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**Adam's Language: Hebrew
Imaginary Writings in the
Romanian Medieval
Monumental Painting**



The imaginary Hebrew writings are present quite often in the Orthodox medieval mural painting, including the Romanian one. On the tower of *St. Nicholas* church of Probota monastery (built in 1532; painting done probably in 1534) we can see the images of some angels of the category of *Principalities* wearing mantles decorated with rows of *inscriptions* which were supposed to imitate the old Hebrew characters^[1], but which presents in fact just a *pseudo-writing* with decorative character.

^[1] *The restoration of the Probota Monastery: 1996 - 2001*, Ed. UNESCO, 2001, p. 58 il. 97 and p. 367.

Probably, the programmers and the painters from Probota wanted to suggest through these mantles the role and the sacerdotal symbolism of this category of angels. The theological bases for these representations can be found in the interpretation of the Old Testament text of Ezekiel the prophet (chap. 9, v. 3) due to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: “The one (the first angel – C. C.) first initiated in this (regards the separation of the guilty from the not guilty – C. C.), after the cherubim, was the one whose loins were girt in sapphire and who wore a full-length cloak [in the Greek original the coat is called **poderis** (ποδήρης) – C. C.] as a symbol of this hierarchy.”^[1].

^[1] Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Despre ierarhia cerească* (On the Celestial Hierarchy), Chap. VIII, par. 2. See in: St. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Opere complete și scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul* (The Complete Works of St. Maximus the Confessor), B., 1996, p. 27.

The truth is that the *poderis*, mentioned by Dionysus, does not involve the decoration with Hebrew writings or of other nature. Worn by the priests of the Temple of Jerusalem, the *poderis* presented an azure sleeveless long coat, decorated only with ornaments under the form of apples and pomegranates. As regards the Hebrew writings, they represented the ornamentation of another type of Mosaic sacerdotal clothing, called *ephod*. *The ephod* is mentioned in the Old Testament (*Exodus*, XXVIII, 6^[1]; XXXIX, 2^[2]; *I Book of Kings*, II.28^[3]; *Hosea*, III.4^[4]).

^[1] And they shall make *the ephod* of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work.

^[2] They made *the ephod* of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen.

^[3] And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an *ephod* before me?

^[4] For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without sacred stone, and without *ephod* or idols.

The Holy Bible: King James Version. 2000.

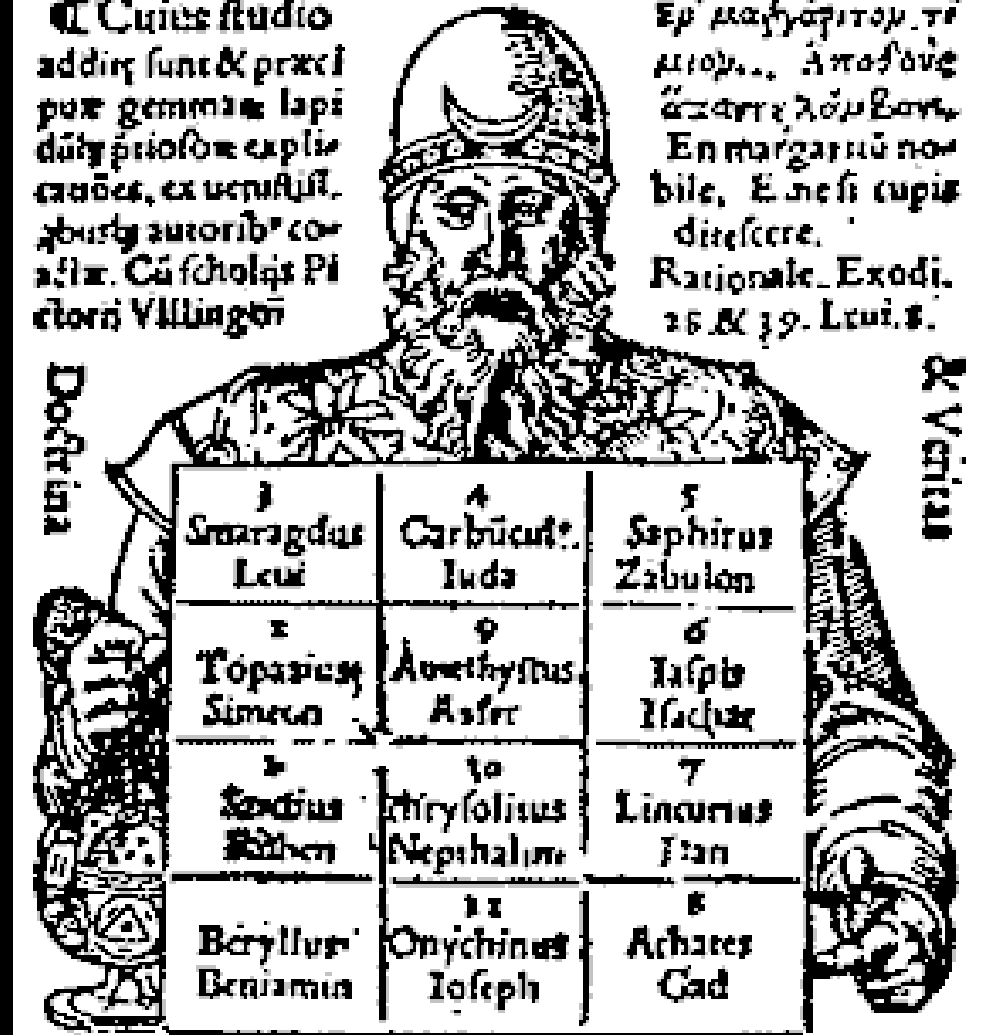
The Second Book of Moses, Called Exodus, 28

The Garments for the Priests:

- 4 And these *are* the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an **ephod**, and a robe, and a brodered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office.
- 5 And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen.
- 6 And they shall make the **ephod** of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work.(...)
- 8 And the curious girdle of the **ephod**, which *is* upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; *even* of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen.
- 9 And thou shalt take **two onyx stones**, and **grave on them the names of the children of Israel**:
- 10 six of their names on one stone, and *the other* six names of the rest on the other stone, according to their birth.
- 11 With the work of an engraver in stone, *like* the engravings of a signet, shalt thou **engrave the two stones with the names of the children of Israel**: thou shalt make them to be set in ouches of gold.
- 12 And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the **ephod** for stones of memorial unto **the children of Israel**: and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD upon his two shoulders for a memorial.



