



Martyrdom as a form of embodiment in the Byzantine Culture

Christos D. Merantzias

*Department of Cultural Heritage Management & New Technologies, University of Patras
(hmerantz@upatras.gr)*

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we will examine the anthropological dimensions of the Christian martyr's embodiment of pain which we consider to be a shaping factor of the identity of Byzantine culture. The Christian martyr's cultural presence gave Christians a meaning and a reason to exist as it heralded his/her salvation. Furthermore, the dramatic depiction of martyrdom scenes in Post-Byzantine monuments under the Ottoman rule, mainly in the 16th century, served an ideological purpose, as they encouraged an attitude of resistance against the Ottoman conqueror with deep long-term social and political consequences for the conquered provinces across the Balkan Peninsula.

KEYWORDS: *Martyrdom, Embodiment, Christian martyr, Ulrich Tengler, Antonio Gallonio.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The symbolic construction of the Christian martyr as a process with a broad cultural character securing to all the members of the community of Christian believers the exclusive privilege of access to the salvation of the soul cultivated, through the adoption of a pattern of sacrificial passivity, a new form of the predisposition vis-à-vis salvation. Furthermore, the cultivation of martyric consciousness through the exploitation of relics strengthening the martyr's presence in time, and also vindicating the instrumentality of the therapy of the potential physical pain of the Christian believer produced and simultaneously reproduced the perpetuation of martyrical practices (DeSoucey et al. 2008: 99–121).

In reality, if Christian faith did not primarily serve the stake of the consolatory intervention on the body, thus, functioning in favour of the creation of a symbolic capital regarding the therapy of pain, it wouldn't have met the widest acceptance, securing the alignment of Christian believer with the basic assumptions of their faith. To the extent that within the body of the martyr what was objectified was the subjective experience of faith, martyrdom acquired as a cultural value a socio-therapeutic function. It is for this reason also that the acceptance of the collectively constituted vital energy, contained in the martyr's objectified body, was capable of activating practices which aimed at religious, but also at political ends. The reminiscence of the martyr during collective memorial ceremonies rendered him physically present (Schudson 1989: 153–180).

2. THE BODY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

The early Christian martyrological sources, witnessing an openly moral-regulatory intention, elevated to an ideal state the bestializing barbarity of the executioners of the Christian martyrs, in order to extol the latter's spiritual merits. The greater abhorrence images of savagery and ferocity generated, the greater probability there was to cultivate the distance of the Christian martyr from his torturers, bequeathing thus to posterity the moral standards of Christian transcendence. The image of physical torture simultaneously cultivated the reminiscence of the "open" body of the martyr, on the one hand, inoculating the subconscious with the symbol of an aversion, whereas consecrating, on the other hand, a repressed surreptitiousness due to the exposure of the internal organs of the human body (Williams 2004: 3–4).

In order to conceive the role and the function of martyric torture as an established cultural practice within the Christian world we shall have to fully

grasp the solid bond which linked the martyr and the anchorite with regard to the manner they embodied physical pain. In fact, the bio-psychical affinity which flourished among the martyr and the anchorite was ultimately founded on the idea that the salvation of the soul could not be realized unless under conditions of resilience to pain and torture. This wide acceptance of pain ascribed to the martyric event a convincing provability, rendering it a unique testimony of holiness. In fact, it is martyrdom that brought about the wide acceptance of the salvational ideal (Jantzen 2004).

One of the early Christian texts depicting martyrdom, with respect to the manner in which it was implemented as a practice of embodiment, dates back to the first or second decade of the second century AD. It is the *Epistle to the Romans* by Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch [c. 37–c. 107] (Schoedel 1993: 272–358) written on route from the same-named Syrian town to the place of his execution in Rome (Castelli 2004: 78–85; Darling Young 2005: 83–85; Drobner 2007: 49–52; Robinson 2009: 3–5). In the aforementioned Epistle, the martyr affords the image of a man strongly motivated by his love of Christ, with a persistence in achieving his goal. However, the effort the martyr strives to realize has to do with a different process of "humanization," founded in its turn on a novel perception of the human body. His post-mortem life required the preliminary acceptance of death, which is founded on the emulation of the crucifixional martyrdom of Christ (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, 4.6.3.1–3).

Consequently, the incorporation of the martyr in the Society of Christ, as a performative sacrificial act, becomes equivalent to the complete annihilation of his body. The image of the martyric body is constructed through a series of exterminatory techniques (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, 4.4.1.1–2.6.)—fire, crucifixion, wild beasts, mutilations, dismemberments, dispersion of the bones, the cutting off of the members, the crushing of the entire body—, which are in complete dissension with the traditional ideal of integrity ascribed to the body of the free Roman citizen (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, 4.5.3.1–6). In contrast of this ideal, for the Christian martyr the dismemberment of the body became equivalent to the transition from a state of servitude to a state of post-mortem freedom. The sacrificial practice which is met in the aforementioned text thematizes the process of annihilation, via the animals, of all distance of the martyr from God (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, 4.2.2.1–6). The martyric body is rendered the object of consumption by the beasts, the latter standing as mediators for its transubstantiation into "wheat" (*σῖτος*) in the mouth of God. The beast's mouth allows, thus, for an inverse

significance, as Ignatius' martyrdom reinserts into the soteriological context of the sacrifice of Christ. Consequently, the success of the martyric torture and death is proportionate to the appetite of the wild animals both in the literal and in the metaphorical significance: the greater this appetite is, the greater the probabilities of the extermination of the martyric body are.

