A SAINT DEFENDER
THE VENERATION OF SAINT JOHN THE NEW OF SUCEAVA IN BUKOVINA – FROM HISTORY TO CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

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(*Abstract*)

Un sfânt apărător. Venerarea Sfântului Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava în Bucovina – din istorie până la cultura contemporană

(*Rezumat*)

Sfântul Ioan cel Nou, cunoscut și ca Sfântul Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava, este unul dintre cei mai veneraţi sfinţi în Bucovina și, în general, în Moldova. Datorită venerării sale de către autorităţi și de clerul Principatului Moldovei, încă din secolul al XV-lea, Sfântul Ioan cel Nou este considerat și astăzi unul dintre cei mai importanţi patroni spirituali ai Bucovinei – protectorul ei de minuni. Scopul articolului este analiza contextuală a transformărilor asociate cu venerarea Sfântului Ioan cel Nou în Bucovina. Ne-a interesat care au fost începuturile venerării sale în Ţara Moldovei, ce factori i-au schimbat forma și natura și ce reprezintă astăzi acest sfânt pentru locuitorii din Bucovina. Articolul prezintă rezultatele cercetării ştiinţifice efectuate între 2004 și 2016 în regiunea Bucovinei pe baza tehnicilor calitative aplicate: interviul liber, observarea directă și indirectă, documentarea fotografică și analiza materialelor vizuale. Cercetarea s-a bazat, de asemenea, pe surse istorice și etnografice secundare și pe materiale disponibile pe internet. Cercetarea a demonstrat că venerarea Sfântului Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava se regăsește în multe texte din cultura română, creând un spaţiu lingvistic specific în care se întrepătrund textele religioase canonice, mitologia naţională și folclorul. Trecerea timpului și evenimentele istorice succesive furnizează informaţii noi, transformând imaginea acestui sfânt și percepţia lui de către locuitorii ortodocși din Bucovina. Sfântul Ioan cel Nou a trecut printr-o lungă metamorfoză – de la ipostaza de apărător al credinţei și al Principatului Moldovei la cea de păstor și ţăran și, în final, la cea de sfânt care își folosește puterea pentru a-i ajuta pe credincioșii ortodocși să treacă peste greutăţile și suferinţa zilnică.

Cuvinte cheie: moștenire culturală, folclor, Europa Centrală și de Est, Moldova, Bucovina, venerarea sfinţilor, Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava, credinţe și ritualuri, iconografie.

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Literary sources of the veneration

The early beginnings of the veneration of Saint John the New in the Moldavian lands date back to the fifteenth century and are associated with the literary religious tradition that was spreading there at the time owing to the monks living and working in monastic centres. The oldest literary sources related to this particular saint are attributed by the majority of researchers to Gregory Tsamblak (1st half of the 15th century), a Bulgarian cleric, who in 1401, together with the Greek Manuel Archont, participated in the mission sent by the Patriarch of Constantinople Matthew I to Moldavia in order to prevent the conflict between the Metropolis of Moldavia, set up informally a few years earlier, and the capital. During the journey, which most probably led through Bilhorod, the delegation is reported to have come into contact with the veneration of Saint John the New[1]. Tsamblak, who spent the following few years in Moldavia as the presbyter of the Great Moldavian Orthodox Church, is said to be the author of the service and life of Saint John the New written in accordance with the teachings of the literary school founded by Euthymius of Tarnovo[2]. In 1438, the life was copied by monk Gavril from the monastery in Neamț, and in 1534 it was re-edited in the Old Church Slavonic by Archimandrite Teodosie of the same monastery[3].

The narratives shaped by this version of life indicate that John the New was a Greek merchant from Trebizond – a famous great port city located on the Black Sea in the east, close to the Assyrians, and bordering the Great Armenia. Having embarked on one of his numerous journeys, the Greek merchant sailed to Bilhorod (Slavonic: *Bělyi gradŭ*), a city located *near Vōspor*. During the sail, an incident took place which determined the merchant's later fate. The eternal enemy, unable to bear the view of John immersed in prayer, stirred up the ship's captain, a follower of the *Latin heresy*, against John. Seeing John's invincible faith and unable to defeat him in their religious disputes, the captain decided to take revenge on the young Christian. Having arrived in *Bilhorod*, he went to see the eparch of the city – a Persian, an ardent defender of and heir to the ancestral hypocrisy, and insidiously told him that merchant John, filled with admiration for the faith of the sun-god believers, wished to renounce Christ and convert[4]. The eparch was very content to hear these words. He ordered John to be brought before him and

[1] A. Naumow, *O eklezjologii Grzegorza Cambłaka, prawosławnego metropolity kijowskiego*, [In:] *Wiara i historia. Z dziejów literatury cerkiewnosłowiańskiej na ziemiach polsko-litewskich*, Studia Slawistyczne Krakowsko-Wileńskie, vol. 1, Kraków, 1996, p. 67.

[2] E. Bakalova, „Цмблаковото Мъчєниє на свєти Йоан Нови в румънската монумєнтална живопис от XVI–XVII вєк", in "Paleobulgarica", XV, 4, 1991, pp. 56–77.

[3] E. Bîrlădeanul, "Racla cu moaştele «Sfăntului Ioan cel Nou» de la Suceava", in "Biserica Ortodoxă Română", 1972, XCII, issues 11–12; idem, „Ieromonahul, presviterul şi dascălul Moldovei Grigore Ţamblac", in "Mitropolia Moldovei şi Sucevei", 1981, issues 4–6, pp. 319–327.

