

NEOCLASSICAL FUNERARY MONUMENTS IN THE LAPIDARIUM OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TRANSYLVANIAN HISTORY

Abstract: In the lapidarium of the National Museum of Transylvanian History, there are preserved three fragments of neoclassical tombstones, two of which are related through their similar iconographic types, being decorated with the figure of a genius who leans against an urn of ancient inspiration. The fragments were placed in the museum inventory records with the mention of their unknown place of origin or indicating Cluj as their place of origin, but without a precise location. The purpose of this study is the presentation of these three fragments, the identification of their provenance and of their analogies in the Transylvanian funerary sculpture of the beginning of the 19th century.

Keywords: funerary monument, neoclassical, genius, urn, Minorite Church, Cluj.

In the lapidarium of the National Museum of Transylvanian History,¹ there are stored three fragments of neoclassical tombstones, two of which are related through their similar iconographic types, being decorated with the figure of a genius who leans against an urn of ancient inspiration. The fragments were placed in the museum inventory records with the mention of their unknown place of origin or indicating Cluj as their place of origin, but without a precise location. The first information about the monuments may be found in the study written by the historian Lajos Kelemen and dedicated to the former Minorite Church and its funerary monuments.²

From the second half of the eighteenth century on, the former Minorite Church in Cluj³ accommodated, besides the tombs housed in the crypts of the townspeople and the Minorite monks, several other tombstones of the personalities who had supported the church, their circle widening at the beginning nineteenth century, with a series of Armenian merchant families, who, as patrons of the church, found their rest in this church. The burials dated until 1834, when following the spread of cholera in the city, the municipal council forbade burials in the centre of the locality.⁴

On 7 November 1926, the Minorites' Order was compelled to leave Cluj on papal command; thus, the buildings of the church and of the monastery were ceded to the Greek-Catholic Church, while the movable assets, such as the altars, the organ, the library and the archives, were transferred to the Minorite monasteries from Lugoj and

¹ Hereinafter we shall use the abbreviation NMTH.

² Kelemen Lajos, "A volt minorita templom és síremlékei," in *Pásztorút* 1926, 536–538. The new, complete version of the study appeared in 1982: Kelemen Lajos, "A volt minorita templom és síremlékei," in ed. B. Nagy Margit, *Művészettörténeti tanulmányok*, vol. II, Bucharest, 1982, pp. 72–76, 348 (hereinafter: Kelemen, *A volt minorita*). The more recent studies adopted Kelemen's information to a large extent: Sas Péter, "A kolozsvári egykori minorita, majd görög katolikus templom sírfeliratai," in *Lymbus*, 2005, pp. 157–158.; Idem, "Az egykori kolozsvári minorita templom örmény síremlékei," in *Művelődés*, 34; Idem, "A szépek temploma – az egykori kolozsvári minorita templom," in *Szabadság*, 01 March 2012.

³ Today it is the Greek-Catholic Cathedral *The Transfiguration of Christ*.

⁴ Kelemen, *A volt minorita*, p. 73.

Târgu Mureș, two of the altars being transported to the Minorite Church from Aiud.⁵ At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were seven tombstones in the Baroque and neoclassical styles in the Minorite Church, some of these items being donated to the Museum of History in Cluj after the changes from 1926.⁶

The monuments identified by the study are: the pediment of the monument dedicated to Mrs. Simon Vikol, born Kata Daniel (1814), the lower part of the monument dedicated to Ms. Márton Bogdánffy, born Augusta Seifert, and the sculpture of a winged genius coming from the monument of Domokos Simai Jr., the fate of the other monuments, as well as the inscribed parts of the museum items being unclear.⁷