- The ephod of the high priest must be distinguished from the linen ephod which is mentioned in Scripture as a common garment of priests and of the disciples of prophets



Even in the tannaitic tradition there was a difference of opinion as to the order in which the names of the twelve tribes were put on the "shoham" stones. (Soṭah 36a). The Tannaim differ in that according to the one opinion the names followed in the sequence of the ages of the Patriarchs, with the exception of Judah, who headed the list.

There was a model of *ephod*, with rich decorations, worn by the great priests of the Temple of Jerusalem. It was made up of two strips of expensive fabric, woven with gold, vision and wool, on which the names of the 12 tribes of Israel were printed. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, in chapter 28 of the comments on the book *Exodus*, wrote about the *ephod* the following: “... *the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen represents Emmanuel. The two frames of the ephod symbolize God’s people and the pagan people, the apostles and the prophets, the celestial and the terrestrial forces. The fasteners of the ephod – two emerald stones, on which the names of the sons of Israel are written, – signify the two Testaments*”[\[1\]](#).

[\[1\]](#) *Восточные отцы и учителя церкви IV века. Антология. Том III, Москва, 1999, р. 387.*

The ephod was used in the practices of the Mosaic cult, but also had a well-established prophetic symbolism. Not in vain did Ephrem the Syrian compare this clothing with one of God's name (*Emmanuel*). *Emmanuel* (in transl.: "*God is with us*") is Messiah's name, who was to be born according to Isaiah's prophecy: "*Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel*" (*Matthew*, 1.23). In the period of time when the priest was not officiating mass, the ephod was hung in the Temple of Jerusalem. This permanent placement of the clothing speaks eloquently about its sacral importance.

The painters and the programmers from Probota, obviously on the base of some older iconographic prototypes, decided to replace the traditional *poderis* from the angels' clothing with the enigmatical *mantles*, such *ephods* surrounded with pseudo-Hebrew graphemes. Probably the aim was to highlight through this vestimentary detail the sacerdotal dignity of the angels in the category of *Principalities*.

The ephod was not represented only as clothing for the priests-angels. More often we find this type of clothing to the patriarchs-priests or to the priests-prophets mentioned in the two Testaments. The Bulgarian medieval painting in the 14th century offers us some examples of pseudo-inscriptions in the images of Old Testament *patriarchs-priests*. Thus, at *Zemen* monastery, in the iconographic programme of the church with *St. John the Theologian* as the patron, we can see the image of the priest-patriarch Melchizedek, dressed in an *ephod* ornamented with decorative characters that remind a little of the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet^[1].

^[1] See the image in: Анна Рошковска, Лиляна Мавродинова, *Стенописен орнамент*, София, 1985, il. no. 83 de la p. 202.



priest-patriarch
Melchizedek.

Zemen monastery
(Bulgaria).



***The ephod* was depicted also in other iconographic cycles where are present the images of the Jewish priests: the priests-prophets of the *The Last Judgment* composition (Probota, Humor, Moldovița, Voroneț etc.), the priests-Levites of the *Tent of Meeting* (the *Tabernacle*) from Sucevița (at Curtea de Argeș the clothes of the Levites are not adorned with graphemes! – C. C.), Aaron^[1] from the decoration of the analogion at Humor, the same Aaron and Melchizedek on the interior of the cylindrical drum of the tower and on the exterior composition with the image of *The Procession of All Saints* from Moldovița, the priests in the scene of *The Circumcision of Our Savior* (in the mural painting of *Menologies* from Voroneț and Sucevița: scene corresponding to the date of January 1) and in the scene of Joachim's banquet (Humor, cycle of Infancy Gospel of James) , Zachary in the scenes of *The Annunciation to Zachary* (Humor and twice at Sucevița), *The Conception of Saint John the Baptist* (St. George's church from St. John the New monastery in Suceava, Voroneț monastery, menology), *The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist* (Sucevița), *The Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple* (Humor, Moldovița, Sucevița), *The Murder of Zachary* (Humor, Moldovița, Arbore and twice at Sucevița) etc.**

^[1] It should be mentioned here that the Slavonic text on the Aaron's phylactery in the image at Voroneț ("You are a priest forever, in the line (in the order – C.C.) of Melchizedek") is taken from king David's *Psalms* (psalm 109, v. 4, in the current Rom. transl. – psalm 110, v. 4). This text, which in fact does not belong to Aaron, was invoked usually to illustrate Christ's sacerdotal function in "Jesus – The High Priest" iconographic type or "The Empress sits on Your right hand" iconographic type.



Probota
Monastery.

The priests-
prophets of
the Last
Judgment
(1532-1534)

Humor Monastery. The priests-prophets of the Last Judgment (1535)





**Moldovița Monastery.
The priests-prophets of the Last
Judgment (1537)**



**Voroneț
Monastery.**

**The priests-
prophets of the
Last
Judgment
(1547)**



The priests-Levits of the *Tent of Meeting* (the *Tabernacle*)
from Sucevița Monastery
(the end of the 16th century)



**Prophet Aaron
from the
decoration of
the analogion at
Humor
Monastery
(17th century)**



Prophet Aaron.