[4] G. Ţamblacŭ, *Мчєнїє стго и слаавнаго мчникка Іанна новаго иже вз Бѣлѣградь мѫжчившагосѧ*, în Melchisedec Ştefănescu, *Grigorie Ţamblacu*, Bucureşti, 1935, p. 86.

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persuaded him to renounce Christian faith, to give glory to the radiant sun, and to worship the star. John, oblivious to the threats, displayed great courage and attachment to the Christian faith, which he did not renounce even in the face of torture and suffering. Unable to compel John to abandon his faith, the eparch ordered to flog him and lock him up in a dark cell, and then tie him to the tail of a wild horse and drag his body through the streets of the city. One of the bystander Jews watching John's ordeal cut off the Saint's head[5].

John's dead body shone with a wonderful glow, and a magnificent choir of angels and flames appeared over his head. Three young men surrounded the body, incensing and praying over it. Seeing the miracles happening around the figure of the saint, one of the Jews – the cunning offspring of a viper – decided to shoot the angels, but his hands grew to his bow and arrows. The frightened eparch of the city gave the deceased's body to the Christians, and they buried it in the sacred place. Upon hearing about John's martyrdom, the captain of the ship, a Frank merchant, decided to steal the saint's body from the grave at night. When he was digging it out, the saint appeared in the dream to a presbyter of a Christian temple, ordering him to save the body. The priest fulfilled John's request, thwarted the captain's plan to steal the relics, and hid them at the sacrificial table in the church, where they rested for the following seventy years. During that period, many a miracle happened there. When Alexander the Good, Prince of Moldavia, heard about the fame of the relics, he sent Archbishop Joseph with numerous soldiers to Bilhorod to bring the relics to Suceava. After the remains had arrived in Moldavia, the hospodar welcomed them in adoration and proclaimed John the New patron of his duchy[6].

The researchers did not agree on many details contained in Tsamblak's account of the saint's life. Not much is known about John the New, and Tsamblak's work cannot be regarded as a reliable historical source, because apart from the facts, it contains legendary elements modelled on the motifs and topics of hagiographic literature. What sparks doubts is the time-frame of John's martyrdom, for example. Some historians say it was the beginning of the fourteenth century (N. Cartojan – 1300, bishop Melchisedec – 1320, N. Iorga – 1330). Another dubious thing is the date of bringing the relics of John the New to Moldavia[7].

[5] G. Ţamblacŭ, *Мченїє стго и*…, p. 96.

[6] G. Ţamblacŭ, *Мченїє стго и*…, p. 99.

[7] M. Cazacu, "Saint Jean le Nouveau, son martyre, ses reliques et leur translation a Suceava (1415)", in *L'empereur hagiographe. Culte des saints et monarchie byzantine et post-byzantine. Actes des colloques internationax «L'empereur hagiographe» (13–14 mars 2000) et «Religues et miracles» (1–2 novembre 2000)*, eds. P. Guran, B. Flusin, Editura Colegiul Noua Europă, 2000, bmv, pp. 137–158; P. Năsturel, „Une prétendue oeuvre de Grégoire Tsamblak: «le martyre de Saint Jean le Nouvrau", in *Actes du Premier Congres International des Études Balkaniques et Sud-Est Européennes*, VII, *Litterature, Ethnographie, Folklore*, Sofia, 1971, pp. 345–351, 352–357.

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Places of religious worship; iconography of the saint

Other traces connected with the veneration of Saint John the New in the Moldavian areas date back to the times of the reign of the subsequent descendants of the House of Bogdan – mostly hospodar Stephen the Great (1457–1504), who, from the end of the fifteenth century, began to dedicate different places of religious worship founded in Moldavia to the Saint's name. In 1498, the Moldavian hospodar funded a bell tower with a chapel of St John the New in the Bistrița monastery, which also has the oldest preserved fragments of the polychrome decorations with the icons of this Saint inside[8]. In 1507, boyar Luca Arbore funded the Orthodox church in Şipote dedicated to Saint John the New[9]. The period from 1514 to 1522, which was the reign of subsequent hospodars, Bogdan III the Blind (1504–1517) and Ştefăniță (1517–1527), brought the construction of a new metropolitan Orthodox church in Suceava. In 1589, the church became a new home to the increasingly famous relics of John the New, previously held in the *Mirăuți* Church in Suceava, a coronation Orthodox church of the Moldavian rulers[10]. The work of Stephen the Great was continued by his son – Petru Rareş (1527–1538; 1541–1546), who, along with the subsequent Moldavian Metropolitan Grigore Roşca (died in 1570), was one of the initiators of the external polychrome of the painted Orthodox churches and monasteries from northern Moldavia, which today constitute a great symbol of Romania[11]. From that moment onwards, the great programme of the wall iconography in the Moldavian Orthodox churches, which was most likely a kind of religious discourse of hospodars and clergy of this particular principality, was full of references to the figure of Saint John the New, which greatly reinforced the significance of the Saint in the Moldavian areas. In 1547, the life of the Saint, presented in as many as twelve icons, was written on the southern wall of the Voroneț Monastery dedicated to Saint George. Among numerous illustrations, there is an iconographic equivalent of the Saint's entire life with perhaps the most famous icon of the translatio of the relics to Moldavia, which presents Alexander the Good and his wife Ana in the typical costumes of Byzantine basileuses. At the same time, the same temple holds the frescoes of the Saint placed in the monumental icon covering the three walls of the apses called the *Great Heavenly Celebration*. The fact that John the New is presented among the greatest Christian saints arranged in a descending order – prophets, apostles, Church Fathers, martyrs and anchorites – and approaching the gates of Heaven

[8] *Repertoriul monumentelor şi obiectelor de arta din timpul lui Ştefan cel Mare*, Bucureşti, Editura M. Berza, 1958, pp. 155–159.