The first of the neoclassical monuments, transported into the lapidarium of the NMTH, is the lower register of a funerary monument representing the figure of a day-dreaming genius, sitting on a cubical seat, with curly hair, fastened with a ribbon, with a typical early nineteenth-century women's hairstyle, with the body partially covered in an ancient-inspired, draped garment. The genius is represented holding an hourglass in his right hand, a symbol of the passage of time, leaning with his left arm against an anchor, the symbol of hope. The scene is completed by the high relief of a funeral urn entwined by a serpent, placed on a high pedestal, richly profiled. The urn is surrounded by a curtain attached with a spherical brooch and decorated with vegetal motifs. The sculptural quality of the monument is inferior to the other monuments from the period, having massive, disproportionate sculptural details, and being carved in sandstone. Lajos Kelemen's study reveals that the monument was originally located on the east side of the nave, close to the entrance, being dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Márton Bogdánffy, born Augusta Seifert, who had died at the age of 24. As described by Kelemen, the monument was originally about 3 metres high, consisting of two registers, an inscribed plaque, decorated with the gilded unified crest of the spouses, while the lower register was dominated by the winged genius figure. The inscription of the monument was incised, with characters painted in black, some parts being golden: *A legjobb nő, anyák egyike, nemes Seifert Augusta rövid élete 24 éveiből hatig nemes Bogdánffy Márton felejtethetlen hitvese.*⁸ (One of the best women and mothers, Augusta Seifert, unforgettable wife of the nobleman Márton Bogdánffy for six years, out of her short life of 24).

The second fragment of a funerary monument is the sculpture of a winged genius leaning on his left knee, with his back bent and his right arm supported by a funeral urn. The genius is a young man, represented with physiognomic features in the classical style, with idealised traits, with a dreamy face, provided with a draped garment that partially covers his body, with curly hair, with strands fastened with a golden ribbon, with a hair-loop coiffure specific of the beginning of the nineteenth century. In his right hand, the genius holds a laurel wreath, the symbol of fulfilled life, in his right hand - an extinguished torch, turned upside down, the symbol of passage into nonexistence. The

⁵ Sabău, Nicolae, *Metamorfoze ale barocului transilvan*, vol. I. Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 154, 176.

⁶ Kelemen, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

⁷ Besides the neoclassical fragments, in the lapidarium of the NMTH there is another funerary monument coming from the former Minorite Church, that of General Ignatius of Rosin, belonging to the Baroque style.

⁸ Kelemen, *A volt minorita*, p. 73.

hair ribbon, the lid of the urn and the laurel wreath are gilded. As described by Kelemen, the sculpture of the genius comes from the monument erected in 1835 in memory of Domokos Simai Jr., the prosecutor of Békés County, the judge of several counties, who died at the age 25. This funerary monument was originally placed close to the monument of Mrs. Bogdánffy. The sculpture is part of the lower register of the original composition, the upper register being reserved for the funerary inscription: *NEHAI NEMES IFJABB SIMAI DOMOKOSNAK NEMES BÉKÉS VÁRMEGYE VICEFISKÁLISÁNAK ÉS TÖBB NEMES VÁRMEGYÉK TÁBLABÍRÁJÁNAK ÖRÖK EMLÉKÉRE SZOMORÚAN EMELTÉK ÉDES TESTVÉREI E KÖVET. SZÜLETETT 1810-BE, MEGHALT KOLOZSVÁRON, 1835-BE JAN.19-ÉN*⁹ (This stone was erected in eternal memory of Domokos Simai Jr., Prosecutor of Békés County, Judge of several counties, by his grieving brothers. Born in 1810, died on 19 January 1835, in Cluj).

