

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF MARY IN THE BAROQUE SCULPTURE FROM TIMIȘOARA

*Mihaela Vlăsceanu**

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Baroque art uses an heterogeneous repertoire, including both the patterns of late Renaissance, and those of the high and late Baroque specific to central Europe, as well as traits specific to neoclassicism. The theorization of the artistic phenomenon that occurred in Eighteenth Century province of Banat involves a presentation of the chronological scheme of the evolution, the metamorphoses of all artistic layouts and the creation of prototypes that were the trend setters for the entire outgoing century and the following one, as well.

The Baroque mentality accompanies those who settled this border area of the Habsburg Empire, penetrating all fields of expression and artistic manifestation. One may encounter in Banat various artistic prototypes, from those of Italian descent to those that were connected to the centre of the empire and its capital, Vienna. Form transcends the limits of time and tends to metamorphose in what shaped the characteristics of the provincial Baroque with its specific coordinates that make it a late variant of the style that emerged from Italy.

The baroque as a style created an unity in diversity as one may express, throughout the multiplicity of its multicultural aspects setting the stage for future contacts, influence penetration, even establishing dialogue between two worlds separated by hundreds of years of evolution, the province of Banat being situated at crossroads between Orient and Occident.

It is not important what is common to all artistic manifestations of the 18th century, but what is unique, what makes the local variant of the style a particular manifestation at the border of the Habsburg Empire, in a period when

* Universitatea de Vest, Timișoara, b-dul Vasile Pârvan, nr. 4, e-mail: mihaela.vlasceanu@e-uvrt.ro

Baroque displays of imperial power proposed a range of subjects in connection with the evolution of the European society.

A great number of artifacts from the Eighteenth Century can be found in museums in general, and in the Diocesan Collection from Timișoara, in particular. The works found here are of many types, and may be traced to many different regions of Banat. The largest number of these items come from various Catholic churches raised in rural Banat throughout the entire century in question, forming in time what we today can see as the religious collection of devotional artifacts. Their chronology ranges from the beginning of the century in question and stretches till the mid of the following one. What we may assume from the beginning is that they all present general affinities which can be subsumed under the heading “Baroque”, or “Late Baroque”.

The researcher of this field must highlight the general tendencies of the baroque age in order to systematically identify the ones common to the area, a local variant of the style that emerged from central Europe.

One of the topics mostly used for its semantically dramatic content was taken by the artists from the Revelation of Saint John the Divine, the victory of Archangel Michael over Satan. Due to the victorious content of the subject it was frequently used to decorate façades (as the initial project of the Catholic cathedral from Timișoara), or in the votive painting of the main altar (a work signed by Michelangelo Unterberger Cavalese), inside the same monument. The doctrinal importance of the theme comes from the Jesuits, who regarded the Protestants as heretics and the Reformation as the work of devil.¹ The victory of the Archangel Michael symbolizes the victory of true faith, against Islam, in the historical context of the beginning of the 18th century. The expansion of such symbolic themes can be placed in the hands of the Catholic militant orders, of which the most effective were the Jesuits, considered the followers of the Apostles with their simple and true faith. They even developed a concept for their propaganda, placing Hungary under the patronage of the Virgin, creating the concept of *Regnum Marianum*.

Various themes promoting visually the Counter-Reformation iconography were inspired by the Bible, such as the images promoting the cult of Virgin Mary, the Christological cycle² and the lives of martyr saints, among these the

¹ Andras Szilagyi, “Thematic approaches to Baroque and Rococo,” in *Baroque and Rococo* (Budapest: Iparművészeti Múzeum, 1990), 9.

² On this issue, see the article published by Mihaela Vlăsceanu, “Lucrări de plastică figurativă barocă din colecția Episcopiei Romano-Catolice din Timișoara (ciclul Christologic),” in C. Firea, C. H. Oprean, eds., *Artă-Istorie-Cultură, Studii în onoarea lui Marius Porumb* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Nereamia Napocae, 2003), 257–270.

cult of Saint Nepomuk being one of the most illustrated in this period.³ His success in patrology resides in the great number of apotropaic qualities, from the protection of the confessional secret to protection against violent death (in analogy with his own martyrdom).⁴

This article intends to present the cult of Mary through several works of art, mainly sculptures (monumental or altar pieces) that decorated the main squares of Banat in that period, or were part of the liturgical furniture decorations inside the Catholic churches. As seen from the bibliography indicated previously, this subject was treated partially by the author. Some of the works that will be analyzed are a novelty in the historiography on the subject, as they were never published, having uncertain origin place and being part of the Catholic Bishopric from Timișoara collection, with no inventory number and poor conservation condition.

One of the most abstract representations of Mary is the Immaculate Conception⁵, present in the subjects of the baroque sculpture throughout the entire 18th and 19th centuries. The source for this image can be found in *The Apocalypse* 12, 1–6, or revelation of John the Divine, the last and most visionary book of the New Testament.⁶ The monument from Libertății Square, in Timișoara is such an example, of how this abstract notion⁷ was perceived and interpreted by the known artists from Vienna (E. Wasserburger and F. Blim)

³ The province of Banat was set under the patronage of Saint Nepomuk in 1726, when the Franciscan order requested this from king Charles V, requested granted due to the large number of devotees found under the Habsburg rule in the province that was a new addition to the crown, defined accordingly as *Kronland*.

