

PERIOD PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE PATRIMONY OF THE NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF TRANSYLVANIA

Abstract: This paper presents the temporary exhibition *The Memory of Images - Everyday Aspects in the Clichés and Photographs of the Nineteenth-Twentieth Centuries* (held from 23 July to 5 November 2012, at the “Octavian Goga” County Library in Cluj) and the Cluj photographers whose works were displayed in that exhibition.

Cluj was represented in this exhibition primarily through a selection of *cliché-verres* made by Ferenc Veress, the first renowned photographer in Transylvania, but also through the photographs taken by József Kato and the brothers Kálmán and Ferenc Dunky.

All these photographers can be considered genuine masters of the photographic art, who were familiar with the latest photographic techniques of the time and obtained numerous medals and awards at world exhibitions in Berlin, Paris or London.

Keywords: nineteenth- and twentieth-century photographs; *cliché-verres*; Ferenc Veress, József Kató, the Kálmán and Ferenc Dunky brothers

The organisation of the temporary exhibition entitled *The Memory of Images - Everyday Aspects in the Clichés and Photographs of the Nineteenth-Twentieth Centuries*, during the summer of 2012,¹ gave us the opportunity to write this article on the Transylvanian photographic art of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

The exhibition presented various types of cameras, *cliché-verres* and reproductions of these, as well as numerous original photographs from the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. These exhibits are part of the patrimony of the history museum from Cluj and come from older or more recent donations, ranging from donations made by Count Géza Kuún or Countess Ottilia Wass, to that made by Eugenia Rațiu, a descendant of the family of Ioan Rațiu, the leader of the Transylvanian Memorandum.

The clichés and the photographs taken during this period showed, most commonly, faces and images of men, women and children from Transylvania at that time. They usually came from wealthy social backgrounds, being either high-society aristocrats or members of bourgeois families of doctors, lawyers or professors.

The characters portrayed are immortalised in sober and elegant poses. The suits, dresses and other clothing accessories, as well the background of the photography studios where the images were made emphasised the special social status of those who posed before the camera.

¹ The exhibition was open between 23 July and 5 November 2012. It was organised in collaboration with “Octavian Goga” County Library in Cluj, on the latter’s premises. We would like to once again express our gratitude to the manager, Mrs. Sorina Stanca, and to the assistant director, Mrs. Viorica Moșoiu, for the kindness with which they supported this project.

The display of this social status, the cult of family values and the adoption of the *Biedermeier* lifestyle, which developed in the second half of the nineteenth century in Central Europe, were the reasons that fostered, in this period, the public interest in photographs - an ideal way to immortalise the individuals and the community to which they belonged.²

Most of these images were made in photography studios from the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, especially in the city of Cluj, but also in Budapest (the Goszleth István Studio) or Vienna (the Adèle Studio). There also appeared, however, photographs taken in other European countries, such as France or Italy.

Another thematic category of photographs displayed in the exhibition captures the outstanding personalities of political and cultural life, either European or local. Such were, for example, the composer **Giuseppe Verdi**; the famous soprano of the nineteenth century **Adelina Patti**, who also sang for President Abraham Lincoln at the White House; the Italian Professor **Roberto Fava** (a sympathiser of the Romanian Memorandists); the Romanian politician **Teodor Mihali** or the Hungarian politicians **Ferenc Deák** and **József Eötvös**. In this gallery of personalities, we may also see the young Countess **Ottília Wass**, the future patron of the museum in Cluj, represented in a family photograph. Another valuable exhibit was the album of Ioan Rațiu's family, which contained photographs of the famous family of Romanian militants.

Dating back to the twentieth century, there is a series of photographs from the family collections of Eugen F. Moga, the mayor of Huedin and a prominent member of the National Liberal Party in the interwar period, the academician Constantin Daicoviciu or from a recent donation made by Mrs. Carpia Petridean, the daughter of the former director of the Theatre of Chernivtsi, Trifon Nello Bucevschi.

Special attention should be devoted to the *passepartouts* and, especially, the frames in which photographs were once placed. Regardless of the material from which they were made (wood, white metal, brass, silver, gilded silver and so on), the frames were, most of the times, genuine works of art themselves, bearing the mark of the artistic styles of the time, which ranged from *Biedermeier* to *Art Nouveau*.

