

The Specifics of Culturological Interpretation of a Piece of Sacred Orthodox Art

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Abstract—The authors present culturological interpretation of a piece of sacred art as a research on the cultural traditions determining creation of a piece of art. The authors distinguish a number of such traditions as esoteric, elitist, professional, folk, mass, and the tradition of churching. The researches also describe sociocultural significances of a piece of sacred art which determine its value for society.

Keywords—*orthodox culture; sacred art; piece of art; culturological interpretation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays we can see a rethinking of constant notions and categories when habitual significances are subjected to transformation. This situation makes us pay attention to the orthodox sacred art as one of the immutable spiritual scopes spheres.

The classical approaches to interpretation of art do not give a whole understanding of an artistic piece. They require a synthesis of present contemporary scientific theories that elaborated in philosophy, art history, theology, religion, and history. In the authors' opinion, the culturological approach achieves an integration of many points of view on a piece of sacred art. And, what is not less important, this approach is inscribed in the contemporary cultural context.

The specifics of a piece of contemporary sacred art is connected with the post-modern situation for which characterized by a disappearing of borders of art styles, directions, and genres. According to R. Barthes, this situation implies "the opening" of an art piece into a text. In the article, we consider a piece of sacred art in a new key scilicet as a text of the Orthodox culture. This methodological position allows fixing the versatility and uncertainty of common notions. The scientific originality here is that we

can see graduations of cultural traditions in creating a certain sacred piece of art.

II. A PIECE OF SACRED ART AS A TEXT OF CULTURE

The notion "piece of art" is traditional for the humanities. We input the notion "text" applied to a piece of art to introduce a piece of sacred art in the context of the contemporary postmodern culture.

The philosophy of postmodernism made possible the using of the notion "text" applied to a piece of art. The representatives of structuralism and semiotics like R. Barthes, C.S. Peirce, F. de Saussure, Cl. Lévi-Strauss, and P.-M. Foucault raised the problems of an utterance and existence of texts in a culture. Doing this, they worked predominantly with literature pieces. In the 60s of the XX century, J. Kristeva offered the principle of intertextuality according to which any text is a set of citations from other texts. Indeed, the restricted wholeness, a text became opened and intertwined with other texts. R. Barthes discerned the notions "text" and "work" ("creation") in literature. He sought to show an indeterminacy of a text which is always "countless", "prolonged", and "felt only in process of creation". A text is not a concrete thing but a field of methodological operations [1]. Trying to give some concrete definitions of "text" and "work", R. Barthes declared at the same time that any attempt to differentiate them is useless.

The art practice of the second half of the XX century — the beginning of the XXI centuries is reflected in using of notion "text" applied to a piece of art. At that time, the understanding of a piece of art as something material goes out. A process of creating an oeuvre itself can be a piece of art. The material for art is not only stuff but a bodily manifestation of artists and spectators.

A sacred piece of art, as well as any piece of art, is to be included in the context of contemporary culture. With this aim, we consider it as a text of the Orthodox culture.

The axiology basis and sociocultural significance of a sacred piece of art have not only the societal dimension the deep personal worldview dimension because a religion practice changes not only social relation but it builds the dialogue between a person and the Absolute. If the dialogue is perceived by community groups as a potential event, its conditions and quality are determined by a sacred content of cultural identity.

The culturological discourse implies research of text and context specifics in the perspective of their interdependence. The text is conceived as a total unity with a context, unlike the art history which considers a context as an accessory factor to understand an idea of a piece of art. We agree with J. Lotman who accounted "according to its type of a memory, from all the mass of messages a culture selects what it considers as texts and what is to be included in the collective memory" [2]. A cultural text is always heterogeneously encrypted. It encompasses many associations, references, and insertions. The dialogue that generates a sense can be established in the process of a relationship with a cultural text. The understanding itself is already dialogical according to M.M. Bachtin [3]. The transfer of a material necessary for wholeness and surviving of a society is implemented through texts.

Due to this fact, any text contains many cultural layers requiring deciphering in order to understand a genuine sense.

Text as a carrier of cultural memory and the ways of its interpretation for a contemporary generation is primarily of interest for us. Every new generation opens its own senses of cultural texts and has its own axiological interpretation ones. A The text can have a lot of social functions such as connection between a sender and a receiver, an audience and a cultural tradition, a recipient with himself, a text and some cultural context.

III. METHODOLOGICAL BASIS OF A CULTUROLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF A PIECE OF ART

By the notion "interpretation" we mean the aspect of understanding directed to the sense of symbolic structure of a text. The ancient times, interpretation is known as a practice to derive senses from texts. The etymology of the word "interpretation" is "explanation", "exegesis". The precise wording is: "inter" is translated as "between", and "predation" as "process", "to go ahead". The prefix "inter" (between) points at space between a person and an object. Before a beginning of interpretation, this space is "a place between", "a place without sense" which needs to be filled with some content [4].