The third neoclassical fragment is a semi-circular pediment, with a slightly curved surface, carved in Baciú limestone. The lower part of the pediment comprises the monument's moulded canopy, as well as the relief of unified escutcheons inscribed in an oval shield, representing a coat of arm with two palm branches combined with a Greek cross and a crest representing Noah's ark, with the oversized relief of a dove that has an olive branch in its beak. The oval shield is framed by garlands of laurel leaves. The fragment comes from the funerary monument of Mrs. Simon Vikol, born Kata Daniel, achieved after 1814, which was originally on the west side of the church nave, by the entrance. The initial shape of the monument is known to us thanks to Tóth István's drawings, published in Lajos Kelemen's study, consisting of an inscribed rectangular plaque, with the funerary inscription engraved in the centre of a sunken panel, framed by a decorated border, in the upper half, with a series of dentils, a wreath and a pair of fluted consoles decorated with vegetal motifs. The lower register of the monument is decorated with motifs specific to the Empire style, with fluted consoles, garlands, gutti, friezes with geometric motifs and the relief of a skull and bones. The funerary inscription is also specific to the literature from the beginning of the nineteenth century, being dominated by expression formulas typical of Romanticism: *Ha kérded ki van itt / e' földnek porában / a' vagy ki fekszik itt / a holtnak sorában, / daniel katalin / vikol simon párja, / kitől el maradott / egy leánya s fia: / három esztendőket / a' sz: házosságban, / kilentzven-két napot / töltött egy folytában / s így midőn élének / adóját letette, / férje könnyei közt / e' követ emelte / szül. mdccxcii / xv junii / megholt mdcccxiv / iv april*¹⁰ (If you wonder who is lying under the sod, or who is lying in the line of the dead, this is Katalin Daniel, wife of Simon Vikol, who left a daughter and a son. Without interruption, she spent three years and 92 days in holy matrimony, fulfilling all the duties of life. Tear-filled, her husband has erected this (grave) stone for her. Born MDCCXCII / XV June / Passed away MDCCCXIV / IV April.).

From the rich collection of funerary monuments from the former Minorite Church, the lapidarium of the museum also preserves the monument dedicated to General Ignatius of Rosin, achieved in Baroque style in 1774.¹¹ This monument was

⁹ Kelemen, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–74.

¹⁰ Kelemen, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–76.

¹¹ Kelemen, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–75.

originally on the eastern side of the nave, at the southern end, being transported entirely into the museum's collection. On the western side of the nave from the Minorite Church, there were initially three simpler monuments, carved in black marble. Chronologically, the first of these was the tombstone of the young Kata Csáky, the daughter of János Csáky and Mrs Rozália Bethlen, who passed away at the age of 15, in 1794. The second monument was made in memory of Mrs. Miklós Csiszár of Vurpăr, born Rozália Geréb of Araci, who died at the age of 16 because of chickenpox, after 23 days of marriage. The third, carved in limestone or sandstone, was dedicated to Mrs. János Csiki, the mother of eight children, buried in this place with six of her children, in 1814. A drawing of Mrs. János Csiki's monument was published in Kelemen's study: its outlines are those of a different type of neoclassical monument, consisting of a rectangular base, decorated with an extinguished candle and an hourglass, an inscribed trapezoidal plaque, combined with the relief of the spouses' unified crests and a cinerary urn with flames.¹²

The first examples of neoclassical funerary monuments in Transylvania appeared in the early nineteenth century. In contrast with the dramatic Baroque language, dominated by the terrifying idea of death, these early neoclassical monuments present a new outlook on death, perceived as eternal, quiet sleep; they represent dreamy geniuses and supplement these scenes with a series of other elements symbolising the idea of time flowing by (the hourglass and the snake), of Hope (the anchor), or of fulfilled life (the laurel wreath).¹³

The first neoclassical funerary monument from Transylvania, decorated with the figure of the young genius, is found in the Reformed Church from Brâncovenești, in a niche arranged above the side entrance, ordered by Baron János Kemény (son of Simon Kemény III) after 1802, in memory of his young wife, born Ágnes Szentpáli.¹⁴ The monument represents the high relief of the genius, partially covered in a draped garment, leaning with his right arm against a prismatic base, with a socle and a moulded cornice and an inscribed façade, crowned by an urn; in his left hand, he is holding a laurel wreath.

This iconographic type is taken from a series of Transylvanian tombstones from the first four decades of the century. One of the examples of a poorer quality is dedicated to the memory of the Reformed priest János Bálint. The funerary monument is next to the main entrance of the Reformed Church in Alba Iulia, having been commissioned by Zsuzsanna Fürst, his widow, in 1836.¹⁵

¹² Kelemen, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–76.

