

THE ROLE OF ROMANIAN UNIATE CHURCH IN PROMOTING PAINTERS FROM BLAJ (1891-1918)

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Abstract: A particular significance in the context of Romanian cultural movement from Transylvania, regarded as a factor of progress and emancipation of Transylvanian Romanians is painting¹. In an ecclesiastical framework strongly influenced by the throne of Metropolis, in Blaj appear the signs of cultural development also as concerns painting. Firstly timidly, then more and more explicit, young Romanian painters searched to distinguish themselves through essential works, both religious and profane. Unirea newspaper², attentive to all cultural approaches irrespective of the artistic field, took notice of the potential of painting and young artists, as complementary means of asserting the Romanian national character³.

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An important moment in his artistic activity was the economic and industrial exhibition from Sighet, an authentic launching platform through dimension of the event, where it is displayed also the eagle's carpet⁴ from the Cathedral from Blaj. 200 years were celebrated from the union with Rome, moment marked by the whole Uniate Church by ample feasts and fastuous celebrations.

Year 1903 seems to have been the year of the genuine launching of painter Smigelschi as ecclesiastic painter. National component of his work, continuously underlined by specialised criticism, placed Octavian Smigelschi in the first line of fighters for national cause, the brush being his main weapon. Folk motives, peasants' portraits, peasants noticed in different aspects, recommended him to the rural environment, his work being also appreciated here. The unseen line of his works touches off and records dignity of Romanian nation, its wish of emancipation and progress. In fact, this is the quiet message of all his exhibitions. Yet, we would be pathetic if we would not remember also the financial aspect here, all the more so as the painter always wanted to upskill with the great masters from occident.

It is surprising the position of Hungarian art criticism, usually anti-Romanian, which praised a Romanian artist. Even if Herceg placed Smigelschi in the group of Hungarian artists, acknowledging

¹Cornel Tatai Baltă evidences in his work *Secvențe din arta plastică blăjeană* three important aspects concerning role of painting as *means of fight for national and social freedom of our nation*: the first, offering a grant in München to the young man George Vladereanu, to make him return to the position of drawing teacher envisaged by Cipariu. The second aspect concerns establishing, in the school year 1867-1868, of the drawing and painting chair to the Gymnasium from Blaj, and a third aspect refers to the support provided to painter Nicolae Popescu, who was in Rome, initiator of the album of drawings after the scenes of Trajan's Column from Rome. Unfortunately, the 500 subscriptions necessary in advance for publication of the album were not taken out, and in these circumstances, the album was not published anymore. See Cornel Tatai Baltă, *Secvențe din arta plastică blăjeană*, Blaj, Editat și tipărit la Casa de cultură din Blaj, 1993.

² *Unirea* newspaper appears in Blaj, on 3 September 1891, as propagandistic platform assumed by the Romanian Church United with Rome.

³ Octavian Smigelschi, *Însemnări*, in the monograph of Iacob Radu, *Biserica Sf.Uniri din Tâmpăhaza-Uifalău*, Oradea-Mare, 1911, p.33.

⁴ References about this carpet we encounter also to Virgil Vătășianu, *op.cit.*, p.75; see also Cornel Tatai Baltă, *op.cit.*, pp.64-68, and Alexandru Constantin Chituță, *op.cit.*, with the foreword of Major Archbishop of the Uniate Church, cardinal Lucian Mureșan, pp.14-17.

his real value was made through his indubitable talent, without involvement of ethnic element. For Transylvanian Romanians this fact meant a step forward in asserting⁵ Romanian cultural identity. The news of Octavian Smigelschi's death took the cultural community of Romanians from Transylvania by surprise. After death of the artist, *Unirea* newspaper continues to publish articles⁶ about the life and work of the great painter. One of these drew our attention, being signed by Nicolae Iorga, intimate of painter Smigelschi. Title of the article, *Smigelschi și România* (Smigelschi and Romania), hides polemics between newspapers *Unirea*, *Neamul Românesc* and *Românul* as for indifference of authorities from Romania and decision makers concerning participation of the Transylvanian painter's works to the exhibition from Bucharest. Under the guise of striking Romanian spirit towards Transylvania, professed in Bucharest, as least as art is concerned, hid envies, artists' prides and different interests.

Artistic activity of painter Smigelschi enticed young talents that confirmed throughout time the school of the master. Two examples are illustrative along this line: Flaviu C. Domșa⁷ and A.W.Zeiler⁸. Both, friends and apprentices⁹ of master Smigelschi, remarked artistically by continuation of Byzantine style imposed by the master.

