

## A HALLMARK OF ROMANIAN ART THE ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL IN TURDA

**Abstract:** This article aims to analyse several landmarks pertaining to the construction of the cathedral in Turda, built between 1930-1937. This project was part of an overall plan developed by the Ministry of Religious Denominations and the Arts led by the historian Alexandru Lapedatu, aiming to build churches for the Romanian communities in Transylvania, in the aftermath of the Great Union of 1918. The creation of the architect Ioan Trajanescu, the cathedral was consecrated on 3 November 1937, in the presence of Bishops Lucian Triteanu and Nicolae Ivan, Minister Alexandru Lapedatu, the elites, the notables and the public of Turda. It was painted by Paul Molda, a very prestigious artist who was on friendly terms with the architect Trajanescu. Their collaboration led to the erection of a splendid modern building, evincing the spirit of the Byzantine tradition.

**Keywords:** Transylvania, interwar period, religious painting, Turda, Paul Molda

The fourth decade of the twentieth century was marked by constructive effervescence, full of achievements in the sphere of architecture and the arts. Ecclesiastical architecture, in particular, was encouraged by stately buildings that the communities supported and that the central authorities encouraged systematically. In the 1930s, Romania's cities received, in most of the historical provinces, representative cathedrals. Transylvania and Banat enjoyed such projects, churches designed by the foremost architects and adorned by outstanding artists being erected from Timișoara to Hunedoara, and from Orăștie to Turda. Conducted through the Ministry of Religious Denominations and the Arts, this was a program deliberately targeted at historical recovery, on behalf of the Romanian urban communities, deprived, up until the Union of 1918, of the right to raise cathedrals in cities. The state invested systematically in this deliberate program, initiated at the time of the first ministry of the historian Alexandru Lapedatu,<sup>2</sup> and the reign of King Carol II (1930-1940) was coeval with the period of a genuine cultural patronage.

Among the most important cathedrals erected in this decade was the one from Turda.<sup>3</sup> Begun in 1930, the construction was completed in 1937, when, on 3 November, the consecration ceremony took place in the presence of Bishops Lucian Triteanu and Nicolae Ivan, Minister Alexandru Lapedatu, Royal Aide Teofil Sidorovici, George Cipăianu and Valer Moldovan, Prefect Eugen Dunca, and Mayor Gențiu. On that occasion, the town's elite – Archpriest Cârnațiu, Professors Mihail Gazdac and Iuliu Corvin, the priests Biji, Pătăcean and Marinca – and high-ranking guests attended the choral performance offered by the Theological Choir of Cluj and

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<sup>2</sup> See Ioan Oprîș, *Alexandru Lapedatu în cultura românească*, București: Editura Științifică, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> The project belongs to the architect Ion Trajanescu and the mural painting to Paul Molda.

of the cathedral from Turda, the former being led by V. Peraşcu and that the hosts being conducted by Professor Iaşinski.

The priest Jovian Mureşanu was elevated to the rank of Archpriest Stavrofor and decorated with the Patriarchal Cross, being pronounced, at the same time, honorary citizen of the town. Bishop Triteanu synthesized, in his speech, the profound significance of the cathedral's foundation: "Our dream has come true. In Transylvania's squares, there rise, all around, towering Romanian churches and cathedrals."<sup>4</sup>

A pilgrimage to the tomb of Michael the Brave – announced by the newspaper *Universul* as part of the antirevisionist actions – again occasioned speeches with nationalist overtones, as well as the dissemination of the idea of a memorial dedicated to the hero slain on Câmpia Turzii. While the architectural project belonged to a well-known architect,<sup>5</sup> the painting project was accomplished by an artist of great prestige. Paul Molda<sup>6</sup> impressed his contemporaries, retaining their attention both as an easel painter and as a restorer of church paintings. In a personal exhibition at the Romanian Athenaeum – in Exarcu Hall (10 February-6 March 1919), the artist presented 116 works, impressing Nicolae Iorga. The learned historian showed that the exhibited works – including many representations of the mosaics of Ravenna and the painting of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo – demonstrated "not only strenuous work, solid technical knowledge and high elasticity of talent, but also – something that is encountered in few of our young painters – a broad orientation in art and a vast experience of nature, in which true art finds its inspiration."<sup>7</sup>

