

## 8. THE EVOLUTION OF ENGRAVING IN MOLDOVA

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**Abstract:** *This paper achieves some landmarks regarding the appearance and evolution of engraving in Moldova within the medieval, modern and contemporary art periods and aims to highlight the evolution of engraving and achievements in the art of engraving in the historical territory of Moldova, but also to establish the basic stages of the evolution of engraving and regional interferences in relation to European engraving. If we follow the comparative evolution of the genus in various neighboring regions, we find that each area has its own specificity and particularities. The approach to this issue is related to the general aspects that conditioned the development of religious engraving, but also to the local tradition, which has evolved in close connection with the respective process in European countries.*

**Key word:** *engraving, graphic art, woodcut, printer, engraving techniques*

### 1. Introduction

The interest for engraving and the possibilities of multiplication by obtaining a large number of prints was and remains one of the main factors that determine the continuous evolution of this kind of art. The engraving occupied a special place in the patrimony of the fine arts, fact that is due to the technical and artistic procedures used as support, but also to the works obtained as a result of the multiplication and which do not lose the qualities of the original. In European art, the art of engraving has been studied step by step over the centuries, from its appearance to our times, we can not say the same about the engraving of Moldavia, both medieval and contemporary. That is why the focus on this field of art is sufficiently motivated.

If the art of miniature benefited from a special interest, being known due to the works of the scientists Nicolae Iorga<sup>261</sup>, Gavril Popescu-Vâlcea<sup>262</sup>, Gabriel Ștrempel<sup>263</sup>, Mircea Tomescu<sup>264</sup> etc., then the engraving, which stimulated the appearance of the print, has a more refractory attention than priority. The same aspects are reflected in the monograph of the researchers Dan Simionescu and Gheorghe Buluță *Pagini din istoria cărții românești* and of many others<sup>265</sup>.

### 2. Discussions

The appearance of engraving in medieval Moldova took place on a different artistic background compared to previous centuries. The 17th century is marked by

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<sup>261</sup> Iorga N., (1934-1936), *Les arts mineurs en Roumanie*, vol.1-3, București

<sup>262</sup> Bianu I., Hodoș N., Simionescu D., (1936), *Bibliografie românească veche. 1508-1830, Vol.3., 1809-1830, fascicula IV.* p.246, Fundația Regală, București

<sup>263</sup> Popescu-Vâlcea G., (1981), *Miniatura românească*, Meridiane, București

<sup>264</sup> Ștrempel G., (1956) *Copiști de manuscrise românești până la 1800*, vol.1, Ed. Academiei, București; (1978) *Catalogul manuscriselor românești*, vol. II, Ed. Academiei, București

<sup>265</sup> Tomescu M., (1968), *Istoria cărții românești de la începuturi până la 1918*. Meridiane, București

<sup>265</sup> A se vedea: Andreescu A., (1997), *Arta cărții (Cartea românească în secolele XVI-XVII)*, Meridiane, București; Radu M., (2004), Repanovici A., *O istorie a tiparului și a tipăriturilor*, ed. II, Brașov

the numerous miniatures created by Anastasie Crimca from the Dragomirna monastery in the first quarter of the century. The next period, that of the time of Vasile Lupu (1634-1653), has a character with eclectic valences (the lost painting of the Three Hierarchs from Iași, 1642). At the same time, mural art loses its dominance, giving way to the painting of icons, in the same way the miniature being replaced by printed, printed engraving (Mihail Strilbitchi, Ghervasie, Casian, etc.) and more accessible to the population. The only exception of mural painting from the 18th century remains the fresco of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin from Causeni. These times are also revealed in the numerous works of religious painting found in the monasteries and rural churches of the Republic of Moldova, such as those of Căpriana, Curchi, Hîrgăuca, Ghermănești, Ivancea, Camenca, etc., created in the XVII-XIX centuries.