¹³ Pusztai László, *A szobrászat*, in ed. Szabolcsi, Hedvig–Galavics, Géza, *Művészet Magyarországon 1780–1830*, Budapest, 1980, p. 111. (hereinafter: Pusztai, *A szobrászat*); Honour, Hugh, *Klasszicizmus*, Budapest, 1991, pp. 135–148.; Sabău, Nicolae, "Monumentul funerar transilvan între Renașterea târzie și neoclasicism," in *Caiete de antropologie istorică*, year III (2004), no. 1–2, p. 49. (Sabău, *Monumentul*); Barabás Kisanna, "Adalékok a marosvécsi református templom építés- és berendezéstörténetéhez," in *Korunk*, 2005, pp. 96–100.; Sisa, József, *A magyar klasszicizmus*, Budapest, 2007, pp. 97–99 (Stílusok – korszakok IV.).

¹⁴ Barabás, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁵ Ibidem; Sisa, *A magyar*, p. 99.

This model spread, of course, throughout Hungary. One of the examples from the Catholic milieu lies in the yard of the Roman-Catholic Church from Csór. The funerary monument is a remarkable work, commissioned by the widow of János Nádas Tersztyánszky, born Katalin Nedéczai Nedeczky, and made by the sculptor József Huber, from Bratislava, between 1831 and 1834. This type adopted the model above, representing the elegant figure of a winged genius, supported by a pedestal decorated with the relief of an urn. Unlike Calvinist examples, in the case above the pedestal was destined to support a stone cross.¹⁶

In yard of the Evangelical Church from Tâlmăciu (Sibiu county), there is the funerary monument of Stephen Samuel of Salmen, made after his death, which occurred on 27 May 1822. The monument is of the same type, having the shape of an aedicule, with a triangular pediment supported by a pair of columns, decorated with a statue of a winged genius that holds an extinguished torch in his right hand and a crown of roses in his left hand, the figure of the genius leaning against a tree trunk.¹⁷

One of the last examples of neoclassical funerary monuments, dominated by the relief of a winged genius, also comes from the Evangelical environment. The epitaph of Martin Haupt lies in the Evangelical Church from Călnic, having been made in 1837. The monument is composed of a lower register, decorated with the relief of the genius, the upper register being reserved for the funerary inscription; the entire composition is crowned by a triangular pediment with corner acroteria, decorated in the pediment field with the relief of a chalice, a cross and an anchor, symbolising the three virtues of Christianity. The scene is completed with the relief of an hourglass, a symbol of fleeting time.¹⁸

Another interesting iconographic type is found today in the choir of the Franciscan Church from Cluj. The funerary plaque was built after 1821, in memory of Ádám Henter of Sântionlunca, having been commissioned by Mrs. Anna Hammel, the deceased man's aunt and the widow of József Mostits of Weidenfeld. The plaque consists of the funerary inscription and a curved pediment, separated by a moulded cornice. The reliefs of the pediment represent the flat relief of a sarcophagus in the background, the late man's a coat of arm on an oval shield supported by the long side of the sarcophagus, framed by a wreath of laurel leaves and flanked by the figures of a bowing woman mourner and of a genius. The female figure is dressed in a long, draped robe, with short sleeves, fastened around the waist with a band, having her head covered with a veil, and a handkerchief in her right hand. The genius appears as a semi-nude young man, of smaller size, with his waist and right shoulder covered with a long robe, holding a downward torch in his left hand. The scene represents the crowning of the female figure with a laurel wreath, symbolising the fulfilled life of the deceased man. This type of representation was certainly adopted, with certain modifications, from the funerary monument of Count Sámuel Gyulai Jr. of Mintia and his 21 month-old child, commissioned by his widow, Baroness Borbála Bornemisza of Cașin in 1794, which

¹⁶ Pusztai, László, *Huber József szobrász élete és művei*, in ed. Zádor, Anna-Szabolcsi, Hedvig, *Művészet és Felvilágosodás*, Budapest., 1978, pp. 515-543.; Pusztai, *A szobrászat*, p. 111.

