idol and may his hands never help that man to triumph; (…)', *Codex*, p. 288 (for the mythological dimension, see Otilia Hedeşan, pp.57 and the following). The lack of the final exhortation from the Greek liturgy books has led to the hypothesis that it was subsequently interspersed, following the Slavonic prototype (N. Cartojan, pp. 200, 204-205).

The etiological character becomes manifest through the inclusion of the elements of chronology that are still left in the Orthodox calendar. 'And her head was cut off, the head of Saint Friday, in the month of July, 26 days, and the Lord did not allow her day to be feasted then, but arranged for it to be feasted when she was born, in the month of October, the 14th day.' (*Codex*, p. 288-289).

Criteria of a philological nature attest that this variant is a copy of a previous translation. Linguistic peculiarities confirm the existence of two language strata, one of these being the stratum of the previous translation, done in south-east Transylvania or even in Walachia, and the other one characterized by rhotacism and the closure of *e* to *i* and so on, which is specific to the regions in northern Transylvania. In fact, the note in Slavonic that appears at the end of the legend (f.97v/ 21-22): *I pi(s) po(p) Grigorie ot Mŭ(hačju), m(s)ca avgu(st) 2 dnĭ.* (And priest Gregory from Măhaciu wrote, in the month of August, 2 days) clarifies the localization and the date at which the apocryphal text was copied, however without providing an exact solution to the latter problem. Although the activity of priest Gregory was dated between January 29th 1583 and May 10th 1619, the absence of certain elements that would enable the indication of the period when this legend was copied (considering also the impossibility of dating the filigree-less paper on which the apocryphal text is written) determines the dating within a long time span, as 'in fact, it is hard to say whether the text belongs to the 16th century or to the next' (*Codex*, p. 51-52).

Bearing in mind the cultural current that generated the translation, N. Cartojan supported the absence of proximity towards Bogomilism, proposing as criteria for the identification of the legend the elements of the Orthodox cult: the worship of the cross, the celebration of Saint Friday or Paraschiva in the church calendar, etc. (N. Cartojan, p. 197).

The connection between arts established for the ancient period may be considered as defining for determining the moments that led to the assimilation of Saint Paraschiva in the realm of collective imagination. Doubtless, the inclusion of Saint Paraschiva in the Romanian spiritual heritage was anticipated and supported by its introduction in the iconographical programs that started in the 14th century and are still in progress nowadays. Thus, one ought to mention here the documentary attestation found in successive office documents (in 1458, 1465 and 1488) issued by the Episcopal Church in Roman. The iconographical representations of this church bearing the blessing of Saint Parascheva have been considered as unique for the medieval period in Romania. We only mention here the two icons from the series that reveal the miracles made by Pious Parascheva, placed above

the entrance door, on the porch. One of these, dated 1550, shows Pious Parascheva holding the Holy Cross in her right hand, seated on a throne in the hypostasis of a ruler, with two angels above her head who lay a crown onto her head. The other one, made in the 19th century, confirms the prolongation of the echo of the miracles made by the saint. The western façade of the Arbore monastery (painted by Dragoş Coman) in Moldavia is representative for the 16th century (on this façade there can be seen 85 scenes inspired by the book 'Origins' ('Genesis') and by the hagiographies of Saints George, Dimitrie, Nichita the Confessor and Saint Paraschiva).

The iconographical representations, together with the representations belonging to religious and apocryphal literature widespread in early Romanian times facilitated the integration of Saint Paraschiva in the collective memory, thus allowing the perpetuation of this cult. The miracles made within the imaginary space of old literature have extended to contemporary times and they have been readapted, thus satisfying the proclivity for the Christian miraculous. As a matter of fact, the pilgrimage that takes place each year in Iaşi for believers to bow and pray in front of the holy relics of Pious Parascheva constitutes an eloquent testimony to the perennial character of certain Christian practices.

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