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## EARLY CHRISTIAN ANTI-SYMBOLISM (II)

### *Korakeresztény anti-szimbolika (II.)*

At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Christians distanced themselves not only from the state religion of the Roman Empire, but also from the Jews, oriental religions and mysticism or rather from Gnosticism, the religious trend incorporating Greek thought. To keep their faith pure, they created their own ethics and an organization serving its maintenance and propagation. However, Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century created their own rose symbolism, denying the Roman religion that maintained the rose cult most together, with the flower cult of the well-to-do, by permanently narrowing its framework and by Christianizing its content.

According to the Greeks, for Christians, in the elaboration of the minute differences of rhetoric and spiritual possibilities, the rose gives a chance to compare the lapidary statements. First of all, the thorny nature of the rose was made to contradict the flower. The differences gave way to a comparison on the spatial, temporal, biological and psychological levels; however, the consequence is always of a moral character. The thornless rose is the most excellent environment, it can be considered the indicator of Paradise, and its thorny variant is the creature after the Fall. And this duality raises the memory of the plant having an allegorical function, notable only for its beauty and lack of harmful features, and the pursuit of it.

This era, with the change of the sense to a Christian one, given the appropriate reasoning, used the group of symbols with pleasure, in which the rose, based on only one botanic feature, is compared with other kinds of flowers. The plants of Paradise embody excelling in the Christian virtues. The immaculate lily and the rose reddening like the blood of the martyr in the first Christian sources could not have referred to one single person: the virtue of the lily was the characteristic of women who offered their virginity and the martyrdom of the rose was that of men offering their lives for Christ.

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## WESTERN CHURCH FATHERS

The clerical figure of the Middle Ages, educated, i. e. bishop, was first manifest in Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine. A part of their knowledge was familiarity with Greek culture. Therefore their rose images emerged from the Hellenistic tradition.

### AMBROSE: *HEXAEMERON*

Saint Ambrose (330/340–397) in his *De Paradiso* described the sometime and invaluable lost worldly paradise, based on the ideas of Philo and Saint Basil the Great. This garden was created by God and placed in an earthly area where it served as the residence of the first human couple. Ambrose, in his work compiled from his speeches about the six days of creation, in *Hexaemeron*, namely in the part describing the third day, spoke about one of the plants more fully. He stated that at that time, since he was speaking about the time before the embarrassing process of the fall, the rose was budding without thorns (LEVI D'ANCONA 1991: 332). “Once the rose grew without thorns in the flower fields and the most beautiful flower brought spring without deception (i. e. it does not deceive with its thorns), later on the charming flower was surrounded by thorns (surrounded the flower’s charm) as if they were holding a mirror to human life, which (i. e. life) ‘prickles’ kindness and is related to his (own) endurance of the ‘spikes’ that stand for life’s troubles.”<sup>1</sup>

However, what is notable besides the fact that the rose itself is subject to the fall and it has to wear the consequence, the thorn, is that Ambrose refers to the plant as the most beautiful flower. In *Hexaemeron*, Origen’s influence, according to which the holy text has hypertextual meaning, can also be shown.

The rose may have been the most beautiful flower for allegorical reasons, but how Ambrose thought about this beauty, we have no information. Instead, the double interpretation of the rose is evident. Its complexity resembles the positive and negative sides going hand in hand. The rose that did not constitute a threat in the beginning is the harbinger of the season of blossom, but the flower surrounded with thorns warned the passing observer that the nice sight can be deceptive. The charming creature deceives you because it is surrounded with thorns – as in human life, all of the kind things are surrounded by troubles. This rose first of all received a figurative meaning, whose resolution was made possible by botanical import. The plant features mentioned carry contradictory moral values – the conflicting method, which can be easily detected in the rhetoric of the text, was a favourite procedure of the Roman orator’s practice.

Ambrose was known to be an excellent orator – in this he transcended his Christian predecessors, who did not appreciate enough the knowledge collected together in the trivium. But he was also an ascetic, as can be supposed from the symbolic manifestation of the rose with thorns, referring to the present era.

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<sup>1</sup> Ambrosius Mediolanensis *Hexameron* Cl. 0123, 3, 11, 48, 91, 3.