Furthermore, the denial of physical necessity, through the elimination of all bodily needs and functions represented by the duality of nourishment and pleasure, which is stated in the text as the denial of "men-pleasing," (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, 4.2.1.1-2) is equivalent to a new form of birth for martyric consciousness. This is an inverse symbolic accouchement (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, 4.6.1.1.), which cannot be comprehended without recourse to what Ignatius designates as "God-pleasing." Therefore, the acceptance of martyrdom is perceived as a voluntary practice of perishing of the body for the sake of the martyr's spiritual existence. Ignatius is thus elevated through martyrdom to a glorifier of the lived access to God, as physical torture is the only means which allows proximity to Him (Zanartu 1979: 324-341; Perkins 1995: 189-192). Complete bodily annihilation grants, therefore, to the martyr, as acting subject, the possibility of being inserted in ecclesiastical time, thus increasing its commemorative power.

Another martyr, Pionius (Castelli 2004: 92-102), bequeathed as a legacy to the Christian community of Smyrna an autobiographic in all probability writing (Lane Fox 1987: 460-492), wherein he narrates his arrest and imprisonment in the year 250 along with other Christians on the day of the memorial of the martyrdom of Saint Polycarpus. The aim of Pionius is no other than to strengthen the institutional gravity of martyric memory as a record of the lived experiences from which the Christian community can draw its values. In order to comprehend the construction of Orthodox Christian memory and also its idealization of death as a desire for spiritual perfection, we must have in mind that the martyr exists only when there is realized, through torture and the persistence of martyric pain, the replacement of his integral physical body by a dismembered body. The outcome of this act assumes a unique psychological significance within the community of believers for a *memoria mortis* which has enriched tremendously the Christian historiography (Stephanie Cobb 2008: 72-76). The incorporation of the martyr into the historical true of the Church takes place through the exhibition of his torture, which assumes the form of a public spectacle (*Martyrium Pionii presbyteri et sodalium*, 2.4.3-4). The martyr is called to prove his faith in the

tradition of the Church, as also persistence in his aim, which is none other than the conquest of the truth of God. It is no accident that Pionius borrows his vocabulary from the army (πειθαρχῆσαι, ἄγωνίζομαι and the negative connotations αὐτομολοῦσιν, ἄστόχημα: *Martyrium Pionii presbyteri et sodalium*, 4.1.1-6.7), as the activity of the martyr denoted for him an involvement with military life, but also the acceptance of a discipline of military character, as the martyr was presented as a "soldier of Christ."

By striving to remain faithful to the teaching of Christ Pionius is voluntarily led to death. Through the latter what is revealed to him is a transcendent reality, whilst the acceptance of martyrdom is equivalent to the transition to Christian truth. For Pionius, to consume his powers is not equivalent to defect or "fail." He is, thus, rendered an advocate of the authentic and solitary truth of Jesus (Gradel 2004: 1-3). When he delivers his body to torture, Pionius is aware that what is about to be subject to torture is not the immortal part of his body. The martyr would prefer to live, but under the current circumstances such a thing is impossible (*Martyrium Pionii presbyteri et sodalium*, 5.4.1-3). The voluntary acceptance of death constitutes for him a performative practice aiming at maintaining the purity of the truth of Jesus. The death sentence of Pionius in the fire and the nailing to a wooden surface preceding it is accompanied, as we are informed by the author who completed his autobiography, by the miraculous restoration of his body which has recovered, thanks to a paradoxical event, his youthful athletic culmination (*Martyrium Pionii presbyteri et sodalium*, 22.1.1-4.4).

Terms and expressions which denote the cruelty of the inhumane methods of martyric torture are dispersed in the *Church History* of Eusebius of Caesarea [c. 263-c. 339 AD] in a unique effort to identify the martyr with the God-man, and also the martyric achievements of the martyr with the crucifixional death of Christ (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.1.41.2-8). Through the shocking enumeration of a plenitude of instrumental mechanisms of putting to death, Eusebius presents the martyr as responding to the various methods of torture with bravery (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.1.20.3). He, thus, renders martyric torture a derivation of an animal and corrupting degeneration (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 10.4.12.1). In contrast to these inhuman practices, the achievement of Christianity is the safeguard of a permanent source of satisfaction, which is elevated to a supreme value within immortality (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 10.4.46.6-7). By exalting the vital functions over bodily pain, Eusebius

depicts the martyrs as participating with boldness and bravery to a superior spiritual life. As he places torture in the service of salvation, Eusebius removes from pain its primacy in the hierarchy of animal functions. Consequently, for the martyr, the very instruments of pain are reduced, however oxymoron this pattern may seem, to mechanisms aiming at its inhibition. What is interesting is that the challenge of pain is now transferred to the readers of the story of martyrdom, who are asked to incorporate the martyr's pain.