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Cluj was present in this exhibition primarily through a selection of *cliché-verres* made by **Ferenc Veress**, the first renowned photographer in Transylvania, the owner of a photography studio which was opened in 1853, on 16 Emil Isac Street (at that time, *Sétatér* utca). Veress was the editor of a specialised magazine, *Fényképészeti Lapok* (*Photographic Sheets*) and a professor of photography at "Franz Joseph" University in Cluj.³

He also distinguished himself through the fact that he supported the idea of setting up a joint (Hungarian-Romanian-Saxon) commission, aimed at immortalising -

² Kreilisheim György, *Régi magyar fényképezés [Hungarian Photographs of Yore]*, Budapest, 1941, p. 3.

³ For the life and activity of Ferenc Veress, see: Miklósi Sikes Csaba, *Fényképészek és műtermek Erdélyben 1839-1916 [Photographers and Photography Studios in Transylvania. 1839-1916]*, *Odorheiu Secuiesc*, 2001, pp. 51-64 and 210-215; Sas Péter, *A Szamos-parti Athén [The Athens by the River Someș]*, Cluj, 2003; Melinda Mitu, "Locuitori ai Clujului în fotografii realizate de Ferenc Veress (sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea)" ["Inhabitants of Cluj in the Photographs Taken by Ferenc Veress (The End of the Nineteenth Century)"], in *Acta Musei Napocensis*, 39-40. II/History, 2002-2003, pp. 431-436.

through photography - the cultural and historical monuments from the patrimony of the three Transylvanian ethnic communities.⁴

Photographic work in Cluj was also conducted by **József Kató**, who, in 1890, took over Veress's studio and worked here for seven years.⁵

Other photographers featured in the exhibition were **Kálmán** and **Ferenc Dunky**. The activity of the *Dunky brothers* was so well appreciated at the time that, in 1898, they were awarded the position of "Court photographers." They opened studios in several cities of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, including in downtown Cluj, in the house of Countess Otília Wass, and on what is currently King Ferdinand Street.⁶

All the photographers illustrated in this exhibition (Veress, Kató and the Dunky brothers) were true masters of the art of photography, being familiar with the latest photographic techniques of the time and being awarded numerous medals and distinctions at world exhibitions in Berlin, Paris or London.

Their works have become genuine period documents. The images they captured immortalised numerous personalities from Cluj, Transylvania and Hungary, as well as streets, towers, buildings, monuments of yore or events of daily life in the city by the Someş River. It is to Ferenc Veress, the pioneer of Transylvanian photography, that we owe - for example - two albums (entitled *Kolozsvár képekben [Cluj in Pictures]*) containing 45 photographs of the most representative buildings and areas in Cluj, taken in as early as 1859!⁷

In their turn, the Dunky brothers are considered to be the founders of journalistic photography, capturing in images many special events in the history of the city, such as the visit of Emperor Franz Joseph to Cluj in 1895, or the unveiling of the statue of King Matthias Corvinus in 1902.⁸

The two brother-photographers had outstanding merits in rendering some aspects related to the film projections in Cluj during the years 1913-1918. In the studio founded by Jenő Janovics, the director of the theatre in this city, the two photographers were commissioned to photograph scenes from movies, the work instruments, the scenography and the scenery, and those photographs would then be displayed in the cinema windows. These images have become even more valuable today, as most of these films were destroyed during the two world wars.⁹

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In the exhibition *The Memory of Images*, **Ferenc Veress** was presented through an entire series of clichés made on glass, which were then processed digitally and listed

⁴ Udvarhelyi Orbán Lajos, "A színes fényképezés kolozsvári úttörője" ["The Pioneer of Colour Photography from Cluj"], in *Korunk*, 1959, no. 7-8, p. 1185.

⁵ On the photographer József Kató, see Miklósi Sikes Csaba, *op.cit.*, pp. 141-142.

⁶ On the photographers Kálmán and Ferenc Dunky, see Miklósi Sikes Csaba, *op.cit.*, pp. 116-117.

⁷ Today, the two albums are preserved at "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library in Cluj, the "Special Collections" Room.

⁸ Miklósi Sikes Csaba, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

⁹ See Izsák Mária, in the presentation text of the exhibition *The Dunky Brothers and Film*. The exhibition was organised at Miskolc (where there existed another important studio of the two brothers), between 10 September and 27 November 2010, at the address <http://www.miskolcigaleria.hu/index.php?pid=10020>.

through modern techniques. By contrast, the photographs developed in that period are much rarer.

One of these rare photographs from the Veress studio depicts two women and a child “in folk costumes from the parts of Transylvania.” The photograph highlights the special interest in folk culture and traditions manifested in that period. The patrimony of the Museum from Cluj also includes dozens of *cliché-verres* from the Veress studio, showing ladies from the Bánffy, Tisza and Teleky families, who took great pleasure in having their pictures taken in popular Hungarian, Saxon or Romanian costumes from different parts of Transylvania.