## SAINT JEROME

Ambrose was the governor of Milan, and then its bishop for 24 years; asceticism was considered one of his virtues. This asceticism was praised so much in his life and in the coming centuries was surpassed only by that of his peer, the Illirian Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus (340/45–419/420). Jerome did not get less by way of honour, either. Pope Damasus charged Jerome with the revision of *Itala* (actually the *New Testament*). Complemented by the amended text of the *Old Testament*, it resulted in the latest Latin version of *Holy Scripture* that was accepted a thousand years ago. This fact in itself ensured Jerome's later citation and thus the maintenance and the rose interpretations offered by him and their treatment as a norm.

Born on the border of Dalmatia and Pannonia, he was brought up in a Christian atmosphere, though he was christened as an adult. He deepened his Catholic knowledge in Rome, and as a result of this thorough training he became outstandingly educated. He was conversant not only with the neoplatonic ideas and with the Roman rhetoric, but, as in the course of his life he travelled to remote places from the Rhone to Jerusalem, from Athens to Constantinople, from Antioch, where he was a hermit, to Alexandria, he gained rich knowledge of places and gained personal experience. His extensive correspondence also contributed to his fame and credibility. His command of the Greek and Hebrew languages made him one of the most educated and popular geniuses of his age.

Saint Jerome's writings contribute valuable data to the evaluation of symbols in Christianity. In one of his comments he put two questions in which plants served as similes. The possible answer arises as a result of the comparison: the compared must be characterised with the redness of the rose and the whiteness of the lily. "What grows as red as the rose? What grows as white as the lily?"<sup>2</sup>

In this rich career we can find this pair of questions elsewhere, too. In one of the explanations of the Psalms, he picked two of the flowers of the field by calling them by their names and mentioning their associated meaning. The rose by its redness and the lily by its whiteness are different, they are more appreciated than all the others growing in the fields, so they are precious flowers. "We go out to the field, it has many flowers: here roses grow red, there lilies grow white, flowers are different."<sup>3</sup>

Knowledge of which relation was being called up in the works of the writer considered to be the greatest in the patristic era? Is there another meaning of the rose other than the common one, might it be the symbolisation of Christian joy?

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<sup>2</sup> Hieronymus *Commentarii in euangelium Matthaei* Cl. 1, 873.

<sup>3</sup> Hieronymus *Tractatus lix in psalmos* Cl. 0592, 77, 4.

Jerome considered it the Christian reaction to be followed in cases of indignation after a major hurt has been experienced, which necessarily brings its own reward: “If you are always furious when describing abominable things, after Persius, I will sing to you of a masculine beauty so that generations of kings and queens and girls will be mad for you, wherever you go may the rose grow there.”<sup>4</sup>

But what are these roses growing as a reward like? Are they the toughness of man, the desirability triggering royal interest, the favour of girls? And what is the reward-making rose, if it can be obtained for nothing?

The meaning of the rhetorical structure: you are furious, so I deride you; you should be glad because I named the reasons that triggered the anger, the abominable things; I provoke you with worldly vanities that I described as abominable and because of which you became furious.

Our interpretation is twofold: on the one hand it can be interpreted as approving anger, on the other hand, as the disapproval of Jerome. If we read as a Christian, the latter is correct.

In this excerpt, the dichotomy of Jerome’s thinking is shown: his equal sensitivity towards Christian virtue and worldliness. On one hand, he blames the weak with a mad anger, and he thought this behaviour demanded authority and was normal. Was it incipient Christian morality becoming universal that was manifest in him, too? The morality that was demanded by the Western Church of the empire converting to monotheism, the exchange of the Greek language for Latin, from Greek looseness to Latin rigidity and to the idea of ‘*vir bonus*’? Which after the acceptance of the victory of the Orthodox following the debate on the Trinity and later on that of the Mary as the Mother of God, and spread the spectacular church ceremonies, the cult of relics, the building of churches over the graves of saints, and recognised the advantages of the clerical career; meanwhile did it become a norm that those who are not loyal to the Church are not loyal to the emperor himself, either?

Is this sheer worldliness the concomitant of the formation of the imperial religion?

After all, as Jerome claimed, if his reader is angry with the way he describes things, an ironic song could as well be written because of his hot temper. The irony felt about the things of everyday life reddened in the rose which was presented to his addressee in his letter by Jerome. Jerome perceived how worldliness had gained ground in Christianity. So this could be the other side.

