

QUO VADIS, OCCASIO?

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Abstract: With its origin in Antiquity, the Occasion concept is identified as “ the time of human life, so different from that of the great cycles of nature and history and plastic personified by the deity of Kairos in Greek mythology (Ursache Tcaciuc, Anca)” and the divinity of Occasio to Roman civilization, the notion is taken by the Jesuit Jan David and converted to the spiritual and religious needs of his time. All the ancient sources presented the deity as the best moment, the opportunity, the occasion in time to realize something good. From the totally independence and jovial manifestation, the Occasion becomes one with the meditator, an opportunity to fallow Christ and to proceed in Divine Salvation.

Keywords: occasion, opportunity, religion, time, catholic christians, decision, choice, personification, allegorie, schemata, transformation, Divinity

Occasio concept in Roman Antiquity

In Roman Antiquity, the field of time in all its aspects, it is extremely obvious in the sources and indices of the both quantitative and qualitative value delimitations. The desire for immortality of Caesareans has manifested in the measure and onomasiology of divided time¹.

The *Occasio* concept has its origin in Antiquity first to the Greeks² under the name of the deity of *Kairos*, a beautiful young masculine presence that symbolized the best, the opportune moment to achieve a

1 It is known that most of the Roman emperors wanted their immortality to be left legacy on the wings of time, bringing changes in the quantitative delimitation and the related onomasiology; until today, only the intervention of Iulius Caesar and Augustus have been kept in the name of the hot summer months, respectively, July and August.

2 Monique TREDE-BOULMIER, *Kairos. Lă-propos et l'occasion*, Ed. Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2015.

good, and then, it is taken by the Romans, initially also with masculine characteristics, but with the passage of time it is transformed preserving less and less the ancestral features, reaching to this day the essence of the concept under feminine perception.

The Cicero's philosophical work³ is appreciated for adapting the Greek philosophical methods to Roman spirituality and mentality, especially for imposing a Latin philosophical language, innovation of undeniable merit.

In his famous work untitled *De Inventione*, Marcus Tullius Cicero precisely determines the nature of the *occasion* as a period for action, to do something or not to do. Although, the notion of occasion seems to be labelled under the same emblem of broken, divided time, the one that quantitatively sums up a value, the essence of the concept lies in the idea of performance and is represented in three ways: public, general and particular, strongly outlined on the social vector to reinforce the author's principles reflected in the social life and the duty of the citizen, who represent objectives with exclusive priority.

With the establishment of Christianity, the polytheism disappears. In the first half of the 6th century, Emperor Justinian closeded all the philosophy schools, forbidding pagans to teach not only philosophie but any other discipline. Pope Gregory the Great, considered that "a bishop should not teach grammar because he could not serve Christ and Jupiter in the same time".⁴

Claimed Renaissance cultural heritage

After an entire millennium, the Renaissance⁵ appears as a cultural movement that has expanded over the 4th – 6th centuries, which deeply affected the European intellectual life in this early modern period. Beginning in Italy and spreading to the rest of Europe until the 6th century, its influence has been felt in literature, philosophy, art, music, politics, science, religion and other fields of research.

3 Ioan-Gheorghe ROTARU, *Istoria filosofiei, de la începuturi până la Renaștere*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, pp. 201-202.

4 Étienne GILSON, *Filozofia în Evul Mediu - De La Începuturile Patristice Până La Sfârșitul Secolului Al XIV-lea*, Humanitas, București, 1995, p. 142.

5 Ioan-Gheorghe ROTARU, *Istoria filosofiei, de la începuturi până la Renaștere*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, pp.353-446.

The Renaissance saw revolutions in intellectual concerns as well as social and political changes that influenced artistic developments and the contributions of the personalities of those times in studying, researching and improving the secular world by reviving ancient ideas and adopting some methods of thinking focused on realism and human emotion in art.

These innovations made the political and church structures more receptive, the humanists of this period not rejecting Christianity, but on the contrary, most of Renaissance creations were dedicated to the church, institution who patronized the amazing works of art.