[9] G. Balş, *Bisericile lui Ştefan cel Mare*, Bucureşti, 1926, pp. 181–186.

[10] T. Bălan, *Romanian Patericon*, California, 1996, p. 120.

[11] C. Nicolescu, *Arta în epoca lui Ştefan cel Mare. Antecendentale şi etapele de dezvoltare ale artei moldoveneşti din epoca Ştefan cel Mare*, Bucureşti, 1964, pp. 292; E. Kocój, *Świątynie, postacie, ikony. Malowane cerkwie i monastyry Bukowiny Południowej w wyobrażeniach rumuńskich*, Kraków, 2015.

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heavens proves that, over a century after the transfer of his relics, his veneration must have been at least known among the Moldavian rulers and clergy[12].

The following stages of how the veneration of Saint John was formed date back to the years of religious and cultural activity of the Movilă family – the great boyars and rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia in the 16th and 17th centuries. Presentations of Saint John can be found both in the literature of the Movilă circle and in the frescoes of Moldavian Orthodox churches. In 1586, the Moldavian Metropolitan George Movilă ordered to build the Monastery Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Sucevița, which was collectively funded by the Movilă family. In comparison with the previous Orthodox churches, the details of the changes introduced to the iconography may be interpreted as an expression of the religious discourse of the Movilă family, but they were also inspired by the decisions made during the *Hundred Chapter Synod* (Moscow 1551)[13]. What can also be found in the iconographic programme of the Sucevița church, painted around 1601, is one of the most extensive hagiographic cycles of Saint John the New in the Moldavian art, consisting of fourteen icons written in the vestibule of the church and placed among other warrior saints: Saint Theodore Stratelates, Saint Demetrios, Saint Theodore Tyron, Saint George, Saint Procopius, and Saint Mercury. This neighbourhood of the most famous warrior saints might suggest that the Movilăs, and maybe even Stephen the Great, associated the role of John the New with being a defender of Christianity.

During the reign of Petru Movilă (1597–1647), the figure of Saint John the New appeared also in the Orthodox church literature. As a member of the Orthodox church, Petru was well aware of the negative effects of the 1596 Union of Brest brought upon the territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Aware of the profound division that has since taken place in the history of Eastern Orthodox Church and the highly unlikely agreement between the Orthodox and the Uniates-*dissenters*, Petru Movilă sought to introduce many changes in the organization of the Orthodox Church in the Commonwealth. Due to contacts with other regions, the Orthodox organization started by Movilă covered not only Poland but a large part of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. It had a very strong influence on Moldavia and Wallachia.

In 1640, Movilă convened the Synod of Kiev. One of the decisions was to prepare new liturgical books. In 1645, his *Trebnik* was published in Kiev, which included the life of John the New, which was already known in the Orthodox Metropolis of Kiev as early as the 15th century. However, there was one distinctive

[12] We do not have sources from this period that could testify to the fact that the echoes of this veneration were already penetrating the folk culture. The oldest recorded folk reports date back to the 19th century, see Elena Niculiță-Voronca, *Datinele şi credinţele poporului român adunate şi aşezate în ordine mitologică*, vol. II, Iaşi, 1998, p. 307.

[13] E. Dragnev, "Note privitoare la pictura «înțeleaptă» din Moldova medievală", in "Revista de Istorie a Moldovei", Academia de Ştiințe a Moldovei, Institutul de Istorie, Chişinău, 4 (60), 2004, p. 21–33.

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feature – the old Greek codes never devoted much attention or space to this Saint[14]. It was not until Kiev that the rank of this Saint was raised, because John the New, with his biography modelled by Tsamblak, perfectly fit into Movilă's vision of the Orthodox Church – empowered with the tradition and loyalty to Christianity of the initial centuries, and in opposition to Islam, covering the then Central and South-eastern Europe, and to Catholicism, symbolized in the life by the Frank captain of the ship[15]. In addition, the life painted the picture of Jews, perpetuating their negative image in Christian culture and literature dating back to the times of Christ [16]. It was probably in Movilă's *Trebnik* where the name of John the New was placed very high in the hierarchy of the order of saints for the first time – just behind the first saints to have been canonized by the Orthodox church in Rus' – Boris and Gleb, known as "Strastoterptsy" (Passion-Bearers), the founders of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra – Saints Anthony and Theodosius, and the three martyrs of Vilnius – Anthony, John, and Eustathius[17].

The tradition of the Metropolitan Varlaam

Other figure associated with the Movilă circle was Varlaam (Vasile Moţoc), the author of the first Romanian translations of the Books of Homilies, emissary to Moscow sent by hospodar Miron Barnovschi-Movilă, Metropolitan of Moldavia in 1632–1653; in 1639 one of the candidates for the Patriarch of Constantinople. The personalities of Petru Movilă and Varlaam, as well as of the Moldavian chronicler Grigore Ureche[18], were shaped for many years together within the confines of the Secu monastery, and they continued to keep in touch even after the Movilă family had moved to Poland[19]. Varlaam's collection of homilies and commentaries on the

[14] A. Naumow, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[15] In the life of St John the New, the captain of the ship is referred to as *Frank*. The term, derived from the Arabic, originally meant "the Christian territory behind the Pyrenees". At the time of the Crusades, when a significant number of Europeans came to the Middle East for the first time, the term began to be used to refer to Europeans to distinguish them from Byzantines (other than Orthodox). As believed by the Muslims, the Franks were followers of an imperfect religion who misinterpreted the Revelation. They were uncouth, dirty, smelly, because they did not bathe, they lacked good manners. The entry of the Franks into the holy places of Islam in Jerusalem was perceived as the tainting and contamination of their space, and after the places were regained, cleansing rituals were celebrated in them. For more on this subject, see: A. S. Nalborczyk, *op. cit*., pp. 181–210.

