

# Preface

I would like to explain in a few introductory words what made me write this short book and what I am trying to accomplish thereby.

I grew up as the only child of two scientists, a family with modest income, in Romania, a satellite country of the Soviets at that time. All their spare time and resources were invested in their daughter's education in parallel with gathering a modest collection of Romanian artifacts, paintings, icons, peasant decorative objects, drawings. Before I learned to read I could differentiate between icons on glass and those on wood, between the naive realism of paintings representing the working class building the socialist society and those of the abstract-ironical Dadaism from an earlier time in the century. I gradually realized that although the language of visual arts is at least as strong and impressive as the written words, the bridge between the two can only be covered with the help of a guide—a book which explains in easy to understand words the images proposed by visual arts.

The icons always fascinated me. Later on I saw entire churches painted inside and out, I met a few old iconographers and I realized that the role of paintings was even more important in times past than in modern societies. The colored images from churches and monasteries had a major role in conveying ideas about the world, about society, about the moral principles and the culture of many generations before us, many of which included illiterate members as a majority.

Although this is true for all civilizations with European roots, the feelings and thoughts impressed on the viewer by the cathedrals of Western Europe are totally different from those one feels in front of the icons and frescoes from the churches of the eastern part of the continent. The religious fervor of the present day populations from the Russian, Romanian, Balkan or East-Mediterranean areas is probably rooted in the expressiveness of the paintings of the Orthodox East.

This book tries to illustrate—and to explain as much as possible—the material ways used by the Orthodox iconographers of times past (intentionally anonymous, as a rule) who succeeded to reach such impressive heights of the artistic expression, while observing the limits imposed by a very rigorous doctrine.

The hypothesis of the author—a scientist active in the field of methods for matter conversion—is that judiciously choosing the materials (some of them prepared by the artisans themselves) and techniques used in painting was the decisive factor

which imparted a dramatic nature and unique expressivity to the icons of Southeastern Europe and helped them stand the test of time.

To the reader, the book opens a window toward the hidden face, the material face, of the Orthodox icons, toward the secretive world of iconographers of times past. I hope that that is interesting and will capture you.

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