The odds of fate would have Paul Molda paint at Turda too. On 8 September 1935, he signed a cooperation agreement with the local artist Carol Gross, in the amount of 50,000 lei, the Turda-based artist receiving 40% of its value (15,000 lei being paid to him on 20 September). On 5 February 1936, the Archpriest of Turda, Jovian Mureşanu, addressed him the request to make the partial reception of the works in summer, which actually occurred on 24 June, when, in the presence of the beneficiary, the architect Trajanescu and the painter, they were delivered, as attested by the minutes drafted at the scene of the place.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Universul*, year 52, no. 306, Wednesday, 6 November 1937. Even by 21 June 1931, the issue of funding the painting works in the cathedral of Turda had not been resolved, Molda being invited by Jovian Mureşanu only for "an exchange of views," cf. letter in the Central Historical National Archives Service (SANIC), the fund of the Ministry of Culture and the Arts (MCA), file no. 162, f. 9-10. A telegram of 21 May 1935 confirms his own intention and that of the architect Trajanescu, as beneficiary, in Turda.

<sup>5</sup> Ion Trajanescu is known for the restoration works he conducted at Arnota, Hurezi, Plumbuita and at the metropolitan church in Bucureşti.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Molda (28 December 1884, Negrileşti- 29 June 1955, Bucharest), the son of a priest - a teacher at Cernatu-Săcele, a political refugee because of his pro-Memorandum views in the Old Kingdom, who settled in Ploieşti; he completed his elementary and high school studies in Ploieşti, carried out his higher education studies at the Academy of Fine Arts (1900-1905), under the supervision of G. D. Mirea, working on religious painting since the third year of study. He was sent on a scholarship by the Historical Monuments Commission, for a specialisation in Italy (1914-1915).

<sup>7</sup> See *Neamul Românesc*, Friday 1 March 1919. On the exhibition, see SANIC, MCA fund, file 55, f. 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> The contract and the minutes in SANIC, MCA fund, file no. 117, f. 1-3.

Molda's ties with the architect Trajanescu were older. On an invitation launched by the General Association of the Romanian Press on 25 October 1922, for a ball with a raffle to be held on 27 January 1923, the architect made him the following dedication: "to the suave painter Molda, who sees nature through a prism of colours full of poetry and idealism. His good and devoted friend Trajanescu."<sup>9</sup>

On 24 May 1936, a new contract stipulated that the artist should paint the icons of the iconostasis, the altar vault and the arches of the nave and the narthex "in neo-Byzantine style," in oil. The icons were to be painted on plywood, against a background of genuine gold. The vault was to be painted in tempera, and the arches and pillars in oil. Molda pledged to use only "first quality materials" and vouchsafed that the "artistic quality of these paintings, in terms of composition, drawing and colour," would rise to "the height of the traditional paintings from the Romanian historical churches."<sup>10</sup> The cost of the works: 85,000 lei for the iconostasis and the altar vault and, respectively, 45,000 lei for the painting of the arches.

When, on 1 September 1937, D. Stănescu-Deteste signed in *Progresul* the article "A round through the artists' workshops," praising the work of Paul Molda on the whole as a "healthy and sustainable art," he emphasised that "no painter has surpassed Mr. Paul Molda in the strength of his expressiveness and in boldness."<sup>11</sup>

Returning to the work in Turda, the same commentator stated that "every fragment stands as testimony to a fortunate invention, every episode is attractive, every type well-characterised." He noted how "the tonal coloration contributes to forming a vivid and comforting harmony, full of brilliance and freshness."<sup>12</sup> As of now, the entire painting could be seen by the parishioners, by the people of Turda, above all, who could admire its "firm, frank and outstanding execution (which) is very well modulated in tones of blue and in the necessary light," conveying "a profoundly serious and religious sense."<sup>13</sup>

The pictorial masterpiece from Turda pursued the artist and the newspapers and magazines of his time reproduced it as a work of reference. The author himself gave it imperishable outlines in his later drawings and paintings.<sup>14</sup>

The thresholds of a city cathedral are crossed by many people every day. How many will have crossed the threshold of the cathedral in Turda? How many hopes will they have put in the Lord's word, which they listened to here? The special atmosphere, the religious scenes and the saints on the walls, the doors of the altar, the icons and the furniture, they have all brought and still bring consolation to our fellow humans. They mattered and still matter to them and their thoughts. But all this is due

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<sup>9</sup> In *loc. cit.*, fund. 170, f. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Progresul*, year III, no. 31, 1 September 1937.