[16] More on aliens in the Byzantine and Slavic literature and art, see: M. Garidis, "*La représentation des «nations» dans la peinture post-bizantine*", in "Bizantion", 1969 [1970], t. XXXIX; E. Kocój, *Świątynie…*, *op. cit.*, passim.

[17] A. Naumow, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[18] The character of Ureche, who grew up together with Varlaam and Petru Movilă, is very important here, because he was the first Moldavian chronicler to mention the transfer of the relics of John the New to Suceava, see: G. Ureche, *Letopiseiseţul Ţării Moldovei*, L. Onu, Bucureşti, 1967, p. 81.

[19] P. Mohyła, *Împăcarea Bisericii Ortodoxe*, tłum. Ş. Lupu, Polirom, Iaşi, 2002, p. 49–50; A. Eşanu, V. Eşanu, *Începuturile formaţiei intelectuale ale lui Petru Movilă*, Materials from the International Historical Conference *Dynastia Mohyłów – przykład wzajemnego przenikania się elit politycznych w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w wiekach XVI–XVII*, Kiszyniów, 17–18 June 2005.

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Gospel and the lives of saints, published in 1643 and titled *Homily 1643* (Romanian: *Cazanie 1643*), included the first translation of the life of Saint John the New into Romanian, created over 200 years after the original was written in Old Church Slavonic. In comparison with Tsamblak's original account, however, Varlaam's translation contains many distinctive changes referring to the contemporary history of the Orthodox Church not only in the territories of the Commonwealth and Moldavia but also other regions of Southern and Central-Eastern Europe. Over the following centuries, these changes have generated new cultural patterns, which still reverberate in many religious and historical texts in today's Romania.

The changes introduced by the Moldavian metropolitan concerned not only the title of life itself but also the vocabulary used by Tsamblak. In Varlaam's version, the Old Church Slavonic title: "Martyrdom of the saint and the famous martyr John the New martyred in Bilhorod, written down by Gregory, priest and presbyter of the Great Moldavian Orthodox Church" was replaced with "Martyrdom of the saint and the famous great martyr John the New of Suceava, whose day is celebrated on Thursday after Rusalia (Romanian: Mucenia svăntului şi slâvitului mucenic Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava, ce să praznuieşte joi dupa Rusalii"[20]. In Romanian consciousness, the of Suceava nickname given to John the New led to the popular belief that the Saint was Romanian, although the Slavonic source says he was a Greek from Trebizond. The fragment about the birthplace of Saint John – Trebizond, the city described by Tsamblak as: "famous and great, located in the east, near Assyrians and neighbouring with Great Armenia"[21], was translated by Varlaam as located "in the east which is called Anatolia"[22].

The original Slavonic mention of the port to which the ship from Trebizond arrived – Bilhorod near Vôspor (Slavonic: "Bělyi gradŭ..., iže kŭ Vōsporu")[23] – was changed in the Romanian edition into: "the city which is called Cetatea Alba, on the Black Sea, on the edge (boundaries) of the Moldavian Land" (Romanian: la cetatea ce să chema Cetatea Albă, la Marea Neagră, în margine de cătră Țara Moldovei)[24]. In this way, the story of the life of Saint John, located by Tsamblak near Vospor, was explicitly moved to the Moldavian region, and the terminology was adjusted to the contemporary political situation.

Other changes in Varlaam's translation related to the characters' titles and the names of the nations. The appearance of Turks in the Balkans and the progressive dependence of Christian territories on the Ottoman Empire caused the city's eparch from Tsamblak's original account – "a Persian, an ardent defender of and heir to the ancestral hypocrisy"[25], to be superseded in the Romanian version with "a Turk,

[20] Varlaam, *Cazania 1643*, Bucureşti, 1943, pp. 151–159.
[21] G. Cambłak, *op. cit*., p. 85.
[22] Varlaam, *Cazania 1643*, p. 451.
[23] G. Cambłak, p. 86.
[24] Varlaam, *Cazania 1643*, p. 452.
[25] G. Cambłak, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

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a zealous believer in the Turkish faith" (Romanian: turc, iubotoriu foarte şi socotitoriu credinţei turceşti)[26]. The phrase used by Tsamblak to describe to the features of the eparch of the city: "the godless soul of the eparch"[27] was changed in Varlaam's life into: "the impure and pagan Turkish soul" (Romanian: necurat şi păgăn suflet turcesc)[28]. In the version by Varlaam, the eparch of the city urging John the New to convert from the Christian faith and give glory to "the radiant sun and the star" induces the Saint to convert to: "the faith of the giaurs" (Romanian: legea ghiaurilor)[29]. At the same time, instead of the city eparch masterfully and deceitfully saying these words, Varlaam wrote: "when this master and the treacherous non-Christian pagan uttered these words" (Romanian: acel meşter şi viclen necredincios păgăn grâi aceste cuvinte)[30].

