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The Rite of Artoklasia in the Eastern Orthodox Church: A Sacred Connection between Pre-Eucharistic and Eucharistic Table

Abstract: This study deals with the rite of artoklasia in the Eastern Orthodox Church, as an integral part of the monastic all-night vigil, in order to identify its historical origins and stages of teleturgical development, and also to give the appropriate, theological and liturgical, interpretation of this akolouthia. Blessing of the five loaves of bread, wheat, wine and oil has been constituted in the East in order to strengthen the assembled Christians in a physical and spiritual way toward liturgical heed, watching and praying on the eve of the second coming of Messiah, which is being foretasted at the holy liturgy after the monastic agrypnia. Artoklasia was gradually introduced into all monasteries and parish churches of the Eastern Church under the impact of *Typikon* of Mar Saba's Lavra, starting probably from the period of the 10th–11th century, and still holds a unique place in the liturgical life of the Eastern Orthodox Christians.

Key words: all-night vigil, artoklasia, worship, *Mar Saba's Typikon*, liturgy

Povzetek: **Obred artoklasije v pravoslavni Cerkvi: sveta vez med predevhariščno in evharistično mizo**

Pričujoča študija obravnava obred artoklasije (procesije pri večernem molitvenem bogoslužju) v pravoslavni Cerkvi kot sestavni del meniškega vsenočnega bdenja, da bi ugotovili zgodovinski izvor in razvojne stopnje akolutije (večernega molitvenega bogoslužja) ter jo zaobjeli s primerno teološko in liturgično interpretacijo. Blagoslov petih hlebov kruha, pšenice, vina in olja so na Vzhodu uvedli zato, da bi zbrane kristjane na telesen in duhoven način pripravili na liturgična dejanja, ki zadevajo pričakovanje in molitev na predvečer drugega Odrešenikovega prihoda, ki ga lahko predokušamo pri svetem bogoslužju po koncu meniške agripnije (bdenja). Artoklasijo so v vzhodni Cerkvi pod vplivom *Tipikona* iz Lavre svetega Save Palestinskega v 10. in 11. stoletju postopno uvedli v vse samostane in župnijske cerkve. Ta obred ima še danes edinstveno mesto v liturgičnem življenju pravoslavnih kristjanov.

Ključne besede: vsenočno bdenje, artoklasija, čaščenje, *Tipikon svetega Save Palestinskega*, liturgija

1. Introduction

A modern way of life in the world of many and different changes represents a great advantage for the entire humanity. In spite of such a complex reality, a sacramental view of life enables Christians to see and experience Divine astonishing love in all things at all times. Keeping in mind that the Church is the Body of Christ and God's own people called to worship the Father »in spirit and in truth« (John 4,23-24), the purpose of salvation and the focus of christian life is *par excellence* communion with the Triune God. Exactly through this prism should be viewed the commitment to the critical importance of worship in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and in the same time, why it has poured its best theological content into liturgical life, to the point that more theological content can be found in worship than in text books. (Williams and Anstall 1990, 205) Parallel with that, it is worth stressing that many constitutive elements of liturgical expressions of the Eastern Orthodox Christians have Jewish roots (Dugmore 1964) and that they were getting the new meaning through the process of enculturation in the Romaic or Byzantine Empire, but also, above all, by comprehensive and never-ending sanctification »by the word of God and prayer« (1 Timothy 4,5).

In the group of partially examined rites of the Eastern Orthodox Church, a unique place holds *akolouthia* of *artoklasia* (ἡ ἀρτοκλασία – the breaking of the bread, ἡ εὐλόγησις τῶν ἄρτων – the blessing of the breads) or the blessing of the offerings – five *prophoras* (loaves of bread), wheat, wine and oil. This is an integral part of the monastic all-night vigil or *agrypnia* (ἡ μοναχικὴ ἀγρυπνία), which is rightfully characterized as a culmination of the common prayer according to *Monastic Typikon of the Lavra of Mar Saba* near Jerusalem. (Fundulis 2004, 147) In this study we are going to give an examination of historical origins, teleturgical characteristics and, finally, theological and liturgical interpretation of the eite of *artoklasia* as the concluding remarks of our research.

