Visual Representations of Death between Production and Reception: A Case-study on the Romanian Churches in Maramureş (18th-19th Century)

Abstract:

This article presents a detailed analysis of the images of death in the iconography of the Last Judgement, painted in the Romanian wooden churches situated in the southern part of the historic Maramureş County. By analysing this visual material, the author attempts to find answers to a few questions: How are the personifications of death represented? What is the message the images of death intend to transmit? How were these representations received? Using the cultural history methods, this study wants to examine the system of production, signification and reception that led to the creation the images of death. The messages transmitted through these representations are part of the religious discourse, elaborated by representatives of the Church. In Maramureş the personified death is sometimes depicted as an apocalyptic rider, but the most frequent way of representation in this region is the portrayal of death inside the Hell, or in its proximity, in the scene of theResurrection of the Dead. In some churches we find a special depiction: Death is represented beside Sloth, Famine and Plague. The association of death with these personifications is a unique one in Christian iconography.

Keywords: *death, iconography, traditions, resurrection, churches.*