Insofar as **József Kató** is concerned, two photographs taken in his studio were selected for this exhibition, showing Elisa Bodocan, the headmistress of Civil School for Girls in Blaj, in the early twentieth century.

The photographs taken by the brothers **Kálmán and Ferenc Dunky** that were included in this exhibition presented members of aristocratic families from Cluj: children or young girls from the Bánffy, Bethlen or Boér families, in romantic postures and “scenarios.” Thus, Zoltán Bánffy, as a child, was rendered playing the flute, in a setting that mimicked the natural environment; Baronesses Elsa Bánffy and Margit Boér appeared as angels and Countess Vilma Bethlen was captured in a dreamy pose, with flowers in her hair and on her dress.

All these theatrical compositions emphasised naivety, purity and honesty, values and attitudes that were highly appreciated by the elites of the time, especially when it came to the education of children and young girls.¹⁰

Other photographs from the studio of the two brothers portrayed Etelka Hóry, who became, after marriage, Mrs. Zsigmond Gyarmathy, a renowned personality in the Hungarian culture of the time for her novels and ethnographic writings.

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The History Museum from Cluj does not own very vast collections of photographs taken by the above-mentioned artists, many of which are preserved in museums or libraries from Romania and Hungary,¹¹ as well as in various private collections. The exhibition *The Memory of Images - Everyday Aspects in the Clichés and Photographs of the Nineteenth-Twentieth Centuries* envisaged displaying only those found in the patrimony of our institution. These photographs show, nonetheless, that on the cusp between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, Cluj could indeed boast its own outstanding representatives of the photographic art.

¹⁰ F. Dózsa Katalin, *Letűnt idők, eltűnt divatok* [Bygone Epochs, Vanished Fads], accessible at <http://fdk.hu/tanulmanyok/letunt-idok-eltunt-divatok/iii-amire-a-divat-hat/>.

¹¹ Ferenc Veress's photographs are preserved at “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library in Cluj, while those of the Dunky brothers are kept in the museums of Miskolc and Budapest.

Figure 1.

Photograph taken by Ferenc Veress (M 7281)

Figure 2.

Photograph taken by József Kató, representing Elisa Bodocan, the headmistress of the Civil School for Girls from Blaj (M 7285)

Figure 3.

Photograph taken by József Kató, representing Elisa Bodocan, the headmistress of the Civil School for Girls from Blaj (M 7286)

Figure 4.

Photograph taken by *the Dunky Brothers*, representing Baron Zoltán Bánffy (M 4030)

Figure 5.

Photograph taken by *the Dunky Brothers*, representing Countess Vilma Bethlen (M 4033)

Figure 6.

Photograph taken by *the Dunky Brothers*, representing Margit Boér, as an angel (M 4032)

Figure 7.

Photograph taken by *the Dunky Brothers*, representing Elsa Bánffy, as an angel (M 4029)

Figure 8.

Photograph taken by *the Dunky Brothers*, representing Elsa Bánffy, as an angel (4031)

Figure 9.

Photograph taken by *the Dunky Brothers*, representing Countesses Ilona and Vilma Bethlen, dressed up as Antigone and Ismene (M 4028)

Figure 10.

Photograph taken by *the Dunky Brothers*, representing Mrs. Zsigmond Gyarmathy (M 12.554)

Figure 11

Photograph taken by *the Dunky Brothers*, representing Mrs. Zsigmond Gyarmathy (M 12.555)

Figure 12

Countess Ottília Wass, in her youth, in 1869, (the bottom row, in the middle), next to Countesses Irma Kuún and Irma Kozma, Count Géza Kuún, Baron Béla Kemény (M 4132)

Figure 13

Giuseppe Verdi (M 4025)

Figure 14

Adelina Patti (M 4023)

Figure 15

Roberto Fava. In the photograph's corner, a dedication written by the Italian professor to the Romanian politician Elie Dăianu (M 6448)

Figure 16

Politician Teodor Mihali – with a dedication: “With kind regards”(M 6128)

Figure 17.

Photograph frames, made of brass or white metal, cu vegetal or avian motifs, stylised in the Art Nouveau manner

Figure 18-19.

Logos for the photography studios of Ferenc Veress and *the Dunky Brothers*



Foto 1



Foto 2



Foto 3



Foto 4



Foto 5



Foto 6



Foto 7






Foto 8




Foto 9

Dunky Fivérek
cs. és kir. udv. fényképészek

Kolozsvár Mátyaskirály-ter 10.		Miskolcz Városház-ter 20.
Dés Felső-séta-ter.		S. A. Újhely Rö tér 9.