The Renaissance humanists searched for the historical and oratorical Latin literary texts of Antiquity in the monasteries of Europe. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 generated an exodus of Greek scholars who brought precious manuscript into ancient Greek, many of them fallen into obscurity in the west part of the continent.

The unique way in which humanists approached religion has been reflected in many cultural fields. Many Christian works, including *The New Testament* written in Old Greek were brought from Byzantium to Western Europe for research and meditation. Personalities, as Erasmus in Rotterdam were fighting for the return of the *New Testament* from Bible in Old Greek, which facilitated the path to Protestant Reformation.

Christianity remains the predominant element of culture. The clergy, the elite class in particular, are changing their exclusive worship concerns, aspiring to an active participation in the social political life, while being listened to and honoured by the faithful.

Preachers, theologians and humanist scholars deal adapt new philosophical and historical knowledge to the study and interpretation of religious writings⁶.

Renaissance Occasio concept: Jesuit Approches to Personification

In 1605 is published in the form of an edict, the book of the Jesuit Jan David; he performs a reinterpretation of the Latin *Occasio* concept,

⁶ The humanist view of theology and Holy Scriptures led, among other developments, to the advent of the Protestant Reformation, initiated by Marin Luther in Germany, Jean Calvin in France and then spread throughout the Catholic world. See and: Ioan-Gheorghe ROTARU, *Om-Demnitare-Libertate. Adoptarea pentru prima dată pe pământ românesc, în Principatul Transilvaniei, a Principiului Libertății Religioase și evoluția acestuia într-un timp relativ scurt de 25 de ani (1543-1568)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Risoprint, 2019, pp. 223-228.

under the title *Occasio arrepta, neglecta, huius commoda, illius incomoda*, a powerful writing with an educational character for young boys.

The work is covered with copper panels and a theatre text in the appendix; the majestic image in baroque style and the twelve selected passages associated with *schemata* inserted into narrative situation is due to the famous Flemish engraver Theodor Galle. This artistic style is initiated in a specific direction of the visual arts at the explicitly suggestion expressed by the Roman Catholic Church. Excessive interior and exterior decoration, construction of dramatic scenes with multiple characters represented from different angles by using the diagonals and the technique of darkening, it creates the inner dramatism of some fanciful or even utopian daring of speech; the Jesuit emblemist Jan David names them *doctrina imaginis*, sacred images as a mechanism of spiritual reflection, instruction and reinvention.

The *taken occasion* is illustrated by a warrior who holds her head, and the *missed chance* disappears in the background of the panel only seeing her plump head.

Although the author knew the Grek antiquity significance of *Kairos* deity, as well the homonym *Occasio* in the Romans, this pagan divinity in his thinking, at that time with the sense of opportunity and related to the *Tempus* and *Chronos*, this time gives us the meaning *decision* in the Christian version. From the world beginning, she was present in Paradise, because every action means a choice, a decision, and then she was expelled; with Christ, she returned to the world to give man a second chance to salvation. The five wise young boys and the five other foolish boys use their opportunity differently, the wise ones fructify them, while the unconscious waste them; the life of the two groups, depends on the choices made and ends properly in Hell or in Haven (moral/ mental / affective and spiritual consequences for their actions).

Schemata. The book outlines *emblems* to characterize meditative prayer; a true believer must make a constant effort through repentance and prayer showing through himself the life and teachings of Christ. The *sensory images* are introduced into the narrative situation – dramatized argument enacted by allegorical characters; the principal *dramatis personae*, the twelve-part story of whose mutual interaction and meetings with other personifications are Occasion (*Occasio*), Time (*Tempus*) and Guardian Angel (*Angelus Tutelaris*) who bodies forth the imperative of

the Divine Will. These *personae* are seen to engage with the five prudent and five imprudent youths, who stands for the emblem book's morally and spiritually malleable users, and accordingly, they are compared by David to parabolic entities such as the wise and foolish virgins in *Matthew 25:1-13*.

