

The Universality of Grapevine

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Abstract "Over the centuries, grapevine, grapes and wine have appeared in all spiritual creations of mankind, treasure bequeathed to world culture" (I.C. Teodorescu)

It is this heritage of world culture that captured our attention, and that is why we gathered information from several fields regarding the representation of grapevine, grapes and wine, in an attempt to render a comprehensive picture in this respect.

There is no other plant more widely spread and no other fruit more wanted than the grape.

Our research focused on the representation of grapevine in religious art: painting, sculpture, engravings. The paper presents the first representations, the oldest we had access to, and in doing so it proves, through the age of these works, that choosing grapevine as an ornamental and symbolic motif is neither spontaneous nor short-term, but that it is supported by an entire philosophy that has lasted throughout the centuries.

Professor I.C. Teodorescu said that: "The importance and recognition of Dacian wines was notorious". The truthfulness of his words is confirmed by the discovery of coins, such as a sestertius from 112, issued by Emperor Traian, or the medal "Dacia felix" which appeared in the time of Emperor Decius (249-251). Some historians do not translate the agnomen of the province "Dacia felix" by "happy Dacia", but by "Bountiful Dacia". If we take into consideration the symbols engraved on the medal, namely grapes and wheat ears, we can conclude that the latter translation seems closer to the truth. Indeed, in the Latin-Romanian dictionary, one of the meanings of the word "felix" is rich, bountiful, plentiful, fruitful, fertile.

All over the world, in the course of time, grapevine has been used as an ornament and a symbol, from the pyramids in Ancient Egypt, displaying the oldest representations of grapevine found until now, to majestic cathedrals, the altarpieces of which bring the art of grapevine representation close to perfection.

The first books in Romania, whether handwritten or printed, appeared in monasteries, where they were needed either for liturgical or secular use. Most of them were decorated with grapevine leaves or grapes.

Material and Method

Our research focused on the representation of grapevine in religious art, namely paintings, sculptures and engravings. For this purpose, we refer to examples from the first representations, the oldest that we had

Key words

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access to, showing, by the age of the works presented, that choice of grapevine as an ornamental and symbolic motif is neither spontaneous nor short-term, but that it is hiding an entire philosophy that survived through the ages.

No other plant is more widely spread and no other fruit is more wanted than the grape.

In his introduction for the 1688 New Testament from Bălgrad, metropolitan Simion Ștefan stated that: "words must be like money, for that money is good which is used in all countries". In this quotation, words are compared to money, and it goes on by saying that currencies must pass through an imaginary sieve of values, where only the good are kept. It is our opinion that grapevine passed through this imaginary sieve of values long before money did. Moreover, if that money is good which is used in a lot of places, grapevine is used in a lot of places because it is good.

What leads people to the conclusion that grapevine is "good" is not the shape of the fruit, because the grape can only appear in a few shapes, which is not extremely impressive. What makes the grapes so desirable is their aroma, taste and colour.

As for its ampelographic characteristic - colour - we would like to make a specification: we believe there is no other plant on earth that displays such a wide range of colours as the fruit of the grapevine.

The entire range of colours (the solar spectrum) is poured generously onto the grape by its composition (anthocyanins, flavonoids, carotenoids,

chlorophyll) and is offered for the delight of our eyes, making the grape "first among fruits".

Our great oenologist Ion Pușcă, while presenting variety Crâmpoșie was wondering "which Romanian variety is represented by the grape held by the child engraved on the sestertius issued in Dacia August Provincia in 112-114 A.D. during the time of Emperor Traian? Could it be "Crâmpoșie" from Oltenia or "Grasă" from Transilvania, both being varieties cultivated in Dacia before the Roman conquest?" (Ion Pușcă – *Vechi soiuri românești de viță de vie - Old Romanian Varieties of Grapevine*, Intact Publishing House, 2010, page 99). We were intrigued by the character represented in the two money fields. Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, was almost worshipped. They erected a statue of her in the Roman forum, the first ever to represent a woman. We have not succeeded in finding out whether a description of the statue still exists, but we believe it would have been representative of her if it presented her with her two

sons, uttering the words that made her famous: "Haec ornamenta mea".

Results obtained

Grapevine represented on seals

Sigillography is the special science, auxiliary to history, that studies the main means of authenticating documents - the seal. (Maria Dogaru).

"Use of the seal was needed for authenticating documents of the peasants and to remove the old method of using witnesses who confirmed by fingerprint". (Augustin Mureșan, Ioan Popovici).

In what follows we will only make reference to seals that contain elements of the flora (grapevine) and those who were used by people whose main occupation was grapevine cultivation and wine production. The seal of the town called Râmnic, printed in smoke on a document dated back to 1649, testifies about a vineyard found on Troianu hill. (Maria Dogaru).



Fig. 1. Seal of Râmnic



Fig. 2. Seal matrix of Prăjești village



Fig. 3. Seal of the Union of brandy makers in București

Seal matrix of Prăjești village, Prahova County, 1824 displays the eagle, symbol of the crusaders, and a grape vine to its left (Maria Dogaru).

Seal of the Union of brandy makers in București, 1849, presents a grape vine on a prop, with four bunches of

grapes, and one dove flying in from the right side pecks at one of them (Maria Dogaru).

Seal matrix of Potgoria, Săcuieni County, 1831, a grape vine with bunches of grapes (Maria Dogaru).