The very same manifestations of barbarity with regard to the defenseless victim are to be found a few centuries later in the narration—written by a deacon named Stephen of Saint Sofia in 807 or 809—of the death of the ascetic martyr Stephen the Younger who was tortured and executed in a merciless and inhumane manner in the streets of Constantinople, in November 765 (Auzépy 1997: 5–9, 18–19, 34–36). The reader of the life of St. Stephen the Younger is called to read with minute details the descriptions of the inflictions of pain upon the body of the martyr by his executioners; *a fortiori* these are not few, but the entire people of the Byzantine capital. The narration of the horrible details of the martyrdom served most probably the needs of a propagandistic discourse, which favoured the memory of the iconophile martyr, persecuted by the iconoclast emperor of the Isaurian dynasty Constantine V. The highlighting of the details of the death of St. Stephen in Constantinople's Mese Odos by his biographer allows the incurrence of hyperalgaesthesia to the readers of its *Vita*. The interest in the narration is an extreme example of cultural model legitimating practices of repulsion and barbarity in which the average Byzantine man was addicted in his daily life.

In the narration of the death of St. Stephen, the function of hyperalgaesthesia experienced by the readers of his *Vita* depends on the salvational hope through their exposure to an experience of extreme horror: the martyr already dead, after receiving a blow on the head with a stick, is dragged on the ground. As the body collides from slab to slab, the hands are cut off, the fingers fall from the nails, the ribs are pierced, the blood runs from the veins and dyes the soil and, last, the muscles are stripped from the joints, allow for the bones to be revealed. Someone throws on the belly of the martyr a large boulder which tears it in two, thus causing that his intestines are gushed out on the street. The mob continues, yet, to hit the soulless body with sticks and stones. Meanwhile, a tavern owner grabs from the fire, where he fries fish, a torch and delivers such a strong blow to the cranium of the martyr that the back part thereof becomes detached, leaving the content of the cranial cavity to be surged out. The latter

is collected by a believer, named Theodorus, who wraps it up in his clothes. Last, the body of the saint is dropped to the so-called *ta Pelagiou*, a site in Constantinople which served as the usual place of the deposition of the dead bodies of the convicts (St Stephen the Younger, *Vita*, 70.10–71.9).

3. THE SPECTACULAR FUNCTION OF MARTYRDOM WITHIN A BYZANTINE CONTEXT

Byzantine authors were fully aware of the fact that the preservation of martyric memory constituted the material token of a unique spiritual challenge. The reading of the life of the martyr, as also the viewing of martyric depictions, made possible its manifestation, as it was situated not only in the dimension of the present, but also in that of the future. By preserving the memory of martyrdom Christian writers could, therefore, trace the inherited Christian identity which obeyed to the relentless need to be objectified. Martyric depictions created in their turn a simultaneity between the martyric performance and its spectacle which aimed at preaching the Christian faith, but also at converting people into it.

John Chrysostom showed a vivid interest in drawing a parallel between the preservation of martyric memory and the art of martyric painting (John Chrysostom, *De sanctis martyribus*, PG 50:712.15–40). Memory, by analogy to the representational art, is meant to preserve a living relationship with the martyric event. The close interdependence of the martyric event with its pictorial depiction bears witness to the facticity as a lived experience (Mitchell 2002: 60–62). In reality, martyric depictions were temporalized in an ecstatic dimension of time, as they condensed time in an indivisible totality of past, present, and future, thus transcending historical time (Agamben 2005: 60–66).

Moreover, the influence upon the spectator of the intense representation of the martyric event is ascertained in a short speech of the 4th century AD written by the Bishop of Amasea in Pontus Asterius (Datema 1970). The speech refers to the martyrdom of the female martyr St. Euphemia of Chalcedon, who was tortured and martyred in 303 during the persecution of Diocletianus. Herein are intertwined the memorial character of the martyric event with vivid depictions of the physical violence that the martyr suffered. The description of the martyrdom of St. Euphemia by Asterius belongs to the literary category of the early Byzantine *Ekphrasis*, a verbally description of an artistic work (Mitsi & Agapetos 2006: 15–38; James & Webb 1991: 1–17; Castelli 2000: 464–468). It is analogous to a painting composition—divided into individual scenes—of which the bishop

was an eye-witness in a sheltered street close to the grave of the martyr. For Asterius, the painting surface allows a life-like depiction of martyrdom. The transition from the rhetorical narration of martyric torture to its iconographic depiction allows it to be enriched with emotional charge. Asterius' reflection on art focuses on its autonomy. As a consequence, the expressiveness of the painting surface, by attributing to the work of art a narrative substance, permits the encounter between the narrative discourse and the iconographic depiction, both conceived as expressions of the martyric pain.