⁴ Subject debated in many articles, for details concerning the numerous representations of the saint that became holy patron of Banat in the 18th century see also, M. Vlăsceanu, "Ipостaze ale reprezentării Sfântului Ioan Nepomuk în sculptura barocă din Banat," *Ars Transilvaniae* 8 (1999): 229–243; "Aspects concerning the themes of the baroque monumental sculpture from Timișoara," *Studii de istorie a Banatului XXVI- XXVII* (2002–2003): 111–124; "The Iconography of Saints as represented in the Baroque Monumental Sculpture of Banat," *Transylvanian Review* XXI, Suppl. 1 (2012): 227–232.

⁵ Subject which refers to her immaculate birth by St. Anna! She was born without sin, she was the second Eve, and the fall from grace in the garden of Eden did not apply to her. She was part of God's plan for the redemption of humanity. For details surrounding this subject see Sally Fisher, *The Square Halo and other Mysteries of western Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1995), 3; Martin Bocian, *Dicționar enciclopedic de personaje biblice* (București: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1996), 290–291.

⁶ In John's vision a woman appears that will be later equated with Mary. She stands on a crescent moon, a symbol since ancient times associated with virginity, being "clothed in the sun", and on her head she has a crown of twelve stars. Other symbols may appear, among these the serpent of the Fall, which she tramples underfoot, Fisher, *The Square Halo*, 52.

⁷ M. Vlăsceanu, "Considerații cu privire la reprezentarea unor concepte abstracte în sculptura barocă din Banat," in *Questiones Romanicae* (Szeged: University Press, 2017), 696–702.

who conceived the apotheosis of Mary on the cloud floating obelisk, creating a religious spectacle suited for a period when all people turned to the Divine for protection. The connotations of this representation are somewhat different in Banat than in the other provinces of the Habsburg Empire, for instance we observe the semantic aspect of Mary protecting against the protestants, who by the way rejected her cult and took her out of their aniconic churches, while in Banat one may notice a change of paradigm, where Mary is victorious over the unfaithful, in this case the Ottomans. The depiction portrays Mary as stepping on the crescent moon with a serpents on her feet, a symbol of Islam, defeated by the Catholic faith in 18th century Banat province. It is in fact a victory scene, where Mary holds a symbol of her virginity (the lily) in her hand while stars emerge from the hallow that crowns her head. Elegant and refined,



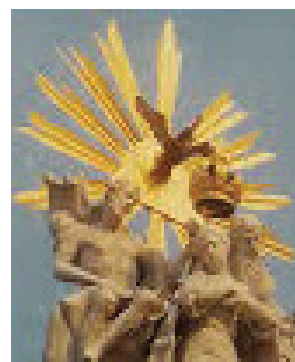
Mary's monument/ Pest column, Libertății Square, Timișoara, 1756, E. Wasserburger&F. Blim, detail of the *Immaculate Conception*

her physiognomy tells about the academic qualities of the two documented sculptors that followed the prototypes associated with her figure that circulated in the empire and were so common for representation. In this case the statue adorns a column that has a repertoire of saints that indicate danger in the shape of (the unfaithful, the plague, famine and war, that were present and influenced the life of the capital inhabitants). Among these St. Sebastian, St. Roche and Carol Borromeus, on whom we will not debate in this article.

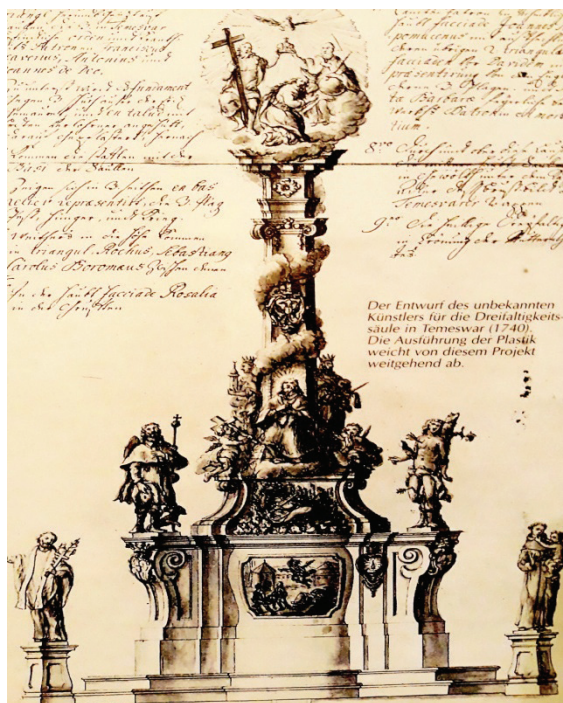
The Baroque style is emphatic, this characteristic is best seen in the way it renders emotional subjects in order to subdue one's imagination in times of turmoil, as this period was often characterized. It is a clear apotheosis scene where