2. Historical Origins of the Artoklasia Rite

Beside the actual terminological problems with understanding and correct defining of the liturgical terms *panikhida*¹ and *agrypnia*,² it is well-known that the practice of all-night praying of some persons or the communities was undoubtedly testified in the life of humankind through the history (Skretta 2010, s. v. »Agrypnia«). The corner-stone of the institution of the all-night vigil among Christians are the words of the crucified and resurrected Son of God, Lord Jesus Christ who

¹ Although the word *panikhida* (ἡ παννυχίς) has several meanings – such as: all-night watching, vigil; night office, comprising twelve prayers, according to the *Pachomian Rule*, and also psalmody; Pagan night festival in the time of St. John the Chrysostom (Lampe 1961, s. v. »Panikhida«) –, we should be very cautious in discussing about *panikhida* as the specific type of common prayer in the Eastern Orthodox Church's tradition (Uspenskij 2004, 111–142).

² The etymology of *agrypnia* derives from the Greek word *ἀγρυπνέω* – be awake, pass sleepless nights, keep vigil (Lampe 1961, s. v. »Agrypnia«; Skretta 2010, s. v. »Agrypnia«).

gave Himself as an example by His all-night praying at different places. According to the evangelists, Messiah had instructed His disciples in liturgical heed, watching and praying on the eve of His Second coming by the words: »Take you heed, watch and pray: for you know not when the time is /.../. Watch you therefore: for you know not when the Master of the house comes, at evening, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, watch.« (Mark 13,33.35-37; Luke 21,36)

Apart from this very strong and undeniable eschatological perspective of the christian all-night praying, in the texts of all four canonical Gospels an inspiring moment of Jesus' blessing of the five loaves of bread and two fishes is mentioned. This miracle story is also giving the information about breaking of those loaves and Christ's giving of these blessed foods to disciples and five thousand people around. (Mathew 14,13-22; Mark 6,31-46; Luke 9,10-17; John 6,1-14) Later on, Jesus dismisses the multitudes and goes to pray. In the next place, He is strengthening the faith of the apostles in the boat in the middle of the night, and finally starting His famous sermon about heavenly bread in the ancient synagogue at Capernaum in this manner: »Labor not for the food which perishes, but for that food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for on him has God the Father set his seal.« (John 6,27) It should be stated that previously mentioned facts from the Gospels vividly express mystagogical and eucharistic nature of the following the christian practice of all-night vigil. Precisely in the context of these sacred events and words should be examined and reconsidered the institution and development of artoklasia.

Thanks to detailed and reliable results of examination of worship of the Eastern Orthodox Church, today we know something more about the coexistence of the two typikons – Asmatic and monastic (Milošević 2012, 124–248). Moreover, the liturgical practice of vigils has been testified in both typikons (Uspenskij 2004, 144). However, the results of searching for the most ancient data about the rite of artoklasia in the *Mar Saba's Typikon* show that the oldest relevant rubrics are written in the Manuscripts № 1096 and № 1095 of the Jerusalem redaction of the mentioned typikon from the 12th century (Dmitrievskij 1917, 23; 66), with some striking mutual differences.³ Such a point of view raises the question: When exactly was this rite created this? Let us try to find the answer starting from the analysis of the terms artoklasia and blessing of the bread-loaves.

Terminus technicus artoklasia together with the term blessing of the loaves of the offered bread, express two, very old characteristics of liturgical usage of bread in the Eastern and Western Church. After the sanctification of the offered loaves of bread and the cup of wine and water at the Divine Eucharist, and their

³ In the Manuscript № 1096 the rubrics of artoklasia mention only the blessing over sliced breads with small piece of probably kneaded bread, but without any information about wheat, wine and oil (Dmitrievskij 1917, 23). On the contrary, according to the Manuscript № 1095, a priest blesses three breads, a cup of the best wine and wheat from monastery granary (66). One century later, in the Manuscript № 1097 of the Sinai's redaction of *Mar Saba's Typikon* written in the year 1214, rubrics are mentioning just the blessing over three breads (401).

becoming the Body and Blood of Christ, bread was entirely broken into pieces for taking the communion of all assembled Christians. This mystagogical practice was followed, on the one hand, in accordance with teleturgical structure of the Last Supper, and, on the other, due to predominant characteristics of every-day eating of bread – its breaking.