In the first scene of the martyrdom of St. Euphemia there are represented the dramatic events of her trial, in which the martyr incarnates the virtues of prudence and valour (Asterius of Amasea, *Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia*, 11.3.3.6–8). In the next scene two semi-nude executioners torture the martyr: one of them holds her head still while the other extracts her teeth by the use of a hammer and a drill. In an effort to strengthen the verisimilitude of the event, the artist, as we are informed by Asterius, scattered on the painting surface spots of blood, so that the very same spectator is in a position to participate emotionally in martyric pain (Asterius of Amasea, *Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia*, 11.4.1.1–8). The work itself seems, thus, to dramatize to the extreme an algaesthetic situation.

In the following two scenes what is depicted is, respectively, the martyr praying in prison and the martyr being burnt, without a trace of dejection in the fire (Asterius of Amasea, *Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia*, 11.4.2.1–4.3.5). The dramaticity of the bloody martyric event is rendered more evident when the martyr is showed to be possessed by emotional mutations which directly allude to the tradition of Greek tragedy, especially of Medea. As a result, the martyrdom of St. Euphemia did not constitute a distant pictorial event but a process achieving proximity, ritual reminiscence, last but not least soteriological signification, as it established a symbiotic relation with the spectator.

Forgotten for centuries, Asterius' text was recovered during the Proceedings of the 7th Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, held in 787 AD, and utilized along with other texts for the legalization of the worship of the icons (Sahas 1986: 129–131). It was incorporated within a wider framework of argumentation which touched upon issues related to the depiction of the material substance of the body. More specifically, it was selected by the iconophiles as a typical sample of a bodily representation demonstrating how one can use the visible token of the martyric event. The possibility of direct access to the original experience of martyrdom, as it was outlined through

the depicted body of the martyr, is what at the end renders the cultural history of the Christian martyrdom an event of critical importance and its empirical content *per se* a transcendental value.

In the *Life* of the Patriarch of Constantinople Tarasius [c. 730–25 February 806] written following his death by the deacon Ignatius (Efthymiades 1991: 73–83; Efthymiades 1998; Pratsch 2000: 82–101), the iconophile Patriarch who officiated the Proceedings of the 7th Ecumenical Council was mentioned to have contributed to the depiction of martyric events in the mural decorations of churches. This point, however, on which the text of the *Life* wished to focus, concerned the function of martyric depiction as the corroboration of the martyric event (Dagron 2007: 97–98, 100). In the *Life*, written by Ignatius, the intensity of the martyric experience depended on the Christian believer's emotional response. Here, the aim of the depiction of martyrdom was to forge a solid relationship of equivalence with any future assumption of initiative when circumstances required it, leading to the infinite repetition of martyric resistance. Therefore, the memorial constitution of martyrdom lied in the preservation of martyric experience which may at any point be reproduced (Ignatius, *Vita Tarasii*, 49.21–24).

In fact, in the martyric scenes cited by Ignatius there are registered various methods of torture, such as the torture in the pyre, the whipping, the dislocation of the members through the usage of pulleys, the incurrence of scrapes with iron nails, the dismemberment of body members, the throwing to the lions, the fastening with straps on poles and the death by sword, the breaking wheel, the stoning, the piercing under the nails with sharp blades, the immersion of the head in boiling water, last but not least, the exposure of the body to frost. This manifold of torturing practices activated within the Christian believers a set of affective reactions which were conducive to the strengthening of their faith, thus rendering the memory of the martyric event incumbent on the emotional intensity of its depiction, as also on the frequency of its repetition (Ignatius, *Vita Tarasii*, 53.10–15). At the exact moment when the gaze of the believer-spectator encountered a torture scene, there developed between the latter and the martyric image a powerful emotional relationship, which converted the distant act of martyrdom into an experience of his own: tears, groans, and devoutness (Ignatius, *Vita Tarasii*, 50.4–5), devastation (Ignatius, *Vita Tarasii*, 50.7), sympathy (Ignatius, *Vita Tarasii*, 50.14), and trepidation (Ignatius, *Vita Tarasii*, 50.14–15).

The iconographic use of the death of the martyrs attached a privilege to the way of their life rendering

it an example to emulate in the eyes of Christian believers. The Christian apologists used the body of the martyr in order to lead to the culmination of martyric anguish, thus exacerbating the symbolic efficacy of martyrdom, or to outline the experience of divine glory as an analgesic towards pain (Bataille 1988: 45–61). One of the most significant texts of the late Middle Ages in the West referring to the Lives of the saints, which knew an extremely large diffusion as it focused on the barbarity of torture methods (eighty-one types of torture are mentioned within it) was the Golden Legend (*Legenda aurea*) of the Dominican monk Jacobus de Voragine (now Varazze) († 1298) in Italy (De Voragine 1993). What impressed within this text was the contempt for any subjective or emotional reaction due to physical harm and pain, the latter was depicted almost without any impact—with only two exceptions—upon the body of the martyr. Ninety-one out of a total of one hundred and fifty-three chapters narrated the *Lives* of martyrs who ended up being dismembered by their torturers. Jacobus recognized that the use of martyrdom constitutes the basic road affording access to sainthood. For him, martyrdom takes place at three stages, each one of which is differentiated into three distinct methods of torture (Boureau 2007: 111–133). The initial stage aims at bending the resistance of the martyr, thus leading him to apostasy. At the intermediate stage, the body of the martyr is subject to torture without ending up in death. At the last stage, the body of the martyr is tortured to death and the latter becomes a victor having secured heavenly glory. This battle shows unobjectionally the power of abolition of death.