Fig. 4. Seal matrix of Potgoria



Fig. 5. Seal of Cuvin



Fig. 6. Seal of Păulișul Vechi

In what follows we will present some of the village seals and town seals from shires Arad and Zărand in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, which display grape vine.

CUVIN - Round seal, showing a vine with three bunches of grapes and three leaves, entwined around a prop, near a plough pointing up, everything on a terrace. The legend was written in Hungarian, in

capital letters. In Romanian: SEAL OF CUVIN VILLAGE 1838 (Augustin Mureșan, Ioan Popovici).

PĂULIȘUL VECHI - Round seal. On a terrace, there is a grape vine entwined around a prop. To its right, there are four ears of wheat and a hoe, and to its left there are a scythe and a sickle. Above the blade of the scythe, there is a flying bird. The legend was written in Hungarian, in capital letters. In

Romanian: ARAD SHIRE, PĂULIȘUL VECHI COMMUNE (Augustin Mureșan, Ioan Popovici).

Representations of grapevine in numismatics

Numismatics is an auxiliary science of history that deals with the study of coins and medals and the technique of coining them. It is also interested in the circulation of money.

In what Romanian banknotes displaying an image of grapevine or grapes are concerned, we will mention the following:

- The most obvious representation of grapevine is on the banknote of 100.000 lei, issued in 1947.



Fig. 7. The banknote of 100000 lei



Fig. 8. Silver coins of 250 lei



Fig. 9. The banknote of 1000 lei

- Silver coins of 250 lei, issued in 1939, 1940, 1941.

- Woman and child carrying a basket with grapes each - element of the Nicolae Grigorescu's allegory, which appears on several Romanian banknotes. The value of one of these was 1000 lei, valid between 1936 and 1941.

Representation of grapevine on medals

Medals and plaquettes were created to immortalize outstanding historical events or dates, to represent figures of state rulers, army leaders, scientists or artists (George Buzdugan and Gheorghe Niculiță).

- In 1958, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry issued a bronze medal for a republican contest. The reverse of the medal reads: "Ministry of Agriculture

and Forestry. Republican wine contest 1958"; the words are encircled by a grape vine with grapes and leaves. (George Buzdugan și Gheorghe Niculiță).

- In 1968, ASIT branch Dobrogea issued a medal for Dobrogea regional wine contest. On the obverse, it displays the monument at Adamclisi and a bunch of grapes. On the reverse, there are two bunches of grapes in the left side. (George Buzdugan and Gheorghe Niculiță).

- On the occasion of the second republican contest for table grapes in 1966, a medal was issued. On the reverse, in the centre there is the bust of a child who holds a big bunch of grapes with both hands. (George Buzdugan and Gheorghe Niculiță).



Fig. 10. The bronze medal 1958



Fig. 11. The medal 1968



Fig. 12. The medal 1966

Representation of grapevine, grapes and wine in religious painting and sculpture

Grapevine as a symbol of the church is present in religious art ever since its very beginning, as are grapes and wine. The most common symbolic representations of grapevine, grapes and wine are met within iconographic themes painted on wood, canvas, paper or glass; all glass paintings in Transilvania are religious in nature.

- Christ - grapevine, icon discovered in Laz, Alba County. The custodian of the museum of Gai Monastery - Arad, which houses this icon, insisted on

the fact that the area where the icon comes from was named "The valley of the fair lady" by Sadoveanu.

- Jesus – grapevine, icon made by a painter of the Grecu family in the 19th century. It is included in the collection on display at Făgăraș Museum.

- The Icon of Christ the Saviour - Sibiu, the 19th century, where the grape is used as an ornament and a symbol.

- The oldest existing representation of grapevine in sculpture is found on an Antiochian chalice made in around 500 A.D. The chalice is kept in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.



Fig.13. Icon of Christ the vine



Fig.14. Icon of Jesus-vine



Fig.15. Icon of Jesus Christ



Fig. 2. Potir antiochian (detaliu), cca 500
(după Howard Hibbard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*,
New York, Harisson House, 1986, p. 101, fig. 197)

Fig.16. The chalice antiochian

Conclusions

If grapevine and grapes have permanently been represented in religious art (painting, sculpture, engravings) either as an ornament or as a symbol, WINE acquires even greater meanings in art.

One of our greatest theologians, Professor ENE BRANIȘTE, PhD, used to say: "bread and wine are obtained through man's hard work and skill". "Before being sanctified, during Mass, as gift of sacrifice, they have already been blessed, so to speak, by man's labour and sweat". Thus, the great theologian was making reference to the participation of all mankind, shoots of Christ's vine, to the act of sanctification. Starting with the teacher, then the researcher in the laboratory, to the man who "speaks" to the vine, everybody is part of this act, as their hard work and skill become sanctifying elements.

In 2008, the great grapevine grower Al. Mihalca published his work entitled "In Honour of Vine and Wine, of the Mother and the Son". The mother feels justified pride when the virtues of her son-wine, are brought to light.

Grapevine, grapes and wine are mentioned on almost every page of the Holy Bible. The Old Testament and the New Testament abound in symbols related to them. Jesus identifies himself with the grapevine: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John, 15:5), and thus grapevine becomes a symbol of the Church. The wine is also present, it being the matter

through which Christ the Saviour perpetuates his sacrifice over the centuries.

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