The rose reminiscent of the first type referred to worldly content. But the rose has another association as well, without which Jerome, who read the holy texts in the original, could not have mentioned the flower.

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<sup>4</sup> Hieronymus *Epistulae* Cl. 40, 54, 2, 311, 3.

Jerome saw the rose as a significance connected to Christ. By this he meant the means of turning away from worldliness: the pledge of virginity, with which the believer engaged him/herself to Christ; and the pledge of martyrdom in order to arrive before Christ.

In his 22<sup>nd</sup> letter, which was sent in 384 to a female friend of his, who withdrew herself from worldly life to Rome, for the salvation of her soul, he focussed on the question of virginity and emphasised its value. Contrary to the carnal indecency of many pagan religions, the emphasis on sexual purity is a powerful phenomenon in religious literature, and for this occurring in the 4<sup>th</sup> century as well, this epistle, which was copied and spread in its age innumerable times among others, is evidence.

In the text, the rose expresses the value that is represented by the marriage to Christ as opposed to worldly marriage. It refers to spirituality appearing as one's salvation. "I praise the nuptials, I praise the marriage, but only because they beget virgins for you. From the thorn I pick roses, from the ground – gold, from the shell – pearl. Well, those who plough will plough all day long? They themselves sometimes enjoy the fruit of their work as well, do they not? They respect marriage more if they appreciate more what is born from it. Mother, why are you jealous of your daughter? [...] She did good to you: you may be God's mother-in-law!"<sup>5</sup>

Saint Jerome cited the *Song of Songs*, as every piece of work in connection with virginity, and he interpreted virginity according to Origen's homily, which he himself. The girl who is addressed, as in Origen, is Christ's selected betrothed, his heavenly wife. This relation qualified the rose as the heavenly future; the rose was placed in Christ's environment, and sharply separated from the worldly, bodily life. The phrase *from the thorn I pick roses* is the manifestation of the trust in the availability of heavenly joy (rose) from the body (thorn) by asceticism. The rose is the manifestation of love for him, too, but only in heavenly relations. Denying worldly love he declared decent behaviour to be virginity. The body is identified with the thorn, which, however, as a result of temperance, results in treasure allegorized by the rose, with gold and with pearl.

According to Jerome, the meaning of Christ included both the Church and the Word. It was thanks to Jerome's work referred to that the moralising and mystical interpretation (as a new development), which gave a richer content to 'amor sanctus' before the Venerable Bede (c. 637–735), became more commonly known. And the rose could become the indicator of the guiding word of the Church, shedding light on the most important values next to life offered to Christ, as it remained among the objective-symbolic evidence of the system of

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<sup>5</sup> Hieronymus *Epist.* 22.

argumentation. And the love for the figure – with its rose image – strengthened by the content of love adjusted to the notions of the Church and the Word offered ammunition from the first moment to the formation of the Marian interpretation and to its development.

The flower coming from Heaven was apparently exemplified even more in the account of the life of Saint Paul of Thebes. *The Life of Paul* (377–378), whose stations served as popular topics for fine art, describing monks' life a thousand years later, was written in the form of a novel about the life of the first hermits during the reign of the emperors Decius and Valerianus, persecutors of Christians. According to the approving biography, the main desire of the Christians is to sacrifice their lives for the name of Christ.

Since Christians who wanted to die to express their commitment were not allowed to die by their tormentors – by this making their confession harder – Jerome described the temptation of one of the martyrs as follows. The enemy persecuting Christians "...ordered the vigorous young person to be taken to a wonderful garden. Here he laid him on a bed with cushions among white lilies and red roses, while a stream was gurgling and the leaves were rustling in the mild breeze; he tied him with charming floral cloth rope so that he could not get up. After everybody had left, a beautiful lascivious woman went up to him and with her nice arm she started to hug his neck, and then – what is sin even to mention – she started to finger his more masculine body parts to excite him to concupiscence, and to ride him exultantly, shamelessly. Christ's soldier did not know what to do, where to turn: torture did not conquer him, but now eroticism started to overwhelm him."<sup>6</sup>

This garden, based on its motifs, can be considered the lurid allusion to the Garden of Eden. The flowers, the stream, the breeze, the shade, and all that is the part of the canonised 'hortus conclusus' by the *Song of Songs* is just the copy of the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve, the foreparents of humankind fell: as they ate from the fruit of knowledge and as they begat descendants. This garden, based on its elements, could be an earthly Paradise according to the Holy Scripture; however, according to the subsequent events, considered to be infernal, it was just the garden of the Fall. Its role without a doubt is to refer to sex.