<sup>12</sup> "Pictorul Paul Molda," in *Viitorul*, year XXIX, no. 8896, Saturday, 4 September 1937.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> Thus, in *L'Écho of Bucarest* (1935), D. Stănescu, in "Une visite aux ateliers des peintres Paul Molda et D. Bărbulescu," mentions the cathedral in Turda, as he also does in *Universul*, no. 8, 10 January 1941, where the cathedral of Turda occupies a prominent place, represented by a drawing signed by Paul Molda; thus, at a time of great hardship for the Romanians, it reveals its value as a national symbol.

to the devotion of a small number of people from Turda, who, in the 1930s, worked so that the town would receive a house of the Lord that would reflect its historical role. Some designed its layout, others gathered funds, while yet others walked the roads to convince people of the need for a model institution. They all wanted a famous architect and a renowned painter, to whom they could entrust this work. The former designed a modern building, but the spirit of the Byzantine tradition, while the latter decorated it in impressive artistic form.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Recently, the priest Dorin Sas has compiled the meritorious monograph *Catedrala ortodoxă de la Turda (The Orthodox Cathedral in Turda)* (84 pages in manuscript), for which we give him our praise and gratitude.

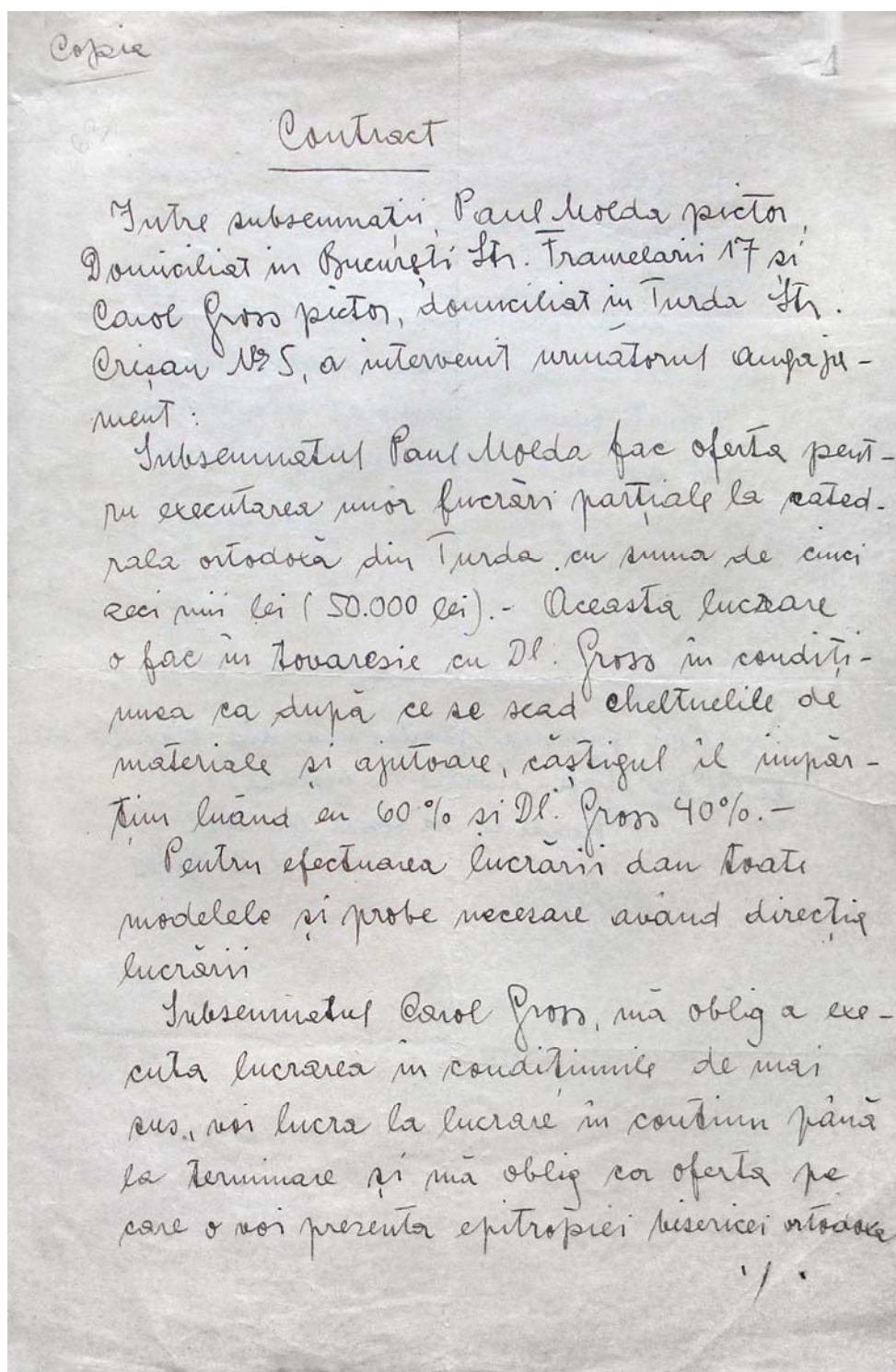


Fig.1

din Turda că nu fie mai jos de suma de  
45.000 lei. -

În privința cheltuielilor ce necesită  