Mary floats victorious over the levels of humanity depicted at the base of the Pest column: the life and death of St. Nepomuk, the other protecting saints mentioned surrounding him and floating clouds on which Mary as the Immaculate Conception ends the dynamic composition. In the case of the statue known in historiography as the St. Trinity column, or another reiteration of the concepts surrounding the idea of Pest columns with their entire iconography, we can observe Mary's iconology as the one who sits among the Trinity group (the Holy Father, Christ and the Holy Ghost) pleading for forgiveness. In this case the notion is not an abstract depiction, but has real protective values, as one may notice from the sketch of the monument, that was realized as an act of devotion after the Plague epidemic from 1736–1738. The monumental sculpture does not render colors, if it would Mary would have been dressed in blue, with red tunica underneath. Blue symbolizes Heaven, Truth, Love and Constancy while red stands for Passion and the Holy Ghost.

The altar fragments chosen to illustrate the depiction of Mary, in fact the iconography that consecrated her as mother of Christ, Virgin Mary, *Maria della Vittoria*, were often seen in the altar compositions (either main altars or secondary) found in the catholic churches from Banat. These statues representing Mary in various iconographical types are in fact altar fragments, that used to adorn the structures, preserved as such in the collection of religious art of the institution



Mary as Intercessor,
Saint Trinity monument,
Timișoara, Unirii Square,
1740, unknown master



Sketch for *The Holy Trinity monument*,
1740, apud H. Diplich, *Die Domkirche*
in Temeswar (München, 1971)

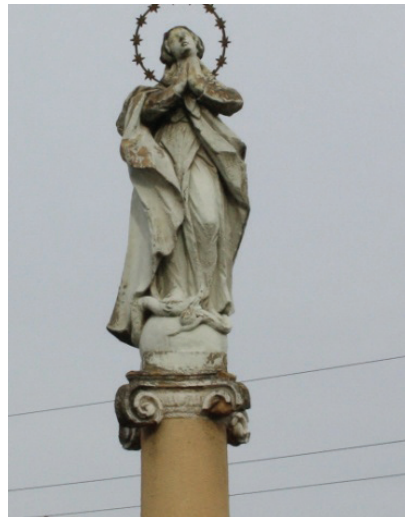


Side altar inside the Saint Nepomuk church, Timișoara, black/white photo taken in 1911, in the centre the wooden statue of the Immaculate Conception, left (St. Anna), right (Joachim)

Reformation was described by the meeting of Anna and Joachim at the Golden Gate, later to be replaced by the adoration of Virgin Mary by her parents, that happened around 1500s.

As mother of Christ, Mary appears in

already mentioned.⁸ One such fragment was identified in the former Franciscan church from Timișoara, turned over to the Piarists in 1781 when they came from Sântana. From the pictures taken by a pupil of the Piarist seminar in 1908, we were able to see one altar sculpture with the Immaculate theme, a statue made of wood that unfortunately was lost when the church was destroyed in 1911, due to serious damages that were done by the artillery attacks from the 1848 revolution. The two statues placed on the altar represent Mary's parents (Joachim and Anna) theme that was rendered in connection with the Immaculate Conception prefiguration/ that until the Counter-



The *Immaculate Conception*, Ciacova, 1801

⁸ We express our gratitude to Msr. Martin Roos who saved these heritage pieces and contributed to their restoration and integration into the artistic circuit of the Diocesan museum collection.

the Gospels, and her story begins with her Immaculate Conception, doctrine that will become a dogma of the Roman Catholic church only later in 1854.

CONSIDERAȚII ASUPRA ICONOGRAFIEI FECIOAREI MARIA ÎN SCULPTURA BAROCĂ DIN TIMIȘOARA

Rezumat

Pornind de la descrierea principalelor tipuri iconografice ale Mariei: Maria Imaculata, Maria Victorioasă, Maria Intercesoare, studiul face o incursiune în domeniul sculpturii de for ce face trimitere la aceste ipostazieri catolice, într-o perioadă în care Banatul era o provincie de graniță a Imperiului Habsburgic. Conotațiile temelor sunt diferite de cele din centrul Europei din rațiuni ce țin de situația politică, de pildă una dintre cele mai abstracte teme din arta barocă, cea a Imaculatei concepții semnifică Victoria, ca și în mediul apusean, dar în acest caz, o victorie asupra forței otomane aflate în acest interval în recul teritorial. Maria intercesoare, un alt tip iconografic consacrat de arta barocă, se manifestă din plin în sculptura barocă din Timișoara, monumentul Sfintei Treimi din Piața Libertății făcând apel prin emfaza reprezentării la calitățile Mariei. Dintre reprezentările Mariei în acest plan urban al statuariei lipsesc cele ce o surprind ca Mater Dolorosa, nefiind identificate încă trimiteri la una dintre variantele temei: Pieta.