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Cover: Capital of a half column from the lapidary of the cathedral in Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár).

Photo: Attila Mudrák

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Critical Remarks on the Chronology of the Early Árpád-period Churches of the Transylvanian Episcopal See

Imre TAKÁCS* 

ABSTRACT. *Critical Remarks on the Chronology of the Early Árpád-period Churches of the Transylvanian Episcopal See.* The predecessor of today's Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) Cathedral was first discovered during its restoration between 1907 and 1917. The three-nave, one-apse church had a rotunda attached to the south side. The study aims to clarify the chronology of the early cathedral by showing that the late eleventh century carvings, which had previously been used as a dating reference, most probably belonged to the rotunda rather than the cathedral, so that nothing rules out the possibility that the episcopal church was built in the early eleventh century. Others agree with the archaeologist who surveyed the area in 2011 that the construction of the small church discovered in the cathedral's foreground could be linked to a Byzantine mission in the mid-tenth century. In the second half of the eleventh century demolition of this building, which served as a baptistery, may have led to the construction of the rotunda, which also functioned as a baptistery.

Keywords: *Gyulafehérvár, Alba Iulia, tenth century, eleventh century, romanesque architecture, romanesque sculpture, Transylvanian architecture, Hungarian Christianization, Byzantine mission.*

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The Cathedral of St. Michael in Gyulafehérvár (now Alba Iulia, Romania), the centre of the Catholic Church in Transylvania, deserves special attention not only as the only intact medieval Hungarian cathedral, but also because, despite continuous interest and numerous publications since the mid-nineteenth century, a host of questions about its architectural history remain unanswered. The greatest uncertainty surrounds the chronology of the predecessor (or predecessors) of the current building. Interestingly, there is no answer, for example, to the question of when the first church of the bishopric, which all indirect sources indicate was founded by King Stephen I (Saint Stephen) in the early years of his reign, after 1003 and likely in 1009, was built in the southwestern corner of the ruins of the Roman Apulum.¹ It remains unclear whether the fragmentary foundation walls of this early building, uncovered through archaeological excavations, and the fairly discernible ground plan they outline point to a construction date that coincides with the cathedral's founding or, instead, whether the associated stone carvings, which date no earlier than the last quarter of the eleventh century, should serve as reference points in dating this structure? This study addresses these problems. The basic question at the outset of our inquiry is this: can we be certain that these late eleventh-century figural and ornamental stone carvings come from the original cathedral? Is there, perhaps, a more reasonable explanation of their origins? How might this dilemma affect the date assigned to the construction of the first church?

Although no written sources support this, it is widely held in art historical literature that the construction of the present second cathedral began in the last quarter of the twelfth century, most likely around 1190, after Adrianus, the former provost of Buda and royal chancellor, became bishop of Transylvania in 1187.² The late Romanesque mouldings and decorative elements in the eastern parts of the building are consistent with the theory that the founding of the first masonic lodge, capable of undertaking large construction

¹ The charter documenting the foundation of the bishopric has not survived. On the history of the location: Györfy György, "Gyulafehérvár kezdetei, neve és káptalanjának registruma," *Századok* 117, (1983): 1103–1134; Bóna István, "Erdély a magyar honfoglalás és államalapítás korában," in *Erdély a keresztény magyar királyságban*, ed. Dávid Gyula (Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2001), 75–76, 85–89. For a brief overview of the circumstances of the founding of the Hungarian state: Györfy György, *István király és műve* (Gondolat, 1983), 183; Marton József, *Az erdélyi egyházmegye a középkorban* (Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2013), 41–42.

² For the chronology of the beginning of the construction of the second cathedral: Entz Géza, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház* (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1958), 87; Sarkadi Márton, "*s folytatva magát a régi művet*"—*Tanulmányok a gyulafehérvári székesegyház és püspöki palota történetéről* (Teleki László Alapítvány, 2010), 50–67; Imre Takács, "The First Sanctuary of the Second Cathedral of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, Ro)," *Acta Historiae Artium* 53, (2012), 20; Marosi Ernő, *A romanika Magyarországon* (Corvina Kiadó, 2013), 105.

jobs, and the initial phase of construction date to the last decades of the twelfth century, as was supposed by Géza Entz. Furthermore, these architectural elements allow for the assumption that their forms, typical of central Hungary, were a result of the connections of the royal clergyman-turned bishop.³ We know even less about why the cathedral was rebuilt: neither written records nor archaeological evidence suggest the new structure was constructed because of fire damage, obsolescence, or a perceived inadequacy of size. The questions surrounding the early church are further complicated because we need to consider not only the immediate predecessor to the cathedral but also three other early buildings. The earliest threads of this story can be traced back to a period preceding the great social and political transformations at the turn of the millennium. The most recent developments place the construction chronology of this eleventh-century Latin-rite episcopal seat in new light.

The church that stands today, usually called the second cathedral, was restored between 1907 and 1917 under the supervision of István Möller with the collaboration of Béla Pósta, archaeologist for the Museum of Transylvania in Kolozsvár [Cluj, Romania], and Sándor Fridli, the head of construction responsible for documenting the work. During the renovations, they discovered remains of an earlier church: parts of the longitudinal walls, a fragment of the semicircular sanctuary, and the remnants of a rotunda wall with an added sanctuary. This last feature was attached to the southern wall of the church, to the section in front of the sanctuary, with a minimal axial deviation (Fig. 1).⁴

The nave of the rotunda had a curve radius of 262 cm and the sanctuary a curve radius of 103 cm. It was clear to the excavators they had found the first cathedral, which, based on the wall remains, was clearly a three-aisled basilica.

³ Adorján's name probably first appeared in a letter sent by Étienne de Tournai, abbot of the monastery of Ste-Geneviève in Paris, to Béla III sometime after 1177 concerning the death and burial of a Hungarian student who was staying there. The letter names three other Hungarian clerics present, including the later bishop of Transylvania. Gombos Ferenc Albin, ed., *Catalogus fontium historiae hungaricae*, vol. I-III (Szent István Akadémia, 1938), III, 2181; Jakubovich Emil, "P. mester. Adalékok az Anonymus-kérdéshez," in *Emlékkönyv Dr Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno negyedszázados kulturpolitikai működésének emlékére születésének ötvenedik évfordulóján*, ed. Lukinich Imre (Rákos Jenő Budapesti Hírlap Ujságvállalata Nyomdája, 1925), 185–186; István Hajnal, *Enseignement de l'écriture aux universités médiévales* (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1959), 192. The rapid rise of Adorján's career is indicated by the reference to him as provost in the list of witnesses to the 1183 archiepiscopal charter of Esztergom. Knausz Nándor, ed., *Monumenta Ecclesiae Strigoniensis*, vol. I-II (Strigonii, 1874–1882), I, 128–129; cf. Kollányi Ferenc, *Esztergomi kanonokok 1100–1900* (Buzárovits Gusztáv, 1900), 2. Two years later, he was listed as royal notary and, in the same year, as royal chancellor and provost of Buda. Another two years after that, he was awarded the bishopric of Transylvania. Temesváry János, *Erdély középkori püspökei* (Ny. Minerva Irodalmi és Nyomdai Műintézet Részv. Társ., 1922), 12–16.