lucrarea nouă biseră împreună prin bună  
înțelegere.

În ziua primirii ratelor de plată se  
va face și împărțirea câștigului.

Drept care s'a încheiat acest angaja-  
ment astăzi 8 Septembrie 1935. Turda.

Carol Grosu

Recunosc primirea partii mea din Accont de  
lei 15.000 după lucrare la biserică.

Turda la 20. septembrie 1935.

C. Grosu.

Fig.2



-3-

OFICIUL PAROHIAL ORTODOX ROMÂN TURDA .

Nr 12-1936 .-

D- Sale Domnului

P A U L M O L D A , pictor - profesor :  
BUCUREȘTI .

Am primit stimata Dvs. scrisoare cu data de 21 Ianuarie 1936 și Vă răspund eu fiind Dul Protopop plecat în concediu de boală, că noi am intenționăm că în vară să facem restul picturii, despre ce Vă vom aviza după întoarcerea Dlui Protopop din concediu.-

Acum însă pentru lichidarea chestiunii bănești în contul lucrărilor ce ați executat deja, că să facem formele recerute, adică recepționarea lucrărilor Vă rugăm dacă aveți Dvs. pe cineva cunoscut care să vină să ne facă acest serviciu, în așa fel ca să ne coste cât mai puțin, Vă rugăm să vorbiți cu dânsul și să ne comunicați pe urmă și nouă cine este Domnul și ce pretenziuni are pentru deplasare și facerea recepționării. În cazul, că ne va costa prea mult atunci vom chema pe unul dela Cluj. Iar noi îndată ce vom avea făcută recepționarea lucrării Vă vom achita și restul de bani ce mai aveți la noi.-

Am fi mai bucuroși dacă ați afla Dvs. pe cineva, care să facă recepționarea, ca nu cumva să se întâmple să avem ceva dificultăți în așteptarea răspunsului Dvs., semnăz