With regard to the pictorial arrangement of martyric pain and anguish the Byzantine art moved, therefore, between two poles: on the one hand, the internalization of pain in the case of the martyric torture whereas, on the other hand, the externalization of grief in the case of the crucifixional martyrdom of Christ. Byzantine art prior to the 12th century had familiarized us to the “frozen gestures” of the holy persons depicted in scenes of the martyrdom of Christ, as there was no intention to represent the emotional involvement therein.

However, from the 12th century on, the mood gradually changed. Furthermore, in the iconographic milieu of the Crucifixion there was depicted an exultation of emotions, as the lamenting spirit extended to all the persons in the scene, thus causing a generalized emotional charge (Maguire 1981: 91–108). The iconography of the Crucifixion involved the spectator in a climate of emotional tension and anguish which functioned as the magnifier of the martyric event and of the grief which is caused by it.

In fact, the depiction of experiences of intense pain or grief was the result of the painter’s need to denote the psychological disposition of the persons and to cause sympathy from the side of the spectator. This condition, directly relevant to the liturgical hymns which focused on the theme of the anguish of the Theotokos during the Holy Passion, deprived the depicted persons of the atemporal or supratemporal and idealized dimension thereof, thus attributing to them a historical character by involving them in the primordial anguish of finitude and death. In this way, the depicted persons were imbued by emotional drives and “humanized” (Velmans 2004: 129, 141–143, 169, 185–186). During the 12th century, Byzantine art reached a culminating point due to the unique emotional intensity transmitted by the depiction of the Lamentation [1164], as in the case of the Church of Saint Panteleimon in Nerezi, FYROM. This scene was inspired by narrations of ecclesiastical authors such as Georgios of Nicomedia (Georgios of Nicomedia, *In SS. Mariam assistentem cruci*, PG 100:1480B, 1488A) [9th century] or St. Symeon the Translator (Symeon the Translator, *S. Mariae Planctus*, PG 114:216B–C) [10th century], where what was also rendered clear was the insinuation of the Incarnation from the way Virgin Mary embraced Christ in a bold position, enclosing him between her legs. Also visible in the Lament of St. Symeon the Translator are the most primary manifestations of the desperation through the concretization of the will of the Virgin Mary to follow her son to the grave (Alexiou 2002: 62–78). As the individual emotion of grief inundated the scene, the spectator was called to sense the anguish of a corresponding scale to the anguish experienced by the holy persons. As to the pictorial unfolding of despair, manifest was also the intensity in the scenes of the Lamentation to be found in the church of the Virgin Mary of Perivleptos (now Saint Clement) in Ohrid [1294/95] of FYROM (Korunovski & Dimitrova 2006: 154, fig. 116) or in the church of the Annunciation of Virgin Mary in Gračanica [1320–1321], Serbia (Velmans 2004: 258, pl. 93). Incessant wailings of women, beatings of the hands on the body, violent drawing and uprooting of the hair witness the affective discharge of the ritual of lament. In fact, these cultural models met a wide propagation, literary and artistic, in the late Middle Ages (Barasch 1976: 1–33, 57–68).

On the contrary, in early Christianity, behavioral patterns were promoted which denoted a more modest manifestation of grief and pain, while aiming at avoiding extreme emotional discharges. The urge of John Chrysostom for self-discipline—in contrast to the affectively unconstrained *gesticulatio*—rendered undesirable the unharnessed manifestations of affectivity which were characterized as mor-

bid (John Chrysostom, *In Joannem*, PG 59: 346.46–52). After all, as the very same ecclesiastical author states, the moderate expressions of grief, which witnessed a stricter regulation of the behavior, were included among the indications of high social rank (John Chrysostom, *In Joannem*, PG 59:347.29–33). For John Chrysostom, the development of a self-constraining mechanism, in relation to the ritual lament on the death of a beloved, constituted an essential factor for the regulation of the social relations on the basis of stable behavioral patterns (John Chrysostom, *In Joannem*, PG 59: 347.49–55). However, his declared desire to attain self-constraint on the occasion of the ritual of lament became later on eventually unattainable (Alexiou 2002: 27–29).