⁴ For a summary of the archaeological results and the ground plan of the excavated walls: Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 72, ill. 57.

The side aisles terminated in a straight wall, while the central aisle ended in spacious, semicircular apse. The dimensions were not particularly large: the length of the nave was not known at that time, but it was obviously less than that of the second cathedral. Its internal width was estimated at 17 to 18 metres. It was also noticeable that the architect who designed the second cathedral had designed the new nave walls to run closely alongside the walls of the earlier building. This was a method common in the Middle Ages known as perimeter building. Its aim was twofold: firstly, to incorporate the whole of the consecrated area of the previous building into the new church and, secondly, to allow the function of the previous church to continue for a relatively long period—certainly for decades—while the new, surrounding walls were being built. The finds were first reported by Möller in 1908.⁵ A carefully executed, deconstructable plaster maquette was made of the excavated wall remains and today is part of the cathedral collection. Géza Entz, who wrote a monograph on the cathedral, commented on the relationship between the cathedral and the rotunda, which was identified as a baptistery, as follows: “there is no evidence that the circular chapel was built separately; the wall structure is also identical.”⁶ He based his position on personal communications and a drawing of the ashlar forming the side walls of the church and the nave wall of the circular chapel.⁷ His identification of the rotunda as a baptistery is also supported by a medieval source mentioning an altar to St John the Baptist.⁸

The relationship between the first cathedral and the rotunda is reminiscent of the architectural connection between the cathedral of Veszprém and the eleventh-century circular chapel built on its north side and also between the cathedral of Eger and a similar structure, revealed by Károly Kozák, on its southside.⁹ The latter could certainly be considered the best analogy to the Transylvanian baptistery if we had access to the documentation of the find.

⁵ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 73, note 32.

⁶ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 71.

⁷ Illustration based on a drawing by Sándor Fridli: Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 55, ill. 45. Géza Entz wrote that in the 1940s, he had met Sándor Fridli in person, who confirmed this information. Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 71, 151, note 31. Cf. Entz Géza, “A Szent István alapítású erdélyi püspökség első székesegyháza,” in *Doctor et apostol. Szent István-tanulmányok*, ed. Török József, *Studia Theologica Budapestinensia* 10 (1994): 102–103.

⁸ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 71, note 28. Cf. Virgil Vătăşianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române*, I, (Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1959), 22. The same position was adopted by Vera Gervers-Molnár when she considered the circular chapel of Gyulafehérvár as the only definitively identifiable baptistery among the Hungarian rotundas. Gervers-Molnár Vera, *A középkori Magyarország rotundái* (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972), 52.

⁹ On the rotunda of Veszprém: Katalin H. Gyürky, “Die St. Georg-kapelle in der Burg von Veszprém,” *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 15, (1963): 341–408. On the problem of the rotunda discovered in the Cathedral of Eger: Kozák Károly, “Közép-Európa centrális templomai (IX–XI. század),” *Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei* 17 (1984): 131; Kozák Károly, “Az

Béla Cserni, a teacher, botanist, and founder of the museum in Gyulafehérvár, formulated the idea, which later became popular, that the Gyulafehérvár rotunda may have originally been a Roman tower that was later provided with an apse and converted into a chapel.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, Cserni's idea aroused considerable interest among Romanian scholars.¹¹ Radu Heitel, the later archaeologist of the church site, made similar claims. He believed the Roman tower was rebuilt into a chapel in the ninth or tenth centuries—in other words before the arrival of the Hungarians—during the so-called Bulgar voivodeship (Voivodeship of Bălgrad).¹² Indeed, the connection between the circular building and the apse wall does raise questions. However, it would be foolhardy to decide whether the entire structure was built at the same time or whether there were two periods of construction without further archaeological research. What is certain is that the nave's curved wall, at least at the foundation level, was constructed from straight-sided dismantled Roman ashlar in secondary use.¹³ In fact, it is precisely this feature that rules out the Roman origin of the building. Moreover, Daniela Marcu-Istrate has recently and very astutely brought up this fundamental problem: what logical reason would there have been for placing a defensive tower within a Roman castrum?¹⁴

The walls of the first cathedral were excavated again by Radu Heitel in 1972, sixty years after Möller's research. Parts of the western, terminating wall and the strip foundation for the row of piers of the earlier church were found somewhat deeper inside the outer wall of the second cathedral. The strip foundation was used to connect the bases of the piers in the second church

egri vár feltárása, VII, (1957–1988). Anyagközlés, előadás, leletmentés, tanulmányok," *Agria: Az Egri Múzeum Évkönyve* 25/26, (1989–1990): 334. For a critique of the excavation reports: Havasi Krisztina, "A középkori egri székesegyház az 1200-as évek elején. Király, püspökök és újjáépülő székesegyházak a korabeli Magyarországon" (PhD diss., ELTE, Művészettörténeti Intézet, 2011), 34–35, 38.

¹⁰ On the biography of Béla Cserni: Csaba Szabó, "Reconstructing Béla Cserni's biography," in *Adalbert Cserni and his contemporaries. The pioneers of archaeology in Alba Iulia and beyond*, eds. Csaba Szabó, Mihai Gligor and Gabriel Rustoiu (Mega, 2017), 23–34.

¹¹ For an overview of the relevant Romanian literature, see: Daniela Marcu-Istrate, *Church Archaeology in Transylvania (ca. 950 to ca. 1450)* (Brill, 2022), 147.

¹² Radu Heitel, "Archäologische Beiträge zu den romanischen Baudenkmälern in Siebenbürgen. II (in Zusammenhang mit der zeitlichen Bestimmung der ältesten „Rotunda Ecclesia“ Rumäniens und der Kathedrale I in Alba Iulia)," *Révue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art* 12, no. 1 (1975): 6–7. The construction of the building during the Bulgar period was first suggested by Kurt Horedt, "Voievodatul de la Bălgrad-Alba Iulia," *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche* 5, no. 1–2 (1954): 487–512.

¹³ The most recent, useful photograph of the walling can be found in: Marcu-Istrate, *Church Archaeology*, 149, fig. 5.5.

¹⁴ Marcu-Istrate, *Church Archaeology*, 148.

(Fig. 2).¹⁵ The total length of the church, based on the excavated foundations, was around 35 metres and probably somewhat more if measured at the level of the ascending walls. The less-than-convincing floor plan published by Heitel shows foundation walls two meters in width, and even more on the southern and western sides, indicating a massive building.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Heitel did not manage to find the corners and the beginnings of the side walls at the western end of the church. Based on this information at least, the conclusion that the first cathedral did not have a massive western structure seems hasty.¹⁷

An obvious analogy to the early cathedral of Gyulafehérvár in terms of dimensions is the first abbey church of Pannonhalma, likewise a three-aisled basilica, built in the late tenth century. The length of this church, founded by Prince Géza, was also around 37 metres and it took about 7 to 8 years to build.¹⁸ A similar construction period of roughly a decade or slightly less can also be assumed for the first cathedral in Gyulafehérvár.¹⁹ The question, however, is where does this decade fit in the chronology?