T U R D A , 3 Februarie 1936.-

cu stăruință :  
*H. Muresanu*

Fig.3

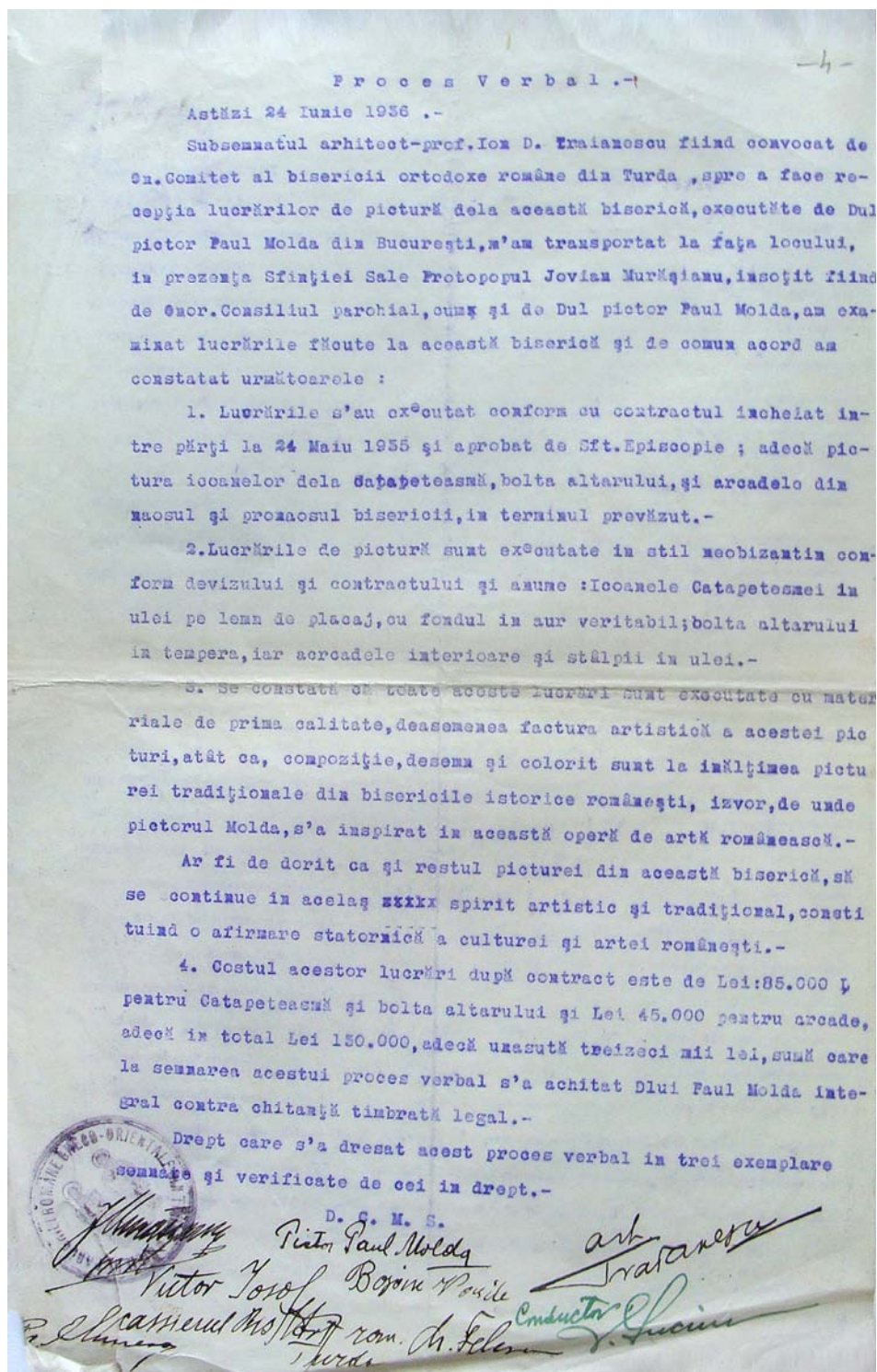


Fig.4





**Fig.5**

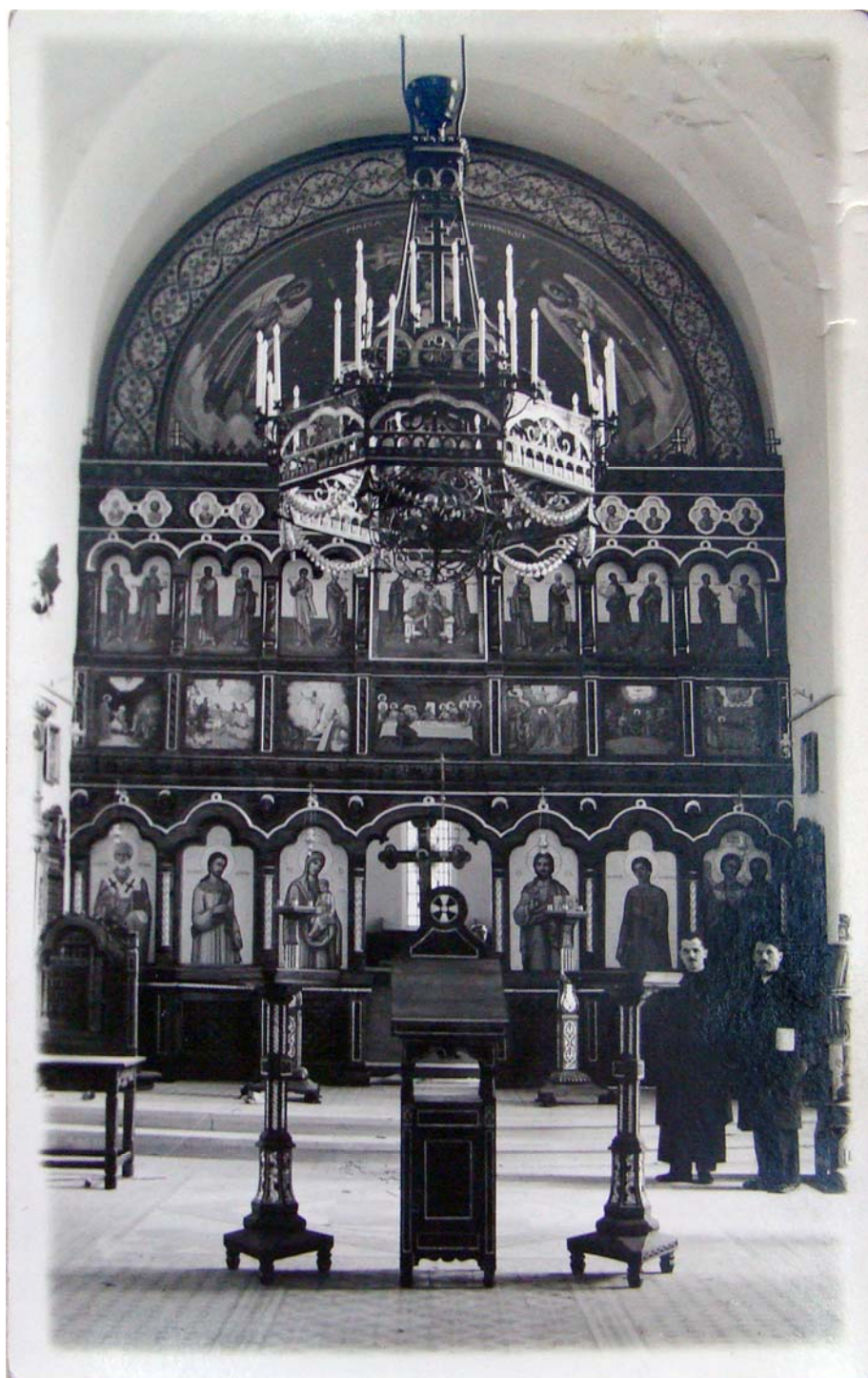


Fig.6





**Fig.7**



Fig.8





**Fig. 9.1**

**Fig.9.2**



Terre de Sienne naturelle: ocre plus brune que l'ocre jaune.  
Terre de sienne brûlée, plus foncée et d'un ton plus rougeâtre que la Terre de S. nat. et obtenue par la calcination de celle-ci.  
Terre d'ombre naturelle, argile colorée par de l'oxyde de fer et de l'oxyde de manganèse, très solide  
Terre d'ombre brûlée plus foncée et plus rougeâtre que la terre d'ombre nat. est obtenue par la calcination de celle-ci.  
Terre de Cassel. Est un lignite.  
Bruna Van Dyck. - Le brun est obtenu par une forte calcination de certaines ocres jaunes. Est très solide.  
Bitume, L'asphalte ou bitume est un produit naturel. Le brun est d'un ton superbe, cependant il est prudent d'en éviter l'emploi. Le bitume tend à se décolorer à la lumière. Il ne sèche pas, et empêche de sécher le couleurs avec lesquelles il est mélangé. Le manque de solidité et ramollissement du bitume lorsque la température s'élève (il coule à 80-85°) déterminent des craquelures. on peut le rendre solide en lui ajoutant de la gomme, laque, de la cire et de l'huile de lin cuite.  