The garden is a profane scene. And the young recognised its role in misleading them.

The young man preparing for martyrdom, who was taken to the place so shameful to him and so similar to the garden in the Old Testament, had to commit the sin, the use of his body part inheriting his foreparents' sin in this marvelous place. The highlighting of the lascivious woman as someone who excites

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<sup>6</sup> Hieronymus *Vita Pauli* 3.

sensual love put a qualification on sexual activity that does not serve the begetting of descendants, and based on the Christian principles, it makes its denial justified. The man losing control "...all of a sudden, from divine impulse, bit his own tongue off and spat it in the face of the woman who was kissing him, and so he put out his flash of lasciviousness with his terrible pain".<sup>7</sup>

This situation is known from Petronius Arbiter's *Satyricon* – from the ancient novel in which the Encolpius, the protagonist was chased by the anger of Priapus. Jerome was not averse to the description of a realistic situation, though it is apparent that he keeps his distance. Without a doubt, his intention was to improve morals with his scene where the rose was exorcised in four ways. Like the flower referring to Paradise, on the other hand like the plant of a real garden whose role is to be of deceptive content. Thirdly, the role of the flower as an indicator of earthly love is without doubt. And finally, the plant connected in the beginning to earthly love – and to a whore – together with the associated lily can indicate the heavenly reward of the virgin man, the rose of martyrdom. And from among the rose interpretations this latter one is the most effective.

Furthermore, it can also be admitted that the rose is not necessarily of heavenly origin, and that it is not the indication of the tight connection with those existing in Heaven. The flower undertook to mediate between remote things, scenes and figures. According to this example, if the expression 'blooming rose among the thorns' is used for the child just born, it indicates the manner and significance of the development of coming fate.

*Vita Hilarionis* (The Life of Hilarion) one of the three hermit biographers of Jerome was born about 391 during his stay in Holy Bethlehem. "Hilarion was born in the village of Tabatha in Palestine, which is located about 5 miles from the town of Gaza. As his parents were fetishists, like they say, he bloomed as a rose among the thorns."<sup>8</sup>

This flower known from Jewish texts emphasises the value of Christian life as opposed to the pagan one. And it reminds the reader – should he have forgotten – that the pagan can also become a Christian.

Hilarion was sent by his parents to Alexandria to a grammarian. Here he gave excellent evidence of both his talents and his morals, compared to most of his age: he became a Christian. The rose is an encouragement, the promise of the reward that can be gained. And the glimpse of the possibility that as a result of development and correct choice, even of the thorns – of the body, in a pagan environment (or at least in some kind of refusal) – the reward can be manifested, the rose form referring to the engagement to heaven. From Hilarion's biography

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<sup>7</sup> Hieronymus *Vita Pauli* 3.

<sup>8</sup> Hieronymus *Vita Hilarionis* 2.

it turns out that he is indeed the opponent of pagan amusements, concupiscence, and instead, he chose a life style of moderation.

The alternative statement emphasises that making such qualifying statements was a contemporary custom. According to Jerome, the rose is the commonly known constituent of idioms, and with this was associated of course the widespread background knowledge of the rose plant and interpretations of the rose.

The stories, which became popular, of Paul and Hilarion – as many point out – operate on a number of levels, like a novel, too (ADAMIK 1991: 241). Many noticed their relationship with the structure of the Hellenistic novels, which are so rich in rose motifs. Their common feature is the narrative motif that inspires the protagonist to undertake a journey full of endless challenges and miracle elements, and perhaps we can mention here the not sufficiently appreciated love motif with the caveat that novels flourishing between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries lead to the consummation of earthly love, while those of the hermits Paul and Hilarion lead to that of the heavenly one. Jerome thought the novel tradition could be matched with that of Holy Scripture – and so in this way, the Christianising of pagan literature and the meeting of Christian readers' expectations happened with him.