Géza Entz noted that the ground plan of the first cathedral in Gyulafehérvár “followed the simpler design of the churches in Székesfehérvár and Kalocsa”, which led him to conclude that its construction may have started immediately after the bishopric was founded.²⁰ Indeed, the analogous layouts cannot be ignored. The single apse and straight terminating walls of the side aisles make the first cathedral of Gyulafehérvár comparable to the much larger and more complex structure of the provost’s church of Székesfehérvár, whose construction began in the second decade of the millennium but was not completed until the 1030s (Fig. 3).²¹ Belonging to this same typological group was the first

¹⁵ Heitel, “Archäologische Beiträge,” 3–10.

¹⁶ Heitel, “Archäologische Beiträge,” 3–10, especially: 4, and Taf. I.

¹⁷ Möller István, *Erdély nevezetesebb műemlékei* (História, 1929), 16.

¹⁸ The date of construction is partly based on the interval between the date of foundation (996) and the entry in the Hildesheim Yearbooks mentioning the consecration in 1003. For the history of the construction of the church of Pannonhalma and the first church, see Imre Takács, “Die Erneuerung der Abteikirche von Pannonhalma im 13. Jahrhundert,” *Acta Historiae Artium* 38, (1996): 35–38, and ill. 1.

¹⁹ That an interval of 5–10 years is a normal period for the completion of a medium-sized church in the eleventh century is supported by examples from Western Europe and Italy. It is sufficient to refer to the rebuilding of the church of Montecassino, begun in 1066 by Abbot Desiderius and consecrated in 1071.

²⁰ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 71.

²¹ On the historical and archaeological condition of Székesfehérvár: Piroska Biczó, “Das Marienstift Stuhlweissenburg (Székesfehérvár),” in *Europas Mitte um 1000*, hg. Alfried Wiczorek and Hans-Martin Hinz (Konrad Theiss Verlag, 2000), II, 621–624; Krisztina Havasi, “The Provostry Church of the Virgin Mary in Székesfehérvár,” in *The Art of Medieval Hungary*, eds. Xavier Barral i Altet, Pál Lóvei, Vinni Lucherini and Imre Takács (Viella, 2018), 359–366.

cathedral of the diocese of Kalocsa, established at the same time as the Transylvanian bishopric (Fig. 4).²² The excavation of the Benedictine nunnery at Esztergom, in the central region of the kingdom, with its three-aisled church and single apse, is one of the achievements of the past decades. The archaeologist conducting the excavation considered the structure consistent with the architecture of the first half or middle of the eleventh century, based on the artefacts discovered there (Fig. 5).²³

However, Géza Entz perceived a serious contradiction when confronted with the early eleventh-century floor plan of the first cathedral of Gyulafehérvár and the series of stone carvings in secondary use in the walls of the second cathedral. The most important carving is a relief of the Last Judgement on the inner side of a stone slab inserted above the opening in the south side door of the second cathedral. The method of creating the figures in the *Maiestas Domini*, Christ flanked by two angels, highlights the restrained use of sculptural tools and the flat, silhouette-like execution of the figures. At the same time, the seemingly primitive approach makes it possible to differentiate the depth of the depicted figures: in the middle, in a very strongly recessed niche, the figure of Christ appears, with the highest projection. The angels, on the other hand, are depicted in a much shallower space, and thus less pronounced. Meanwhile the birds in silhouette, representing the created world on Earth, are only lightly engraved and therefore barely visible in the stone surface (Fig. 6). As Ernő Marosi later explained, this method of carving demonstrates the concept of true-to-life depictions in Romanesque art, which was speculative in nature and strove to create symbolic content. The higher the position of the figure in the hierarchy of existence, the greater the depth at which the figure was created. The “hierarchically enhanced nature” of Christ’s existence “was intensified by the deeper, niche-like recess”.²⁴ Along the lower edge of the relief, in the position of a cornice, is a ribbed, braided ribbon. A similar solution can be found in Aracs (today Vranjevo, Serbia), where the carver of a sarcophagus separated

²² In contrast to the single-nave with a pronounced western structure, assumed by Imre Henszlmann, Ernő Foerk, also referring to excavation results, considered likely a three-nave building at Kalocsa. Imre Henszlmann, *Die Grabungen des Erzbischofs von Kalocsa Dr. Ludwig Haynald* (C.A. Haendel, 1873); Foerk Ernő, “A kalocsai székesegyház,” in *Magyarország Műemlékei*, vol. IV, ed. Forster Gyula (Franklin Társulat, 1915), 43–70. For versions of the ground plan reconstruction: Béla Zsolt Szakács, “Ernő Foerk and the medieval cathedrals of Kalocsa,” *Ybl Journal of Built Environment* 7, no. 2 (2019): 82–88.

²³ Lovag Zsuzsa, *Az Esztergom-Prímás szigeti apáca kolostor feltárása* (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2014).

²⁴ Marosi Ernő, “Magyarországi művészet Szent László korában,” in *Athleta Patriae. Tanulmányok Szent László történetéhez*, ed. Mezey László (Szent István Társulat, 1980), 214.

the figural registers from one another with this same type of moulding.²⁵ Géza Entz, disagreeing with earlier assertions,²⁶ ruled out the possibility that this portal relief was contemporary with the foundation of the cathedral. "In any case," he wrote, "the carvings are more likely to date from the second half of the century" as the "developed composition and elaborate style" of the relief make "a date in the era of St. Stephen highly unlikely".²⁷

Géza Entz determined the other architectural elements, which according to his information István Möller had recovered from the southern wall of the second church, were similar in terms of chronology to the tympanum.²⁸ Among these elements is a relatively large fragment of a frieze with leaf decoration, consisting of a straight section and a longer, curved section meeting at a right angle.²⁹ Running along the upper edge of the double-rowed leaf decoration, which is depicted with herringbone-like grooves, is the same twisted ribbon braid that appears on the tympanum (Figs. 7–8). Another element is the capital of an engaged column with an abacus and walling, all carefully carved from a single block.³⁰ Among the leaves, which match the decoration of the curved frieze element, are narrow rods serving as vines. These rods are carved from the same block as the volutes at the end of each leaf in the upper row. This simple floral decoration is complemented by a flat mask with a human face on the front of the capital. The sculptural approach is similar to that used in creating the figures on the tympanum. Wavy vine decoration runs the length of the abacus. Géza Entz attributed the stick-like supports at the corners and the disproportionately large human mask, composed in a leaf ornament, to a misunderstanding of the ancient model. The diameter of the engaged column indicates that it belonged to a relatively small building (Fig. 9). The next member of the group is a cushion capital similar in size and shape.³¹ Its proportions are

²⁵ The tomb from Aracs is currently on loan from the Hungarian National Gallery and on display in the Hungarian National Museum. On the stylistic relationship between the ribbon ornaments on the two monuments: Tóth Sándor, "Az aracsi kő rokonsága," in *A középkori Dél-Alföld és Szer*, ed. Kollár Tibor (Csongrád Megyei Levéltár, 2000), 435.