To complete the big picture of *Unirea* newspaper and implicitly of the Romanian Uniate Church, as promoter of Romanian culture and painting, we must mention a series of books and specialised studies published within its pages. Petru Dulfu¹⁰, Dumitru Stăncescu¹¹, Dimitrie Comșa¹² are only a few reference names mentioned in *Unirea* with works necessary to each artist either beginner or well-known. Publication of some complex studies such as *Începuturile picturii creștine*¹³ (Beginnings of Christian Painting), *Despre iconografia bizantină*¹⁴ (About Byzantine Iconography) or *Crucifixul și învierea în arta creștină*¹⁵ (Crucifix or Rebirth in Christian Art) follow evolution of interest for this art manifested by the nation. *Unirea* newspaper maintained alive this connection between artists and nation, by whole journalistic activity manifesting as an authentic promoter of culture and also of painting, less understood or appreciated by the wide public.

⁵ After his death, on the occasion of the exhibition from Budapest of Bellearte Society from the capital, *Unirea* newspaper, Year XXIII, issue 99, 4 Oct. 1913, p.4-5, publishes the following: „Smigelschi's paintings will evidence to the foreigners, how many moments of creative artistic inspiration our nation takes from the valleys of Transylvania, in all aspects of his life. [...] A striking Romanian spirit dominates the whole exhibition, a piece from Transylvania's soul, in the turmoil of the great foreign city...”. This article was also taken over by *Românul* newspaper.

⁶ Article published in *Művészeti* magazine, issue 1, from 1913, Budapest, taken over in *Unirea*, Year XXIII, issue 42, 26 Apr. 1913, p.8.

⁷ Cornel Tatai Baltă, *Secvențe din arta plastică blăjeană*, Blaj, Editată de Casa de cultură din Blaj, 1993, pp.39-49.

⁸ Cornel Tatai Baltă, *op.cit.*, pp.50-59.

⁹ In the advertisement published by A.W.Zeiler in *Unirea poporului* mentioned that he participated to painting of churches from Rădești and Cacova, as collaborator of master Smigelschi. See *Unirea poporului*, Year VI, issues 17, 27 Apr.1924, p.7.

¹⁰ Petru Dulfu publishes the work *Noțiuni de estetică*, București, Tipografia Basilescu, 1891. Volume is destined for study in school and includes exact definitions, easily understandable examples; there are underlined the merits of the church and religion in developing of arts. See *Unirea*, Year I, issue 52, 26 Dec.1891, p.416.

¹¹ Dumitru Stăncescu signs translation of work *Arta creștină. Epoca Gotică* (Christian Art. Gothic Age) by E. Pecant and C. H. Baude and is published under the same title to *Feuilleton* column in *Unirea*, Year VI, issue 20, 16 May 1896, pp.153-154.

¹² Dimitrie Comșa realizes album *Ornamentica română* (Romanian ornamentation) that includes 284 embroideries and textiles. The author explains: *Painters and all lovers of plastic arts, masters or dilettantes will find in folk ornamentation, gathered in albums, an inexhaustible source of inspiration and Romanian motives.* See *Unirea*, Year XV, issue 3, 21 Jan.1905, p.26.

¹³ The study *Începuturile picturii creștine* is published in series, between issues *Unirea*, Year VIII, issues 6, 5 Mar.1898, p.70 and *Unirea*, Year VIII, issue 20, 21 May 1898, p.158.

¹⁴ Study *Despre iconografia bizantină* is published in series to *Parte Științifică-literară* (Scientific-literary part) column, between issues *Unirea*, Year VIII, issue 25, 25 Jun.1898, pp.198-199 and *Unirea*, Year VIII, issue 45, 12 Nov.1898, p.358.

¹⁵ Study *Crucifixul și învierea în arta creștină* is published in *Unirea*, Year IX, issue17, 29 Apr.1899, pp.142-142.

Keywords: painters, talent, exhibitions, art criticism, Byzantine painting.

A particular significance in the context of Romanian cultural movement from Transylvania, regarded as a factor of progress and emancipation of Transylvanian Romanians is painting¹⁶. In an ecclesiastical framework strongly influenced by the throne of Metropolis, in Blaj appear the first signs of cultural development also as concerns painting. Firstly timidly, then more and more explicit, young Romanian painters searched to distinguish themselves through essential works, both religious and profane. *Unirea* newspaper, attentive to all cultural approaches irrespective of the artistic field, took notice of the potential of painting and young artists, as complementary means of asserting the Romanian national character¹⁷.

Octavian Smigelschi is a distinct figure amongst young painters. We will not insist over personal data, where there already exists a solid bibliography¹⁸, not being the subject of this paper, but we will demonstrate the role that the Uniate Church and *Unirea* newspaper had in his promoting. Having at disposal the whole collection of the newspaper and comparing results of actual scientific research, we identified also new, unpublished aspects from the life and work of Octavian Smigelschi, aspects that complete the overall picture of a great Transylvanian painter.