Noir d'ivoire, Charbon obtenu par la calcination, en vases clos, de déchets provenant de la fabrication des objets en ivoire. Il est de qualité inférieure, ce n'est du véritable noir d'ivoire, c'est alors du noir d'os. Sans la catégorie des noirs obtenus par le procédé signalé, il faut citer les charbons provenant de la calcination des matières végétales telle que le liège (noir de liège) les sarments de vigne (noir de vigne) (noir de betterave) noir de pêche etc.

Fig.10

Noirs de fumées - Les noirs sont formés par le carbone contenu dans la fumée qu'on dégage pendant la combustion incomplète de certaines matières résineuses ou grasses. Chacun de ces noirs est désigné par le nom de la substance qui le produit; de là les noms de noir de houille, noir de résine, noir de lampe, noir de bougie. Ces deux derniers sont seuls employés en peinture. Le noir de fumée entre dans la fabrication de l'encre de Chine.

Tintura a proteza pânza contra influenței atmosferice se sta cu vernis (care s'auzintă pânza bine) Vernis à l'huile ou vernis grosse, à l'eau, à l'alcool. Plus le vernis est sec, plus il est solide, plus vite il s'effrite, se gâte et s'écaille (cela a été observé).

Fig.11



modifie aussi et les rendant plus ternes, les teintes vertes ou violettes obtenues par le mélange du jaune ou du rouge avec le bleu de cobalt.

Bleu d'outremer. Composé de silice, d'alumine, de soufre et de soufre. Est d'une grande solidité.

Bleu de Prusse. Ferrocyanure de fer. Se décolore sous l'action prolongée de la lumière, manque de solidité; il a un très grand pouvoir colorant, et en mélange donne des tons d'une grande richesse.

Vert malachite. Carbonate de cuivre. — Est formée par la pierre dit malachite d'une belle teinte verte, réduite en poudre. Est très solide.