²⁶ For example, Gerevich Tibor, *Magyarország román kori emlékei* (Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága, 1938), 89.

²⁷ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 75.

²⁸ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 70.

²⁹ The height of the carving is 31 cm, the width 54 cm, and the depth 31 cm. The bottom, top and back have attachment surfaces. The tapered end was later cut off. Currently on display in Gyulafehérvár, in the cathedral lapidarium. Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, ill. 47.

³⁰ Height: 32 cm, width: 44 cm, depth (the back is sawed into a flat plane): 32 cm. The diameter of the shaft of the embedded column is about 18 cm. It is currently on exhibit in Gyulafehérvár in the cathedral lapidarium. Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, ill. 56.

³¹ Height: 30.5 cm; the length of the side of the abacus: 43–44 cm; the diameter of the shaft joint: 18 cm. The abacus has largely been filed down or broken off along with the top of the shield.

peculiar: a thick necking connects the capital to a strikingly thin shaft. The edges of the block are articulated by a rod-shaped rib that fans out towards the bottom. The side shields are richly decorated: a smooth element and a braid follow the arc of the capital's rounded lower section, enclosing an unfolding, planar leaf-shaped vine decoration (Fig. 10).³²

Géza Entz, referring to József Csemegi, relied on an analogy from Tarnaszentmária to demonstrate these carvings from Gyulafehérvár also date to the last decades of the eleventh century (Fig. 11).³³ This period of fabrication is further substantiated by analogies from the former church of the collegiate chapter of Titel (now in Serbia), which can be dated with greater certainty, as the foundation of the chapter is attributed to King (Saint) Ladislav (1077–1095) and his brother, Prince Lampert (Fig. 12). Moreover, fragments of a similar sort from the Benedictine abbey of Dombó (now Rakovac, Serbia), of unknown date, confirm that the building adorned with the tympanum and the three other carvings discussed above could not have been built before the time of St. Ladislav.³⁴

This stylistic and historical analysis has led to the consensus that the dating of the first cathedral in Gyulafehérvár should be based not on the founding of the bishopric in 1009, but rather on the style of the early carvings, which are characteristic of the eleventh century or, at the latest, c. 1100.³⁵ Different answers have been given to the question of how the seat of the vast Transylvanian diocese could have functioned for almost a hundred years

On one side, a square hole was gouged. The carving was exhibited in Bucharest, in the National History Museum of Romania until 2009; currently it is exhibited in Gyulafehérvár, in the cathedral lapidarium. Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, ill. 46.

³² As a regular cushion capital, it stands out from this uniform group. It cannot be clearly decided whether this artefact came from the same site as the other early carvings. On the other hand, its regular form and decoration consisting of carefully constructed concentric circular sectors represents a geometric style highly distinct from the strong ornamental concept of the other carvings. At the same time, however, this cushion capital cannot be linked to the moulding types that have survived on the second cathedral. The cushion capital was exhibited until 2009 in Bucharest, National History Museum of Romania; it is currently exhibited in Gyulafehérvár, in the cathedral lapidarium. Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, ill. 48.

³³ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 73. Cf. Csemegi József, "A tarnaszentmáriai templom hajójának stíluskritikai vizsgálata," *Antiquitas Hungarica* 3, (1949): 92–107.

³⁴ On the connections between Gyulafehérvár, Titel and Dombó: Tóth Sándor, "Volt egyszer egy titeli vállkő," *Ars Hungarica* 23 (1995): 227–232. The figural tombstone fragment transferred from Aracs to Budapest can be added to the set of analogies; see: Tóth, "Az aracsi kő," 429–448.

³⁵ On the dating of the *Maiestas Domini* tympanum and the group of early carvings to c. 1100, see: Vătăşianu, *Istoria artei*, 151–152. Similar conclusions were drawn by: Gheorghe Arion, "Date noi referitoare la prima catedrală de la Alba Iulia," *Studii şi cercetări de istoria artei. Seria Artă plastică* 14, no.2 (1967): 55–59. Radu Heitel, who excavated the walls of the first church came up with a similar chronology: Heitel, "Archäologische Beiträge," 4. Later, Ernő Marosi adopted a similar position: Marosi, "Magyarországi művészet," 213–215.

without a cathedral. One hard-to-follow theory suggests the diocese had a “wandering” whose initial location was somewhere in northern Transylvania.³⁶ Another postulates that a temporary “wooden church”³⁷ was used, while yet another asserts that the founder of the cathedral was not Stephen I (1000–1038), but Ladislav I (1077–1095), based on late medieval sermon literature—or, as Géza Entz interpreted the source, it was Ladislav I who oversaw the completion of the construction work.³⁸ The idea of a long construction history seemed the most useful hypothesis, since it makes it possible to focus on the interior design, documented by the decorative details, or some kind of renovation rather than on the building itself.³⁹

Several considerations, however, challenge the notion that the *Maestas Domini* tympanum originated from the first cathedral building, particularly from above the main entrance. One contradiction is the size of the stone: the width of the southern doorway, where the stone slab was relocated, measures only 131 cm, too narrow for the main portal of a cathedral. The next concern arises from the current position of the stone and the construction of the present, or Prince’s Portal. In his foundational study on the chronology of the second cathedral, Sándor Tóth concluded that the building of the perimeter walls of the new structure began relatively soon after construction commenced at the end of the twelfth century, before the sanctuary was completed. The walls of the transept and the lower part of the side-aisle walls were erected. The general principle was, by all accounts, to preserve the earlier church as much as possible.⁴⁰ Without

³⁶ This was proposed by János Karácsonyi. See Karácsonyi János, “Szent László és Erdély,” *Erdélyi Múzeum* 32 (1915): 26–36. For an overview of the literature regarding this theory, see: Ciprian Adinel Dincă, *Instituția episcopală în Transilvania medievală (sec. XI/XII–XIV)* (Argonaut, 2017), 35–52.

³⁷ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 75.

³⁸ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 75. Cf. Kertész Balázs, “A gyulafehérvári székesegyház építésének hagyománya Laskai Osvát Szent László beszédeiben,” *Magyar Könyvszemle* 111 (2005): 218–222. For a critique of the text, see Szakács Béla Zsolt, “Építészet Szent László korában,” in *Szent László emlékkönyv*, ed. Bódvai András (Bethlen Gábor Alapkezelő Zrt., 2021), 149, note 3. Possibly, an analysis of Osvát Laskai’s sermon, which was drawn from an otherwise unknown source, may solve the problem: the founding of the *monasteria episcopalis*, attributed to King Ladislav, can be understood as a commemoration of the steps taken to establish the chapter. It is not necessary to suspect the founding of the episcopal see as the driving force. In any case, the late-fifteenth-century Franciscan sermon is essentially indifferent to the building history of the early cathedral of Gyulafehérvár.