**The interior of the
cylindrical drum of
the tower from
Moldovița
Monastery (1537).**



Prophet Melchizedek. The interior of the cylindrical drum of the tower from Moldovița Monastery (1537).



Prophets Moses and Aaron on the exterior composition with the image of *The Procession of All Saints* from Moldovița Monastery (1537)



Prophets Melchizedek and David on the exterior composition with the image of *The Procession of All Saints* from Moldovița Monastery (1537)



The Circumcision of Our Savior. Mural painting of *Menology* from Voroneț Monastery (1547): scene corresponding to the date of January 1.



***The Circumcision of
Our Savior.***

**Mural painting of
Menology from
Sucevița Monastery
(the end of the 16th
century): scene
corresponding to the
date of January 1.**



*The Annunciation to
Zachary.*

Mural painting of
Menology from Humor
Monastery (1535).
The slavonic text is
improper:
*The Conception of Saint
John the Baptist*



The Annunciation to Zachary. Sucevița Monastery (the end of the 16th century).



The Annunciation to Zachary. Sucevița Monastery (the end of the 16th century).



***The Conception of
Saint John the
Baptist (mural
painting of
Menology from
St. George's
church from
St. John the New
Monastery,
Suceava, 1534).***



***The Conception of
Saint John the Baptist
(mural painting of
Menology from Voronezh
Monastery, 1547).***

The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. Sucevița Monastery (the end of the 16th century).





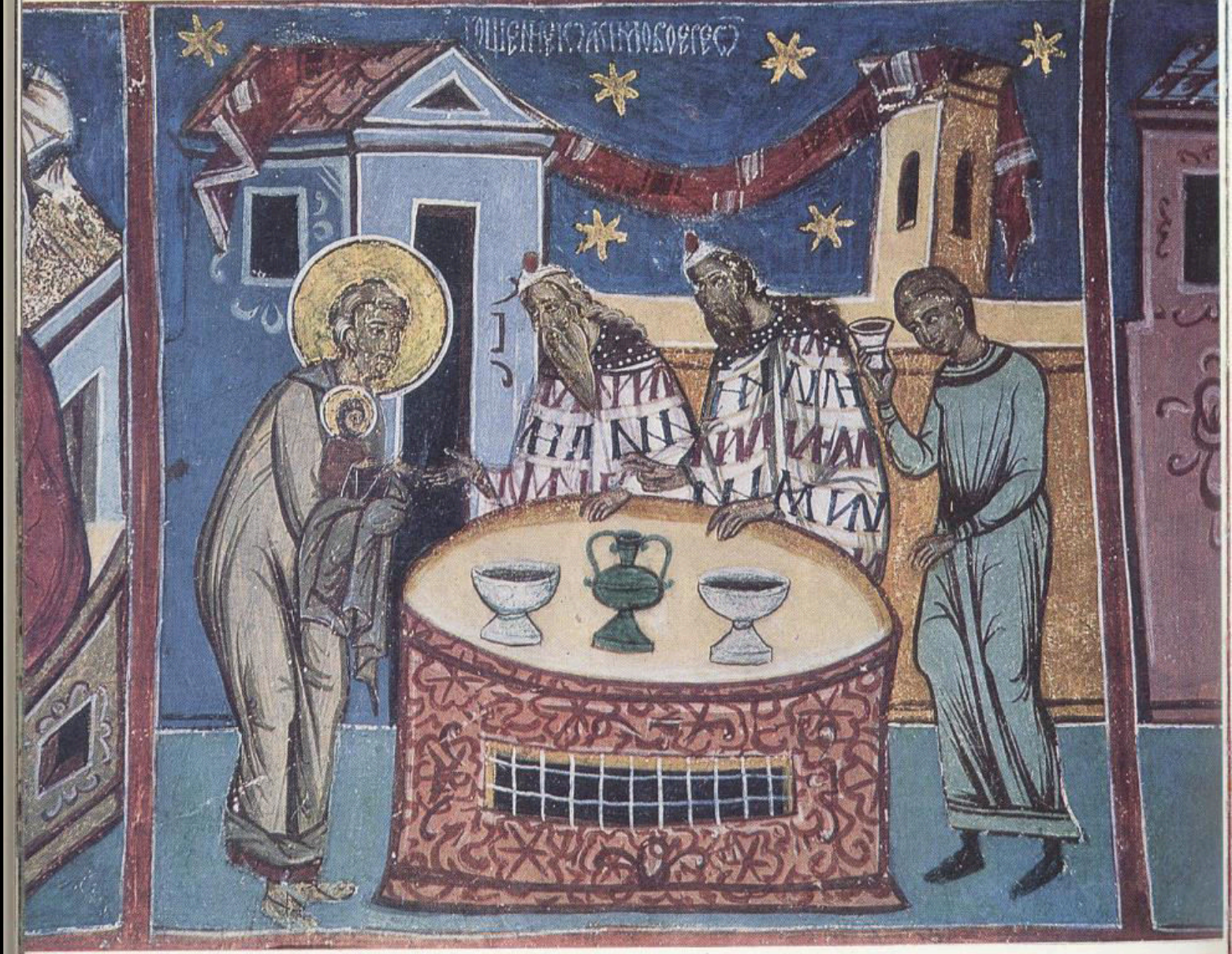
**Humor
Monastery.
1535.
Illustration
to Book (or
Prote-
vangelium)
of James.**

**Ruben
priest
worshiping
in front of
Ark of the
Covenant**



**Humor
Monastery.
1535.
Illustration to
Book (or
Prote-
vangelium)
of James
(I,2):**

**And Reuben
stood over
against
Joachim
saying: It is
not lawful for
thee to offer
thy gifts first,
for as much as
thou hast
gotten no seed
in Israel.**



Humor Monastery.1535. Illustration to Book (or Protevangelium) of James (VI.2): And the first year of the child was fulfilled, and Joachim made a great feast and bade the priests and the scribes and the assembly of the elders and the whole people of Israel. And Joachim brought the child to the priests, and they blessed her, saying: O God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name renowned for ever among all generations.