Some researchers believe that the character of the *alien* was changed from a sun-worshipping Persian to a Turk condemning Saint John to martyrdom because of Moldavia's dependence on the Ottoman Empire, which reflected the fears of the era which were present in the collective consciousness. The name *Persian* alone was probably symbolic in Tsamblak's days and was used to describe "any man of the East who did not profess Christ". With time, although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact time-frame, the name also expanded in the legendary etymologies to include all Oriental peoples, especially Turks, Tatars, and Mongolians[31]. Warnings against the veneration of the sun, the moon, and the order of the sky appeared as early as the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4: 9-19), from where they later spread to early Christian texts. We can find them both in the texts by St Niphon of Constance, where Christ himself referred to pagans who did not believe in Christianity and the coming of the Son of God as idolaters paying homage to idols (stone worshippers), as well as in the works of St Athanasius of Alexandria (4th century)[32]. Tsamblak's hagiography easily became part of this tradition, but it was not until the work of Moldavian Varlaam that the real Turks, whose domination over Moldavia had already been a fact for years, were introduced to the life for the first time. However, by changing the life's version, Varlaam simultaneously introduced certain historical inaccuracies – during the martyrdom of John the New (first half of the 14th century), the Moldavian Bilhorod (Romanian: Cetatea Alba) was under the Tatar rule, and the Turks' control in that city did not begin until more than 50 years later – in 1484[33]. What also proves that the code introduced by Varlaam alluded to the contemporary political situation and contained strong religious undertones are the

[26] Varlaam, *Cazania 1643, op. cit.*, p. 452.
[27] G. Cambłak, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
[28] Varlaam, *Cazania 1643*, p. 452.
[29] *Ibidem*.
[30] *Ibidem*.
[31] A. Naumow, *op. cit*., p. 69.
[32] For more, see e.g.św. Atanazy z Aleksandrii, 2000, p. 73; św. Nifon z Konstancji, "Vedenia supra Înfricoşatei Judecăţi a Sfântului Ierarh Nifon, Episcopul Constanţianei, sec. IV", in S. Dumitrescu, *Chivotele lui Petru Rareş şi modelul lor ceresc*, Bucureşti, 2001, pp. 317–339.
[33] M. Cazacu, *op. cit*., p. 138.

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names of St John's torturers, who, apart from *Latinist schismatics* and Jews, commonly blamed for the martyrdom and death of Christ, also included *pagan* Turks. Furthermore, it was on the cover of Varlaam's Homilies where an interesting iconography of Saint John the New appeared for the first time. Clad in the robes of a martyr, the Saint is depicted as a knight – with a cross in his right hand and a sword in his left hand, against the background of two cities – Trebizond and Cetatea Alba. Following the example of the martyrs of the first centuries, guarding orthodoxy and faithfulness to Christianity of the first centuries, John shows the continuity of his faith in the Moldavian territories and, like the knight of Christ, defends the land where he is buried.

John the New – the Palladium of Moldavia

The Kiev's Metropolitan Petru Movilă and the Moldavian Metropolitan Varlaam are also associated with the information about treating the Saint's relics as a *palladium* of Moldavia[34]. It is worth mentioning here that the tradition of treating paintings as a *palladium* in European culture dates back to at least the times of ancient Greece. The term was originally used to define the works of gods believed to have fallen from heaven, most often images of the goddess Athena aka Pallas blowing across the sky as a meteor[35]. They were regarded by Greeks as objects of special apotropaic powers, which provided protection for the place they were in. The most famous *palladium* was the one in ancient Troy. It was dropped by Zeus from heaven to protect the city[36]. In the early Byzantine era, Christianity adopted this tradition and used the term *palladium* for paintings depicting emperors and then saints. The first Christian object to have been treated as a *palladium* was probably the well-known icon of Christ from the "bronze" Chalké Gate, which led to the Great Palace of Byzantine emperors in Constantinople. The icon replaced the portrait of Constantine the Great. With time, this tradition moved from the icons of Christ to the icons of the Mother of God, and then some saints. To Christians, holy paintings became the source of power. It was believed that the magic of the sacred stemmed from their inherent similarity to the person depicted. Owing to the resemblance to the original, such paintings became imbued with their existence, thus gaining supernatural powers. At the same time, such images held in a given territory fulfilled an apotropaic function – they defended a given space from the attacks of enemies and evil forces. Over time, this tradition also covered relics, i.e. the remains of people who were believed to have miraculously experienced theosis during their lifetime. The historical events of 1629, when after the battle of Chocim

[34] P. Mohyła, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–50; S. Fl. Marian, *Sântul Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava. Schiță istorică*, Bucureşti, Göbl, 1895, pp. 60–70.

[35] E. Kuryluk, *Weronika i jej chusta. Historia, symbolizm i struktura 'prawdziwego' obrazu*, Kraków, 1998, pp. 46–47.

[36] E. Kuryluk, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

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between the troops of Hetman Chodkiewicz and Sultan Osman II the units of Zaporozhian Cossacks were sent by the Poles to Suceava, became a role-model story in which the relics of John the New were used as a *palladium* of Moldavia and which presents the eternal enemies of the Orthodox Church and Moldavia – Poles, Turks, and Tatars. The story is based on the familiar Byzantine motif of the miraculous defence of the fortress city, this time carried out by the relics of Saint John the New. Legend has it that upon seeing the Cossack army approaching Suceava, the Moldavian Metropolitan Anastasie Crimca along with the local clergy went to the metropolitan church to hide the Saint's body. However, they were unable to bring out the relics, imbued with the divine gift, from the temple – the relics mysteriously remained intact, and the Cossack army, which were trying to get through to the city across the Suceava River, drowned in the stormy waters. To commemorate this event, Metropolitan Crimca and the inhabitants of Suceava celebrated a litija, circling the temple with the relics of St John[37]. Since then, the day June 2, when the relics revealed their *palladium* nature, has been the feast of John the New – the patron of Moldavia.