³⁹ This sentiment was most recently expressed in: Szakács Béla Zsolt, “Romanesque Architecture: Abbeys and Cathedrals,” in *The Art of Medieval Hungary*, eds. Xavier Barral i Altet, Pál Lővei, Vinni Lucherini and Imre Takács (Viella, 2018), 137.

⁴⁰ The distance between the existing side aisle walls and the excavated foundation walls of the former building varies between 110 and 140 cm. The spacing between the ascending walls may have been slightly greater.

delving into the problems surrounding the chronology of the second church, we can accept that the modified design of the side walls of the second church are connected to the activities of a workshop that started operating after the turn of the century. "Only one event is known from this period that could explain the flurry of workshop activity prior to the completion of the sanctuary: the arrival of a new bishop between 1202 and 1204. The Prince's Portal can therefore be dated to the period 1205 to 1210."⁴¹ At the same time, however, it is difficult to imagine that the earlier, functioning main entrance to the church (which they clearly wanted to use still for some time) would have been demolished in order to create a side entrance in the south wall, then under construction, of the new building.⁴² In other words, the early tympanum and the stylistically related group of carvings could not have originated from the first cathedral, which was still standing between 1205 and 1210. The date of these carvings therefore cannot serve as a basis for dating the first cathedral of Gyulafehérvár.

There is another equally strong argument in favour of this thesis: the wall section of the southern side aisle where the Prince's Portal was placed, was not directly connected to southern wall of the transept. Instead, an extension consisting of two vaulted bays, clearly constructed after the transept, joined the two. The ornamentation of its capitals suggests a stronger stylistic connection to the workshop of the Prince's Portal than to the transept. This intermediate space is described by local tradition as the "old sacristy", although it obviously never had such a function. Its position in the ground plan clearly shows it was built almost exactly on the site of the rotunda as an architectural and functional successor.

While it can be stated with great certainty that the former cathedral was carefully preserved and kept in use at the time the new church's perimeter walls were constructed, the same cannot be said for the rotunda. The moment the construction of the south aisle wall began, demolition of the rotunda became necessary. After all, the foundations for the new wall encroached onto the wall remains of the circular chapel. Similarly, the engaged pier foundations of the extension (the "old sacristy"), probably built to replace the circular chapel, also rested on the walls of the rotunda. This means the building material from the demolished rotunda may have accumulated in the work area when the new southern gate was built. Therefore, the most reasonable hypothesis is that the tympanum for the new southern gate was not removed from the still functioning

⁴¹ Tóth Sándor, "A gyulafehérvári fejedelmi kapu jelentősége," *Építés- Építészettudomány* 15, (1983): 420.

⁴² It is as if Sándor Tóth is reacting to this dilemma when he assumes the removal of the tympanum from the former portal would have entailed only a partial demolition. However, even if that had been possible, this removal would have deprived the church of its main ornament, which can hardly be considered a minor matter. Cf. Tóth, "A gyulafehérvári fejedelmi kapu," 407–408.

western portal of the earlier cathedral but was selected from among the nearby rotunda remains for reuse. Its size thus determined how wide the opening of the new portal would be.

As the other carvings share stylistic characteristics with the tympanum and were also found in secondary use in the southern wall of the cathedral, near the demolished rotunda, they too must have originated in the rotunda.⁴³ The narrow shafts (17 cm) attaching to the cushion capital and the engaged capital suggest the building was relatively small. The arched frieze adorned with a row of leaves is even more likely to be associated with the sanctuary of the rotunda. If we place the frieze at the entrance to apse, then after an approximately 30 cm façade section, a short section follows, extending straight back, with the curved section of the apse attaching to its inner edges. The basic shape of the stone matches the ground plan of the horseshoe-shaped apse of the circular chapel (Fig. 13). We must therefore imagine the sanctuary of the rotunda as a deep bay with a semicircular wall at the back, but the wall in the front is almost perfectly straight where it attaches to the narrow pilasters. A frieze in pronounced high relief, decorated with rows of leaves, ran around the apse at the height of the vaulting springers. The origins of the use of an ornate inner cornice to accentuate the crowning line of the apse wall are not entirely clear. In any case, it is striking that the designer of the sanctuary of the second cathedral at the end of the twelfth century also added an interior cornice adorned with foliage to the new main apse wall, when the rotunda was still standing.

It is at this point that we must return to the question of the relationship between the first cathedral and the rotunda and the order in which they were built, using a source that has not yet been examined. At the time of excavation, a detailed survey of the site where the cathedral wall met the rotunda was carried out.⁴⁴ A drawing by Sándor Fridly, showing the stones of the two walls in great detail, clearly distinguishes the stones belonging to the side wall of the cathedral from those of the curved wall of the rotunda (Fig. 14). In the side wall of the church, regular blocks of stone with perpendicular corners are arranged in a straight line and bonded together. It can also be seen that the stones of the circular chapel, positioned radially, are only wedged into the line of stones where the walls meet. Crucially, they are not wedged deeply enough to penetrate the entire thickness of the nave wall. Moreover, this inter-wedging is abandoned about midway through the stretch where the walls meet. The result is that the regular pattern of the stones of the church wall remains continuous across the entire intersection with the nave wall of the rotunda. In fact, on the rotunda

⁴³ Entz, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház*, 70.

⁴⁴ Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center, K 4614.

side, at the base of the ascending wall, it can be clearly seen that the longitudinal section of the cathedral wall slightly protrudes, intersecting the arc of the rotunda wall at the transverse axis. It thus seems that the side wall of the early cathedral only minimally absorbed the nave wall of the circular chapel causing as little disturbance to the wall as possible. It is difficult to explain this phenomenon any other way than that the chapel was built after the first church. There is no sign whatsoever that the curved wall of the rotunda was ever complete on the side where it meets the church wall—in other words, there is no indication that it might have been built before the wall of the first cathedral. During construction, the wall of the cylindrical nave of the circular chapel was joined to the already existing side wall of the early cathedral by carving into the edges of the cathedral's wall to a depth of about 1 to 1.5 stone widths. It is as if the existing straight wall were overlaid with the cylindrical form of the rotunda, and the excess thickness of the latter were lopped off. After all, it is clear that when the two geometric shapes intersected, the part removed came from the wall of the circular chapel.

To put the above conclusion in simple terms: the three-aisled church and the rotunda were constructed independently of one another. The carvings indicate that the rotunda dates to the last decades of the eleventh century, while the basilica dates to an earlier period. It is therefore possible that the first episcopal church in Transylvania was built shortly after it was founded by St. Stephen, in the 1010s. However, it is difficult to account for the absence of typical early eleventh-century forms, mouldings or decorative carvings. The most likely explanation is that a church as modest as the first cathedral of Gyulafehérvár never had such adornments. After all, neither the church of Pannonhalma, built around 1000, nor the early cathedrals of Esztergom or Kalocsa had stone carvings.