FIVÉREK

KOLOZSVÁR
MISKOLCZ
S. A. ÚJHELY
DÉS

Foto 10



Foto 11



Foto 12

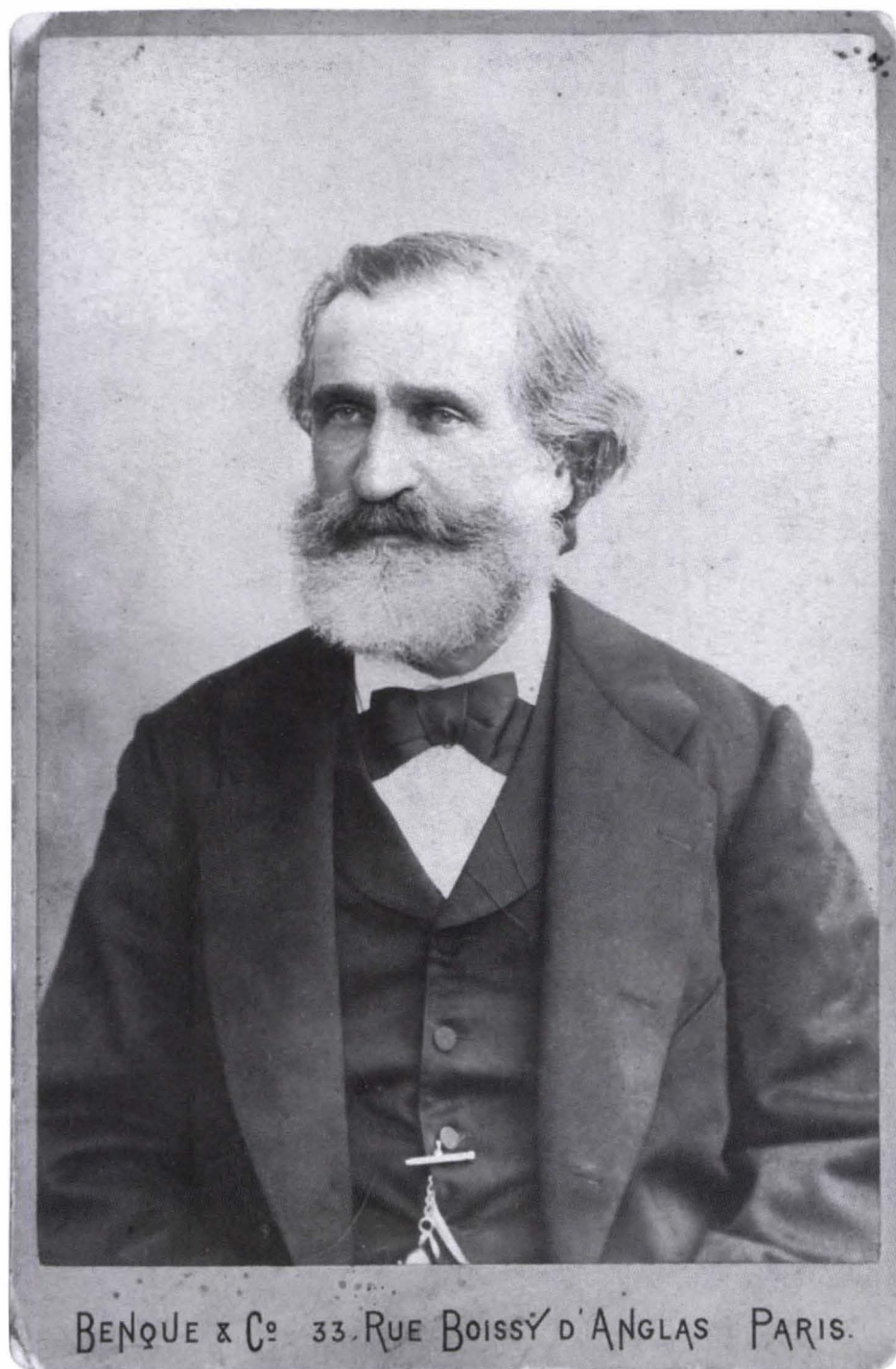


Foto 13



Foto 14



Foto 15



Foto 16



Foto 17




Foto 18

Be. Bonyi. D. // Zoltan

IV. 3200. H. 4030

321.



Után rendeléseket évek múlva is eszközünk.

STGM. HONDT WLEN

Boor. Ma. // mint augyal

IV. 3202.
H. 4032

323.



Után rendeléseket évek múlva is eszközünk.

STGM. HONDT WLEN