4. THE ALGAESTHETIC IMAGE OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR IN THE POSTBYZANTINE CULTURE (16TH CENTURY)

From the above-mentioned it becomes clear that the depiction of martyric pain had a powerful performative character, as martyrdom not only urged its spectators to function as eye-witnesses of a holy event, but further invited them to participate in its dramatized revival (Cazelles 1994: 56–74; Thompson 2002: 27–52). Actually, the position of martyr in the wider cultural context is the outcome of a series of symbolizations which are based not merely on his/her spiritual identity, as also in his/her function as the agent of a universal drama *par excellence*. Thus, the depiction of his/her dismembered body contributed to the construction of a cultural space which maintained the function not merely of sacred violence, but rather of heinous horror (Baraz 2004: 164–167). The iconographic depictions of torture and pain eventually constituted for the Christian believer a place of sanctified alterity in relation to the desanctified place of his/her executioners. As a consequence, the contrast between the public barbarity of the dismembered martyr and the spirituality of the spectator-believer incubates unobstructedly a spirit of active resistance vis-à-vis the consolidated worldly power.

Among the records of violence reproduced passionately, especially from the 16th century and onwards, by the martyric compositions depicted in the post-Byzantine churches belonged two elements giving special emphasis to the ideological message of the iconographic material. These are, first, the fatal vulnerability of the Christian martyr and, secondly, the anonymity of the executioners in contrast to the victims who are recruited by the collective body of the Christians. In these terms, the depicted cruelty on the part of the Ottoman ruler—with the intention to inflict harm, injury, bodily malformation and

eventually death—, manifest the desire for complete domination over the Christian martyr.

In the Post-Byzantine art, depictions of atrocities which focused on the bodily tortures—we could invoke here a plenitude of testimonies from the narthex [1541/1542] and the Northern exonarthex [1560] of the Philanthropenon Monastery of St. Nicholas on the Island of the Lake of Ioannina, in Epirus, Greece—cannot always be verified. The historical accuracy of some of them can indeed be established on the basis of recorded events. The scenes of horrendous tortures in the narthex and the exonarthexes of the Philanthropenon Monastery, which motivated—through the depictions of numerous methods and instruments of torture—an entire mechanism for the annihilation of the material bodies and the decomposition of the moral subjects, unfold before the eyes of the spectator-believer the life-like function of bodily pain. However, the depictions of violent tortures have primarily a cultural value with regard to the exposure of the internal organs of the body. The extraction of the skin, which served to delimit the body as the protective tissue between the inner world of the self and the outer world of society did not merely constitute an indication of occasional horror. In reality, it operated as a concrete sign of a treatment of the body which provoked the strong revulsion of the spectator. After all, the medieval punitive mechanisms, in the East as well as in the West, exploited to the utmost the dynamics of the martyric spectacle so that their recipient becomes aware of the severe impact of the punishment and avoid the future perpetration of a similar offence.

In the case of these martyric depictions the relationship developed between the depicted martyr and the spectator-believer was cultivated even more not only by the brutality of the torture, but also by the spectacle of profuse bleeding, which sprang quite frequently from the open bodies and the cut-off members of the martyrs; these extremities served the painter's intention to exaggerate the dramatic intensity of his work. The Eucharist symbolism of blood, as the denotation of the living presence of Christ and of His martyric passion, functioned as a binding rule, thus exacerbating the need of the believer to emulate the martyric resilience of the martyr. In its turn, the function of torture, having been hoarded during the centuries of Christian history, was turned into an embodied anguish constantly present in the daily life of the believers. The bodies of the Christian saints may seem deprived of any socio-political importance, yet their iconographic depictions in the context of the 16th century Ottoman Empire attributed to them a deeply symbolic character, as they turned them into powerful weap-

ons of political resistance (Kyriakoudis 2006–2007: 213). We shouldn't forget that the principal aim of the painters was to achieve, through the embodiment of pain, the emotional identification of the spectator-believer to the victim-martyr (Clover 1992: 61–62). What the painter of the Philanthropenon Monastery, for instance, wished to unfold to all its extent was, on the one hand, the preservation of the tradition of martyrdom and, on the other hand, the recruitment of fresh "faith fighters" with a view to the weakening of the enemy of the Orthodox faith, that is the Ottoman conqueror.

In the case of the Philanthropenon Monastery, violence is experienced as an authentic driving impulse: human members are dispersed on the ground and profuse bleeding denotes a threatening environment; the Monastery becomes a place where the believer dwells in a state of permanent fear. However, no bodily expression of the depicted martyrs testifies to some kind of response to the stimulus of pain (Wolff & Langley 1968: 494–501). The latter is as if it does not touch them, as they continue to show complete self-constraint and undisturbed serenity.

Besides, we cannot ignore the fact that the depictions of pain further reproduced the processes of the gender constitution of the body at a definite place and time. In the Philanthropenon Monastery, the depictions of the semi-nude virgin martyrs whose breasts the executioners are getting ready to cut off or have already cut them off (Garidis & Paliouras 1993: 91, 101, 113–114, 116, 159, fig. 140, 153, 172–173, 177, 260; Acheimastou-Potamianou 2004: 109, 113, 117, 119–120, 125, 181, 200, fig. 84, 90, 93, 112) become part of a symbolic capital which could be considered as having pornographic connotations (Caviness 2001: 115–124). In fact, the rendition of the acts of torture in the case of the women martyrs focused on their seminude body. In this way what was cultivated, probably deliberately, was a gender determined image of pain reproducing specific cultural models which touch upon gender identity (Crachiolo 2004: 147–163).