It is also known that he referred with pleasure to the thorn-rose duality, as to any other pairing together with a botanical symbol. The citation attributed to Tertullian reminds us vividly: “The leaves from the trees, the rose from the thorns, the plants from the fields vanish dried out, then they blossom again full of life.”<sup>9</sup>

The pattern that we saw of “the rose among the thorns” was further varied after St Ambrose and St Jerome. And in the foreground of this subsequent period there stood Caesarius Arelatines (470–542) and Gregorius Magnus (540–604), who affirmed what their predecessors had said: “Even if in our century there lived only people that loved earthly life it would not mean disillusion with eternal life; but there is always wheat among the chaff, and sometimes roses are also picked among the thorns.”<sup>10</sup>

Pope Gregory the Great claimed that thorns growing meant bodily pain, together with the rose emitting the fragrance of sainthood, which is the ongoing development of a virtuous life. According to this, things of worth and things of no worth are inseparable from each other, their contrast draws man's attention to where he is on the agonizing path towards his becoming spiritual. “As at threshing the grains get under the chaff, so do the flowers grow among the thorns, just as the sweet-smelling rose grows together with the thorn that pricks.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tertullianus (pseudo) *Carmen aduersus Marcionem* Cl. 0036, 2, 233.

<sup>10</sup> Caesarius Arelatensis *Sermones Caesarii uel ex aliis fontibus hausti* Cl. 1008, 104, 159, 2, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Gregorius Magnus *Moralia in Iob* Cl. 1708, 143A, 20, 39, 20.



It is a mundane truth of life, but things like this may be needed by the listener to the speeches or the reader of the texts. Some of the conclusions – those meant for memorisation and sentences that are easy to learn – use the well known picture of the rose. Since the rose is cited, it also proves that rhetoric also counted on its popularity.

“Just as you know it as well: wheat is from the soil full of thistles, and roses are picked from thorns.”<sup>12</sup>

The dichotomy was suitable for the introduction of the differences between the evaluation of the rose by Christians and Jews. With the Jews, the rose had its own meaning, too, as it also indicated the elect nation – *Israel must blossom like the rose*.<sup>13</sup> This cannot be the same flower as with the Christians since Christianity is of anti-Semitic character, and according to them, it is the Jews that can be considered to be the thorns. John of Damascus, the last of the line of Eastern Church fathers (?–754) called the Jews thorns in one of his sermons: “Oh, rose, you, who are from the thorns; this means: you, who grew out of the Jews and covered everything with divine fragrance”<sup>14</sup> (HEINZ-MOHR-SOMMER 1988: 156).

The thorn that would soon be called the wild rose, or rose thorn, still did not acquire a history of being a possible symbol. Its development happened at the same time – almost parallel with the description of the varieties of thorniness and partly with the shaping of the image of Paradise, partly with the opposition of the two female roles, those of Mary’s and Eve’s, the two contradictory female roles.

## AUGUSTINE

Saint Augustine’s (354–430) anthropology had a cardinal point, and that is free will. The basis of Augustine’s principle is the soul created by God and similar to him. The soul keeping in contact with God rules over the passive body, which can be supported on psychological, ethical and religious grounds. This makes man capable of overcoming his passions which hold him in slavery. The will is free as long as it is able to guide the soul. Thanks to it, values are created. As is apparent from this, Augustine followed Plato in his philosophical work. In the second book of his *De libero arbitrio* (*On free choice of the will*), he justified the existence of God and his providence step by step, progressing from man to God. The created world, for reasons of its similarity to the Creator, has to be good in its essence, and man’s task is to recognise and learn it.

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<sup>12</sup> Gregorius Magnus *Registrum epistularum* 1714 , 140A, 10, 16, 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Hos.* 14,6.

<sup>14</sup> Iohannes Damascenus *Oratio I de nativitate*.

