

**Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban, *Învierea lui Lazăr de-a lungul secolelor [The Resurrection of Lazarus throughout the Centuries]*, vol. I: 125-1486, Studii și documente de istoria religiilor 7 / *Archaeus. Studies in the History of Religions* 22, Ed. Spandugino and Zeta Books, Bucharest, 2025, 398 pp., ISBN 978-606-8944-95-1 (hardback)**

**MARIUS PORTARU** 

*The Patristic Institute Augustinianum*  
E-mail: [mportaru@startmail.com](mailto:mportaru@startmail.com)

**T**HIS FIRST VOLUME OF THE first 'total history' of the reception of the biblical episode of Lazarus' resurrection (*John* 11) appears in exceptional graphic conditions. It is signed by none other than Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban, scientific researcher at the Institute of the History of Religions of the Romanian Academy and a leading name in our culture.

The approach proposed by this valuable historical project is, in terms of method, inspired by the previous histories, *Jesus Through the Centuries* and *The Virgin Mary Through the Centuries*, written by Jaroslav Pelikan. We are offered a 'history of the reception of Lazarus' resurrection through a diachronic view of textual testimonies, studying the constitution of exegetical tradition, the succession of themes, recurring and original elements, continuities and discontinuities' (27–28). The analysis of theological themes in the history of patristic and medieval exegesis is accompanied by an analysis of 'iconography', a term that here covers a wide range of testimonies: frescoes in catacombs, sarcophagi, miniatures in manuscripts, icons, and various illustrations. In reality, the analysis is not limited to or does not favour a particular type of 'text' (*largo sensu*), but attempts to extract the essence from all types of historical evidence that has been preserved: dogmatic treatises, exegetical commentaries, sermons, liturgical texts, poetry, epigraphy, epistles, literature, apocrypha, epitaphs, funeral orations,

liturgical dramas and medieval mysteries, medieval university debates, *etc.* Compared to previous reference studies, such as the syntheses of Alain Marchadour and Jacob Kremer, Tătaru-Cazaban's history, on the one hand, leaves aside the biblical issue and focuses on the history of Lazarus' reception, and on the other hand, integrates recent discoveries and the relations between the Byzantine and Latin worlds into a series of new analyses. The material is divided into two volumes: the first volume starts with the fragment of Quadratus' apology (125) and ends with Jean Michel's *Mystères de la Passion* (1486), while the second volume deals with the reception of Lazarus in the 16th–20th centuries.

Ch. 1 presents interpretations of Lazarus' resurrection from the early apologists to the great anti-Gnostic writers (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement). Irenaeus of Lyon inaugurates the penitential and spiritual interpretation of the figure of Lazarus in a pre-baptismal context. Ch. 2 is entirely devoted to Origen's exegesis, in which the resurrection of Lazarus takes on a moral and spiritual significance, referring to post-baptismal repentance. Ch. 3 contains a detailed analysis of early Christian iconography – frescoes in the catacombs and bas-reliefs on sarcophagi. The author notes that the resurrection of Lazarus is the most prevalent biblical scene in catacomb art and explains the early Christians' preference for the Johannine episode through their hope in the resurrection, which distinguishes Christian art from pagan funerary art, where death occupies a central place. Detailed comparisons with the mystery art of Isis or with the magical manifestations associated with the names of Asclepius and Apollonius of Tyana place us within the broader cultural context of the early centuries. Ch. 4 traces the interpretation of Lazarus as a penitential symbol from Pope Damasus to Gregory the Great, and from the Cappadocians to Ephrem the Syrian. Unlike other specialists, the author believes that the symbolism of Lazarus 'has from the outset a penitential dimension, because Lazarus' funerary connections were already understood as signs of his sinful condition before conversion' (86). The theme of Jesus' tears is masterfully re-constructed from patristic literature.

Ch. 5 presents the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection as an argument for Jesus' divinity in the context of the 4th-century controversy against Arius. The refutation of Arian objections by the great Cappadocian Fathers is presented with the expertise of a Christologist. The author captures an element of originality, slightly anticipated by Gregory of Nyssa, in *the Homily on Lazarus* 3.1 by Amphilochius of Iconium, which provides physiological details about the condition of a corpse after four days: 'They knew that it had been exactly four days since he had been laid in the tomb and that, after four days, the dead man completely disintegrates, the flesh diminishes, the bones detach, the tendons break, the intestines disintegrate, and the belly liquefies'. The resurrection of a man who had been dead for

four days thus becomes a powerful argument in favour of Jesus' divinity. With impressive erudition, the author identifies similar descriptions of decomposition in Potamius of Lisbon (how many theologians are familiar with his writings?). The chapter ends with an analysis of the Latin poetry of Juvenius, Prudentius, and Sedulius.