In medieval Moldova, as well as in other Orthodox regions, the religious book illustrated with engravings dedicated to the events of the Old and New Testaments was practiced, an integral phenomenon that persisted in the XVII-XVIII centuries. Only after the arrival of Mihail Strilbitschi in Iasi (1750) did the secular book and the illustrations for it begin to take shape more distinctly. The study of the sources regarding the appearance of wood engraving during the reign of Vasile Lupu (1634-1653), reflected in the publications of Nicolae Iorga<sup>266</sup>, Mircea Tomescu<sup>267</sup>, Cornel Tatai-Baltă<sup>268</sup>, indicates, as a landmark, the art of Ukrainian and Transylvanian engraving, which, in turn, benefited from German or Italian woodcuts. From a historical point of view, the engraving of medieval Moldova can be motivated by the existence of three periods, which promoted it, and by the centers where it was printed:

- the first half of the 17th century signified by the activity of the printing house from Trei Ierarhi from Iași;
- the next epoch marked by the editorial beginnings of Mihail Strilbitchi, who worked in Iasi, Movilau, Dubasari in the second half of the eighteenth century;
- the first half of the 19th century characterized by the printing activities of the Neamț monastery.

The specificity of these periods, which include the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, is that there were simultaneously the manuscript book and printed editions, each field having its own distribution practice and various sponsors, even if some images were borrowed and used in various forms in both cases. In the 17th century, Ukrainian engraving had a special influence on Moldovan engraving, conditioned by the early development of printing in Lvov. Simultaneously with the development of printing and the evolution of book engraving, in the seventeenth century, monasteries continue to make several manuscripts, whose decoration is clearly influenced by book engraving, and the elements of Renaissance ornament are complemented by Baroque forms. One of the essential features of the local engraving is its conservative, traditional character, which evolves, with few changes, from the miniature of the manuscripts from the 15th century to the metal

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<sup>266</sup> Iorga N., *Tipografia la români*, în: *Almanahul graficeii române*, 1931, p. 180-204, București

<sup>267</sup> Tomescu M. (1968), *Istoria cărții românești de la începuturi până la 1918*, p.215, București

<sup>268</sup> Tatai-Baltă C., *Incursiune în xilografura românească (sec.XVI-XIX)*, în: *Apulum*, v.XVII, 1979, p. 459, Alba Iulia

engraving of the 19th century. In this case, the miniature played the basic role, being the foundation of the book illustration from the XVII-XIX centuries. The share of books printed in the eighteenth century, their diversity and spread speak of the dizzying leap in the evolution of printing, with a religious orientation, but also secular orientation.

The development of book engraving in medieval Moldova was a result of the emergence of printing houses, due to the joint effort of Vasile Lupu and Petru Movila. The first half of the 19th century is dominated by wood engraving, used in book printing. The woodcuts from this period are distinguished by the linear finesse of the compositions, the structural freedom of the image. The engraving of the book from the second half of the 19th century begins to give way, being replaced by the images obtained through the metal matrix. However, the most obvious professional treatment in book engraving is proposed by Western painters, who worked in Iasi during the reference period. The prints from Chisinau from the second half of the 19th century contain fewer engravings, some of them being made of metal. It means a performance in making prints:

- more dynamic images;
- application of intersecting engraving techniques to reproduce the space, the volume;
- the pictorial qualities of wood engraving were abandoned.

### **3. Results**

A characteristic moment for all the prints from Chisinau is the lack of the author's signature, unlike the engravings from Iași and the Neamț Monastery, and in some cases the year when they were made is not indicated. The frequent use of the same engraving in different editions is also attested. Thus, compared to the editions printed in Iasi, the achievements of the Spiritual printing house in Chisinau are much more modest. Due to the Russo-Turkish wars and their consequences, printing was the only field that continued to be maintained, becoming an important link between the Russian government and the Principality of Moldova and had an intense circulation throughout the nineteenth century.

The next period developing as an artistic phenomenon in the ambiance of Russian and European culture, but considerably distant in time and space, modern Bessarabian art has its beginnings in the 90s of the nineteenth century, and is constituted as a process in the 2-3 decades of the twentieth century, marking the appearance of the first professional artists in our land. Most of them were originally from Bessarabia and this moment was fully revealed in the way of reflecting the picturesque reality of the land. Professional art, including engraving, appeared in the Orthodox environment due to the founding of art education institutions, which also stimulated the emergence of art genres, related to the European ones, but also of the respective fields that represented it. This process took place differently in different regions, sometimes decades apart. Thus, the beginnings of specialized studies in the Principality of Moldavia are indispensable related to the names of Gheorghe Asachi (Mihăilean Academy in Iași, 1839) and Gheorghe Pănăiteanu-

Bardasare, who founded the School of Fine Arts in Iași (1864)<sup>269</sup>.