The works of thinkers of other ages (Schelling, Schleiermacher, Gadamer, Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, Ricœur, Barthes) contain the philosophical comprehension of the notion "interpretation". According to V. Dilthey, the task of the "human sciences" (Geisteswissenschaften) including culturology is to understand a life proceeding from itself.

Thereby, Dilthey offered the method of "understanding" giving immediate comprehension of some spiritual wholeness. Understanding is an intuitive penetration in a life opposed to the method of explanation and rationalization. We can achieve of understanding of a personal inner world by means of introspection. Comprehension of a "foreign" world is possible by means of "getting used to", "empathy", and "feeling into". [5]. Applied to the culture of the past, understanding is a method of interpretation called by Dilthey hermeneutics. When we research the culture of the past, it is important to undertake the reenacting of its "life world" by learning texts and, in our case, pieces of art.

In his works P. Ricœur explored art as a way to transfer of human traditions to the culture, and methods of its interpretation. In Ricœur's phenomenological hermeneutics, symbol and interpretation are linked notions. Interpretation takes place when there is a diversity of senses. The diversity of senses becomes evidence only in a process of interpretation [6].

Comprehension of a sense of a piece of art can be fruitful if traditions of the past and the present crisscross in a perceiving person. According to G. Gadamer, a text is a carrier of cultural tradition. The unity of understanding, exegesis, and "applying" can be reached in a text. In other words, the correlation of text content and intellectual experience of contemporary culture occurs in the moment of that comprehension. Interpretation, as Gadamer states, is some more than merely a technique of science of text reading. Interpretation begins from a tentative understanding given by tradition. "Text is directed to making a relationship between tradition and perceiving person" [7]. The Gadamer's hermeneutics is linguistic on its character. He emphasized attention to the language games accompanied by text creating. In our turn, we would like to notice that the cultural languages and their symbolic systems may vary. The language of fine art is one of the most tolerant because its perceiving does not require the knowledge of national languages although a viewer has to be able to understand the language of colors, lines, forms, and symbols.

However, there is a danger of a nasty infinity in the interpretation of cultural texts when we cognize not an objective cultural picture of the world but a content of the inner world of a researcher himself.

It is necessary to find such way of cultural texts interpretation which would not consist in of immersion into the more and deeper layers of sense structure but on the contrary, implies the reduction all sense multifold to invariants or meta-images. A text of a piece of art may and should be literally understood as a representation in the literal sense of the word i.e. as an object pointing at a condition of social landmarks and value.

American anthropologist Cl. J. Geertz solved the problem consonant with ours. He considered the culture as an inherited system of significances and saw the task of culturological study as preservation culture for the transmission to descendants in a form of synthesized according to certain criteria meta-objects. Geertz highlighted such particularities of the ethnographic description as

interpretability and aimed at the social discourse. The goal of the interpretation is to fix “the uttered” in an accessible for further study form [8].

Thus, the task of this research is not only classification of all kinds of information concerning sacred art but also to get as a complete picture its existence as is possible. We should structure traditions and sociocultural significances of sacred pieces of art to derive value principles of a society.

The notion “value” is multivocal. This category has elaborated by E. Durkheim, J. Dewey, P. Sorokin, C.I. Lewis, T. Parsons, W. Köhler, M. Scheler, N. Hartmann, and many others. The cultural values are a “core” of a culture of society contained a successful experience of many generations in many spheres.

Every value is not an object itself but an attitude of a person perceiving it. People define their world of values in a diverse way thus value is not a thing but a relation. The value attitude is a criterion of the advisability of things or phenomena for a human. The value attitude is often designated by the notion “sense” which is usually tied with a subjective understanding of cultural texts.

The value attitude of people to the shrines which are pieces of sacred art is a representative marker of self-identity of a nation. Hence an optimal way of decoding a cultural text is a contextual study of cultural traditions and interpretation of sociocultural significances of sacred art.

IV. DETERMINATION OF A CREATION OF A SACRED PIECE OF ART BY CULTURAL TRADITIONS

A sacred text is a precise structure of art expressing the means represented the sacral axiology of society. In view of it, the culturological analysis of Orthodox culture phenomena, in our opinion, consists in a combination of different approaches in the humanities including semiotics and axiological approaches.

We distinguish the several traditions determining creation of sacred pieces of art. They are esoteric, elitist, professional, folk, mass traditions, and tradition of churching.

In the esoteric tradition, the conveyed content is a mystic ascetical experience of spiritual practice. Such experience has an active-energetic nature. In this sense, according to A.A. Korol'kov, “a spirituality is conservative, not due to it cannot be fit for the current moment, but due to it sublimates historical experience of the mankind” [9].