In the 17th century, the fame of the relics was already very strong in the eastern areas. In 1686, King John III Sobieski, returning after his Vienna victory, took the relics of Saint John the New away from Suceava (so-called Dosophtei's treasure) and placed them in Stryj, from where they were later transferred to the Church of the Basilian Order in Żółkiew[38]. Metropolitan Dosophtei (1624–1693) mentioned the Saint in his *Lives of the Saints*, which were written in the years 1682–1686. In 1783, on the command of Emperor Joseph II, the relics returned to Suceava and were again placed in the Orthodox Church of Saint George, and John the New was this time proclaimed the patron of Bukovina[39]. In the following years, the life of this Saint was translated and published several times in Moldavia. In 1812, the hagiographic legend translated from the Russian (Ukrainian?) sources was placed in the lives of saints printed in the Neamț Monastery, and in 1846 it was put in the *Mineja* for the month of June, printed by the same monastery[40].

The tradition of recognizing Saint John the New as the patron of Moldavia and Bukovina was often emphasized in the literature of the nineteenth century. Probably due to the then flourishing national consciousness and the retrieval of the Saint's relics by Moldavia, people began to recall and disseminate the stories about the *palladium* nature of the relics, previously known only in the Movilă circle. In the meantime, Enecan (1882), followed by Marian (1895) and Pamfile (1997), published their versions of the legends about the historic events in Moldavia, in

[37] P. Mohyła, *op. cit*., pp. 49–50; S. Fl. Marian, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[38] T. Bălan, *Sfintele Moaştele Făcătoare de Minuni din România*, Editura Episcopiei Romanului, 1999, p. 120.

[39] S. Fl. Marian, *op. cit*., p. 18.

[40] Melchisedec Ștefănescu, *Grigorie Țamblacu*, Bucureşti, 1935; Vasile M. Demciuc, *Viața şi minunile Sf. Mare Mucenic Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava cu un scurt istoric privind Mănăstirea Sf. Ioan cel Nou*, Suceava, 1990, p. 30.

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which the relics of the Saint inexplicably revealed their power and protected the city from enemies. Also, at that time, people began to revisit other stories dating back to the times of Petru Movilă and Metropolitan Varlaam about the miraculous power inherent in the relics of St John, which were printed up until modern times in popular brochures for believers coming to the monastery. The most famous of these stories was based on the theme of punishment administered to a Catholic – a Pole named Ujazdowski, who, in the service of George Movilă, insulted the relics, for which he was punished by Saint John[41].

Owing to the tales found in Movilă's texts, more people began to believe in the miraculous power of the relics that protected against the enemies of the land and against evil and impure forces. From the late nineteenth century, the story about St John the New spreading in the territory of Moldavia clearly began to combine the themes and motifs derived from the Slavic version by priest Tsamblak and the Romanian version by Metropolitan Varlaam. The place of martyrdom and the nationality of the protagonist kept changing, depending on the source mentioned. In the legends published about John at that time, the Saint was either a Greek merchant or a Romanian man treacherously tortured by the Persians, Turks, or Tartars[42]. The contemporary art of the Moldavian Orthodox Church did not forget about the Saint either. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the life of John the New was painted on the walls of the monastery churches in Secu and Sihăstria Secului and in the chapel of the Monastery of St George in Suceava. Moreover, the icons of the Saint currently located in the collections of the museum of the Monastery of St George in Suceava also come from this period.

Folk tradition

The hagiographic legend about John the New had its counterparts in Romanian folk beliefs as well. The oldest ethnographic sources concerning the figure of John the New come from the end of the 19th century and echo various religious literary models. In the folk consciousness, there was a mixture of the content from Tsamblak and Varlaam and the themes and motifs known from the legends of other holy figures. Different versions of religious texts disseminated by the clergy of Moldavia and circulating in these regions in popular brochures were incorporated into the thinking mechanisms typical of the folk consciousness, often succumbing to the syncretism of content coming from various sources. It is worth noting, however, that in the folk tradition the life of the Saint, modelled anew, did not always have such harsh and polemical overtones referring to Catholicism and Judaism. In the folk tales, John the New's greatest enemies were Muslims – Turks or Tatars, who condemned the Saint to martyrdom and death. Nevertheless, this formula of the life

[41] P. Mohyła, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–54; S. Fl. Marian, *op. cit*., p. 63.
[42] T. Pamfile, *Sărbătorile la români*, București, Editura Saeculum, 1997.

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present in the oldest folk sources is not a surprise, especially when one takes into account the dependence of the Moldavian lands on the Turks until the mid-19th century. At the same time, the cultural codes created by Tsamblak in the life of Saint John the New did not necessarily have to be reflected in the consciousness of the dwellers of Moldavian villages, which were inhabited by a myriad of nations and religions. In the materials collected in the late 19th century by Elena Niculiță-Voronca from the field studies in Bukovina, Saint John the New was considered a Christian merchant living in the Turkish lands who was killed by the Turks for his faith. Murdered and insidiously tied to a horse's tail, he was miraculously brought by an animal from the Turkish territories all the way to Bukovina[43]. In the folk consciousness of those times, there was also no echoes of the transfer of John the New to Suceava by Alexander the Good. Both the appearance of the Saint in Bukovina and the placement of his relics in the Monastery of Saint George in Suceava (omitting the Mirăuți Monastery) were associated with the supernatural signs manifesting themselves around John[44].

Presenting John as a Bukovina born-and-bred Romanian is another distinctive feature of the nineteenth-century folk tales about John the New. The tendency to give him the Romanian nationality, which alludes to the vocabulary introduced by Varlaam and is also associated with the folk habit of placing all salient events within *a close familiar world*, was also often linked with the belief that this Saint was already God's chosen during his lifetime. The incorporation of folk beliefs into Christian religious texts about the heavenly liturgy, so typical of the Orthodox faith, resulted in the appearance of the motif of open heaven only visible to exceptionally good people. In one of the stories from Bukovina, John – a peasant grazing the cattle – sees God, the ruler of thunders, in the open heavens[45].