Humor Monastery. 1535. Illustration to Book (or Protevangelium) of James (VII.2):
And the child became three years old, and Joachim said: Call for the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take every one a lamp, and let them be burning, that the child turn not backward and her heart be taken captive away from the temple of the Lord. And they did so until they were gone up into the temple of the Lord.



Humor Monastery. 1535.
Illustration to Book (or
Protevangelium) of
James (VII.2):

And the priest received
her and kissed her and
blessed her and said: The
Lord had magnified thy
name among all
generations: in thee in the
latter days shall the Lord
make manifest his
redemption unto the
children of Israel.



Humor Monastery. 1535. Illustration to Book (or Protevangelium) of James (XVI): And the priest said: I will give you to drink of the **water of the conviction** of the Lord, and it will make manifest your sins before your eyes.



***The Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple.
The Menology from Humor Monastery (1535)***

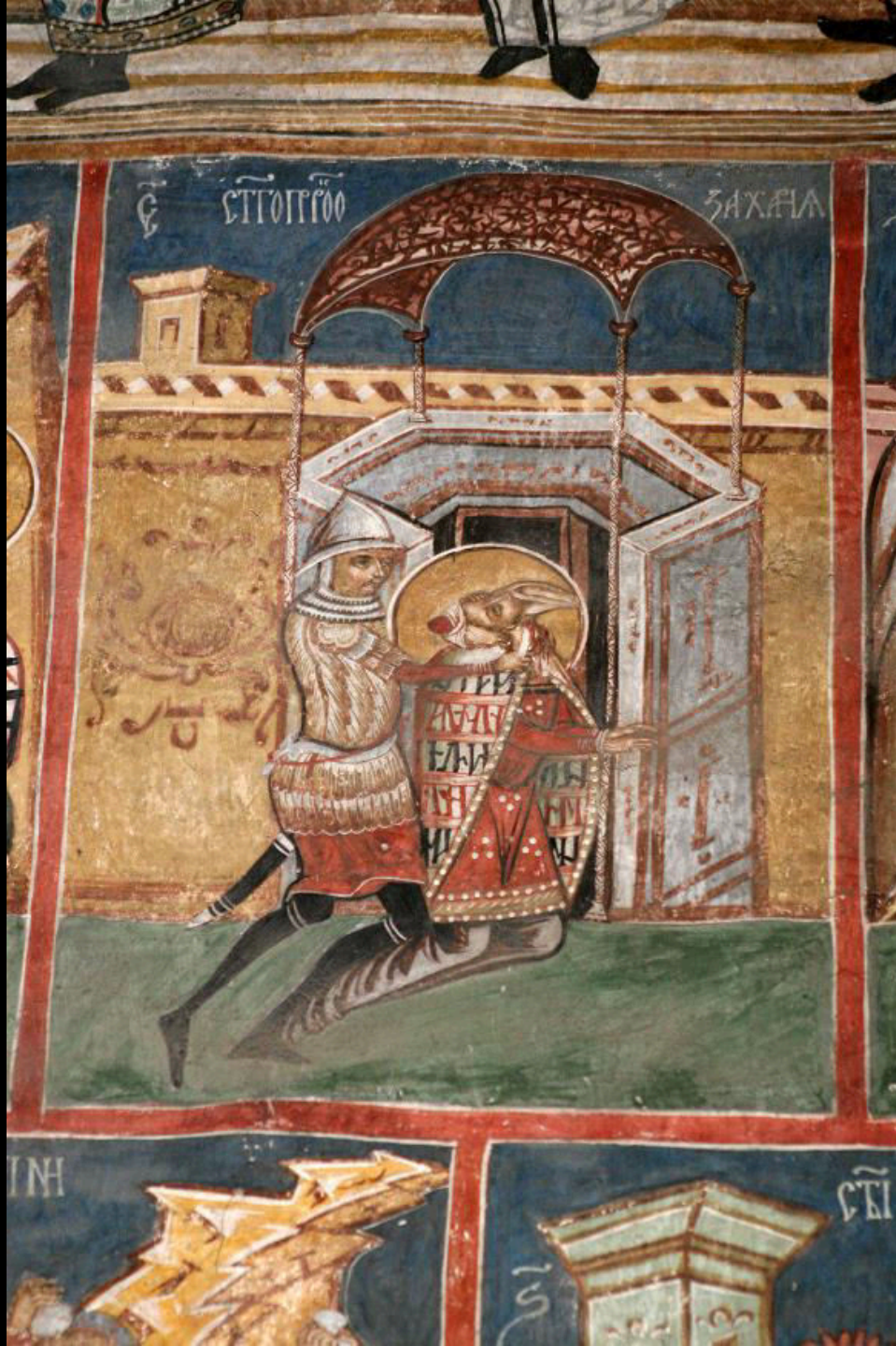


*The Presentation of the
Virgin Mary at the
Temple.*

Moldovița Monastery
(1537)