In effect, these specific acts of torture served, on the symbolic level, as acts of rape (Wolfthal 2000: 43–44; Coyne Kelly 2005: 40–62; Vigarello 2001), to which women martyrs were subjected by their male executioners. But the same applied in turn to the gaze of the male monk who found himself faced with the naked body of the woman martyr on a daily basis and could very easily phantasize with the physical presence of her revealed female breast. The tortures to which the seminude bodies of the Christian women martyrs were submitted were analogous to the public executions of women which took place in the 14th and the 15th centuries in Western Europe who were finally burnt naked (Shahar 2001: 114–115).

In the environment of late medieval culture these tortures served as models of moral integrity, chastity and invincible faith (Salih 2001: 16–40; Bernau 2006: 104–121). In combination with the concealment of the genitals of the male martyrs in the martyric scenes, as the body constitutes the object *par excellence* on which a gender group grounds its moral perceptions, we could argue that these scenes cultivated in the eyes of the ascetic monks a negative perception of human sexuality which exhorted to an eroticism of a sadistic kind directed against the female body (Hearn & Burr 2008: 1–14).

Contrary to the martyr who underwent the anguish of torture, the latter's depiction brought about a new perception of human finitude which deeply altered the relation to corruption and death, eventually leaving the body of the martyr intact, a material proof of incorruptibility (Baert 2005: 149–152). The tortured body was thus transubstantiated from a dehumanized state into a new embodied life (Kay 2000: 3–20). Consequently, as the Christian believer was confronted with biological death, he was led to the adoption of a regulatory model of resistance so that his acts for the sake of the salvation of his soul were assimilated to those of the martyr. Only seen as the undertaking of active resistance with the aim of supporting the Christian faith can we interpret the pleasure taken by the believer from the torture imagery of the Philanthropenon Monastery, to which the painters dedicated at least one fourth of the total painting surface of the monument (Fradenburg 2002: 34).

In fact, in the 16th century, the trend of "spectacularisation" of martyrdom was adopted also by the painters of the Philanthropenon Monastery, who copied a variety of martyrdoms which had arrived from the West thanks to the circulation of Western copper-plate prints. The use, however, of the latter was based on the symbolic function of the iconography of martyrdom. As in the European Renaissance, on the one hand, the role of martyrdom was repressive, but also related to the political role of the Catholic Church, in the scenes of martyrdom there were traced the progressive changes which occurred in the penal system as well as in the inflictions of the sentences.

In the Post-Byzantine culture, on the other hand, the corresponding iconographic compositions documented primarily the ideological crystallizations of faith, as in the Orthodox world martyrdom was the token of the inner quest of the Christian believer for the salvation of his soul. For a world of spirituality as is the one of the Byzantium, the image formed an intangible reality. Thanks to its formative dynamics, the image penetrated in the everyday life of the Christian believer, both religious and secular,

aiming at producing an even greater degree of conformity to a strictly delimited pattern of behaviour.

Besides their consolatory and soteriological message, the plenitude of bloody martyric scenes in the Philanthropenon Monastery helped the Christian believer to endure situations of brutality and extreme oppression, thus promoting an ideology of resistance to the Ottoman rule (Cohen 2000: 40). Therefore, the depiction of these scenes of violence was integrated in the system of symbolic values which aimed at securing the survival of the Christian faith in conditions of extreme despair. The painters showed special care for the realistic account of the methods of torture and the detailed representation of the wounds originating from them. The spectacle of the open body caused to the spectator of martyrdom a feeling of sympathy. Furthermore, the realistic to the point of brutality depiction of such a violent event as martyrdom functioned in favour of a process of signification based on the organic assimilation of the past to the present and the transformation of the distant in time martyric event into a familiar reality.

The strictness of the violent sentences imposed by the Renaissance repressive mechanism was evidenced by the exhibitionist public execution of criminals, heretics and any type of dissenters. This system of sanctions was codified at the beginning of the 16th century by the German lawyer Ulrich Tengler in the *Laienspiegel* (1509). In this work Tengler focused on the efficacy of torture (Sorensen Zapalac 1990: 195). A series of acts of torture, such as burning in the pyre, burial of the victim while still alive, which was especially diffused in the 16th century, hanging, martyrdom at the breaking wheel, disembowelment and cutting-up, decapitation and the dismemberment of the body, owed their effectiveness to the insistence upon complete annihilation of the tortured body. The Theban painters of the Philanthropenon Monastery first appropriated in their depictions of martyrdom a number of tortures from the *Laienspiegel* copying from the wood engravings of the specific works many types of torture. As a consequence, these depictions represent the basic torture practices institutionalized and widely spread already in the Middle Ages of the European penal system. We must always, therefore, bear in mind, while studying the visual tokens of painful torture, that the relevant cultural practices aimed at the complete annihilation of the bodily substance of the believer-martyr. In fact, what the depictions of the Philanthropenon Monastery show, such as dismemberments, mutilations, exposure of the dead bodies—a material drawn from copper-plate models of the 15th and 16th centuries—constituted a common re-

