THE CREATION OF NEW VISUAL CONTENT IN ALTAR SCULPTURE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE NEO-GOTHIC ALTARS IN THE CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL OF TIMIŞOARA

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This approach is particularly relevant for understanding how nationalism and identity were visually and symbolically constructed within Catholic church interiors during the nineteenth century, establishing these altar sculptures as significant historical monuments. The paper demonstrates how an iconographic approach can decode the cultural and political messages embedded within a series of neo-Gothic altars constructed for the *Sacra Ecclesiae Cathedralis Temesoarensis*. By treating these altars as total phenomena, the study provides a nuanced perspective that connects their artistic elements with historical narratives and societal values. Given that this examination constitutes an introduction to the artistic landscape of the nineteenth century art in Banat, we shall employ a range of analytical approaches, discussing everything under the methodologycal approach of art history. In order to investigate the programmatic curricula and content associated with the Catholic cathedral located in Timişoara, specifically focusing on the altar sculptures from the mid-nineteenth century, this research interprets these altars as significant cultural artifacts. It conducts an analysis of their artistic components within the framework of their historical and socio-political contexts, thereby underscoring their profound significance. Furthermore, the research illustrates the intrinsic interconnectedness between artistic expression and socio-political frameworks, while proposing potential avenues for future scholarly inquiry. It is indeed feasible to conduct a semantic analysis of monuments. In this particular case study, we engage with primary sources to execute an iconographic examination of the statues, investigating

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the manner in which Romanticism is manifested through specific depictions of saints in connection with the monument's historical narrative. By conceptualizing the two neo-Gothic altars as holistic phenomena-taking into account their form, iconography, and historical relevance-we obtain critical insights into the cultural narratives that are interwoven within overall artistic manifestations. This method enhances our understanding of how nationalism, which grew during the nineteenth century, influenced the selection of saints featured in public monuments. Such choices often conveyed statements about identity, unity, and historical continuity within local multiethnic communities. The paper highlights the value of iconographic analysis in uncovering the semantic layers of any type of monuments.

Moreover, utilizing György M. Vajda's theoretical framework of the "phenomenology of ideas" as a potential lens through which to scrutinize the progression of artistic movements that emerged during the mid-nineteenth century, we apply fundamental analytical methodologies and conceptualize the aesthetic object as the phenomenon in question, a phenomenon encompassing its entirety, which is most conducive to the phenomenological examination that we are undertaking.[1]

Thus, this paper positions aesthetic objects, such as the two altars, as the most suitable subjects for phenomenological analysis. This involves understanding the object in its entirety through a holistic approach that encompasses not only its physical form but also its symbolic and contextual meanings, including its broader historical and cultural context. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the object's significance, with iconography and iconology contributing to the framework of this study. Furthermore, the authorship of Ioannes Müller[2] is also examined, given the scarcity of sources analyzing his works and artistic development.

To achieve this in the brief overview, we will provide a contextual analysis of the altar sculptures, focusing on a period marked by significant political upheaval as the centrally governed multinational state evolved towards the

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[1] György M. Vajda, "The Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy Approached from a Phenomenological Angle," in M. Kronegger, A.T. Tymieniecka, eds, *Life the Human Quest for an Ideal. Analecta Husserliana*, vol 49 (Springer, Dordrecht, 1996). Accessed 30 August 2024 https://doi.org/10.1007/978–94-009–1604–3_23.

[2] HKA kamerale Ungarn r. Nr. 639 fol.233/13.5.1807, in Hans Diplich, *Die Domkirche in Temeswar. Ein Beitrag zu Ihrer Baugeschichte*, Verlag des Sudostdeutschen Kulturwerkes (München, 1972), 282, where the information on the two altars is concise and accurate, as it follows: *Duae primariae laterales arae ad limen Sanctuarii: prima est in honorem B. M. V. Patronae regni Hungariae cum statua antiqua aenea B. M. V. et reliquiis S. Verrecundi; secunda est S. Gerardi E.M. cum statua et reliquiis ejusdem Sancti. -Arae haec laterales in stylo gothico ab Episcopo Csájaghy sunt erectae et per sculptorem Vindobonensem Joannem Müller affabre confectae.*