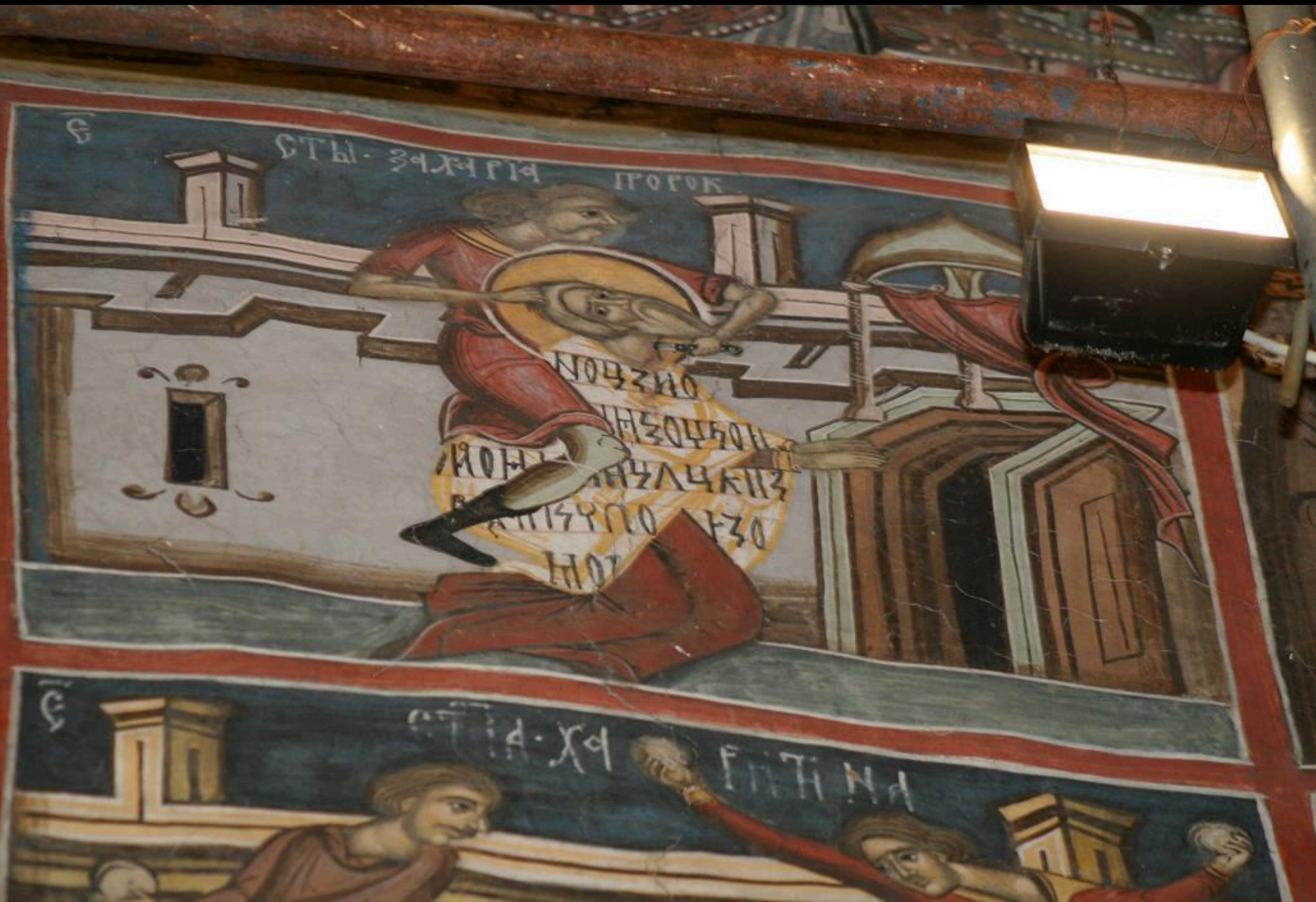


*The Presentation of the
Virgin Mary at the Temple.*
The Menology from
Sucevița Monastery
(the end of the 16th century)



The Murder of Zachary.
The Menology from Humor
Monastery (1535).