In the mythical folk consciousness, the character of Saint John the New was also often mixed and confused with motifs and themes known from the legends about other saints. When – sadly – giving up the publication of the materials collected in Bukovina, Niculiță-Voronca emphasized, for example, that it was impossible to gather much fieldwork information about St John the Baptist, because in all folk tales his character was confused with Saint John the New of Suceava[46]. The folk expert from Moldavia did not notice, however, that it is in such confused stories where the most characteristic features of mythical thinking are revealed. These stories, seemingly chaotic and full of mistakes, reflect the motifs and themes from the archaic myths circulating on the lower levels of mythology, as well as the influence of specific literary models on folk beliefs.

[43] Elena Niculiță-Voronca, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 294.
[44] T. Pamfile, *op. cit*., pp. 61–64.
[45] Elena Niculiță-Voronca, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 181.
[46] Contamination of both characters is also associated with the fact that in the Romanian Orthodox calendar the same day, 24 June, is dedicated to both St John the Baptist and St John the New. The feast of John the New is also celebrated in the Romanian calendar on June 2, but the course of the feast is not as festive as on June 24.

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What is also interesting in the oldest folk stories about St John the New is people's faith in the miraculous power inherent in his relics. In collective imaginations, the death administered by the enemies of the nation and the Orthodox Church with time became the beginning of a new life – in the "power of God". Above all, people saw Saint John as a great miracle worker who could heal various diseases and ailments. The healings of sight, headaches, deafness, blindness, muteness, or paralysis, occurring in the Saint George church near the relics of John the New, constitute one of the most common motifs in the folk stories. Another typical feature was associated with stressing the significance of the great annual feasts of Suceava – the pilgrimage to the Saint and the procession with his relics leading through the city streets on June 24[47]. These pilgrimages were commemorated with the famous 1889 and 1890 hymns still sung by folk people in honour of the Saint even today[48]. However, in the popular consciousness, the palladium veneration of the relics of St John and the associated custom of the pilgrimage and procession gradually gave way to the beliefs about the supernatural power of the relics guarding the faithful from worldly calamities and suffering. The Saint was the one who protected against drought and disease, cured of incurable diseases, and helped the distressed and tormented. Already at that time, many elements of Midsummer Night rituals (June 23/24) were also transferred to the cult associated with the day of St John the New. The very feast of John the New was called the day of summer John and treated in opposition to the winter solstice called the day of winter John[49]. The attributes used during the Midsummer Night celebrations such as herbs, fire, candles, and incense were rubbed against the Saint's relics and blessed by the clergy in the monastery in Suceava. Heading to Suceava day and night with lit torches, the pilgrims, including the sick and the disabled, believed that on this day they would be healed by the relics. As the years passed, John became an ever-closer saint, through whom the people continued to experience God's presence.

The contemporary face of the veneration of the Saint

In the modern religiousness of the inhabitants of Bukovina and Moldavia, St John the New occupies one of the most important ranks in the pantheon of the Orthodox saints. In collective imaginations, the death of St John at the hands of the enemies of the nation was at the same time the beginning of a new life in the "power of God". In contemporary stories, there is a syncretism of the content stemming from numerous sources, including, most importantly, the hagiographic lives of G. Tsamblak and Varlaam, still contaminated with local legends and model stories about the *palladium*-based veneration of the relics of John the New. It is

[47] Elena Niculiță-Voronca, *op. cit.*, p. 294; T. Pamfile, *op. cit.*, pp. 64–65.
[48] S. Fl. Marian, *op. cit.*, pp. 151–164.
[49] T. Pamfile, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

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popularly believed that all these themes and motifs create other model stories in which the time-frames and historical events related to local and national heroes overlap. In the legendary history, John the New is often regarded as a fellow countryman and called a Romanian. His fate is often joined with the history of the Moldavian hospodar Stephen the Great, and like the hospodar, John fights with enemies and donates money to raise monasteries: "St John came from a very religious family, he was from Bessarabia, also a Romanian, but from those parts. He believed in God, he worked in trade, he would buy icons and bring them to other people who were poor, and he was very merciful and would often fast, and he was a very good man, and he went onto the ship of those Muslim followers, like Turks, and they betrayed him and denounced him to Cetatea Albă, where he was tortured badly, they denounced that he wanted to convert from Christianity to the Turkish faith, and out of hatred they caught and tortured him, and he said he would not leave his faith even if it meant giving up his spirit: I will not bow to moons and stars, as was the case at the time with the Turks. They tortured him terribly, they beat him up and eventually tied him to a horse, to its tail, and they dragged him through the streets, the horse escaped, and he was tied to the tail. And he did not say anything, he did not object to anything when they were torturing him, and he said that he would not deny the Christian faith, so they tortured him very badly, and then, people say that a Jew cut off his head, with a sword. And after they cut off his head, the body remained there, they put him to the grave, and the angels descended from heaven at night, and a pillar of fire appeared from St John up to heaven, and he was surrounded by people with censers, and there were guards there, and one of them thought they were mortals, ordinary people, so he wanted to shoot them with a bow, but God made him stiffen, and he was left there for everybody to see, he confessed what he had done, and many people gathered and prayed for him with God and St John so that he would lift the curse put on him, so he took the curse away, and there were angels and the pillar of fire, and one could hear nice songs, and they brought him to Cetatea Albă, but they took him from there, and with great pomp, and he chose the place where he is now"[50].