Origin and Metamorphosis. The book of twelve emblems originates in the conversion of the pagan idol *Occasio* by Phidias and described by Ausonius; a prosopopee able to convey the Christian meaning. The goddess transformed into the captured or missed opportunity, in analogy with her ancient sense when the opportunity to do good or bad evil arose.

According to Melion, one of the most important interpreter of his work made in the same extent from engravings and exploratory commentary in Latin, and citing the *Statuarum Descriptiones* of Callistratus, he argues that the Greek god *Occasio*, in his original name *Kairos*, was portrayed as a young male, his Roman counterpart as female, but for Christians like David, who acknowledge God alone to be sole author of all things, *Occasio* awaits conversion; she must be seen newly emergent personifying a concept that derives from the ancient notion of Occasion. The author describes this notion genealogically, according to the Latin sources, rather than endowing Occasion with fixed identity: she descends from the Stoic virtue Modesty (*Modestia*), „the science of putting in their proper place the things to be said or done”⁷; since finding the proper place to act requires that an opportune time be chosen, Occasion was implicitly associated with *timely opportunity* or, more accurately, with the accommodation of time to action (*tempus actionis opportunum*). That is the explication for Modesty, to be understood as knowledge of the opportunity for timely action, and Occasion, „part of time having in itself the opportunity of doing or not doing something properly”⁸.

What is very impressive in David's approach is the way he rendered the old term *Occasio*, thus implies an alloy of time, place and the thing itself; the personification of Occasion refers both to the opportune moment and to the thing that opportunely occurs in that moment, to the apt place in which that thing take place, the moment and the thing in the author's vision, in functioning as prosopopeea are concretized,

7 MELION, S.Walter, Series: Intersections, Vol.41, *Personification. Emboding Meaning and Emotion*, (Chapitre 14 – Figured Personification and Parabolic Embodiment in Jan David's *Occasio arrepta, neglecta*), Brill, 2016, p.384.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 388.

temporized and visualized as if “seasonably coming to life round about or in view of you (...) occurring before your eyes either by fate or chance, with a timely opportunity”.⁹

The Occasion is portrayed as a Nymph with winged ankles, setting foot upon a swiftly rotating wheel, and holding a dagger with one side sharpened; the dagger signifies that she is momentarily opportune to some, inopportune to others, as destiny or mere chance decrees.¹⁰

The author widens the Occasion horizon by quoting Ausonius’s extended epigram on Phidias’s cult statues of the goddess, popularized by Politian:

*I am the Goddess rare and now to few.
Why do you set foot upon a wheel? I can stay in no place.
Why do you wear winged sandals? I fly; what Mercury
Is wont to prosper, I abandon once having flown.
Why does your hair cover your face? I do not wish to be known. But ho there!
The back of your head is bald. To ensure that my departure brooks no delay.
Who is the companion beside you? Let her speak for herself. Speak, I say, who
are you? (...)
I am the goddess who punishes the deeds done and left undone.
And as this gives cause for complaint, so I am called Regret (Metanoëia).
Now you, tell me, what has she to do with you? When I (Occasio) have flown,
She remains: they whom I have passed hold her close.
You, to, while you question, while you delay by asking.
Shall say that I have eluded your grasp (Ausonius:33).*

The Latin poet, Ausonius translate the Posseidippos Greek Epigram and he adapts it to Roman society, by adding the figure of Regret, insists that is incumbent upon whomever Occasion visits to seize her, rather than leaving such opportunities entirely to chance or fate.

He also, describes her, with bald pate and hair falling over her face, which is to say, graspable by her tresses when she is first encountered, but ungraspable from the rear once when she is passed. Her masked countenance indicates that she is difficult to know: if she is handled, she must be first recognized, process who needs discernment.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 388.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 388.