The first reference about Octavian Smigelschi in the pages of *Unirea* newspaper dates from 21 November 1891, in issue 47, p.373. He is presented as a drawing teacher to Elisabetopole gymnasium, author of the portrait of bishop Inocențiu Micu Clain. The article records that the artist did the work by the order of In. M. Clainu Reading Society from Blaj, using a small picture of spiritual patron of the society. The portrait has the following dimensions 132,5 cm height, 98,5 cm width and was appreciated as follows:

„this is made aesthetically, skilfully and with great finesse; even the most delicate features are so well delimited, that the best art lover could not do anything but to admire the painting did by Mr. Octavian Smigelski”.

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¹⁷ Octavian Smigelschi, *Însemnări*, in the monograph of Iacob Radu, *Biserica Sf.Uniri din Tâmpăhaza-Uifalău*, Oradea-Mare, 1911, p.33.

¹⁸ See Virgil Vătășianu, *Octavian Smigelschi*, București, Editura Meridiane, 1982; Alexandru Constantin Chituță, *Pictorul Octavian Smigelschi lumină vie în veșnicie*, Sibiu, Editura Astra Museum Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2012; Nicolae Sabău, *Contribuții la cunoașterea pictorului Octavian Smigelschi*, in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Series Historia*, Fasc.1, 1972; Negoită Lăptoiu, *Incursiuni în plastica transilvană*, Cluj-Napoca, 1981, pp.33-35.

The amount of money demanded by the painter was more than symbolic, 60 florins, it we take into consideration that only the frame of the painting cost 25 florins. About this portrait, we have not encountered any reference in the older or newer specialised publications. Until 1899, *Unirea* newspaper does not contain any information concerning the artist. Barely in issue 35 from 2 September 1899, p. 285, it is published a short article about dedication¹⁹ of the iconostasis of the Greek-Catholic church from Ilva mare, Rodna vicarage. The added value of the iconostasis from Ilva mare resides, according vicar Ioan Pop, in the fact that it is the work of a Romanian painter, Octavian Smigelschi.

An important moment in his artistic activity was the economic and industrial exhibition from Sighet, an authentic launching platform through dimension of the event, where it is displayed also the eagle's carpet²⁰ from the Cathedral from Blaj. Its history is extensively depicted in *Unirea* newspaper, issue 38, from 5 September 1901, pp. 308-309, and has as starting point wish of Sofia Mihalyi, daughter of Diet deputy Petru Mihalyi de Apșa, great proprietor in Saraseu, brother of the metropolitan Mihaly, of offering her uncle a gift according to his position.

200 years were celebrated from the union with Rome, moment marked by the whole Uniate Church by ample feasts and fastuous celebrations, ideal moment for offering such a gift.

The carpet is an impressive work to which contributed Octavian Smigelschi, teacher at that time in Ibașfalău, who made the drawing of the citadel and vulture, Sofia Mihaly, the one who established dimension of the carpet, the 24 colours and their combination. She also ordered a giant loom to which 12 women worked simultaneously, to 6 meter rolls. Artistry of peasants from Maramureș in the weaving craft remarked through impression let to looker, that the vulture is painted not woven.

Subsequently Metropolitan Mihaly donated it to the cathedral from Blaj, where is still kept nowadays. Initially, the carpet was preserved in a special chest, nowadays is rolled over a wooden frame, being placed behind the iconostasis. Presence of the carpet in the exhibition from Sighet is owed to intervention of baroness Rosner, patron of the exhibition, next to Metropolitan Mihaly.

Symbolism of the carpet exceeds as importance its technical data. The motive of the vulture was not chosen by chance, as personal whim. It represents in the ceremony of consecrating the bishop, *the visible part of God's work*. An explanation, based on artistic and theological norms, about symbolism of the carpet with vulture is offered by professor Cornel Tatai Baltă in the work *Scieri despre artă (Writings about art)*, in which he remarks „vulture from the carpet of cathedral from Blaj, so ingeniously imagined by Octavian Smigelschi, represents a distinct sign of Jesus Christ's presence”²¹. He brought as argument inscribing of Greek initials XP, accompanied by letters A and Ω, in the pattern of the carpet.

¹⁹ See also Virgil Vătășianu, *op.cit.*, p.71.

²⁰ References about this carpet we encounter also to Virgil Vătășianu, *op.cit.*, p.75; see also Cornel Tatai Baltă, *op.cit.*, pp.64-68, and Alexandru Constantin Chituță, *op.cit.*, with the foreword of Major Archbishop of the Uniate Church, cardinal Lucian Mureșan, pp.14-17.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p.67.