formation of independent nations in Central Europe. The Habsburg monarchy, encompassing diverse nationalities, was a fertile ground for dissatisfaction and the emergence of varied nationalist ideas. These sentiments are reflected even in altar sculpture, where they were expressed through a distinct form of hagiolatry. The Hungarian revolution was defeated following the siege of Timişoara, during which Georg Freiherr Rukavina von Vidovgrad, the commanding general of the imperial army, died in 1849.[3] After the Battle of Sânandrei, Hungary lost the Banat region, and Timişoara briefly served as the capital of Serbian Vojvodina and the Temes Banat until 1860, when it was reintegrated into Hungary. During the siege, an epidemic of typhus and scurvy also broke out. As a consequence, there was an impetus for the representation of themes reflecting the glorious past of the Hungarian nation using the cult of the Holy Kings of Medieval Hungary (Stephen, Ladislas and Emeric, and other Arpádián saints like St. Elisabeth of Hungary)[4], the Virgin Mary as *Patrona Hungariae*, conveyed to foster Catholic revival and propaganda. This transformation compelled artists to confront emerging ideologies and reinterpret established iconographies. The three holy kings were linked to the doctrines of legitimacy which form the basis of political power-part of the dynamic "process of symbolization". From the beginning of the seventeenth century the Jesuits effectively connected the cult of the Hungarian saints with the current historical objective of the nation, re-Catholicization and hostility towards the Ottoman Empire. During this period the iconography of St. Stephen focused on the representation scenes of the angelic coronation and on offering of the country for the Virgin Mary.[5] Saint Stephen was the most powerful symbol of nationalism connecting a distant but glorious past when he devoted the church to the Virgin Mary. This courtly ideology was surpassed by Franz Joseph who right after the compromise of 1867 evinced himself as the second Árpád.[6] Another doctrine that was given artistic expression through the

[3]   *Schematismus Cleri Dioecesis Csanádiensis pro Anno Jubilari MDCCCC* [Schematismus 1900] (Temesvárini, Typis Typographiae Dioecesis Csanádiensis, 1900); Nicolae Ilieşiu, *Monografie istorică* (Timişoara: Editura G. Matheiu, 1943), 98; I. D. Suciu, *Revoluţia de la 1848–1849 în Banat* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Române, 1968); Ioan Munteanu, Rodica Munteanu, *Timişoara. Monografie* (Timişoara: Mirton, 2002).

[4]   The presence of Saint Elisabeth of the House of Árpád / Elisabeth of Thurigia was linked to an intense Eucharistic devotion. As Franciscan tertiary member (of the Beguines) she practiced active charity and was devoted to the poor.

[5]   This hypostasis reffering to St. Stephen's coronation by angels holding the *Corona Sacra* appears on the left side altar of the Catholic Church in Vinga, crafted in the south Tyrolean workshop of Josef Runggaldier (1892).

[6]   Katalin Sinkó, "Árpád versus Saint István: Competing Heroes and Competing Interests in the Figurative Representation of Hungarian History," *Ethnologia Europaea* XIX (1989): 83. Accessed, 5 June 2024, https://doi.org/10.16995/ee.1001

emphasis of Christian origin of royal power[7], was linked with the presence of the *Corona Sacra*, the concept of power emerging from the historical event of 1001. Furthermore, Saint Stephen was seen as the personification of wisdom and generosity, while Ladislas promoted chivalry and Emeric chastity.[8]

Fig. 1. Joannes Müller, 1856, Patrona Hungariae neo-Gothic altar, Roman-Catholic Cathedral, Timişoara. Image source: Mihaela Vlăsceanu. / Joannes Müller, 1856, Patrona Hungariae, altar neogotic, Catedrala Romano-Catolică, Timişoara. Sursa foto: Mihaela Vlăsceanu.