The elitist church tradition is the closest to the esoteric tradition but does not coincidence with it. A piece of art sacred manifests the concepts of the esoteric tradition in a sensual mode. A priest has to explain the rules of interaction with it: how to enter the temple correctly, how to behave in it, how to venerate icons. A priest solves a lot of discussion moments which take place in a parish life [10]. People may ask a blessing for icon creating or bring a finished icon in a temple for a consecration. A clergyman has to be able to define conformity of pieces of art to the church canons. Priests can write texts which commented the Holy Scripture

and the Holy Tradition; they can be professional architects or icon painters directly taking part in a process of creation.

The tradition of churching is relevant to present-day situation because noninstitutionalized belief is spread. Self-consciousness of churching believer implies the ultimate obedience of inner and outer human life to an external ideal. The ideal is Jesus Christ as he was described in the teachings of the Church [11].

The cult is very important to the orthodox churching people for it gives a visible embodiment of fulfillment of worship. A temple is such an embodiment. Requires of cult determined an architect plan of a temple, so that it is hardly possible to offer something principally new in a building without changes in the rites.

The professional tradition is presented by experts: philosophers, art historians, scholars, artists, culturologists, researches of religion and other specialists in the theory of Orthodox culture who undertake the translation of the knowledge about it and comprehend the Orthodox culture as a considerable part of the Russian cultural heritage. In the narrow sense, the professional tradition of sacred art is diverse instructions on making of masterpieces.

Represents of the folk tradition interpret the Orthodox dogmatic in a consonant with before-Christian heathen beliefs, above all, the cult of ancestors. The utilitarian sorcery is spread in this tradition. It is the behavior of people oriented to the implementation of the Orthodox rites and the traditional remnants at the same time.

Representatives of the mass tradition of the Orthodox culture have an indistinct understanding of the Holy Scripture based on popular books and movies. It is well known that the mass culture industry does not have forbidden topics. It uses the Orthodoxy for commercial purposes to distribute of works to the unsophisticated consumer. Herewith mass media may interact with the Church by bless books, postcards, icons etc. A mass person perceives the Church in the magic-utilitarian key or obeying fashion. In an opinion of a large number of people, the elitist Orthodox culture is inexplicable and inaccessible therefore they settle for simulacra.

V. THE SOCIOCULTURAL SIGNIFICANCES OF AN ORTHODOX ART

The sociocultural significance of pieces of art insists on the expression of its advisability and manifestation of the qualitative certainty in regard to a person and society. The criterion of the advisability is a value relation of people to texts. An art piece as a text of the Orthodox culture represents not only itself in its symbolic material givenness. A sacred piece of art goes out own borders becoming a “mirror” of an age due to declaring a value principles of its time.

Sacred art exists in the complex of its sociocultural significances. It includes significances from scopes of worldview, value, inculturation, education, enlightenment, as

well as museum, memorial, aesthetic, and social-representative significances.

The worldview and value significances of a sacred art are based on the generalization of a social experience. A sacred art represents an Orthodox picture of the world which claims to cover the entire cultural space. A sacred art transfers the value norms of consolidation that is important for the survival of society.

A sacred art plays an important role in the process of socialization and inculturation of a person acting as a way of development of ethic and aesthetic values. At the moment, there is a broad range of educational services of budget and commercial organizations that contribute to the effective mastering of the values of the Orthodox culture.

The educational significance is linked with a process of images creation that is an internal essence of education. In this sense, sacred art gives to a believer a pattern to follow a divine Prototype. Sacred art has an informative function as well. Cultural peculiarities of different epochs can be studied by examples of pieces of sacred art. Icons, miniatures, architectural objects allow reenacting valuable historical details.

The museum significance of sacred art is its capacity to accumulate cultural and religious senses. Over the centuries, temples accomplished the function of museums. Not only shrines were saved in churches but state reliquiae. Churches gather in its sacristies collections of pieces of art. Today there are temples that successfully combine liturgical and museum functions.

The memorial significance of a sacred art played always the no less important role in social life. Events of someone's life or a life of a whole nation could be fixated by the creation of an icon or temple. Pieces of sacred art are inherent components of a funeral rite. The ancient tradition to save a memory about the Saints consists in a placing relic in icons and reliquaries.

The aesthetic sociocultural significance of church pieces implies the organization of space upon laws of beauty. One of the conditions of the creation of a sacred building always implied the organization of an aesthetic environment. Moreover, a temple created this environment in a locality by the fact of its own existence.

The listed sociocultural significances of sacred art are dynamic. Their interrelation is different for each historical period. For instance, the dominant significance of Siberian temples of XVII century was a creation of a cultural environment because in that time new territories were being developed for the land increments of Russia.

VI. CONCLUSION

Thus, a piece of sacred art as a text of culture may be interpreted into the frame of the diversity of cultural traditions and sociocultural significances which knowledge allows comprehending a sacred piece more precisely to attribute it to one or another level of Orthodox culture.

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