Solemnity of bishop's consecration is heightened to a great extent by the ritual of the Church that envisaged mandatory usage²² of the carpet, as essential part of the ceremony:

„To the consecration of the bishop, this laid between the royal door and pulpit, where the chair of consecrating bishop is placed. The chosen bishop is headed by two priests stepping on the vulture's tail to the question of consecrating: What do you think?, recites the first symbol of faith; then stepping on the middle of vulture, also at the demand of consecrating, recites the second symbol of faith and finally. When they are stepping on the head of the vulture makes a third confession of public faith before clergy and nation, so that all to be convinced about his orthodoxy (faith). The citadel (depicted on the wallpaper) is the image of the chair or episcopal residence of the chosen one. Rivers represent sacred science and the three theological virtues demanded by the Bishop, by which divine rivers to water the believers; and the vulture from above the citadel on the one side represented the sublime dignity of hierarchic superiority of the bishop, and on the other side the theological qualities that the bishop demanded from the chosen one. That is why, when that chosen by the bishop on his presentation and profession is about to pass over the vulture, by this, the saint church wants him pay attention, because similarly as the vulture raises high, equally the bishop by wings of sacred science, virtues and saint life is higher than his obedient people and like a vulture raising above human passions, to watch closely, rightfully govern and apostolically defend his herd. The vulture sits with one leg on the wall of the fortress symbolising the human power of the bishop, and with the other one on the tower meaning the spiritual power of the bishop”²³.

An interesting and new piece of information concerning painter Smigelschi is recorded in the article „*Unirea's*” *Jubilee* from *Unirea*, issue 6 from 9 February 1901, p.49, out of which we find out that to the banquet organised on this occasion 25 persons participated, amongst whom „esterni Vas Muntenescu from Boziaş and teacher Smigelschi from Ibaşfalău, painter of <<Union>>”. We do not hold information whether the syntagm *Unirea's painter*, used by the author of the article, is based on an agreement between the painter and newspaper or he is named like this through his friendship relationship with owners and editorial board of the newspaper.

We must notice then that the painter was brother of one of the five founders of the newspaper, canon Victor Smigelschi.

Important is also information concerning existence of the eight owners of the newspaper in 1901, being known that in the masthead of issue 9 appears as publisher and editor Aurel C. Domşa, subsequently he being the first owner-editor and responsible publisher recorded in masthead of issue 14 from 7 April 1906.

Year 1903 seems to have been the year of the actual launching of painter Smigelschi as ecclesiastic painter. Consecutive issues of *Unirea* newspaper debate extensively impressions from his exhibition²⁴ from Blaj, organised in the gymnasium of the school, where he displayed religious paintings in Byzantine style, plans of iconostases and painting plans of the cathedral from Blaj, some in sketches, others in *maxime originale*. Success registered by the exhibition is noticed by specialised criticism:

²²The carpet with vulture was used for the last time in the Cathedral from Blaj, on the following bishops' consecration Mihai Frătilă and Vasile Bizău, on 16th December 2007.

²³ Ioan Boroş, *Ierarchia bisericească*, Gherla, 1894, p.88.

²⁴ See also Cornel Tatai Baltă, *op.cit.*, p.71.

„Mr. Smigelschi's painting is vigorous, living and at the same time most pious. Whole and each part denote talent that deserves respect of impartial, competent people, a refined talent of special force, passionate. In general, Mr. Smigelschi presents as a person, skilled master over all criteria of the art of painting. His brush is correct and full of meanings. Rare finesse of drawing, happy combination of colours, mastery of perspective, combination and reasonable disposal of parts at first sight fill us with entitled national pride that we are given an authentic ecclesiastic painter, above all painters of this type that we had until now.”

A renowned professor also visited the exhibition from Bucharest, whose name not being mentioned in the article we did not identify, he pointing out „to Romanians he is the only painter with a great future on the field of ecclesiastical painting”²⁵.

We would have expected that after such a laudatory criticism addressing his talent, that offered also befitting financial perspectives, to assist to an extensive work of the artist, such as painting of the cathedral from Blaj, Sibiu, etc. Yet, reality materialised in small orders of iconostases or icons. Thus, *Unirea*, issue 35 from 29 August 1903, p. 348, publishes the article *Sfințire de Biserică (Consecration of a Church)* out of which we find out the unpublished, new information that iconostasis of the church from Cuteiuș²⁶ was painted by painter Octavian Smigelschi.

A short commentary is necessary. Virgil Vătășianu includes in bibliography of the work *Octavian Smigelschi*, published to Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, in 1982, newspaper *Unirea* from 5 September 1903, without indicating issue 36 of it. Interesting is the fact that issue 34 from 22 August 1903, 35 from 29 August 1903, 36 from 5 September 1903, 38 from 19 September 1903 contain relevant information about activity of painter Smigelschi. Furthermore, issue 35 from 29 August 1903 holds new information concerning painting of the iconostasis from Cuteiuș, not recorded by Monumental List of the work previously mentioned. It is likely that author Virgil Vătășianu, resonant name in the history of art, not to have benefitted of whole collection of *Unirea* newspaper, possible fact at that time, or to have researched selectively the collection of the newspaper.