Vert Véronèse. — Bisulfate de cuivre. D'une teinte un peu crue, mêlé à d'autres couleurs tend à s'altérer, est préférable de ne l'utiliser que pur ou presque pur.

Vert de cobalt. — Combinaison d'oxyde de cobalt et d'oxyde de zinc. dit et vert de zinc, est très solide.

Vert émeraude est oxyde de chrome, est très solide.

Bruns, il s'obtiennent avec par le mélange du rouge ou vert avec noir. En nature sont antistatique en coloration avec ça;

Ocre jaune, ligile colorée par l'oxyde de fer. ~~est~~ très solide

Ocre rouge. — Se trouve dans le même condition que l'ocre jaune. La sanguine est une ocre rouge saumelle. on peut obtenir par la calcination de l'ocre jaune.

Ocre de terre. Plus foncé que l'ocre jaune, a pour base du peroxyde de fer mêlé d'argile.

Fig.12

Rouge de Saturne. Mine orange. Plombate de plomb.  
 Cette couleur n'est pas très solide, elle tend à noircir sous l'in-  
 fluence de la lumière et des émanations sulfureuses.

Vermillon. - Sulfure de mercure. - A cause du  
 composé qui la constitue, on doit éviter de mêler cette couleur  
 or celles qui ont du plomb pour base; on se sert plutôt en  
 blanc de plomb ci en alb de zinc. Le vermillon de chine est plus beau  
 et solide.

Carmine de cochenille. Le carmin est extrait d'un insecte, la  
 cochenille (*coccus cacti*). Cette couleur ne résiste pas beaucoup à  
 l'action de la lumière de sorte qu'il est préférable de ne pas l'em-  
 ployer en peinture.