Ch. 6, the most unified and robust in my opinion, analyses the theology of the great commentaries on *John*: the moral homilies of John Chrysostom, the Antiochian literalism of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Christological sensitivity of Cyril of Alexandria, and Augustine's allegorical interpretation of Lazarus applied to the inner spiritual life. All these authors contribute essentially to the symbolic universalisation of the Johannine episode. Ch. 7 is devoted to the theme of Lazarus' descent into hell, closely examined in several authors, especially their relationships of influence: Chromatius of Aquileia, Peter Chrysologus, Hesychius of Jerusalem (an original interpreter), Basil of Seleucia, Roman the Melodist, Leontius of Constantinople, and several apocryphal compositions.

Ch. 8 captures the progressive formation of the cult of Lazarus in the Byzantine tradition. We learn that the oldest attestation of the tradition that Lazarus was bishop of Cyprus is found in a sermon from 774 attributed to John of Euboea. The cult of Lazarus in Byzantium was inaugurated by Emperor Leo VI the Philosopher, who brought Lazarus' relics from Kition (today's Larnaca) to Constantinople and placed them on the right side of the Church of St. Lazarus. Thus, Lazarus entered the Constantinopolitan Synaxarion, the hymnography of the Studion Triodion, the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, the miniatures of Byzantine manuscripts, among which the 6th-century *Purpureus Rossanensis* codex stands out – whose miniature is printed on the cover of the book –, in icons and frescoes, and in classical Byzantine poetry (Kometas, Christophoros Mitylenaios, Nichifor Basilakes). In counterpoint, ch. 9 is dedicated to the formation of the cult of Lazarus in the medieval West. Here, the first evidence of Lazarus' presence is iconographic (in miniatures, frescoes, and mosaics). Still, the cult of Lazarus emerged during the era of *The Song of Roland*, continuing with the French Bible paraphrases in verse, then with liturgical dramas (e.g., Hilarius of Orléans, *Suscitatio Lazari*, 1140 AD). The influence of Byzantine devotion will be reflected in the West through the veneration of Lazarus' relics (the author presents the legends that 'explained' how they arrived there). The relationship between Lazarus and Mary Magdalene, indirectly caused by the Byzantine emperor Leo VI, is also imported into the West, with the difference that the emphasis here is on Mary Magdalene's veneration. Various hagiographic legends describe Lazarus and his family in terms of medieval social relations. Ch. 10 continues the formation of the cult of Lazarus in the West through a careful analysis of medieval exegesis: from Augustine to Bernard, to university readings. The exegeses of Albert the

Great, Thomas Aquinas, Hugo de Sancto Caro, Meister Eckhart, Bonaventura – and the influence of Aristotelian ethics – are examined. The last ch. 11 of this first volume deals with the twilight of the Middle Ages: Lazarus is present in painting (Giotto, Duccio, Fra Angelico, Gozzoli), in various legends, including *Visio Lazari*, in liturgical iconography and in ‘mysteries’ (dramatic representations independent of the liturgical framework, which took place in the public square, such as the *Mysteries* composed by Jean Michel). ‘Thus, in the twilight, far from being a silent character, Lazarus had acquired a melancholic loquacity’ (330).

In his note on the edition, the author modestly writes that ‘the “total history” I have attempted in this book is a risky journey’ (14). As the reader progresses through this book, they will feel how the ‘risk’ diminishes, how the overwhelming erudition of each page dispels their mistrust, and how their expectation of an informed and diligent history is replaced by admiration for a monument. These pages contain an impossible multitude of voices, synchronous and diachronic strips of time in eschatological dialogue, diverse geographical areas and cultures – from paganism to Christianity, from the Byzantine tradition to the medieval tradition and back to the Syriac tradition. Lazarus is in the tomb, in hell, on earth and in the glory of holiness; Lazarus is at our baptism, in our repentance, in our hearts; Lazarus is next to Jesus, and each of us who hears Jesus’ call to rise from the death of sin becomes Lazarus. From universal symbol to total history!

To conclude with a suggestion, I wonder if, at the end of the second volume, when the story of Lazarus will have arrived closest to us, the author will offer us a meditation on the phenomenology of the two great traditions of Christianity, Byzantine and Latin. The counterpoint presentation of these traditions is one of the original elements of the present history (29), and by writing the history of the reception of Lazarus’ resurrection, the author will have reached a point of view from which such a meditation becomes possible. I do not doubt that the history of Lazarus has the potential to clarify this for us.