The *Patrona Hungariae* altar reiterates concepts associated with the *Corona Sacra*, where Saint Stephen is depicted offering the Esztergom Basilica as a gift to the Virgin Mary. The altar also features Saint John of Nepomuk, the patron

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7   As Vayk was bestowed with royal prowess by Pope Sylvester and was crowned with Attila's crown used in 401 at the event.
8   See, Dragoş Gheorghe Năstăsoiu "Between Personal Devotion and Political Propaganda: Iconographic Aspects in the Representation of the *sancti reges Hungariae* in Church Mural Painting (14th Century – Early–16th Century)," PhD Dissertation (Budapesta: Department of Medieval Studies of the Central European University, 2018), DOI: 10.14754/CEU.2018.01, accessed at 21 August 2024 at https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2018/nastasoiu_dragos-gheorghe.pdf.

saint of the province since 1729, consecrated by the Franciscan order of Bosnia Argentina. On the right side, it includes Saint Gerhard, the bishop who founded the diocese of Cenad, and Saint John of Capistrano, "the soldier saint" patron of jurists and military chaplains, member of the Order of Friars Minor[9] (Fig. 1, 2). The tabernacle serves as a repository for the relics of Saint Verucundus.[10] Both altars were commissioned during the period when Alexander Csajágy was serving as bishop (1851–1860).
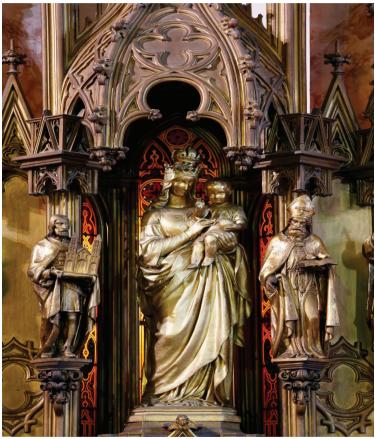

Fig. 2. Detail of the Patrona Hungariae altar with Saint Stephen devoting the Esztergom basilica to the Virgin Mary, and bishop of Cenad-Gerhard of Sagredo. Image source: Roman Catholic Diocese of Timişoara. / Detaliu privind altarul Patrona Hungariae, cu Sf. Ştefan închinând basilica Esztergom Fecioarei Maria şi lui Gerhard de Sagredo, episcopul Cenadului. Sursa: Dioceza Romano-Catolică Timişoara.

[9]   When in 1456 at age 70 he led a Crusade against the invading Ottoman Empire at the siege of Belgrade with the Hungarian military commander John Hunyadi.
[10]   *Schematismus 1900*, 104.

The altar dedicated to Saint Gerhard provides insights into the qualities of several notable saints, including Adalbert of Prague, a missionary to the Hungarians, Poles, and Prussians who was martyred while attempting to convert the Baltic Prussians to Christianity[11], Saint Elisabeth of Thuringia (also known as Saint Elisabeth of Hungary); and Marcianus, "the first bishop of the West". The altar also preserves the relics of Saint Gerhard in the tabernacle (Fig. 3). The iconographical choice reflects the traditional privilege of the Hungarian rulers to organize the Church and appoint ecclesiastical dignitaries in their territories – the case of Gerhard.[12]

Fig. 3. Joannes Müller, altar of St. Gerhard, bishop of Cenad, 1856, Image source: Roman Catholic Diocese of Timişoara. / Joannes Müller, altarul Sf. Gerhard, episcopul Cenadului, 1856. Sursa: Dioceza Romano-Catolică Timişoara.

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[11] Devoted to the sick and imprisoned, Adalbert was the patron saint of Poland and was referred to as the "patron saint of the spiritual unity of Europe". In this context, I envision his connection to other representative saints. In iconography, he is most often depicted in the attire of a bishop, wearing a pallium and holding a crozier.

[12] *Ius supremis patronatus regis.*

This approach is innovative in its thematic focus. The author[13] has previously published numerous detailed studies on the altar sculptures of Catholic churches in Banat, which are stylistically categorized under a late Baroque classicizing style that persisted into the early nineteenth century. Moreover, this research extends further into a period characterized by a diversity of styles that defined European art during the analyzed period.