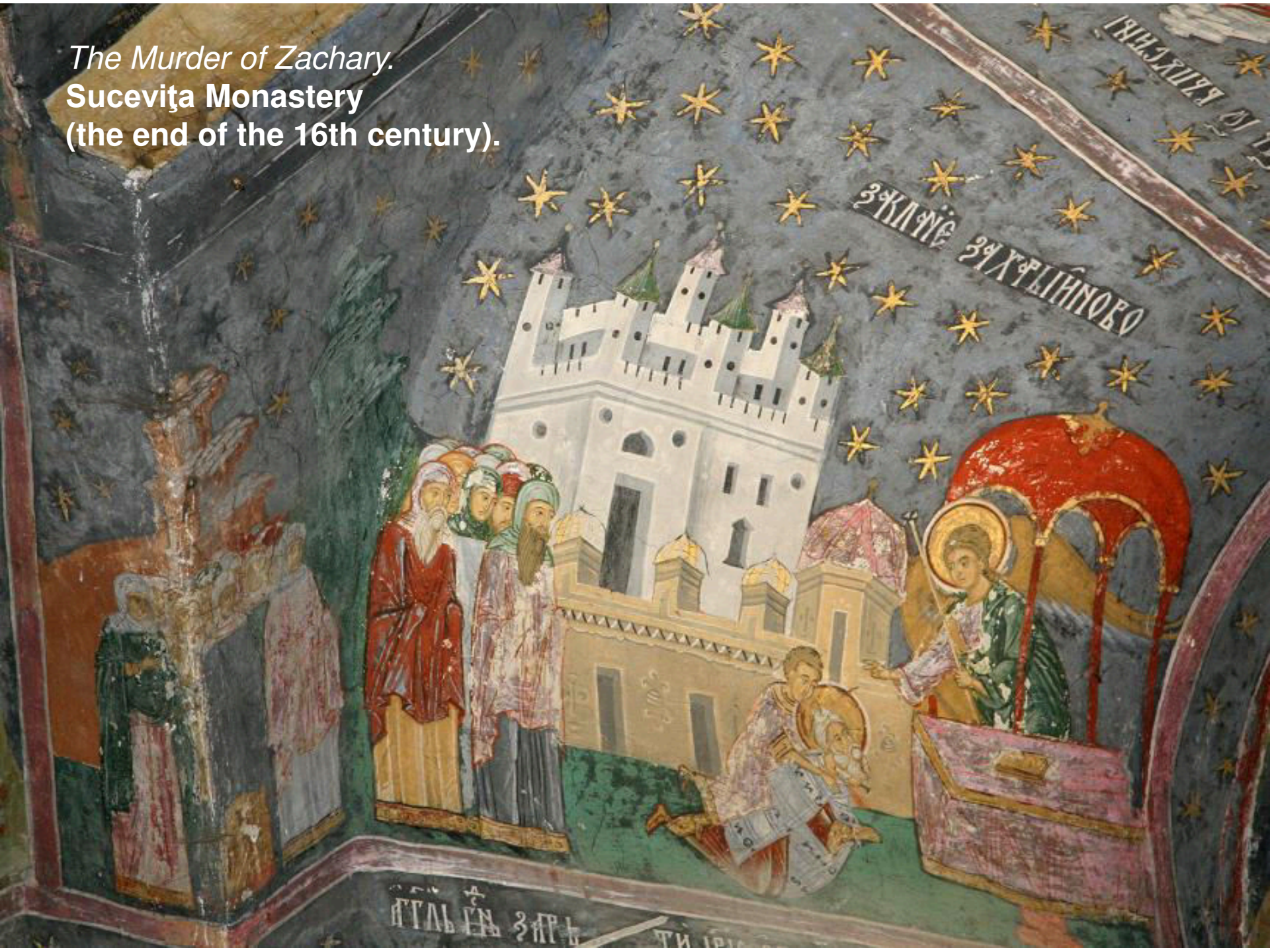
The Murder of Zachary.
The Menology from Moldovița Monastery (1537).



The Murder of Zachary.
Arbore. Church of the *Beheading*
of St. John the Baptist (1541).



The Murder of Zachary.
Sucevița Monastery
(the end of the 16th century).



The Murder of Zachary.
Sucevița Monastery
(the end of the 16th century).





Probably the oldest illustrations of the *ephod* in the Romanian art appear in the Byzantine-type mural paintings (of the 14th century) at *Saint Nicholas* royal church in Curtea de Argeș. There we can see the image of three Old Testament prophets wearing *ephods* adorned with indecipherable graphemes.



In the composition *The Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple* we can notice the image of Zachary wearing a similar *ephod*.

It is worth noticing that the imaginary writings in the Orthodox painting are not limited to the role played in the ornamentation of the Mosaic sacerdotal clothing. Thus, in the exterior mural painting of Sucevița monastery, we find a series of indecipherable characters (which probably symbolized an antediluvian writing) on the tables of laws transmitted by God to Moses the prophet. The writings on the devil's phylactery in *The Last Judgment* from Voroneț monastery present the same mystery.



- Sucevița monastery.
- (the end of the 16th century).
- The tables of laws transmitted by God to Moses the prophet.



- The writings on the devil's phylactery in *The Last Judgment* from Voroneț monastery (1547) present the same mystery.

Unlike the *pseudo-Kufic*, *pseudo-Greek* or *pseudo-Cyrillic* writings which were mainly *decorative*, the *pseudo-Hebrew* writings aimed at other purposes. We have already noticed that these writings contained certain hints to the prophetic status of the characters in the images where they were present. For this reason, we find such *writings* on the *ephods* of the Old Testament patriarchs, on the clothes of the prophets-priests (Aaron, Melchizedek etc.). Yet, sometimes we can find such *writings* engraved on the clothes of some pagan kings. Thus, in the narthex of church *Mother of God Peribleptos* from Ohrid, the coat of Nebuchadnezzar king is covered with indecipherable *graphemes*, imitating the writings of the old Jews. This fact is due to the visionary capacity attributed to this king (let's remember Nebuchadnezzar's "prophetic dream"! [\[1\]](#)).

[\[1\]](#) Daniel, chap. 2.



Nebuchadnezzar's
“prophetic dream”.

Narthex of church
Mother of God
Peribleptos from Ohrid.

Ilia Rodov, in his study *Hebrew script in Christian Art*, noticed: “The symbolism is derived from the ambivalent Christian perception of the Hebrew language as the sacred tongue of Scripture and the historical people of Israel, the biblical Holy Land; as the either exotic or enviable language of Judaism and the Jews; or as a tongue possessing magic power.

An early occurrence of a simulated Hebrew script is found in the 6th-century mosaics in the choir of San Vitale in Ravenna. Orderly rows of illegible signs fill the scroll held by Jeremiah and marks resembling capital script are visible in the book by St. Matthew the Evangelist. Schapiro explained these as an imitation of the Hebrew writings by the Jewish prophet and by the evangelist, who is believed to have composed his gospel in Hebrew (Epiphanius: 30. 3.7)”.