Studying the creative activity and exhibition manifestations of the Bessarabians, we are convinced that under the influence of traveling exhibitions of peredvijnics in Chisinau is the Society of Art Amateurs of Bessarabia (1903), among its founders are Vasile Blinov, Alexandr Climașevschi and Vladimir Ocușco<sup>270</sup>. The creation of this first association after the model of the respective structures in Russia and Ukraine was an important phenomenon for the local culture, stimulating the development of Bessarabian professional art. With the change of the political situation, following the union of Bessarabia with Romania, the artistic life grows, and in the area of interests of Bessarabian painters enter the styles and orientations of Western art. At the initiative of Alexandru Plămădeală, Auguste Baillayre and Vladimir Doncev, as well as of the members of the former Society of Art Lovers, in 1921, the Society of Fine Arts from Bessarabia was established in Chisinau<sup>271</sup>. In general, modern art in Bessarabia has known two main stages of its evolution, which coincide with certain historical periods:

- the first includes the years when the land was part of tsarist Russia with the status of gubernie (1812-1918);
- the second is related to the reintegration of Bessarabia into the composition of the Romanian Kingdom (1918-1940). The first stage marks the establishment of modern art, which reaches the peak of its development in the second stage.

Bessarabian plastic artists, in the initial stage, become attached to the traditions of democratic realism in the forms characteristic for peredvijnics and for the Society of Painters of Southern Russia. Although a limited number of works were available for making in-depth conclusions, but the materials of the archives, the testimonies of the press, etc. allow us to conclude that this process had a double significance - positive and negative. On the one hand, the professional level of the plastic artists increased, but, on the other hand, the connection with the art of Nicolae Grigorescu and with the national traditions of the Romanian art school was lost.

In Bessarabia at the beginning of the twentieth century are the main fields of professional art - painting, noted for portraits, landscapes, genre paintings; sculpture with the respective genres; print as a genre of graphics. Marked by the period and the influences of art schools, where the Bessarabians studied, it is obvious that in painting and sculpture or graphics, in the first stage, dominated the influences of peredvijnics with their monochrome theme and color. During this period, the engraving of Pavel Shilingovschi can be noticed, having a pronounced popular character<sup>272</sup>.

Mir iskusstva, post-impressionism and Art Nouveau played a special role, the principles of which can be traced in the creation of Bessarabian artists until 1940. These moments are quite accentuated in the creations of Eugenia Maleșevschi, Auguste Baillayre, Pavel Shilingovschi. , Moisei Kogan, Lidia Arionescu and

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<sup>269</sup> Drăguț V., Florea V., Grigorescu D., Mihalache M. (1970), *Pictura românească în imagini*, p. 140, Meridiane, București

<sup>270</sup> Plămădeală A., *Artiști plastici basarabeni - un scurt istoric*, în: *Viața Basarabiei*, 1933, nr. 11, p.50

<sup>271</sup> Plămădeală A. Op. cit., p. 47

<sup>272</sup> Stavilă T., (2000), *Arta plastică modernă din Basarabia*, p. 80, Știința, Chișinău

others. The orientations of Bessarabian artists in the second stage of development of modern art represent the decisive moment of the establishment of Bessarabian engraving as a genre of professional arts, marked by some trends that appeared in European and Russian art at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, such as would be expressionism in the creations of Șneer Cogan, Gheorghe Ceglocof and Art 1900 in the works of Theodor Kiriacoff, Moissei Kogan or Elisabeth Ivanovsky.

The traditions of *peredvijnics* continue to be explored during this period by some Bessarabian artists such as Vasile Blinov, Nicolae Gumalic, Nadezhda Ivanov, Mihail Berezovschi, Gavriil Remmer and others, who remain in the minority, but this is not the main trend of Bessarabian art. Thus, the engraving from this period is organically integrated in the Bessarabian plastic arts, becoming, in the second stage of its evolution, a specific artistic phenomenon, which records the appearance of a new genre of arts, namely graphics.