Artists commissioned for these works were encouraged to incorporate symbolic elements that reflected the Banat region's significance, celebrated its local heritage, and conveyed messages of continuity and loyalty to the monarchy and the Catholic church. This was particularly relevant during the dynamic period of redefined national and regional identities. Although there are no surviving documents detailing Joannes Müller academic background (such as his studies at the Vienna Academy of Art) or other certified works, it is reasonable to presume that he was engaged by other officials within the empire artistic fabric. He may have been involved in creating funerary statues, including those in Vienna's Central Cemetery.

Surveying the pantheon of Hungarian national heroes, it becomes evident that the most common Baroque representation of Saint Stephen is that of the king offering his country to the Virgin Mary. This gesture echoes the dedication of the country by Leopold II in 1693, which clearly alluded to Saint Stephen's similar act, dedicating Hungary to the Queen of Heaven, Our Lady (*Magna Hungariae Domina*). Under Maria Theresa, the veneration of Saint Stephen was further enriched by the revival of the Holy Right Hand, a relic associated with the revered king. Maria Theresa succeeded in acquiring this valuable relic from

[13]   See, M. Vlăsceanu, "Sculptura de altar a bisericii catolice din Iecea Mare," *Studii de Istorie a Banatului* XIX–XX (1999): 89–108; eadem, "Ipostaze ale barocului din Banat – considerații privind altarul baroc al bisericii catolice din Neudorf (jud. Arad)," in *Societate și civilizație în Banatul istoric* (Timişoara: Mirton, 2003), 229–238; eadem, "Studiu de caz – sculptura barocă de altar a bisericii catolice din Grabaţ (judeţul Timiş)," *Studii de Istorie a Banatului* XXIII, XXIV, XXV (1999–2002): 227–242; eadem, "Considerații privind sculptura altarelor laterale ale Domului Romano-Catolic din Timişoara," in *Ars Transsilvaniae* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei, 2000–2001) nr. IX, 159–164; eadem, "Studiu de caz – sculptura barocă de altar a bisericii catolice din Lenauheim," *Patrimonium Banaticum* II (2003): 227–242, 257–27; eadem, "Considerații stilistice asupra sculpturii altarului principal al Domului Romano-Catolic din Timişoara," *Studii de Istorie a Banatului* XXVIII–XXIX (2005): 441–454; eadem, *Sculptura barocă din Banat* (Timişoara: Editura Excelsior Art, 2005); eadem, "Aspecte ale barocului în arta bănăţeană a sec. XIX– sculptura de altar a bisericii catolice din Giarmata (jud. Timiş)," *Studii de Istorie a Banatului* XXX–XXXI (2006–2007): 248–251; eadem, "Art and Ideology in Nineteenth Century Banat," in *Euroregionalia. Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* (Timişoara: Art Museum, 2019): 111–128; Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Use of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001). Accessed June 3, 2024. https://imagesociale.fr/wp-content/uploads/Burke_Eyewitnessing.pdf

Ragusa and had it ceremonially brought to the royal castle in Buda. Since 1771, the worship of the Holy Right Hand has been a significant aspect of the Saint Stephen cult.[14] Additionally, both altars discussed are repositories of relics of Saints Verecundus and Gerhard, a practice that enhances the faith.

The presence of the three Árpádian kings in the art of Upper Hungary, Bosnia and Croatia has been scientifically explored through dedicated studies.[15] In this relevant literature, research has focused on how these figures are integrated into the narrative, and according to Năstăsoiu[16], the iconography was always in correlation with certain characteristics derived from the king's life and legend, often the iconography reflects characteristics of old and wise King St. Stephen, young and chaste Prince St. Emeric, and knight King St. Ladislas.

A strong process of symbolization can be observed in this new visual imagery of power- as these altars construct the framework for the expression of the status and power of the Roman-Catholic church denomination. Furthermore, the study establishes the tendencies and directions of the expansion of the phenomenon of Ars sacra in nineteenth century capital of the Austro-Hungarian imperial Banat and opens new research perspectives, and identifies types and other iconographical solutions promoted locally and across the entire part of the south-eastern part of the empire.