pressive mechanism in Western Europe until the late 18th and the first half of the 19th century. The public torture determined the identity of the penal system, on the basis of which there was the reduction of all the sanctions—and also the subsequent pain—to the human body (Spierenburg 1984: 183–199). Prior to the abolition of the public spectacle during the infliction of a punitive sanction, countless were the bodies of the condemned to death who were sandwiched between the gear wheels of a brutality incredible in number and variety.

It's worthwhile noticing at this point that for the medieval penal justice there existed a relation of equivalence between the criminal act and the sanction with the result that the sanction had to annul each and every possibility for retribution of the crime (Foucault 2012: 81–107). However, this expansion of the scale of severity of the sanction, with the use of various methods of violent and painful death, functioned preventively for the spectators, as a regulatory model of compliance and obedience signified by the violent system of punishment within which it was reproduced. In several cases, the spectacularity of the public torture was further exacerbated as the very body was subjected to various types of sanctions for different offences. The classification of sanctions, according to the gravity of the punishment, was governed more or less by a relation of proportionality; thus, hanging was destined for thieves, criminals and rapists were dismembered on the breaking wheel, sodomists and heretics were burnt on the pyre, the immoral female deviations, such as infanticide and adultery, were punished with drowning, whereas in the cases of incest and homicides there corresponded the sanction of decapitation (Evans 1996: 72; Briggs et al. 1996: 83–85).

By recognizing a great moral significance to the martyrological narration of extreme forms of torture the Counter-Reformation treatise of martyrdom by the Jesuit priest Antonio Gallonio entitled *Trattato degli instrumenti di martirio—usale da gentili contro Christiani*, printed in Rome in 1591 initially in Italian and then translated in Latin in 1594, offered a decisive help to the Christians in order for them to resist their opponents of faith (Gallonio 2002). Illustrated with forty-six gravures by Antonio Tempesta which presented, as narrative samples of horror a number of bodily acts of torture gathered from Gallonio's text, rendered horror a familiar affective state for the Christian believer (Touber 2009: 59–89). These depictions, aiming at the creation of a *post factum* optimistic spirituality, were gradually enriched, as they borrowed material which did not belong exclusively to the medieval practices of torture, but also to the Roman arsenal of penal repression.

If we inquire into the wider cultural context of the system of crimes and sanctions during the Middle Ages, but later on in the Renaissance, we can easily reach the conclusion that sanctions which exacerbated the agony of the victim, as also those which manifested a merciless cruelty and were related to the protracted dishonourment of the human body, were recorded as dishonorable (Merback 1999: 141–142). On the contrary, decapitation with the use of a sword afforded an instant, glorious, and brave death equivalent to the death in the battlefield without the body being dishonoured and humiliated (Merback 1995: 267–279; Evans 1996: 55; Merback 1998: 14–23). Besides this, the experience of violent death on public sight granted for centuries a safe guarantee for the restoration of the social order as *mutatis mutandis* the religious symbols afforded a “macrocosmic” guarantee by cultivating a permanent sense of spiritual safety.

5. CONCLUSION

As it is elaborated through a wide range of iconographic depictions in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine culture, the visual representations of pain served to render explicit the relation between martyric torture, as a form of identification of the Christian believer with the martyr, and the exercise of violence as a means for existential safety and life after death. As a result, during the Middle Ages, the depiction of pain functioned, on the one hand, as a source of spirituality and, on the other hand, as a form of self-

regulation for the salvation of the soul. What must be pointed out, however, is that the function of embodied pain constituted an instrument of subjugation or resistance of the body within an established system of power, secular or transcendent.

The Middle Ages bequeathed upon the Renaissance and the Enlightenment a prevalent perception of pain as instrument of domination, an idea which is difficult to accept viewed from the perspective of contemporary civilization of the West (Pincikowski 2002, xvii–xxvi, 1–20). Through the spiritual transfiguration of martyric pain the medieval man reconciled himself with human finitude, but also experienced the intense desire of union with God. The spiritual credit of bodily pain reflected upon specific cultural perceptions, such as the faith in the absolute, the cultivation of interiority, the perspective of beyond, the hope of eternal salvation, but also promoted the cultural practices of self-confinement and self-constraint. In the Medieval cultural milieu pain functioned primarily as the material testimony of the suffering (*ἄλγος*) of the soul on the fallen state of man and the Christian believer had to endure it stoically with the aim of attaining repentance. Thus, martyric pain remained for centuries closely intertwined with the stake of the salvation of the soul; it was also perceived as a means of liberation from the constraints of transient life, endowed with a vital significance for the treatment of the sorrowful earthly reality (Cohen 1995: 47–74).

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