Sisa, op. cit. pp. 97-98.

¹⁷ Sabău, *Monumentul*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁸ Sabău, op. cit., pp 50-51.

located inside in the Franciscan Church from Cluj.¹⁹ While the ungainliness of the Henter monument denotes a mediocre sculptor, this latter monument is a work of outstanding quality, coming, in all likelihood, from the workshop of one of the famous stonemasons of the time. It is equipped with a curved pediment, decorated with the relief of a sarcophagus in the background, while in the foreground, in the centre, there is the crest of the deceased, flanked by the figure of a mourner, the figure of Chronos cutting a rose with a sickle and a bubble-blowing baby, one of the well-known *memento mori* themes of Baroque art. The artistic decoration of the monument is inspired by Baroque, the inscribed plaque being framed by a border decorated with motifs characteristic of the neoclassical style. One of the early analogies of the Gyulai monument dates from 1795, being found in St. Michael's Parish Church in Cluj, on the western side of the nave, near the main entrance. The funerary monument of Baroness Rozália Kemény of Mănăstireni was commissioned by her husband, Elek Cserei, inspector of the salt mines from Transylvania, assessor of the King's Bench. The funerary monument is an accurate rendition of the type above, similarly composed of three registers, the high, prismatic socle, and the engraved field, crowned by a semi-circular pediment. The decoration of the pediment is a simplified version of the decoration from the Gyulai monument, the central motif of the scene being the sarcophagus relief in the background, on whose lid is placed a skull and an urn shaped like a flattened sphere, decorated with garlands. In front of the coffin, in the centre, there is the defunct person's coat of arms, in an oval shield, framed by a wreath of laurel leaves, over which the kneeling figure of a woman mourner is bent, dressed in a long, draped robe, with her head partially covered with a veil, raising, with her right hand, a long scarf to her face to wipe her tears.²⁰

In parallel with the above types, simple neoclassical funerary monuments also spread, being composed of three registers, with a moulded base, an inscribed plaque and a semi-circular pediment decorated with the dead person's coat of arms in a circular or oval shield, framed by a wreath of laurel leaves. The first example of this model is the funerary monument of Baron Ferenc Huszár of Cuișd, a student of the Royal High School in Cluj, who died of chickenpox at the age of 27; this monument is located in the Franciscan Church from Cluj, having also influenced the monument of Mrs. Simon Vikol from 1814.²¹

The three fragments of neoclassical funerary monuments from the lapidarium of the NMTH, originating from the former Minorite Church in the city, fall into the category of late neoclassical monuments, their quality being much lower than that of the monuments from the Franciscan Church due to the rougher material in which they were carved, two of them being made from sandstone, but certainly also due to lesser financial possibilities of those who commissioned them, since they belonged to the circle of tradesmen who had settled in the city. The above-mentioned monuments illustrate the popularisation of new trends, such as the permeation of the neoclassical style among the urban bourgeoisie, after having most certainly appeared initially in smaller, typically

¹⁹ Sabău, *op. cit.*, pp. 64.

²⁰ Sabău 2004, pp. 62–63, fig. 22.

²¹ Kelemen, *A volt minorita*, pp. 75–76.

aristocratic milieu. Despite the fact that the three fragments of the former Minorite Church are not among the most remarkable works of this kind from that period, their importance resides in the fact that they represent the testimony of an interesting phenomenon in the city's history, namely, the settlement and development of a strong layer of Armenian tradesmen in the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, who, in time, established close relations with the Minorite Church of the city.