The architectural framework of the investigation is meticulously designed to serve as a preamble to the nineteenth century sacred artistic expressions, a topic that has regrettably been overlooked in scholarly discourse, thereby establishing paradigms that characterize the altars as recipients of a manifest

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14   Sinko, "Árpád versus Saint István," 71; S. Krasa-Florian, *Die Allegorie der Austria. Die Entstehung des Gesamtstaatsgedankens in der österreichisch–ungarischen Monarchie und die bildende Kunst* (Wien: Böhlau, 2007), Accessed 23 August 2024 http://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/34441; Bálint Varga, "The Monumental Nation: Magyar Nationalism and Symbolic Politics," in *Fin-de-siècle Hungary, Austrian and Habsburg Studies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).

15   For further reading refer to Sinkó, "Árpád versus Saint István," 67–83. Accessed, 5 June 2024, https://doi.org/10.16995/ee.1001; Marija Mirković, "Ikonografija sv. Ladislava na području Zagrebačke (nad)biskupije," in *Zagrebačka biskupija i Zagreb. 1094.–1994*, Antun Škvorčević, ed. (Zagreb: Horvátország/Magyarország. Évszázados irodalmi és képzőművészeti kapcsolatok, 1995), 579–591; Linda Burke, "A Sister in the World: Saint Elizabeth of Hungary in the "Golden Legend," *The Hungarian Historical Review* 5, no. 3, *Saints Abroad*: 509–535. Accessed 2 May 2024. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44390788; Danko Šourek: "Arpadian Royal Cult in the Zagreb Cathedral: From Gothic to Baroque," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 41 (2017): 47–58.

16   In his MA thesis adressing the issue, Dragoş Gh. Năstăsoiu, *"Sancti reges Hungariae" in Mural Painting of Late-medieval Hungary* (Budapest: Central European University, 2019), 5, defines the features of the three royal characters of Hungarian kingship saying that these were established independently into each saint's hagiography, quoting Melinda Tóth, *Árpád-kori falfestéstészet* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974).

iconography. Among the sources mentioning these two altars, a short list comprises those who only mention the two retables withouth any aestetic or iconographic debate.[17]

The symbolism associated with the national emblem was particularly poignant, as it reinforced the idea that the strength of the empire lay in its diversity and the integration of various nationalities under a unified imperial rule.[18] This integration was not just political but also cultural and religious, with Catholicism serving as a binding force among the different nations of the empire. Thus, Saint Stephen's image and the associated Marian devotion were central to the Habsburg political narrative which was reinforced after the Ausgleich, still in the period of refference this iconographical topoi was a reinactement, an instrument of re-Catholicization. Noteworthy that the act of founding the Archdiocese of Esztergom[19], signified not only a personal religious commitment from the canonized king, but also a strategic move to foster unity and legitimacy in the newly Christianized kingdom, which later evolved into the concept of *Regnum Marianum*. This notion, symbolizing Hungary as the Kingdom of Mary, remains a cornerstone of Hungarian religious identity, deeply influencing its cultural and spiritual heritage. Furthermore, the Esztergom Basilica, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, stands as a testament to this enduring legacy and devotion. These connotations are vividly expressed in the iconography of the altar, where Catholic universalism is highlighted by statues of the most significant saints of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, such as Saint Stephen[20] and Saint Gerhard of Sagredo, the first bishop of Csanád in the Kingdom of Hungary[21], central to the edicula structure, seconded by niches crowned with coronets and adorned with dynamic pinnacles. According to Sinkó (1983), "Saint Stephen was emblematic of imperial unity, intertwining with themes like Catholicism, universalism, and multinationalism". This