This fact offered us the joy of a modest contribution to pointing out creation of the renowned painter, by completing the list with iconostases painted by Smigelschi.

From Blaj, the exhibition was moved to Sibiu, including the mention that the number of displayed works increased from 40 to 70. Movement is not accidental. The contest for painting of the orthodox cathedral from the locality followed to be organised in Sibiu. *Unirea* newspaper, issue 43 from 24 October 1903, p.423, published under the title *Expoziția prof. Smigelschi*²⁷ (*Exhibition of Teacher Smigelschi*) an extensive commentary regarding success of the action and renders criticism of the two present specialists, St. Groh, teacher at the school for artistic industry from Budapest and C. Dörschlang, teacher at the Science school from Sibiu. The first remarks the following about the painting promoted by the painter: „Smigelschi stepped on a road that nobody had stepped before him. He searched to reveal his art, so that to remain sincere and national. [...] it is a cycle of creations, for whose realisation is demanded serious introspection and style knowledge.”

²⁵ *Expoziția pictorului Smigelschi*, in *Unirea*, Year XIII, issue 34, 22 Aug.1903, p.341.

²⁶ Cuteiuș, nowadays village Cutiș, belonging to commune Almașu, Sălaj county. See Cutis, Sălaj-Wikipedia.

²⁷ About the exhibition from Sibiu see also K.D., Die Ausstellung Oktavian Smigelschi, in *Siebenburgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt*, Sibiu, year XXX, issue 9066 from 15 October 1903; Leandru, chronicle in *Tribuna poporului*, Arad, Year VII, issue 188, from 14/26 Oct. 1903.

The second, in the same appreciative tones, confirms:

„With his refined taste he knew how to avoid requirements of the old masters, yet without altering style; he knew how to dissolve the too many colours and too bright, in harmony and serious tones of colours”.

Similar accounts were published also in other newspapers. *Unirea*, issue 45 from 7 November 1903, p.441, takes over and publishes article *O interesantă manifestație artistică* (*An interesting artistic manifestation*), appeared in *Vremea* newspaper from Bucharest, out of which we cull:

„Merit of Mr Smigelschi’s work is indubitably great and would be desirable to see exhibition from Sibiu brought also here in Bucharest to serve as model for some and to be subjected to serious and more competent criticism of others”, allusion to the two teachers Groh and Dörschlang.

National component of his art, continuously underlined by specialised criticism, placed Octavian Smigelschi in the first line of fighters for national cause, the brush being his main weapon. Folk motives, peasants’ portraits, peasants noticed in different aspects, recommended him to the rural environment, his work being also appreciated here. The unseen line of his works touches off and records dignity of Romanian nation, its wish of emancipation and progress. In fact, this is the quiet message of all his exhibitions. Yet, we would be pathetic if we would not remember also the financial aspect here, all the more so as the painter always wanted to upskill with the great masters from occident.

Shortly after, *Unirea*, issue 50 from 12 December 1903, p. 487, publishes the article *Profesorul Smigelschi la Pesta* (*Teacher Smigelschi in Pest*) in which takes over the commentary of Malonyay Deszö from Budapesti Hirlap, concerning participation of the artist to the exhibition on industrial art:

„A great surprise expects art lovers to the floor. Those are paintings of a modest drawing teacher from province, Smigelschi Octav from Elisabetopol. The teacher artist made them in Byzantine style following ornamentation of the church from Blaj, and who knows, nobody would have remarked them, if they had not been discovered by teacher Gros and had not been brought here for display. Solid and rich knowledge, much archaic feeling and even more monumentality characterise the work of this great painter. We can barely count those masters of ours, that can take responsibility of such great issue-and could also execute the issue. These are works worthy of interest manifested by the whole country”.

It seems that minister Berzeviszy himself, present at the exhibition, would have congratulated the Romanian painter. Positive appreciations are taken over by *Unirea*, issue 52 from 26 December 1903, p.509, in the article *Pictorul Szmigelschi* (*Painter Smigelschi*), from the newspaper *Uj idök*²⁸, fictional weekly periodical, of art and social that appeared in Budapest, recorded by the novelist Herczeg Ferenc:

„We enjoy that in the group of Hungarian artists also this special issue has found out such an excellent artist, and that on judging works like these we are not familiar with framework decorations from abroad.”

²⁸ See Virgil Vătășianu, *op. cit.*, p.76.

This special issue refers to Romanian national problems in the historical, political, social and ecclesiastic context of the period. It is surprising the position of Hungarian art criticism, usually anti-Romanian, which praised a Romanian artist. Even if Herceg placed Smigelschi in *the group of Hungarian artists*, acknowledging of his real value was made through his indubitable talent, without involvement of ethnic element. For Transylvanian Romanians this fact meant a step forward in asserting²⁹ Romanian cultural identity.