There is, however, an interesting link between the construction of the rotunda and the destruction of another building at Gyulafehérvár. Excavations between 1972 and 1977 revealed the remains of another church building 24 metres from the western façade of the present cathedral (Fig. 2).⁴⁵ These were systematically excavated again in 2011 by Daniela Marcu-Istrate,⁴⁶ who provided detailed documentation of the building and a historical interpretation which still attracts great interest today. The building's interior was about 14 meters long and 10 meters wide and consisted of a single nave and a wide apse to the

⁴⁵ For the results of the excavation without detailed documentation: Radu Heitel, "Principalele rezultate ale cercetărilor arheologice din zona sud-vestică a cetății de la Alba Iulia (1968–1977), I," *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologia* 36, no. 3 (1985): 215–231.

⁴⁶ Daniela Marcu-Istrate, "Biserica din secolele X–XI, de influență bizantină, de la Alba Iulia. Restituiri preliminare," *Apulum, series Historia et Patrimonium* 51, (2014): 93–140; Marcu-Istrate, *Church Archaeology*, 152–154.

east (Fig. 15). Archaeological evidence indicates it was constructed no earlier than the tenth century and was no longer standing at the end of the eleventh century. Its foundation walls were built over ninth- and tenth-century graves, and one of its walls, in fact, cuts through a conquest-period grave. Above the foundation walls, another burial layer was found containing late-eleventh-century coins, establishing an endpoint for the building's existence.⁴⁷

Daniela Marcu-Istrate has linked the church to a mid-tenth century narrative and its characters. Well documented by written sources, the story relates the conversion of Hungarians by Byzantine missionaries from the 950s onwards. The basis for her supposition is long-known Byzantine accounts about the baptisms of high-ranking Hungarians. The earliest Hungarian peace delegation, led by Bulcsu and Termacsu, arrived in Constantinople in 948, where the two men were both baptised. Bulcsu's godfather was the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus ("born in the purple"), who in honour of the occasion gave his godson the impressive-sounding title *patrikios*. The next important Hungarian dignitary was baptised a few years later, also in Constantinople: Gyula, the second Hungarian leader to bear this name,⁴⁸ whose territory included the Maros [Mureş] and the vast area between the Tisza [Tisa] and the Apuseni Mountains of Transylvania. His conversion must have been significant not only because of the vastness of his territory but also because it was driven by genuine religious conviction and not political considerations alone. It is said that on his return to his homeland, Gyula brought with him the monk Hierotheos, who had been ordained Bishop of Turkia in Byzantium, and Gyula himself remained loyal to his faith and no longer disturbed the land of the Romans.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Marcu-Istrate, "Biserica din secolele X–XI," 102–105.

⁴⁸ On the transition of the title Gyula from being originally a Hungarian honorific to a personal name: Loránd Benkő, "Észrevételek Erdély déli részeinek korai Árpád-kori történetéhez," in *Erdély a keresztény magyar királyságban*, ed. Dávid Gyula (Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2001), 16–20.

⁴⁹ The time and circumstances of the baptism of the Hungarian leaders in Constantinople are recorded in the chronicle of Ioannes Scylitzes. He also tells us the name of the bishop sent to the Hungarians, who are consistently referred to as Turks in the text. The relevant passage: "The Turks did not discontinue their raiding and ravaging of Roman land until their chieftain, Boulousoudes, came to the city of Constantine under pretence of embracing the Christian faith. He was baptised and received [from the font] by the emperor Constantine who honoured him with the title of patrician and put him in possession of great riches; then he went back to his homeland. Not long afterwards, Gylas who was also a chieftain of the Turks came to the capital where he too was baptised and where he too was accorded the same honours and benefits. He took back with him a monk with a reputation for piety named Hierotheos who had been ordained bishop of Turkey by Theophylact. When he got there, he converted many from the barbaric fallacy to Christianity. And Gylas remained faithful to Christianity; he made no inroad against the Romans nor did he leave Christian prisoners untended. He ransomed them, took care of their needs and set them free." The text was published in: Ioannis Scylitzae, *Synopsis historiarum, editio princeps*, (De Gruyter, 1973). The source of the passage above: Skylitzes John, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, trans. John Wortley, (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Accordingly, Hierotheos was not appointed bishop of one city, but was given a wider missionary mandate, covering the entire Hungarian territory. We have no information about how the story continued. We do not know where and for how long exactly Hierotheos was active, nor how successful he was. Nevertheless, in light of the text, his stay in Hungary should be treated as fact.

Counter-arguments have been raised about the tenth-century dating of the church excavated in Gyulafehérvár and its Greek liturgical orientation. On the one hand, it is true that the lower limit of archaeological dating is rather uncertain: it could have been built in the mid-tenth century but also in the early eleventh century, when the Byzantine mission was certainly in decline or had ceased.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the floor plan of the excavated building lacks certain features of typical Byzantine church architecture such as the *narthex*, the *prothesis* and the *diaconicon*.⁵¹ The Byzantine character of the building is also questionable in other respects. For example, the archaeologist performing the excavation offered a less than convincing Byzantine structural interpretation of a chunk of wall uncovered in the middle of the nave, which in the excavation photographs most closely resembles an amorphous foundation block (Fig. 16). The archaeologist argued that four free-standing pillars could have risen from the large and seemingly interconnected foundation and from this inferred the presence of a central structure, a Greek cross-shaped superstructure, a cross-domed roof (Fig. 17). This line of reasoning, however, is difficult to follow based on the published photographs. First of all, the spatial reconstruction of the few wall fragments recovered from underneath the occupation surface should be approached with the greatest degree of caution. The main problem is that, assuming there were indeed a cluster of piers in the centre, it would not have been possible to construct an arcade parallel to the side walls. Only a very unusual, a trapezoidal structure would have been possible. However, this is effectively inconceivable, and naturally the “Byzantine analogies” did not have such forms.

Why do I, therefore, consider Daniela Marcu-Istrate’s proposal worthy of further consideration? Firstly, because it is difficult to explain rationally why, following or coinciding with the founding of the Latin episcopate, two church buildings—a “temporary cathedral” and an episcopal church intended to be permanent—would have been constructed simultaneously. Perhaps the former

<https://archive.org/details/JohnSkylitzes.ASynopsisOfByzantineHistorytrans.ByJ.Wortley2010> (Last accessed 3 September 2024). Most recently on the relationship between Byzantine conversion and Transylvania: Thoroczky Gábor, “Gyulafehérvár korai egyháztörténetéhez (A Hierotheos-féle térítés),” in *Ruscia – Hungaria – Europa. Ünnepi kötet Font Márta professzorasszony 70. születésnapjára*, ed. Bagi Dániel et al. (Kronosz, 2022). 618–627.

⁵⁰ Miklós Takács, *Byzantinische oder byzantinisierende Raumgestaltungen kirchlicher Architektur im frühárpadenzeitlichen Ungarn* (Schnell und Steiner Verlag, 2018), 112.