The *visionary* and *hermetic* meaning of the pseudo-inscriptions has close parallels in the medieval literary phenomenon called “*words knitting*”(in Slavonic “*pletenie slovese*”)[1]. This literary phenomenon is attested in Russia and in Balkans at the end of the 14th century and at the beginning of the 15th century. According to the Russian famous literary historian Dmitri S. Lihachev, the artists and the writers of that time “offer the impression of impossibility to express in words the *depth full of mystery of the event, they struggle to create the impression of a primacy of the ideal principle on the material one...*”[2]. All the artistic techniques are used not to clarify the texts, but to make them more confuse and to enhance their emotional side. “*The word, Dmitri S. Lihachev specifies, acts on the “reader” (or on the “spectator” – C.C.) not only through its logic side, but through a general tension and a diversity of mysterious meanings, through harmonies and rhythmic repetitions*”[3].

[1] Dmitri S. Lihaciov, *Prerenașterea rusă. Cultura Rusiei în vremea lui Rubliov și a lui Epifanie Preaînțeleptul (Sfârșitul secolului al XIV-lea – începutul secolului al XV-lea)*, București, ed. “Meridiane”, 1975, p. 96-97.

[2] Dmitri S. Lihaciov, *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 98.

The epithets of the Slavonic literary style at the end of the 14th century—beginning of the 15th century remember to a certain extent *the pseudo-inscriptions* in the painting of that time: “*they are not intended to play a illustrative role and do not contain the special characteristics of the phenomenon*”[\[1\]](#). Their function is to enhance the degree of *abstractization* of the text in order to create the impression of expressing some *last* and *eternal* spiritual essences[\[2\]](#). The literary language itself should have been, according to these ideas, a holy language, a language that could not be touched by the profane life. It had to be expressed through a complicated orthography, which should not have been accessible to anyone. Only the wise are entitled to use it[\[3\]](#).

[\[1\]](#) *Ibidem.*

[\[2\]](#) *Ibidem.*

[\[3\]](#) *Ibidem*, p. 92.

The polemics concerning the existence of the holy language, the language used by God to address Adam, the language of angels, of the celestial forces, the polemics regarding the legitimation of various writings and alphabets were frequent during the entire Middle Ages. The old dilemma formulated first by Plato in *Cratylus* dialogues (“*Do the words name the things according to their nature (physis) or through a human law or convention?*”^[1]) is solved by the medieval people according to the perspective of absolute, transcendent and providential value of “*words*”.

For the medieval people, language (with its words) could not have been a simple convention established between the mortal bearers of a certain idiom.

^[1] Umberto Eco, *În căutarea limbii perfecte* (The Search for the Perfect Language), Iași, ed. “Polirom”, 2002, p. 16.

For the representatives of the Tarnovo School, which reformed substantially in the 14th–15th centuries the orthography and the style of the Slavonic literary language, the written *word* and the *being* “*represented*” by it were inseparable[1]. We can notice here some influences of the medieval philosophic *realism* in opposition to the *nominalism*: the *universalia* referred to by the *words* represent here independent “*realities*”, prior both to the human intellect and to the individual things[2]. The medieval scholars realized the priority of the Hebrew and Greek languages as regards the holiness of the Orthodox tradition.

[1] Dmitri S. Lihaciov, *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

[2] See the definition of the concept of “*medieval realism*” at Lazăr Șăineanu in *Dicționarul universal al limbii române* (The Universal Dictionary of the Romanian Language), Chișinău, ed. “Litera”, 1998, p. 753, article “*Realism*”.

According to *Story about Heber* in George Hamartolos's *Chronicle* – based mainly on a fragment of the *Homily* written by Origen to *The Book of Job*^[1] –, after the segregation of the languages, the only people allowed by God to preserve Adam's old language were the followers of upright Heber, that is the Jews. This was due to the fact that Heber refused to take part in the madness of the construction of Babel tower. This led to the conclusion that the oldest and holiest language of the humanity should have been the Hebrew.

^[1] Origenes, *Homiliae in Job*, 361 Κεφ. Α', β'. ιζ'.

In the light of these medieval ideas, Konstantin Kostenetzki (the last quarter of the 14th century – the '30s of the 15th century)[1] tried to build a whole “*theory*” of the “kinship” relations (obviously of *holy* and not *genetic* nature) between languages. According to this “*theory*”, the Slavonic language plays the role of “*daughter-language*”[2]. The Hebrew words and signs are its “fathers”, and the Greek diacritical words and signs are its “mothers”. That is why the Slavonic literary language, (different from the spoken Slavonic!) has to be subordinated to its “*parents*”.

[1] South-Danube scholar in the 15th century, supporter of the reform of the Slavonic writing, initiated by patriarch Eftimie of Tarnovo (cca. 1325 – cca. 1403).

[2] Dmitri S. Lihaciov, *Op. cit.*, p. 88.

It should be noticed the fact that for Konstantin Kostenetzki even the letters are “animated”: the consonants represent men and vowels – women. The first dominate and the others are subordinated. The diacritic signs represent the women’s head coverings. That is why it is not appropriate that men (consonants) should wear such a thing over them. Women (vowels) can uncover their heads only at home, in the presence of the husbands. Thus, there are vowels without diacritical signs when they are near or between consonants.

In the practice of the Slavonic letters, the ideas of Kostenetzki and of other representatives of the Tarnovo School led to the segregation of the church literature from the rest of the literary writings, to the creation of an aristocratic language and to an extremely sophisticated literature, addressed to a limited number of initiated in the study of *God's Word*^[1]. Yet, as it is known, between an *enigmatic language*, incomprehensible to most of the population, and a *secret science*, such as *Kabala* – assumed to be extremely profound –, the distance is not so big. The option between the *accessibility* granted to the uninitiated and the secret *depth* granted only to the initiated was solved by the scholars of Tarnovo School in the favours of *depth*, no matter how hermetic and inaccessible it was. Consequently, both the incomprehensible *graphemes*, and the *pseudo-inscriptions* in the images painted on the frescoes, miniatures or icons had their purpose, which was far from being only *decorative*.