It seems that the long expected exhibition from Bucharest of painter Smigelschi was about to become certitude. *Unirea* newspaper, issue 21 from 14 April 1904, p.189, publishes a short notice concerning this event.

Another announcement in *Unirea*, issue 34 from 20 August 1904, p. 323, informs us about decision of Plenary Consistory of the Orthodox Church to give to painter Smigelschi painting of the orthodox cathedral from Sibiu. To study thoroughly the technique of Byzantine painting, makes a study trip in Bukovina³⁰, to the old monasteries. On this occasion, he encounters Nicolae Iorga in Bucharest, the host of the period spent here.

A fruitful period follows for the artist, who receives a series of orders to paint some churches, both in the urban environment³¹, and in the rural environment³².

The news of Octavian Smigelschi's death took the cultural community of Romanians from Transylvania by surprise. *Unirea* newspaper neither publishes a funeral advertisement, but renders directly, to *Feuilleton* column, in issue 129 from 16 November 1912, pp. 2-4, the funeral speech delivered by Alexandru Ciura to the funeral³³. Out of praises and considerations about life and artistic activity of the painter, we remark:

- „his appearance fascinated whole world at a time”,
- „he regenerated Byzantine painting and changed it, by a new glow”,
- „he was the greatest painter, that Transylvanian Romanians took pride in him and we were a too poor nation to support according to capacities such an exceptional talent”.

After death of the artist, *Unirea* newspaper continues to publish articles³⁴ about the life and work of the great painter. One of these drew our attention, being signed by Nicolae Iorga, intimate of painter Smigelschi. Title of the article, *Smigelschi și România (Smigelschi and Romania)*, hides polemics between newspapers *Unirea*, *Neamul Românesc* and *Românul* as for indifference of authorities from Romania and decision makers concerning participation of the Transylvanian painter's works to the exhibition from Bucharest.

²⁹ After his death, on the occasion of the exhibition from Budapest of Belle arte Society from the capital, *Unirea* newspaper, Year XXIII, issue 99, 4 Oct. 1913, p.4-5, publishes the following: „*Smigelschi's paintings will evidence to the foreigners, how many moments of creative artistic inspiration our nation takes from the valleys of Transylvania, in all aspects of its life. [...] A striking Romanian spirit dominates the whole exhibition, a piece from Transylvania's soul, in the turmoil of the great foreign city...*”. This article was also taken over by *Românul* newspaper.

³⁰ *Smigelschi în Bucovina*, in *Unirea*, Year XIV, issue 49, 3 Dec. 1904, p.447.

³¹ In Timișoara, the church from Fabrica district, see in *Unirea*, Year XVI, issue 50, 8 Dec. 1906, p.392.

³² The church from Tâmpăhaza-Uifalău, see in *Unirea*, An XX, issue 30, 23 Jul. 1910, p.254-255; Church from Ilva-mare, in *Unirea*, Year XX, issue 49, 3 Dec. 1910, pp.402-403.

³³ About funeral of painter Smigelschi see also *Octavian Smigelschi*, obituary in *Drapelul*, Lugoj, issue 126, 30 Oct. 1912; *Octavian Smigelschi*, obituary in *Românul*, Arad, issue 241, 1 Nov. 1912; Valer Bota, *Înmormântarea pictorului Octavian Smigelschi*, in *Drapelul*, Lugoj, issue 243, 6 Nov. 1912.

³⁴ Article published in *Művészet* magazine, issue 1, from 1913, Budapest, taken over in *Unirea*, Year XXIII, issue 42, 26 Apr. 1913, p.8.

Under the guise of striking Romanian spirit towards Transylvania, professed in Bucharest, as least as art is concerned, hid envies, artists' prides and different interests. Iorga's dissatisfaction was completely justifiable also in relation to Orthodox Episcopacy of Galați which although contracted the work of painting the Episcopal cathedral from Galați with Smigelschi, subsequently preferred to entrust it to a Hungarian³⁵.

A possible answer seems to come from critic Al. Tzigara-Samurçaș, whose article published in *Convorbiri literare* is taken over by *Unirea*, under the title *Octavian Smigelschi. Cestiunea picturii religioase* (*Octavian Smigelschi. The issue of religious painting*). With pros and cons on quality of Byzantine painting of the master, the author insists on complying with rules, although finally admits innovative contribution of Smigelschi in technique of Byzantine painting, yet mentioning „being much too expensive for our times, it hardly could become dominant again ensuring churches the imposing richness of before”³⁶.

Artistic activity of painter Smigelschi enticed young talents that confirmed throughout time the school of the master. Two examples are illustrative along this line: Flaviu C. Domșa³⁷ and A.W. Zeiler³⁸. Both, friends and apprentices³⁹ of master Smigelschi, remarked artistically by continuation of Byzantine style imposed by the master. Even if research period had in view in this approach includes the artistic debut of the two painters, there is sufficient information in *Unirea* to create a first positive impression on their activity.