List of Images:

1. Fragment from the funerary monument of Mrs. Márton Bogdánffy, born Augusta Seifert, NMTH, lapidary
2. Fragment from the funerary monument of Domokos Simai Jr., NMTH, lapidary (1835)
3. The pediment of Mrs. Simon Vikol, born Kata Daniel, NMTH, lapidary (1814)
4. The funerary monument of Mrs. Simon Vikol, born Kata Daniel, drawn by István Tóth
5. The funerary monument of Mrs. János Kemény tomb, born Ágnes Szentpáli, Brâncovenești, the Reformed Church (1802)
6. The funerary monument of the Reformed priest János Bálint, Alba Iulia, the Reformed Church, 1836
7. The funerary monument of Ádám Henter from Sântionlunca, Cluj, the Franciscan Church (1821)
8. The funerary monument of Count Sámuel Gyulai Jr. from Mintia and of his child (1794), Cluj, the Franciscan Church (1794)
9. The funerary monument of Baron Ferenc Huszár from Cuieșd, Cluj, the Franciscan Church (1796)



1 Fragment from the funerary monument of Mrs. Márton Bogdánffy, born Augusta Seifert, NMTH, lapidary



2 Fragment from the funerary monument of Domokos Simai Jr., NMTH, lapidary (1835)



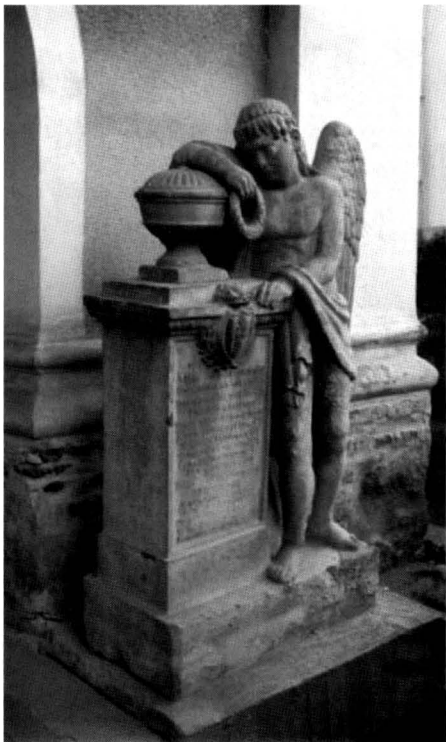
3. The pediment of Mrs. Simon Vikol, born Kata Daniel, NMTH, lapidary (1814)



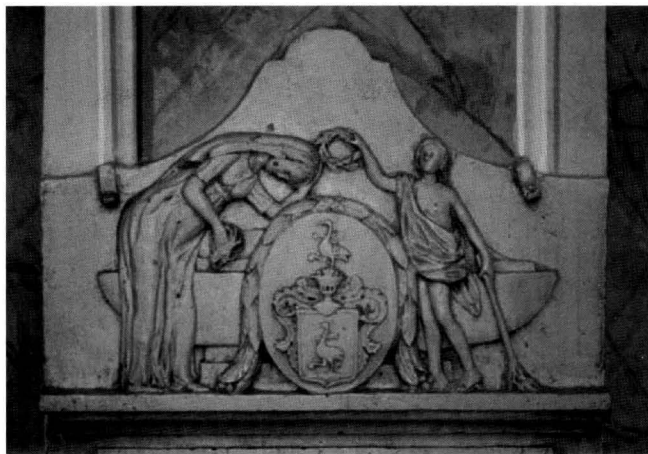
4. The funerary monument of Mrs. Simon Vikol, born Kata Daniel, drawn by István Tóth



5. The funerary monument of Mrs. János Kemény tomb, born Ágnes Szentpáli, Brâncovenesti, the Reformed Church (1802)



6. The funerary monument of the Reformed priest János Bálint, Alba Iulia, the Reformed Church, 1836



7. The funerary monument of Ádám Henter from Sântionlunca, Cluj, the Franciscan Church (1821)



8. The funerary monument of Count Sámuel Gyulai Jr. from Mintia and of his child (1794), Cluj, the Franciscan Church (1794)



6. The funerary monument of Baron Ferenc Huszár from Cuieșd, Cluj, the Franciscan Church (1796)