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[17] Diplich, *Die Domkirche*, 284; *Schematismus 1900*, 104.
[18] Matthew C. Potter, ed., *Representing the Past in the Art of the Long Nineteenth Century. Historicism, Postmodernism, and Internationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2023); Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Elena Dana Prioteasa, *Medieval Wall Paintings in Transylvanian orthodox Churches. Iconographic Subjects in Historical Context* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Academiei&Mega, 2016); Katalin Sinkó, "Árpád versus Saint István," 80. Accessed, 23 August 2024, https://doi.org/10.16995/ee.1001
[19] Founded in 1001 by Stephen I of Hungary.
[20] Stephen, the first Hungarian king (1000/1–1038), and his son Emeric (Imre, †1031) were canonized in 1083 at the initiative of King Ladislas I (1077–1095), together with Gerard of Sagredo (Gellért), bishop of Csanád and martyr, and the hermits Zoerard-Andrew and Benedict.
[21] Established in 1039.

portrayal of Saint Stephen is rooted in his historical testimony, which emphasized "the vulnerabilities of a nation confined to a single language and culture".[22]

The symbolism associated with the iconography of the Holy king Stephen national emblem was particularly poignant, as it reinforced the idea that the strength of the empire lay in its diversity and the integration of various nationalities under a unified imperial rule.[23] As a state-forming ruler and statesman who led the country into the European Christian community, and also the first canonized king of Hungary, Saint Stephen took on the characteristics of these patterns, which resulted in his prompt transformation into a "symbol".[24]

Arguably, this integration was not just political but also cultural and religious, with Catholicism serving as a binding force among the different nations of the empire. Thus, Saint Stephen's image and the associated Marian devotion continued after 1867 to be central to the Austro-Hungary political narrative, promoting a vision of a cohesive yet diverse imperial entity.[25]

The history of the *Patrona Hungariae* concept can be traced in the church historiography of Jesuits, where besides the idea of, there emerged the notion that "Hungary is Mary's country" dating to the first half of the seventeenth century. From that time on, this notion has been continuously presented in Catholic religious literature, and it also played an important role in the political and ideological propaganda of the period. The notion of *Regnum Marianum* infiltrated into the definition of history and nation, and it contributed to the deepening of the confessional identity of Catholics. Furthermore together with other flourishing literary topoi of the nation's doom, like *querela Hungariae* and *propugnaculum Christianitatis*-expressed and compensated this constant feeling of threat, and, it strengthened the impression of a celestial protection. This notion was further nourished by the absolutistic government of the Habsburgs and by the Austro-Hungarian construction.

The concept of Patrona Hungariae has its origins in Jesuit church historiography, where the notion that "Hungary is Mary's country"[26] first emerged in the early seventeenth century. This idea has since been a persistent theme in Catholic

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[22] Sinkó, "Arpád versus Saint István," 83. Accessed 30 May 2024. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346324625

[23] Ibid., 80.

[24] Eva Knapp, Gábor Tüskés, "The Iconography of King Saint Stephen I in Prints 1450–1700," in György E. Szönyi, Csaba Maczelka, eds., *Centers and Peripheries in European Renaissance Culture. Essays by East-central European Mellon Fellows* (Szeged: Jatte Press, 2012), 255–273.

[25] For an examination of the Magyar nationalism through the politics of monuments, see chapter two of Bálint Varga, "The Monumental Nation: Magyar Nationalism and Symbolic Politics in Fin-de-siècle Hungary," in *Austrian and Habsburg Studies*, vol. 20 (New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016).

[26] Over the centuries they have symbolized two different sets of ideas about Hungary and

religious literature and played a significant role in the political and ideological propaganda of the time. The notion of *Regnum Marianum* became integrated into the historical and national identity of Hungary, reinforcing the confessional identity of Catholics. Furthermore, this concept, along with other literary motifs such as *querela Hungariae* and *propugnaculum Christianitatis*, expressed and alleviated the constant sense of threat felt during the period, while also enhancing the perception of divine protection.[27] This notion was further reinforced by the absolutist policies of the Habsburgs and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. According to Cieger[28], politicking through art was a direct way to communicate and one may assume the role these pieces of theatrum sacrum had not only in liturgy but also as visual imagery of a constructed statehood. Within this frame of ideas the iconographical programme furthered cultural nationalism in a multi-ethnic territory.

The two altars located in the naos were likely among the first commissions[29] of the nineteenth century made for the Catholic Church, specifically for the Cathedral of Timişoara (Temeswar). These altars feature a structured design, with the predella serving as the foundational element upon which the entire architectural structure is built.