The second term of this rite reveals the attempt of the Eastern Orthodox Church for making sacramental difference between eucharistic bread and eulogia-bread,⁴ which was blessed and sanctified in the case of artoklasia, according to St. Symeon of Thessalonika (d. 1429): »διὰ τὸν κόπον διετυπώθη τῆς ἀγρυπνίας, ἵνα καὶ εὐλογίας Χριστοῦ, καὶ μικρᾶς παρακλήσεως οἱ ἀδελφοὶ διὰ τὸν κόπον τυχόντες.« (Symeon Thessalonikes 1866, 620b)

Parallel to this, if we mention the liturgical practice of the early Church concerning the celebration of agape and Holy Liturgy together in the evening (Jungman 1959, 29–38), and later only the agape with customized blessing and breaking of the offered bread (Hippolyte de Rome 1946, 57–62), then it seems clearly that these highlighted facts could be the starting point of establishing and practicing of the office of artoklasia during agrypnia in the Mar Saba's Lavra, and afterwards in the rest of the monasteries and churches around and inside Jerusalem. Although it is very difficult to determine the precise moment of the beginning of its celebration, we can presume that it could be at least the period from the 10th–11th century or even earlier, because Nikon of the Black Mountain, while he was writing his last work, the *Taktikon* (between the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th), had used the term »monday of artoklasias« for the first day after the Sunday of Antipascha. (Hannick 2014, 72) Moreover, it should be said that the *Typikon of Mar Saba's Lavra* had started to have its new and stronger impact on liturgical life of the monasteries and churches at the East, firstly in Asia Minor, from the 11th and during the 12th century, then in the Nicæan Empire in the first half of the 13th century, and in Constantinople and the rest of the Romanic or Byzantine Empire after 1261 (Pentkovskij 2003, 79–84). *Mar Saba's Typikon* will definitely become the ruling *taktikon* in the Eastern Orthodox Church during the 14th and the first half of the 15th century until today.

The earliest evidence of practicing the rite of artoklasia in liturgical tradition of the medieval Serbian Orthodox Church are written in two different manuscript copies of the translated second redaction of *Mar Saba's Typikon*, *Nicodim's Typikon* from 1319 (Trifunović 2007, 16a), and *Roman's Typikon* from 1331 (Simić 2010, 54). However, one thing still remains unknown. Could it be possible that the rite of artoklasia was actually celebrated in the time of St. Archbishop Sava I (1175–1236), especially at the end of the 12th century and during the first three decades of the 13th?

⁴ It shouldn't be forgotten that in the Western Church, when the faithful no longer furnished the altar-bread, a custom arose of bringing the bread to the church for the special purpose of having it blessed and distributed among those present as a token of mutual love and union, especially in France. This blessed bread was called *panis benedictus*, *panis lustratus*, *panis lustralis*, or in French *pain bénit*. It was differed from *eulogia*, called *antidoron*, because it was common bread which received a special benediction. In the Roman ritual before the Second Vatican Council, there were six blessings for the bread. (Goggin 1913, s. v. »Bread, Liturgical use of«)

In the Chapter 8 of the *Hilandar Typikon* (Jagić 1898, 21–22) and *Studenica Typikon* (Saint Sava 2018, 64), we find a commandment that agrypnia should take place on Sundays, at the feasts of the Lord, and commemorations of the memories of other saints, which will be instructed by the Synaxarion. Above all, Chapter 35 of the *Studenica Typikon* ordains as it follows: »You should celebrate with a feast and all-night vigil service the remembrance [of] our three-blessed and glorious father and consolidator, Lord and Monk Simeon, which falls on the month of February, [day] thirteen, which you should celebrate in a splendid manner, with chanting, and candles, with abundance of food and drink.« (2018, 188–189)

So, if we take into account that the first Serbian Archbishop was highly experienced in intensive and dynamic worship at Mount Athos and in the monasteries of Thessalonika and Constantinople, where dominating typikon was under the impact of Mar Saba's one, then it would be an acceptable presupposition that such a rite as the blessing of the bread-prosphoras during agrypnia was, thanks to St. Sava I, already introduced in Hilandar, Studenica and in the rest of the monasteries of medieval Serbian and maritime lands.