This is the moment when David inserts a crucial disclaimer for *Typus occasionis* to be engraved, only those features of Occasion deemed relevant for the acquisition of eternal salvation were retained: „we judged it unnecessary to fallow in all things the visible traces of the ancients; but instead we took from their description what chiefly seemed to be worthy of consideration.”¹¹

Therefore, the conjunction of this allegorical mechanisms and the title proper, *Occasion Seized, Shirked, Commodious to Some, Incommodious to Others, by the Author, the Reverend Father Jan David, Priest of the Society of Jesus*, adverts to the dual significance of *Occasio*, who not only signifies opportunity, but also personifies David's book, which offers the vigilant, from salvation. In the *Occasio drama*, the emblematic *schemata* and the related comments in twelve chapters of the book, the five prudent and five imprudent youths, the author analogizes them to the five wise and the five foolish virgins in *Mathew 25*; he counsels to imitate the prudence of the wise virgins, because the foolish girls will be excluded from entry into heavenly kingdom and given up to the chains of eternal damnation.

The prudent youths who earnestly embrace what is offered to them by divine favour, the grace of God, the help of the Guardian Angel and the advantageousness of Time and Occasion, for the purpose of securing erudition, honour and salvation, should exemplify to everyone the necessity of conducting themselves accordingly, in David's believes.

Another different and impressive thing in David's approach is that, even Occasion decamps, she may be still recalled by repentant Christian aided, of course, by his tutelary Angel, who is a mediator of life and grace and offers assistance to those who delayed to seize Occasion.

Also, the miracle that happened, is that David has seized his own Occasion to produce this emblem book, and, having made the best of the resources at his disposal, he has succeeded in engendering Occasion as a living presence. The black ink from which issues the person of Occasion must be construed as something other than an ancient fleeting shadow cast upon the surface of the book's white pages: „Live, Occasio, live”.

The author personifies the impulse to dedicate this emblem book, which is itself personified as Occasion who embodies the effort opportunely expended in writing *Occasio arrepta, neglecta*: “It is right I

11 *Ibidem*, p. 386.

rejoice in myself and my opportunity”¹² and, in this moment he (the author) and she (Occasio) become mirror images of one another. Continuing his arguments, David proposes to allow every faculty of Occasion be placed at our disposal for the purpose of accomplishing every kind of noble deed, reaching the summit of eternal glory; and, “the marvel is, Occasion to find the image of herself in you, long before arriving before you, speak sweetly with herself through you, *in the manner of Acco*¹³, who addressed the image of herself in mirror!¹⁴”. On this account, Occasion personifies the ability of meditators to transform fiction into fact, and her action of seeing herself mirrored in them signifies theirs of converting opportunity into accomplishment; Acco, is the inverse of Occa(sio), true reflection of the fully realized occasion for achieving goodness.

The silence present of God the Father signifies David’s conviction that these personifications body forth mysteries only through the confluence the divine grace and human cognition. The interval of space between God and Tempus represents another main point in the Jesuit’s debate; in analogy he presents the categories of space and time, defining the space an abstraction reference measuring the distance between of two or more things, and time a property of the durative of those things, simultaneous, or differential existence, but successive intervals, that extend from the origin to the final end of the world. In this way, David resuscitate the Occasion, demonstrating her inheritance over Time and every opportunity who provides for attaining salvation must be seized; Time’s connection to Occasion becomes evident in David’s assumption that the need to make every opportunity count constitutes a moral obligation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we point that the process of conversion is compared to transforming the meditator into a true Christian, capable of grasping and adapting every opportunity to understand, imitate and follow Christ.

12 *Ibidem*, p. 419.

13 On Acco, see Rhodiginus Ludovicus Caelius, *Lectio num antiquarum libri XXX* (Lyons, Apud Sebastianum Honoratum: 1562) 457. He cites Plutarch’s *De Stoicorum contrarietatibus* at his source.

14 MELION (pp. 419-420), DAVID, Jan, *Serenissimis ac reverendissimis Principibus, Domino D. Leopoldo, Episcopo Passaviensi, Ioannes David Soc. Iesu sacerdos I. m. dedicat consecratque*, +3v, +4r.

Christian reformulation of the pagan deity that existed in a latent state waiting to be exploited in the light of the present concerns, is very impressive reinvented and adapted in the Catholic world. It is an impulse to realize that change and well-being live in you and always start from you.

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