Laque carminée. - Cette couleur laque est obtenue par la  
 fixation des sels de fabrication du carmin sur de l'alumine.  
 Cependant ce sont des matières carminées neuves que l'on  
 emploie de préférence pour la fabrication des laques carminées  
 de qualité supérieures.

Laques de garance. - Le principe colorant de ces laques  
 est extrait des racines des plantes du genre *Barbier*, la culture  
 de ces plantes étant en décroissance, on fabrique maintenant ses  
 laques avec l'alizarine artificielle et la purpurine. La laque  
 de garance est une couleur très solide; elle se vend sous différents  
 tons - tons roses - bruns.

Carmine de garance. Ce carmine remplace avec avantage,  
 parce qu'il est plus solide le carmine de cochenille.

Bleu de cobalt. Aluminate de cobalt. - Cette couleur est très  
 solide. Présente l'inconvénient de prendre une coloration vio-  
 lette à la lumière du gaz ou d'une bougie; cette coloration

Fig.13



Journe de zine. - Chromate de zine. - Est plus stable que le journe de chrome.  
Journe de strontiane. - Chromate de strontiane. Est comme le précédent, plus solide et plus fixe que le journe de chrome.  
Journe de cadmium. - Sulfure de cadmium. ~~Les couleurs~~  
 Les mélanges de journe de cadmium et de couleurs à base de plomb sont sujets à noircir. Certains auteurs affirment que ces mélanges ne présentent pas d'inconvénients: cela est vrai à condition que le sulfure de cadmium soit absolument pur et qu'il ne contienne pas, comme ~~des~~ ailleurs quelquefois, du soufre en liberté.  
Journe indien. Couleur assez solide sur la nature de laquelle on n'est pas complètement fixé. D'après certains auteurs, elle serait fournie par l'urine de chameaux pourris avec les fruits du mangoustan; pour d'autres, ce seraient certaines plantes, et particulièrement les fruits de mangoustan.  
Gomme gutte. Matière résineuse fournie par certains végétaux de Cambodge et de Siam. Cette couleur qui manque de corps est employée surtout dans l'aquarelle.  
Laques jaunes. Ces couleurs, peu solides, sont fournies par des principes colorants provenant de certains végétaux, principes qui sont fixés sur de l'alumine. Le principe colorant de la laque de gaude provient des tiges, feuilles et graines de la gaude (*Reseda luteola*). Celui du stil-de-grain est fourni par la graine du nerprun des teinturiers ou graine d'argemone. On l'extrait avec de l'esprit qui ~~fournit~~ fournit la graine dite de perse.

Fig.14

M. Paul Colin), Les Grecs qui ont suivi le canon et qui ont glorifié Polyclète pour l'avoir écrit et sculpté; les Grecs qui avaient pris soin de mesurer les membres du corps humain, restèrent libres cependant, mais ils ne s'écartèrent de la règle qu'après l'avoir bien connue. Malgré la loi des proportions, ils ont eu varier à l'infini les types humains. Ils ont concilié la variété individuelle de la règle typique, la symétrie et la liberté.

Les couleurs ou points de vue chimique

Blanc de plomb, dit blanc d'argent - carbonate de plomb.

Acopère vite, a l'inconvénient de noircir sous l'influence des émanations sulfureuses. Blanc d'arg. et vermillon se mêlent.

Blanc de zinc oxyde de zinc. Couvre moins et est moins siccatif que le blanc de plomb, est inaltérable, car l'hydrogène sulfuré en contact avec lui forme un sulfure qui est blanc. Il peut être utilisé avec avantage lorsqu'on ne désire pas obtenir de grands empâtements.

Jaune de Naples. - Antimoniate de plomb. Couleur solide, mais qu'il ne faut pas triturer avec le couteau à palette, car le fer a la propriété de l'altérer en lui faisant prendre une teinte verdâtre. On peut, du reste, remplacer cette couleur, par un mélange de blanc et de jaune, ce qui en outre, a l'avantage de permettre d'obtenir un jaune plus ou moins coloré.

Jaune de chrome. - Chromate de plomb. Noircit sous l'influence des émanations sulfureuses.

Fig.15