Gerhard, depicted with the symbol of religious authority – a crosier – alongside an oversized putto bearing his episcopal mitre, is centrally positioned in the niche of the edicula-type altar. Joannes Müller's work demonstrates in both cases his academic training, as evidenced by the balanced composition, naturalistic gestures, and postures of his statues, which also convey didactic and moralizing content. The neo-Gothic revival, emerging at the onset of Romanticism, represented a reconsideration of the Middle Ages and its art, following the Renaissance's period of rejection and dismissal of earlier styles. By the end of the nineteenth century, South Tyrolean workshops had become notable exporters of sacred art. Ferdinand Stuflesser, a prolific artist trained at the Art Academy in Munich, exemplifies the high level of craftsmanship and artistic production from this region.[30] Notably, in the eighteenth century, artistic styles functioned as a communicative medium that linked Banat to the broader European cul-

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Hungarianness and formed the basis of two competing national iconographies, for details see Sinko, "Arpad versus St. Istvan," 86.

[27] Andras Cieger, "The Symbolic World of 1867: Self-Representation of the Dual Monarchy in Hungary," in Gábor Gyáni, ed., *The Creation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy A Hungarian Perspective* (Routledge, 2021) DOI: 10.4324/9781003195160–2

[28] Ibid., 148.

[29] Due to the fact that the scholarship has received little attention in art historical research so far.

[30] A comparative study of his creation in the Banat, along with specific traits and examples will form the corpus of a study, with fragments undergoing at present the review for publication.

tural evolution, whereas in the nineteenth century, characterized by a stylistic diversity, one can discern trans-regional expressions that are emblematic of a society in a continuous state of redefinition from various national viewpoints. This investigation reveals that the reinterpretation of the forms and iconographic elements of these altarpieces was significantly influenced by the status of the Banat province during the specified period. Although there is no specific mention of the foundry that cast the bronze statue of Patrona Hungariae or the casting methods used, it is likely that the lost wax technique was employed. This technique was becoming increasingly sophisticated due to advancements in bronze casting technology of the time. Records show that a foundry in Sânandrei was operational during the siege of Timişoara in 1849, where cannons were cast. Many sources suggest that the statue was made from one of the four cannons requisitioned during the siege. These details underscore Müller's expertise in both wood carving and bronze casting, demonstrating his academic training and versatility across different mediums. Structured to operate in service of both the state apparatus and the Catholic ecclesiastical institution, these altarpieces were characterized by a specific propagandistic iconography of the saints, which was propagated with a didactic orientation by sculptors involved in the production of such altarpieces for the late nineteenth-century Roman Catholic Church in both urban and rural settings. The artistic movement, identified as historicism, pervaded European art and architecture throughout the nineteenth century, serving as a counter-response to modernity and the swift industrial transformations occurring within the developed nations of Europe.

The high altar of Mehala Catholic Church in Timişoara, constructed in 1878 features the same iconography with Saints Stephen and Elisabeth of Thuringia depicted on the predella. In comparison, the Vinga Catholic Church showcases altars with representations of the Three Holy Kings. Both churches reflect similar iconographic themes, illustrating a broader trend in religious art of the era. The choice of figures in these altars not only highlights local religious veneration but also aligns with the artistic and cultural movements of the time (Fig. 4).

Additionally, the Millennium Church[31], constructed in 1901 to commemorate the 1,000-year anniversary of Stephen's Christianization and the formation of the Hungarian state, showcases a classical historicist high altar created by Dominik Demetz Art Studio (established in 1872 in South Tyrol). This altar prominently features the holy kings Stephen, Ladislas, and Emeric in central positions (Fig. 5).

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[31] Josef Geml, *Vechea Timişoară în ultima jumătate de secol (1870–1920)* (Timişoara: Cosmopolitan Art, 2016).

Fig. 4. Joseph Runggaldier, 1891, Vinga Catholic Church high altar with Saint Stephen and Gerhard of Sagredo. Image source: Mihaela Vlăsceanu. / Joseph Runggaldier, 1891, altarul principal al Bisericii Romano-Catolice din Vinga, cu Sf. Ştefan şi Gerhard de Sagredo. Sursa foto: Mihaela Vlăsceanu.