Any hierarchy of the gradually opening created world awaiting cognition is good, but if its superiority, which accounts for goodness, is commonsense, then the truth about goodness can be grasped. How much more satisfied is the man lying on petals, being anointed with balmy ointments and filled with happiness caused by things – argues Augustine, mentioning the luxury of the rose, condemned as pleasure by the Roman pagans – when he can justify the truth. “We can hear the voices of those who claim themselves happy when they are lying on roses or other flowers, or if they enjoy the balmiest ointments: what can be balmy and more beautiful than the stimulus of truth?”<sup>15</sup>

What occurred earlier as a problem can now be decided: whether the rose and the flower are synonyms? Texts always emerge, in which, if apart from its own naming there is no reference to any botanically checkable features, the reader might wonder whether the letters making up the word ‘rose’ can really be interpreted with the meaning of rose. It can also be evidence to justify a conclusion, similarly to botanic features, if the pre-image of the rose symbol group is recognisable or definable.

But in cases like this it also happens that the reader – or the author – makes a mistake. From among the Romans, Dioscorides and Plinius mentioned that there is a plant which, due to the identical colour, looks like the rose, but it grows by water and it is poisonous: this is the oleander. The protagonist in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, who became a donkey, also wrote an account of this misleading experience. Such a mistake can be supposed in the case of the multitude of plants by the water in Saint Augustine’s *Speculum* as well, since the roses are not members of flora found by water, in spite of the fact that the Jewish-Christian antecedent of the rose growing by the river can be found. We might assume that here, as with the river similes of the Church fathers, there is only a topographical reference: i.e. it is about the place where the four rivers of Paradise flow. “...so promulgate: listen to me divine creatures of the waters, and grow like the rose planted on the river bank (multiply).”<sup>16</sup>

The flower of the *Speculum*, if it is a rose, is to be read as the synonym of the flower. According to the traditions of Augustine, this plant living in a wet soil is a relative of the flower that had a vague profile in early Christian heritage, but was called the rose. And this is how it became the chain link itself with later work referring to these textual traditions.

Augustine is the first to have distinguished the pagan and Christian views, if not in the case of the rose, but in cases related to it. Even in this case it was not the plant that gained his attention, but the vivid colour of its petals, which is identical with blood. However, according to the humoral pathology of antiquity,

<sup>15</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis *De libero arbitrio* 0260, 2, 13, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis *Speculum* 0272, 23, 151, 9.

the red flower colour and the body liquid of the same colour were known to belong to the primary element, fire and to the warm quality associated with the pair of fire and air, and furthermore, to Christian ideas indicated by blood.

The procedure of the comparison is known from physiological work: first the two things were identical, and then the definition of their distinctive features was elaborated.

Augustine was 20 years old when he joined the Manicheans, and after 9 years, when he distanced himself from the sect, as a result of being a catechumen, he must have known its doctrines very well. According to the Manicheist view, man has two characters; one originates from God or from light, the other from material, from darkness. Libido is the most developed form of the material, and the procreation of children belongs to the greatest sins. Manicheans considered the rose a light flower, a plant of God's, keeping a strong connection with the light, and they cited it with pleasure and they did so before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, i. e. before the religious idea was qualified as a heresy by Christians. Saint Augustine, having been convinced that that evil is a mistake of man's free will, was disillusioned with the Manichean doctrines and he summed up his arguments against them in several writings. The *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus manichaeorum* proved with several examples that his former confrères, the Manicheans, chose the earthly, lower ones from what is good rather than the heavenly and imperishable ones. He exemplified the choice between the earthly and heavenly by the citing the rose as well: "After all, what is the reason you consider red the characteristic of virtue if it is a rose, while you despise the same colour if it is of blood?"<sup>17</sup>

The red colour of the rose, according to the Manicheist view, is the distinctive feature of virtue – as this is the colour of blood for Christians. However, the same colour is evaluated differently – which highlighted the contradiction for Saint Augustine. Why cannot the colour of blood, which might be the blood effused by the martyrs, count in the Manicheist view as the expression of virtue, like self-sacrifice coming together with bloodshed?

Augustine, surely unwittingly, with this statement of his, linked the rose to the pagan tradition in which the flower was linked to light, or rather to the spirit expressed by light, even if it is of Christian content in its contextual meaning. "Why? Because the rose is a gourd, the shadow exists, the sun is visible."<sup>18</sup>

When Jonah left Nineveh and went to the desert, he withdrew from the strong sun to the shade of a gourd leaf. Such shade may also be cast by the rose– its evidence is the shade and the sun causing shade – though the shade of the rose is the consequence of spiritual radiation.

