

Louis REAU: Iconographie de l'art chrétien
/The Iconography of Christian Art,
Paris, 1955

The term 'iconography' which is the compound of 'eikon' /image/ and 'graphein' /describe/ appeared in France only relatively late in the Dictionnaire de Furetiere of 1701. The three main fields of these studies are the following: the description of a great personality /Louis XIV., Napoleon etc./; the characteristic visual code-system of a period /e.g. the iconography of the Counter-Reformation/; and the relatively unified tradition of using images for religious topics. The Christian and Buddhist religions are iconic, while the Jewish and the Moslem faiths are not.

The author makes a distinction between iconography and art-history: the latter studies form in its broader sense /composition, drawing, colours, etc/ while iconography deals with the sujet, and examines those monuments only, in which human figures appear.

Iconography /or rather iconology using Panofsky's term/ has changed with the history of civilization, and since they both have clearly defined common elements, certain topics, motives, have survived different periods, and thus they can be used to show the direction and character of the development.

Let us take the Expulsion of Heliodorus as an example. Answering the prayer of the Jewish Prelate Onias an angel arrives from Heaven and drives out the pagan Heliodorus, who is committing sacrilege. In the Middle Ages the story and its presentation was

a warning to those who did wrong to the possessions of the Church. The Popes of the Renaissance were expressing their aversion to foreigners in this way showing their wish to chase away those, who had flooded Rome and were occupying the papal empire /sacco di Roma/.

The Romantic Delacroix /Saint Sulpice, Paris/ interprets the scene in a quite different way: the figure with the wings, chasing out Heliodorus is the genius of art, who drives the profane, the unconsecrated and untalented people out of the sacred empire of beauty. Another example is the Coronation of the Virgin. For Romanesque sculptors, the mother of Christ was no more than the living throne of the Child /Sedes Sapientiae/. On Notre-Dame in Paris, Mary is crowned by an angel, while on the portait of the Cathedral of Reims she recieves the crown from Christ. On a 15th century panel by E. Quarton in Villeneuve-les-Avignon Mary is a member of the Holy Trinity. She has the dove-wings of the Holy Spirit and is placed between the Father and the Son. This process shows the growth of the cult of the Virgin, together with its theological and sociological relations.

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/Transl. Anikó Kiss/