The outcomes of this investigation indicate how the artistic practices reflected and reinforced the changing notions of nationhood. This is a significant point, as it suggests that altar sculptures were not just religious or artistic endeavors but were deeply intertwined with national identity and political dynamics. The new visual content in altar sculpture followed Central European patterns, evident in the style, representation, and iconography of martyr saints and canonized kings, also in the academic formation of the author Joannes Müller. The Hungarian kingdom, will have merged into the empire in the state entity established in 1868, nevertheless the attributes of a by-gone age will be displayed in altar sculpture iconography as future research will confirm. The paper also illustrated how the selection of particular saints for inclusion in altar sculpture during the nineteenth century often conveyed messages about identity, unity, and historical continuity, especially in the multiethnic community of mid-nineteenth century Timişoara. As nationalism grew during this period, these choices were strategic, reflecting broader societal values and political objectives. Also, this investigation revealed that the re-semantization of the forms and iconographic elements of these altarpieces reflected a pronounced dependence on the status of the Banat province during the specified time frame.

Thus, the monuments functioned not only as artistic expressions but also

Fig. 5. Dominik Demetz Art Studio, high altar of the Millenium Catholic Church, 1902, Timişoara. Image source: Roman Catholic Diocese, Timişoara, courtesy of Claudiu Călin. / Studioul artistic Dominik Demetz, altarul principal al Bisericii Catolice Millenium, 1902, Timişoara. Sursa: Dioceza Romano-Catolică Timişoara, imagine obţinută prin bunăvoinţa lui Claudiu Călin.

as tools for cultural and national representation. They can be categorized as "symbols of territorial and ethnic identity" within the Banat region prior to the Dualist Compromise.[32] This period, defined in art history by significant Europeanization, saw these monuments reflecting both local and broader European influences in their iconography and design.

CREAREA UNUI NOU CONŢINUT VIZUAL ÎN SCULPTURA DE ALTAR: O PRIVIRE DE ANSAMBLU ASUPRA ALTARELOR NEO-GOTICE DIN CATEDRALA CATOLICĂ DIN TIMIŞOARA

Abstract

Pentru a înţelege relaţia dintre arta şi ideologia perioadei prezentul studiu evidenţiază relaţiile complexe dintre creaţiile artistice şi contextul lor istoric, subliniind importanţa criticii şi interpretării într-o secvenţă de timp definită de ideea renaşterii naţionale ce în Banatul austro-ungar dobândeşte valenţe inedite prin resemantizarea unor concepte cu impact vizual ce trimit privitorul în registrul trecutului glorios al Ungariei medievale. Vom explora o astfel de accepţiune a conceptului de naţiune, cea promovată prin intermediul artei şi o perspectivă plastică a sculptorului Joannes Müller din 1856, în compunerea celor două structuri – altare neogotice – în care expune un limbaj universal de conectare a prezentului la trecut prin recurenţa unor iconografii consacrate. Astfel de imagini simbol transpun politica perioadei printr-un tipar de discurs vizual manifestat printr-o propagandă vizuală făcută momentului de consfinţire statală, legislativă, culturală şi religioasă a regatului maghiar din perioada regilor canonizaţi Ştefan, Ladislau şi a ducelui Emeric. Dat fiind faptul că această examinare constituie o introducere în istoria genului din Banatul secolului al XIX-lea, vom utiliza o serie de abordări analitice, discutând totul în cadrul metodologic al istoriei artei.

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32   For studies on Stuflesser's presence in altar sculpture across Croatia, refer to Irena Kraševac, "Kipar Ferdinand Stufflesser. Doprinos tirolskom kiparstvu druge polovine 19. Stoljeća u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 27 (2003): 231–239, Accessed 19 May 2024, https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/326990; B. Varga, "Egy össze nem álló kép mozaikjai. Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia dualitásának kortárs reprezentációja," *Aetas* 32, no. 4 (2017): 5–20.