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<sup>17</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis *De moribus eccl. catholicae et Manichaeorum* 0261, 2, 1362, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Augustinus Hipponensis *Sermones* 0284, 62A, 1, 611, 1.

### BOETHIUS: *DE CONSOLATIONE PHILOSOPHIAE*

As if the mosaics' sun god dashing across the sky continuously in his cart drawn by four horses from sunrise to sunset or the iconic figure of spring from the four seasons had been exorcised at two points in the work of Anicius Manlius Torquatus Severinus Boethius' (480–524) *De consolatione philosophiae* (*The consolation of philosophy*): “When o’er the heaven Phoebus from his rose-red car begins to shed his light abroad, his flames oppress the paling stars and blunt their whitened rays. When the grove grows bright in spring with roses ‘neath the west wind’s warming breath, let but the cloudy gale once wildly blow, and their beauty is gone, the thorns alone remain.”<sup>19</sup>

This great and effective philosophical work by Boethius, written at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, is evidence that at the fall of the Roman Empire, visual and written sources always emphasised the same points about the pre-existing sun god image, in which, on the grounds of the colour analogy, the rose always had a role.

On the other hand, this didactic work of the executed Roman Christian author, as a result of its content and its transparency, belonged to the most frequently copied, read and quoted manuscripts in the European Middle Ages, and later, at the time of the formation of national literatures it was among the most widely translated pieces., It was the preserver of the rose simile associated with Phoebus/Apollo/Helios and with Spring. In addition, it is interesting because it proves the maintenance of the referential link between the Middle Ages and Christian antiquity.

The Christianity of Boethius, executed by Theodore, the Gothic king residing in Ravenna, was never criticised for his pagan symbols. Boethius was respected as a martyr, later he was listed among the late western Church fathers. He considered himself a philosopher, but he was better known for achievements in translation, pedagogy and commentary, because he made the writings of Greek philosophy, first and foremost Aristotle, easily available to the Latin Middle Ages. And it was thanks to him, and later people were enthusiastic about it at the time of scholastics, that for the study of philosophy, the quadrivium ars, i. e. arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music, are needed.

Boethius himself possessed knowledge of mathematics, astronomy and natural philosophy, and for this qualification of his, this is not the only reference: “This man has been free to the open heaven: his habit has it been to wander into the paths of the sky: his to watch the light of the bright sun, his to inquire into the brightness of the chilly moon; he, like a conqueror, held fast bound in its order every star that makes its wandering circle, turning its peculiar course.

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<sup>19</sup> Boethius *De consolatione philosophiae* 2. 3,1–8. trans. W. V. Cooper

Nay, more, deeply has he searched into the springs of nature, whence came the roaring blasts that ruffle the ocean's bosom calm: what is the spirit that makes the firmament revolve...<sup>20</sup>

He also revealed that his knowledge came first of all from Aristotle, then from Plato and from the neoplatonists. And this amalgam of knowledge, like sediment from the text, mixed with itself the pre-Christian, but as a result of Boethius' activity, strengthened rose images. No pagan or even Christian mosaics could have such a great knowledge-transmitting effect since they existed in only one copy, whereas *Consolatio* must have had – mostly in institutions – 400 copies in the Middle Ages.

### CHRISTIANISED DUALITIES

According to the Greeks, for Christians, in the elaboration of the minute differences of rhetoric and spiritual possibilities, the rose gives a chance to compare the lapidary statements. First of all, the thorny nature of the rose was made to contradict the flower. The differences gave way to a comparison on the spatial, temporal, biological and psychological levels; however, the consequence is always of a moral character. The thornless rose is the most excellent environment, it can be considered the indicator of Paradise, and its thorny variant is the creature after the Fall. And this duality raises the memory of the plant having an allegorical function, notable only for its beauty and lack of harmful features, and the pursuit of it.