Compared to the interwar period and its openings to a European art, the events of the post-World War II period cardinally changed the image of Bessarabian culture and art. The plastic art of the post-war period differs cardinally from the achievements of the previous epoch. The political and economic changes that took place during this period, as well as the change of priorities through the introduction of "socialist realism", found the local artists completely unprepared. Invoking the new way of life in which artistic values are replaced by images devoted to exaggerated and declarative pathos such as "art belongs to the people", the Soviet regime downgraded national art by several decades. Thus, this period can be divided into two stages:

- The first stage covers the years 1945-1970 and is supported by the implementation in all fields of the arts of "socialist realism", which provided for the application of artistic principles of Russian survivors in a new era, defined as "the era of social construction." In this situation, the graphic artists created images of a desired reality, reflecting in the foreground compositions with industrial motifs, repeating, without imagination and originality, the geometric shapes of architecture, people appearing as a ghost on this background. Any deviation from the norms pre-established by the ideological structures was monitored by the party organs, which vehemently sought to uproot the phenomenon called by the Soviets "bourgeois formalism."

Limiting ourselves to the artists who practiced engraving, we will mention only those artists who imposed themselves with certain achievements. Some of them - Victor Ivanov, Grigori Fiurer, Petru Țurcan, Iacov Averbuh and Boris Nesvedov - are part of the pleiad of Bessarabian painters from the interwar period; others - Evgheni Meregă, Leonid Beleaev, Ilia Bogdesco, Stepan Tuhari - arrive in Moldova after graduating from the Soviet Union; most of them, however, are graduates of the School of Fine Arts in Chisinau - Igor Vieru, Emil Childescu, Ion Vatamaniță, Vasile Cojocaru, Isai Cârmu and others, their creation being established after 1960.

- The second stage includes the years 1970-2000. It is the period when one feels a certain freedom in the perception of artistic creation, being admitted some deviations from the norms of ideological censorship, such as decorativism, stylization, the application of formal plastic procedures. This moment is also due to the emergence of a new generation of graphic designers, who, in addition to

studying in Moscow, Kiev or St. Petersburg, are also graduates of art education institutions in Romania.

The art of national engraving after 1990 is completed with new names of plastic artists, which give the genre new subjects and new approaches, massively involving the experiment of mixed technologies. Important representatives of this generation can be considered Simion Zamșa, Elena Karacentev, Ion Severin, Valeriu Herța, Tudor Fabian, Violeta Zabulică, Alexandru Ermurache and others. who in their creation showed maximum freedom of virtuosity and an inexhaustible imagination of expression. In the foreground of the creative process of graphic artists, the experiment in various techniques and plastic processes of engraving is required.

In the last decades from the border of the XX-XXI centuries there is a negative tendency in the evolution of engraving in the Republic of Moldova. More and more graphic designers abandon engraving due to harmful technical conditions (working with acids) the most obvious case being the creation of Emil Childescu, Victor Kuzmenko, Eudochia Zavtur and others, who after 1990 create painting and unfortunately, these examples do not they are the only ones. Another category of artists prefer experiments using computer techniques called author technique, mixed media, where it is difficult to track which techniques are used - are engravings, technical compilations or computer-processed images, demonstrated by Tudor Fabian, Tatiana Fiodorova, Alexandru Ermurache and many others.

Engraving from the Republic of Moldova in the contemporary period demonstrated the main trends in the evolution of national fine arts, from the narrative of "socialist realism" and thematic-ideological structure to the first formal artistic experiments in the early 70s of last century and the metamorphoses of national engraving after '90, which gives the genre new subjects and new approaches, with tendencies to integrate into European art at the beginning of the third millennium.

Engraving in the Republic of Moldova is not only a genre of artistic creation; it is its history and one of the most valuable compartments of national culture. This fact significantly influences the psychology of graphic designers' creation, regulates the relationship between them, in such an environment they have a more responsible attitude towards the ideas of their predecessors and contemporaries. Areas of common interest are formed, a new vision of cultural heritage is formed. But they do not contradict the broad interests of graphic artists, so the evolution of contemporary engraving in Moldova is the coexistence of several worldviews and art, often diametrically opposed artistic treatment of art form and traditional themes, different ways of thinking and perceiving the very aesthetics of engraving.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The totality of these forces is marked by the dialectical principle of mutual attraction and mutual rejection, which left its mark on the content of ideas and patterns, the formal qualities of art in the process of the evolution of engraving in Moldova. Proceeding from the above, we can say that engraving is an open system, which is linked through several channels with the most modern phenomena of universal and

national art. The evolution of engraving, its diversification lies not in the preservation of the spiritual heritage, but in the deepening of all the compartments, of the artistic experience of the graphic artists, including through the assimilation of the expressions of expression, technological, etc.

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