^[1] Dmitri S. Lihaciov, *Op. cit.*, p. 90 and p. 92.

All referred to a “holy language”[1], unknown to the uninitiated, or to a “divine message”, whose depth overcame the modest human capacities of understanding. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s *mystical theology* provided enough arguments in the favour of such an approach of the *written* message. The supreme purpose of the theological knowledge – *Divinity* (=God) – could not be reached in its final and absolute objective, as *God*, according to Pseudo-Dionysus, “cannot be either expressed, or understood”[2]. In this context, *the illegible, the mysterious, the cryptic* demonstrate the supreme degree of religiousness, and *the decorative cryptogram* becomes the symbol of the intellectual refinement and of the spiritual initiation[3].

[1] The concept of the existence of a “holy language”, inaccessible to mortals (or accessible only to the chosen ones) is extremely old. In the Mediterranean literature it appeared a millennium before the Christianity. Thus, in Homer’s texts we find the antithesis between *the language of gods* and *the language of people*. For example, the word “blood” in *the language of gods* at Homer is designated by “ἰχϝρ”, and in *the language of people* by “αἷμα”. See: *Мифы народов мира*, Volume I, Москва, ed. “Советская энциклопедия”, 1980, p. 532.

[2] Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Despre numele divine. Teologia mistică* (*The Divine Names, Mystical Theology*), Iași, ed. “Institutul european”, 1993, p.154.

[3] Г. Н. Попов, *Op. cit.*, p. 294.

Disciple of the patriarch Eftimie, the scholar Konstantin Kostenetzki started from the idea that each peculiarity *of writing, of graphical writing, of expression* has its sense^[1]. Understanding a concept means expressing it better, and *knowledge* means, for him, *representing the world by the means of the language*. It is known that the conceptions of Tarnovo School were deeply influenced by the Hesychast thinking. Yet, the Hesychasts used to consider the words as *the being* of the phenomena indicated by them. Thus, they saw God Himself in the word “God”. That is why, in the light of the Hesychast conception, *the word* which illustrates a holy *act* is as holy as that *act*^[2]. But how holy should have been the words God addressed to Moses, how holy should have been the words in which the Old Testament prophecies or the evangelic testimonies on Christ were expressed?

^[1] Dmitri S. Lihaciov, *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

^[2] *Ibidem*, p. 89.

In his study *Text și imagine în vechea civilizație a românilor* (Text and Image in the Old Romanian Civilization), the academician Răzvan Theodorescu mentions the famous theological dispute from Venice (in the year 867), to which participated the prominent Byzantine missionary from Thessaloniki, Constantine, who became Cyrilus, who denounced the famous ***trilingual heresy*** according to which only the Hebrew, Greek and Latin could have been holy languages. It is the great pleading of one of the two founders of the Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets for what was later called *gramota slovenska*, which – from the theological and doctrinary point of view – was based on a very well-known text of the New Testament: on *The first epistle of Paul the apostle to the Corinthians*, chapter XIV, in which is mentioned the gift of languages[\[1\]](#).

[\[1\]](#) *Now I wish that all of you could speak in other languages; See: I Corinthians, chap. 14, v. 5.*

The scholars of the 14th century obviously understood the priority of Hebrew and Greek languages as regards the holiness of the Orthodox tradition. Although in the early Byzantium there were some attempts to attribute the Syriac language to Adam – fact that was also attested by Theodoret, the bishop of Cyrus, even in the 5th century[1] –, it was the point of view expressed in the above-mentioned story about Heber in the George Hamartolos's *Chronicle* that won. It's worth to be noticed the fact that the anonymous Slavic author of "*The Hrabr's the Monk Story about the Letters*" (in slav. *Skazanie chernoriztza Hrabra o pis'menah*, - the '90s of the 9th century) tried to use a statement of Theodoret of Cyrus referring to the priority of the Syriac (in slav. *Pis'mena Surskie*, probably *aramaic* language) in the argumentation of the introduction of the Slavonic writing[2].

[1] *Сказания о начале славянской письменности*. Москва, ed. "Наука", 1981, note 4 at chap. VI, p. 185.

[2] *Ibidem*.

The diminishing of the role of the three sacred writings (Hebrew, Greek and Latin) through the absence of those languages in the antediluvian time raised the status of the new languages and new writings, inclusively the status and the value of the Slavonic language (writing) in church.

As regards the Greek language, it was accepted in the Orthodox world as a younger language than Hebrew, but as holy as the latter, as most of the texts of the *New Testament* were written in this language. The Latin language had in the Byzantine area a smaller importance, but this language entered also the triad of the well-known languages. Legitimizing the Latin language was guaranteed by the inscription on Christ's cross, on which, at Pilate's order the text "*This is the King of the Jews*" was written in three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin).

The Romanian Principalities, which “in the 15th and 16th centuries carried out an intensive work of *assimilation*, *preservation* and *treasuring* of the south-Slavic cultural creation”[\[1\]](#), also known this process of *abstractization*, *hermetization* and *aristocratization* of the Slavonic church language, used at that time by all the Moldavian or Wallachian scholars. Moreover, due to the huge distance between the Romanian language, spoken by most of the population, and the Slavonic language used by the scholars (bigger than the distance between the Serbian, Bulgarian or old Russian and the same Slavonic language!), was favoured the process of *abstractization* of the “written word” and its *polarization* towards “the spoken word”.

[\[1\]](#) Gheorghe Mihăilă, *Originalul slavon al învățăturilor lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul sau Theodosie* (The Slavonic Original of Neagoe Basarab’s Teachings to His Son Theodosie), in: “*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie*”, București, 1996, ed. “Roza vânturilor”, p. LXXXIII.