⁵¹ Szakács, “Építészet,” 120.

structure was a processional church, but even then, simultaneous construction of the two churches would have been unlikely; furthermore, why would a processional church, which was integrated into the planned liturgical order, have been demolished at the latest fifty to sixty years after its construction? There are many more logical arguments that support Marcu-Istrate's proposal. Transylvania (as well as the rest of the Carpathian Basin) in the tenth century was a broad region of proselytization, where the task was to preach the Gospel and baptise the converted. This required, above all, buildings that could accommodate the baptismal rite for large numbers of people. We cannot be at all sure that in this area of Greek missionary activity, these presumably modest buildings were intended at all costs to meet the requirements of the elaborate and complicated liturgical order of imperial churches, nor can we assume that Bishop Hierotheos and his dedicated missionary team were accompanied by skilled master builders.

In other respects, the size and ground plan of the church in Gyulafehérvár is very reminiscent of the type of building that appeared in several places in the Hungarian Kingdom in the eleventh century. The two-storey church building belonging to the Benedictine abbey of Pécsvárad may have originally been the court chapel of the royal palace. Its transfer to the Benedictines is mentioned in a late medieval source recording the foundation of the monastery in 1015.⁵² It is comparable to the church in Gyulafehérvár in terms of its known dimensions and single apse even though—at least on the lower level—a three-aisled floor plan has been confirmed (Fig. 18).⁵³ The early Árpád-era church near Zirc, known only from its remaining walls, was also part of a royal estate, which is mentioned in the text describing the death of King Andrew I in 1060.⁵⁴ The shape and size of the church is close to that of the Transylvanian building (Fig. 19). Similar in character is the later, but still eleventh-century, church belonging to the county centre of Szabolcs. In this context the diaconal churches of Borsod and Abaújház should also be mentioned.⁵⁵ These and similar buildings with three or one aisle and a single spacious apse are the closest analogies to the western church of Gyulafehérvár in terms of size and—with the exception of Pécsvárad—simple layout. They represent a type of building that primarily met the needs of the courtly centres of the period.

⁵² Szentpétery Imre, *Szent István király pécsváradai és pécsi alapítólevele* (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1918).

⁵³ Interior dimensions of the lower church of Pécsvárad: 14 x 12.4 m. On the original organization of the space, see Bodó Balázs, "A pécsváradai kolostor I. István korában," in *Etűdők. Tanulmányok Granasztóiné Györfy Katalin tiszteletére*, ed. Bardoly István (OMvH, 2004), 21–33.

⁵⁴ Koppány Tibor, "XI. századi királyi udvarház maradványai Zircen," *A Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei* 11, (1972): 139–147.

⁵⁵ For a brief overview, see Szakács, "Építészet," 134–135.

To sum up, while far from certain, it would be foolish to rule out the possibility that the church discovered in front of the cathedral of St. Stephen was built in the middle or second half of the tenth century, at a time when founding a Latin bishopric had yet to be considered. In that case it could have functioned as a baptistery serving the mission of the Greek clergy. The foundations in the centre of the nave, which could scarcely accommodate piers, may in some way be related to this function. The building may also have served as the court church of Gyula and his milieu—obviously with a Greek liturgy. This interpretation is consistent with the brief, less-than-one-hundred-year existence of the building, its short lifespan mostly likely due to the loss of its original function or its obsolescence. The least justifiable would be to suppose, out of twentieth-century bias, that the Latin clergy felt prejudice or antipathy towards the Greek Church.⁵⁶ As for the first cathedral, although there is still no conclusive evidence as to the date of its construction, it is safe to discard the notion that it was the work of St. Ladislav or that its construction certainly continued to the end of the eleventh century. Nothing excludes the possibility that it was built at the time the episcopate was established. In fact, this date is bolstered by the recognition that the rotunda was a secondary construction.

Lastly, a question arises from the recognition that the demolition of the church in front- of the cathedral roughly coincides with the construction of the rotunda on the south side of the first cathedral: is it possible that the rotunda was the successor of this small church, which was demolished in the last decades of the eleventh century, and that it was erected on the side of the then Latin rite cathedral as a baptistry? And moreover, that its own thirteenth-century successor is the extant “old sacristy”? Are we not dealing with an uninterrupted series of architectural witnesses to centuries of medieval history? Is it not the case that this history, which is both religious and architectural, began with the baptistery built during the Byzantine mission in the mid-tenth century? The story then continued with the Latin cathedral erected by King Stephen; followed by the rotunda, which took over the role of the old Greek church; and then the early thirteenth-century baptism chapel that replaced it?

⁵⁶ As Daniela Marcu-Istrate supposes. Assigning a religious motivation to the demolition of the “orthodox” church is absurd in part because it is unlikely that in Hungary in particular, where representatives of Eastern Christianity were also present at the royal court, there would have been a categorical rejection of the Greek Church in the years following the schism. Furthermore, after the establishment of the Latin bishopric, the cathedral clergy obviously adapted the building to the liturgy that accorded with their own customs. The other “oddity” raised in connection with the demolition of the church was the supposed desacralisation of the building site. However, this was obviously not an issue here, as archaeological evidence clearly indicates that the site of the church was occupied by a cemetery, the land of which was considered consecrated ground.