This era, with the change of the sense to a Christian one, given the appropriate reasoning, used the group of symbols with pleasure, in which the rose, based on only one botanic feature, is compared with other kinds of flowers. The plants of Paradise embody excelling in the Christian virtues. The immaculate lily and the rose reddening like the blood of the martyr in the first Christian sources could not have referred to one single person: the virtue of the lily was the characteristic of women who offered their virginity and the martyrdom of the rose was that of men offering their lives for Christ. The pair of white and red raised a variety of possibilities. Based on the few remaining visual representations, it is well-known that, looking at the female saints of Ravenna mosaics, both colours, and plants linked to both colours, were associated with the figures. Some of the sources dressed the most excellent persons with both of the virtues. Saint Ephrem (373) a deacon from Edessa raised this possibility in his hymn *On Paradise*: “When two neighbouring flowers – both in their own colours – get united

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<sup>20</sup> Boethius *De consolatione philosophiae* 1, 2,6–12.; 18–22. trans. W. V. Cooper

and become as one, they present the world with a new colour.”<sup>21</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, this and Paradise flower interpretations similar to this supported the transmission and reapplication of the conventions of plant colours from the Romans (DELUMEAU 2004: 22).

The rosettes and roses from the various profane and sacral scenes of the Mediterranean region are well-known. In them, the parts closer to the phalanx and to the carpel part of the petal are white, and the outer edges are red. For the illustration of this two-colour petal, the squill, described in the world of Christian mosaics from Porec and Ravenna are suitable examples.

The rose, leaning like a flower and spun into a crown, which in the beginning symbolised masculine virtue, was given to women who – by losing their blood – kept their virtue. This is how Mary was associated with the red flower as well, since she is the most important saint among women. The cult of the rose was also starting, which may well have led to the closer differentiation of the martyr interpretation of the rose.

The thornless rose of Paradise – which reminded the beholder that the worldly, thorny rose is the accessory to etherialisation, and was needed for the believer to find the salvation of his own life – referred to Christ’s environment. But where did this Paradise, which gave our plant the chance to be magnificent, unfading and enabled it to be a balm, lie? And what newer role did the Church fathers meditating about Paradise offer to the flower?

*(The End)*

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### *Korakeresztény anti-szimbolika (II.)*

A keresztények az 1. század végével nemcsak a Római Birodalom államvallásától határolódtak el, hanem a zsidóságtól, a keleti vallásoktól és a misztikától, illetve a görög szemléletet magába foglaló vallási irányzattól, a gnoszticizmustól is. Hitük tisztán tartása érdekében saját erkölcsant s az ennek megmaradását és terjesztését szolgáló

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<sup>21</sup> Saint Ephrem *Hymnes sur le paradis* (Sources chrétiennes 37), Paris, Cerf 137, 19, 139 (10).

szervezetet hoztak létre. Az első századok keresztényei azonban – a rózsakultuszt leginkább fenntartó római religiót s a tehetősebb rétegek virágkultuszát egyként elutasítva – megteremtették a maguk rózsaszimbolikáját, mégpedig úgy, hogy miközben a keretét végtelenül leszűkítették, a tartalmát krisztianizálták.

A görögök szerint, a keresztények az apró retorikus és spirituális módosítások révén kiérették a rózsából az övéktől elütő vallási színezetet. Elsőképpen a rózsza tövises volta ellentétben áll a virág szépségével. E különbségek helybeli, időbeli, biológiai és pszichológiai összehasonlításokat hoznak elő, viszont érzékeltetik az egyfajta magatartást, szellemiséget. A tövis nélküli rózsza a legszebb környezet, Paradicsomnak tekinthető, a tüskés változata pedig a bűnbeesést jelöli. E dualitás a növény allegorikus funkciójára emlékeztet, a virág szépségére és kártékonyatlanságára, és ezek beláttatását szorgalmazza.

Ebben az időszakban, a keresztény hitvallásra váltva, a megfelelő szemlélet mellett, ezeket a szimbólumokat előszeretettel használták, ahol a rózsát, csupán növényi jellegzetességei alapján, más virágokkal hasonlítják össze. A Paradicsom növényei keresztény erényeket testesítenek meg. A makulátlan liliom és a vérvörös rózsza, akár a mártír vére, a korai keresztény forrásokban nem vonatkozhatott csak egy személyre: a liliom erénye szüzességüket feláldozó nőket jelképezett, míg a rózsza társítható volt azokkal a férfakkal, akik életüket Krisztusnak szentelték.

*Kulcsszavak:* szimbólumtörténet, virágszimbolika, szemlélettörténet, ókeresztény gondolkodásmód története