"St John of Suceava, he was a Romanian, we worship him, he was a leader, a kind of minister of Romania. Because he attended a school run by priests, he became a saint, participated in wars and built monasteries and became St John of Suceava, he also built the monastery in Suceava"[51].

Today, John the New is also predominantly associated with someone who heals the sick and the suffering with his power. The belief in the power of the relics, derived from the old conviction that the Saint actually lives in the place of his burial, makes people treat him as an intermediary between God and men, who

[50] Field study (hereinafter referred to as – BT), Ewa Kocój, Arbore, K., NN., age 67, Romanian, member of the Orthodox Church.

[51] BT, Sucevița, K., NN, age 59, she worked in the field her whole life.

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protects against misfortunes and sends grace to the faithful. Saint John is thus commonly believed to be a true messenger of God, and the place where his relics are kept – the Monastery of Saint George in Suceava – enables the contact between the sacred and the profane, between the earthly world and the divine. The contemporary stories combine the threads and motifs from the hagiographic texts with the belief about the supernatural powers of the relics. These types of beliefs become particularly visible during the processions with the relics of the Saint in Suceava. Every year, on June 24, the inhabitants of Bukovina and the neighbouring regions make a pilgrimage to Suceava to the Monastery of Saint George (John the New) to take part in the celebrations on the occasion of the Saint's feast. These celebrations take on a ritual character, constituting a tangible, visible source of the Saint's power manifested before the eyes of the believers. During this event, we are dealing with a kind of balancing between this world and that world, between miracle and normality. Heading to Suceava day and night with lit torches, the pilgrims, including the sick and the disabled, believe that they will be cured of all their ailments. The Saint is the one who protects against drought and disease, cures of incurable diseases, and helps the distressed and tormented. On this day, the faithful bring numerous gifts for the Saint and place them at the feet of the reliquary – herbs and fire, candles and incense, money and food. Some rub them against the relics, have them blessed by the monks, and take them home, believing in the miraculous power of these objects, imbued with the grace of St John[52].

Orthodox Romanians also believe that on this day John the New reveals his strongest powers, leading the way for the people carrying his relics through the streets of Suceava. The contemporary division between fellow men and aliens is reflected in the fact that – as believed by the feast participants – John the New does not allow aliens to lift the reliquary in which he rests. To the contemporary Orthodox Romanians, however, aliens are not those who appeared in the hagiographic legends by Tsamblak or Varlaam, but those who come from the regions of Romania other than Bukovina and Moldavia: "St John the New of Suceava, here in our monastery, he was a Romanian, I think that no alien can move or touch him, when aliens come from the side of Maramureş hills, they are unable to lift him when they are to lead him through Suceava, taken away from the monastery, he is carried through the city, otherwise it is impossible to lift him or move him, he is heavy and doesn't want to be lifted"[53].

It is a common conception that aliens also include bad people, nonbelievers, even if from the same village: "On the Saint's feast day, his coffin is carried from the monastery, and if people are evil, nonbelievers, then he doesn't show. If the coffin is lifted by nonbelievers, evil people, he doesn't allow them to carry him"[54].

[52] E. Kocój, *Świątynie, postacie, ikony…*, pp. 323–346.

[53] BT, Vatra Moldoviței, K, NN, age 44, housewife.

[54] BT, Arbore, M, NN, age 88, local treasurer, finished 7 grades of school, Romanian, member of the Orthodox Church.

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Contemporary beliefs also reveal a typical folk faith in the miraculous power of the relics. By his power, the Saint heals the believers from the suffering here on earth. At the same time, the relics of St John admired in the Monastery of St George, arranged in the reliquary to model the real person, become a tangible proof of his existence. The wonderful preservation of the body that has not decayed, the scent coming from the reliquary – all this is a tangible proof of his holiness, manifesting itself to ordinary mortals: "He was a merchant, he brought grain from other countries and sold it cheaper. He was from Trebizond. He did not want to submit to Turkish law. They tied him by his feet to a horse's tail and dragged him through the city. One of the Jews cut his head off. And to the place where they cut off his head, angels came with lit candles. That's what the legend says. His body was buried in the monastery. He is a saint, because his body has not decayed. I once had a cousin who couldn't see well. Someone took her on a cart to the monastery in Suceava. When she reached the Suceava River, she saw the water. If you strongly believe and pray to him, you will be heard"[55]; "John the New is a saint, his icon is here in the monastery, on the day of his feast, he is taken out in Suceava and people carry him through the city. I don't know when he lived. He was a Romanian; how could he be anything else? He is important, he was the greatest saint. People go to the monastery, do the service, and when you touch the place where it is buried with your sick head or arm, you will be healed, I went there once too myself with my daughter, people approach the saint, hold out their hand and then say that their request has been fulfilled"[56].

Due to the strong veneration of St John the New, which has been growing for centuries, he is today one of the most important patrons of Bukovina – its protector and miracle worker. The veneration of the Saint has permeated through the local community to the point where every day hundreds of believers visit the "Saint's Monastery" in Suceava, hoping that it will change their lives. They pray, rub their clothes or objects against his relics, leave cards with requests and thanks on the reliquary, believing that their fate will be changed. At the same time, believing in the holiness of the place and the Saint, they try to "take the part of him" with them – a piece of so-called holy cotton wool from the grave – to put it in the space of "their little centre of the world" – in their home, purse, or pocket, and to thereby be close to the source of its power every single day.

[55] BT, Arbore, M, NN, age 70.
[56] BT, Vatra Moldoviței, K, NN, age 75, worked on a farm her entire life.

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