Thus, *Unirea*, issue 1 from 5 January 1907, p. 4, records painting of the church and iconostasis from Galda de jos by the drawing teacher Flaviu C. Domșa. The same article mentions also painting of the iconostasis of the church from Șeica. Also in 1907, on the anniversary of the president of Artisan Society from Blaj, Pop Gavril, Domșa paints his portrait in oil painting⁴⁰. Painter got involved also in realisation of commemorative album⁴¹ Augustin Bunea. Newspaper *Unirea*, issue 30 from 23 July 1910, p.255, mentions the cover of the album *in more colours after the original of our painter Flaviu C. Domșa*, the last portrait of canon Bunea, made in four colours and 20 clichés.

An interesting text draws our attention in issue 122 of *Unirea* from 23 November 1912, p. 5:

„They have the sublime mission of replacing foreign paintings – Jewish – with the faces painted in the clean Byzantine style by a painter of ours”.

The text refers to initiative of Domșa of painting the icon of the Saviour and Virgin Mary⁴², for typographic multiplication of them and their selling at the price of 4 crowns. Article still mentions that Domșa „painted numerous iconostases”, although *Unirea* records

³⁵ *Smigelschi și România*, in *Unirea*, An XXIII, issue 119, 25 Nov. 1913, p.4.

³⁶ Al.Tzigara-Samurçaș, *Cestiunea picturii bizantine*, in *Unirea*, Year XXIV, issue 69, 11 Jul. 1904, pp.2-3 and issue 70, 14 Jul. 1914, pp.2-4.

³⁷ Cornel Tatai Baltă, *Secvențe din arta plastică blăjeană*, Blaj, Editată de Casa de cultură din Blaj, 1993, pp.39-49.

³⁸ Cornel Tatai Baltă, *op.cit.*, pp.50-59.

³⁹ In the advertisement published by A.W.Zeiler in *Unirea poporului* mentioned that he participated to painting of churches from Rădești and Cacova, as collaborator of master Smigelschi. See *Unirea poporului*, Year VI, issues 17, 27 Apr.1924, p.7.

⁴⁰ See in *Unirea*, Year XVII, issue 6, 16 Feb.1907, p.71.

⁴¹ See commentary of Cornel Tatai Baltă, in *op.cit.*, p.46.

⁴² See Cornel Tatai Blată, *op.cit.*, p.49.

only two until 1918. We only remember that, in his turn, Flaviu C. Domșa had his own disciples out of whom Eugen Găscă⁴³ remarked, one of renowned⁴⁴ Romanian painters.

About A.W. Zeiler we encounter one piece of information within the advertisement entitled *Iconostase (Iconostases)*, in *Unirea*, issue 39 from 18 April 1914, p.5. Artist offers for selling two complete sets of icons painted for a small iconostasis, encompassing „4 main faces, 6 of holiday, 12 with apostles, 1 Last Supper, 1 Holy Trinity, 1 Crucifixion” and a complete set of icons painted for a great iconostasis comprising previously mentioned pieces to which are added also „1 God the Father, 12 prophets, 2 faces for the main door (royal), 2 lateral doors, 1 Annunciation.” Noteworthy is also the title by which he recommends to the public, *academic painter in Blaj*.

We mention that research carried out within this approach, contributes also to completing and rectifying some information⁴⁵ published based on consulting archives of Ludaș Greek-Catholic Parish, concerning person of painter A.W. Zeiler.

Research period imposed by the approach limits us only to this information, yet *Unirea* newspaper followed and encouraged artistic activity of the two painters on the whole route of their affirmation. Although, neither of them attained the value of Smigelschi, his fame encouraged affirmation of some painters, otherwise remained anonymous, through works, positive criticism promoted within the newspaper. We remember Augustin Cucerzan⁴⁶, Nicolae Baci⁴⁷, painter Petride⁴⁸ and Ioan Bochiș, Greek-Catholic vicar from Ormanu, Gherla diocese.

Unirea newspaper publishes in issue 31 from 5 August 1893, p.253, a laudatory article entitled *Pictura bisericească (Ecclesiastical painting)* referring to work of priest Ioan Bochiș, pointing out his indubitable artistic characteristics. He is mentioned as restaurateur of painting of iconostases from more churches from Gherla diocese. Priest Ioan Sonea, vicar from Suplac, completes information by an article sent for publication to *Unirea* newspaper, on regional priests' conference. He depicts surprise of colleague priests concerning passion of Bochiș and delight regarding such good works⁴⁹.

To complete the overall picture of *Unirea* newspaper, as promoter of Romanian culture and painting, we must mention a series of books and specialised studies published within its pages.