3. Teleturgical characteristics of Akolouthia of Artoklasia

Although there aren't so many teleturgical characteristics of akolouthia of artoklasia, it is worth mentioning that today's celebrating of this rite in the Eastern Orthodox Church should be accomplished before dismissal of the Great Vesper during agrypnia. Five small loaves of bread-prosphora, a measure of wheat, a measure of wine, and a measure of oil are set upon the analogion in the central part of the church (nave).⁵ A deacon or a priest censes crosswise these offerings and the assembled people, while the chanters are singing troparion: »Hail, most blessed Mary, Virgin Theotokos, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, for you have given birth to the Savior of our souls.« Then the priest takes one of the loaves into his hands, blesses cruciform the others bread-prosphoras, returns the taken-one and starts reading aloud the artoklasia prayer:

»Lord, Jesus Christ, our God, You blessed the five loaves and from them five thousand men were filled. Bless now [showing with the right hand] these loaves, the wheat, the wine and oil and multiply them in this city [or in this village, or in this holy community], and in Your whole world, and sanctify Your faithful servants who partake of them. For You bless and sanctify all things, Christ our God, and to You we offer up glory together with Your eternal Father and Your holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.« (Služebnik 2007, 31–32)

After Psalm 33 and priest's blessing, the particles of the sanctified loaves of bread dipped into the blessed wine, are being distributed to all of the participants

⁵ On the Christian place of worship as a distinct phenomenon: Debevec 2016, 165–199.

as the only allowed food before taking the communion after the end of all-night vigil.

Beside the fact that the vast majority of manuscripted and specially typed copies of the already-mentioned typicon, starting from the 14th century, command blessing the five loaves of bread-prosphora, wine, wheat and oil, there is a unique characteristic of celebration of the rite of artoklasia in the manuscript copy of *Mar Saba's Typikon*, № 385 Paris Library of Jerusalem-Constantinopolitan redaction from the 14th century. An unknown author had witnessed the widespread practice in many monasteries and specially in the Studios monastery in Constantinople that after the dismissal of the vesper at Agrypnia, the community goes to the monastic granary, where the priest is reading the prayer of artoklasia and blessing the wheat. (Dmitrievskij 1917, 183)

Even though the rite of artoklasia today still has an important role in the worship of the Eastern Orthodox Church, it seems that quite a few number of participants in this akolouthia are slowly forgetting that the particles of the blessed loaves of bread dipped into the sanctified wine are the gifts to the all participants of agrypnia as a humble nourishment in effort of their physical and spiritual strengthening during the all-night prayer. Finally, celebrating of artoklasia is being allowed, according to St. Symeon of Thessalonika, only in the case of practicing Agrypnia. (Symeon Thessalonikes 1866, 620ab)

4. Concluding remarks

Theological significance of the blessing, at first the loaves of bread, and later one wheat, wine, and oil, during the monastic agrypnia, is a very interesting and inspiring topic. Celebration of this rite is undisputedly the fulfillment of the Lord's commandments, written in the biblical tradition of the Church. In that way, Eastern Orthodox Christians are making anamnesis of the miracle story, but also showing a clear and strong orientation toward liturgical heed, watching and praying on the eve of the Second Coming of Messiah, which is going to be foretasted at the Holy Liturgy after agrypnia. Parallel to this, eating and drinking of the sanctified offerings of bread and wine, then usage of wheat for the preparing of prosphoras and kollyba, and oil for eating and anointment – these are the blessing of Christ and the fountain of sanctification and many gifts for the human body and soul.

Consequently, from the historical point of view, it should be stated that the rite of artoklasia was created in the context of careful and devoted monastic keeping of the unbreakable connection between every-day, pre-eucharistic and eucharistic table. Moreover, in the light of this statement, akolouthia of artoklasia could be understood as the rite of small monastic agape or sacred introduction to Divine Eucharist, which follows immediately after agrypnia. Also, this rite is an opportunity for all of the partakers in this magnificent all-night sanctification of time and space to get physical and spiritual strength for continuing of such a bles-

sed labor. The aim of such a motion is food which endures unto everlasting life – Body and Blood of Christ.

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