One of the most successful artistic analysis written in Romanian referred to the work the *Last Supper* painted by Leonardo da Vinci and is published in two consecutive issues of

⁴³ Negoită Lăptoiu, *Eugen Găscă*, București, 1984.

⁴⁴ See *Enciclopedia artiștilor români contemporani*, vol.I, București, 1996, p.87 and *Dicționarul artiștilor români contemporani*, București, 1976, p.208.

⁴⁵ Parochial archive includes notes about construction and painting of the iconostasis of the Greek-Catholic Church from Ludaș in Vienna. Indeed, construction of the iconostasis is made in Vienna, yet its painting was realised in Blaj, in the workshop of painter A.W. Zeiler. See Russu Sorin Valer, *Monografia Parohiei Greco-Catolice Ludaș*, Tg-Mureș, Casa de Editură Mureș, 2010, p.71; *Unirea poporului*, Year VI, issue 17, 27 Apr.1924, p.7.

⁴⁶ See advertisement from *Unirea*, Year XXII, issue 81, 1 Aug.1912, p.7.

⁴⁷ Nicoleta Baci recommends as Romanian ecclesiastic painter specialised in art of ecclesiastical painting acquired abroad, ready to make for a fee painting for iconostases, banners, any icons or renovation of churches. See *Unirea*, Year XX, issue7, 12 Feb.1910, p.69.

⁴⁸ Academic painter Petride is mentioned as author of the painting of the church from Șumal, Bihor. See *Unirea*, Year XX, issue 49, 3 Dec.1910, p.403.

⁴⁹ See also depiction of works of Ioan Bochiș in *Unirea*, Year III, issue 35, 2 Sept. 1893, pp.284-285.

*Unirea*⁵⁰, entitled *Cina cea de taină de Leonardo da Vinci* (*The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci*). Merging of religion with art, theology with aesthetics, punctual analysis of each figure embodied in the painting and motivation of its expressivity open to us the perspective of the whole religious work of the artist.

Petru Dulfu⁵¹, Dumitru Stăncescu⁵², Dimitrie Comșa⁵³ are only a few reference names mentioned in *Unirea* with works necessary to each artist either beginner or well-known. Publication of some complex studies such as *Începuturile picturii creștine*⁵⁴ (*Beginnings of Christian Painting*), *Despre iconografia bizantină*⁵⁵ (*About Byzantine Iconography*) or *Crucifixul și învierea în arta creștină*⁵⁶ (*Crucifix or Rebirth in Christian Art*) follow evolution of interest for this art manifested by the nation. Definitely, interest was influenced by appearance of Romanian painters equal to Smigelschi, Domșa or Zeiler that remained in close spiritual connection with communities within which they expressed own technique and value of Byzantine painting.

Unirea newspaper maintained alive this connection between artists and nation, by whole journalistic activity manifesting as an authentic promoter of culture and also of painting, less understood or appreciated by the wide public.

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⁵⁰ *Cina cea de taină de Leonardo da Vinci*, in *Unirea*, Year I, issue 46, 14 Nov.1891, p.336. See also *Unirea* Year I, issue 47, 21 Nov.1891, p.374.

⁵¹ Petru Dulfu publishes the work *Noțiuni de estetică*, București, Tipografia Basilescu, 1891. Volume is destined for study in school and includes exact definitions, easily understandable examples; there are underlined the merits of the church and religion in developing of arts. See *Unirea*, Year I, issue 52, 26 Dec.1891, p.416.

⁵² Dumitru Stăncescu signs translation of work *Arta creștină. Epoca Gotică* (*Christian Art. Gothic Age*) by E. Pecant and C. H. Baude and is published under the same title to *Feuilleton* column in *Unirea*, Year VI, issue 20, 16 May 1896, pp.153-154.

⁵³ Dimitrie Comșa realizes album *Ornamentica română* (*Romanian ornamentation*) that includes 284 embroideries and textiles. The author explains: *Painters and all lovers of plastic arts, masters or dilettantes will find in folk ornamentation, gathered in albums, an inexhaustible source of inspiration and Romanian motives*. See *Unirea*, Year XV, issue 3, 21 Jan.1905, p.26.

⁵⁴ The study *Începuturile picturii creștine* is published in series, between issues *Unirea*, Year VIII, issues 6, 5 Mar.1898, p.70 and *Unirea*, Year VIII, issue 20, 21 May 1898, p.158.

⁵⁵ Study *Despre iconografia bizantină* is published in series to *Parte Științifică-literară* (*Scientific-literary part*) column, between issues *Unirea*, Year VIII, issue 25, 25 Jun.1898, pp.198-199 and *Unirea*, Year VIII, issue 45, 12 Nov.1898, p.358.

⁵⁶ Study *Crucifixul și învierea în arta creștină* is published in *Unirea*, Year IX, issue17, 29 Apr.1899, pp.142-142.

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