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Illustrations

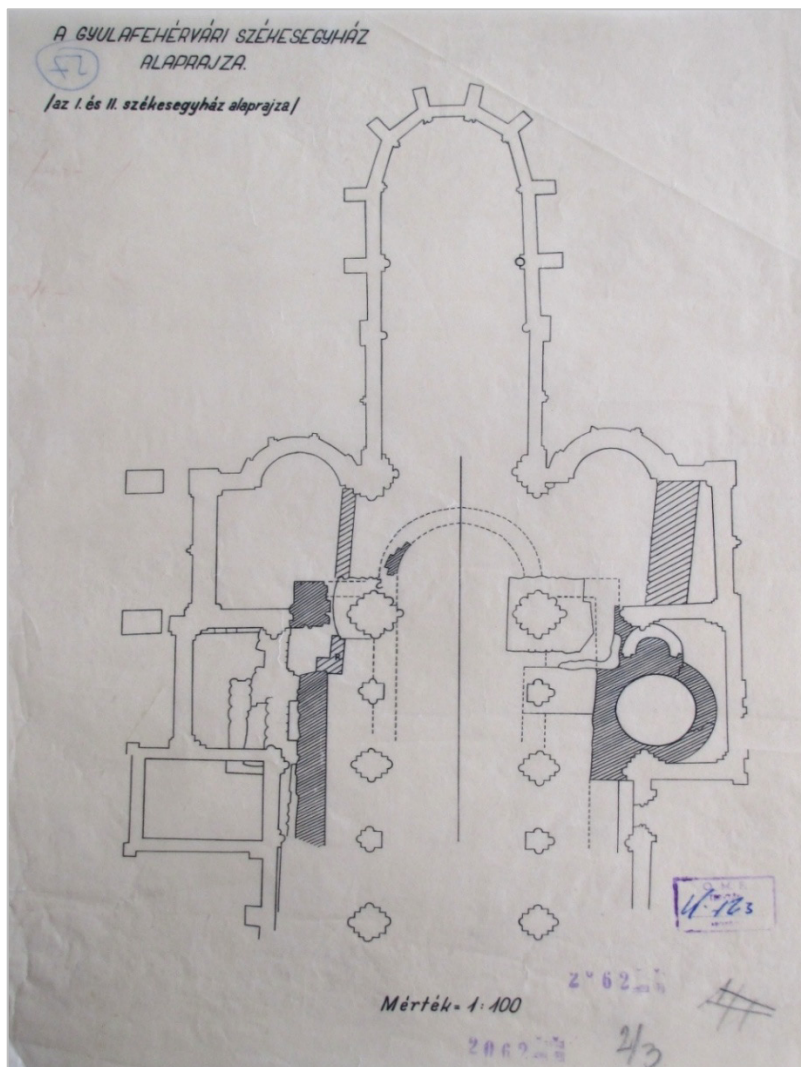


Fig. 1. Remains of the first cathedral of Gyulafehérvár, Budapest, Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center (drawing: Sándor Fridli)

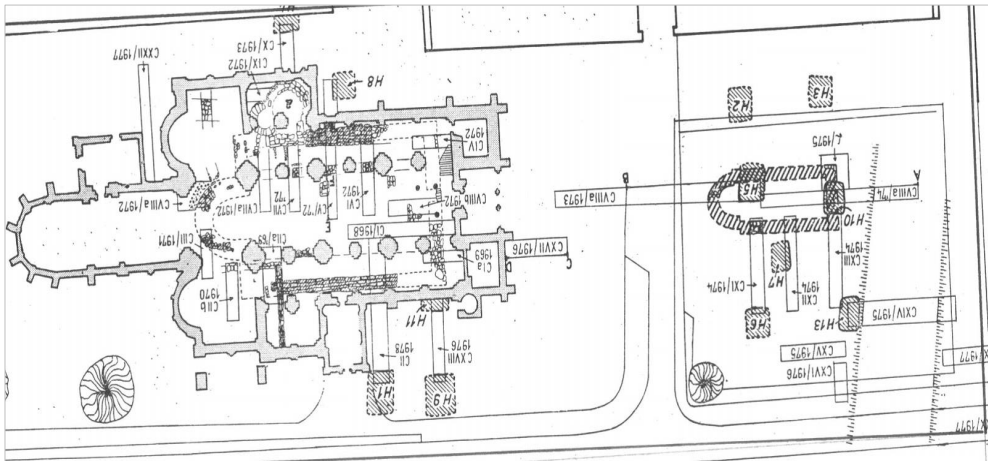


Fig. 2. Remains of the first cathedral and the church excavated in the foreground of the cathedral, 1968-1977 (Heitel 1985)

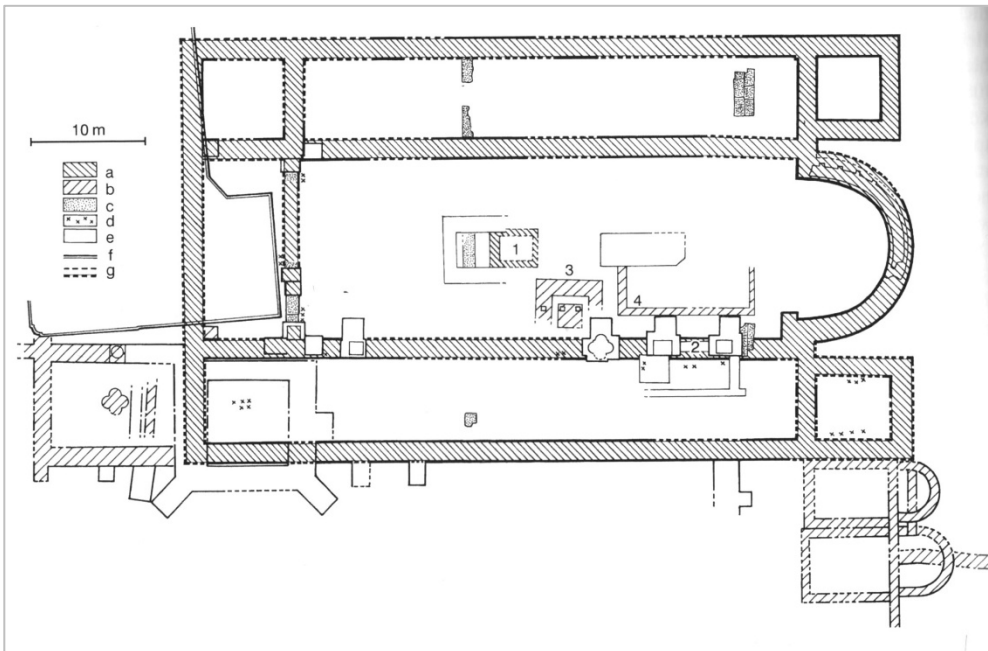


Fig. 3. Ground plan of the royal provostry of Székesfehérvár (Biczó 2000)

CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE EARLY ÁRPÁD-PERIOD CHURCHES
OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN EPISCOPAL SEE

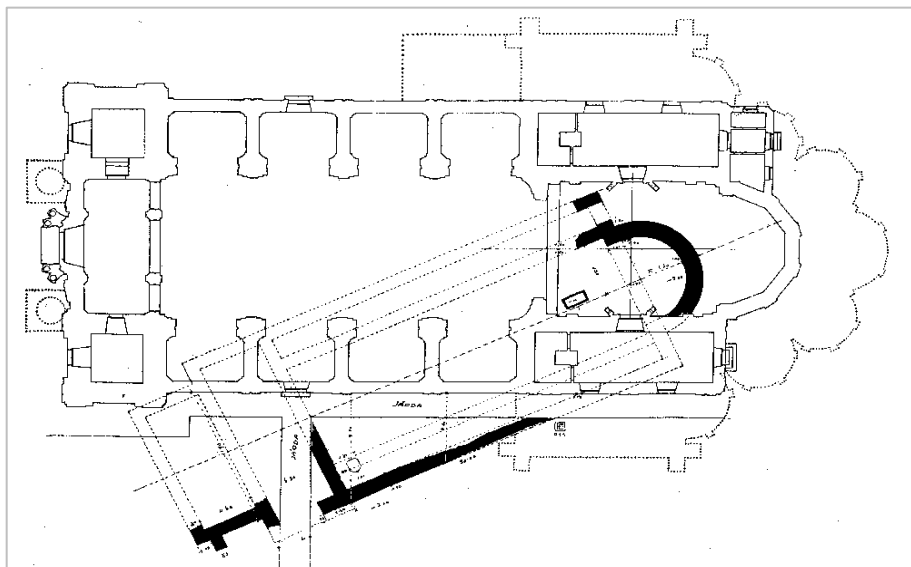


Fig. 4. Ground plan of the first cathedral of Kalocsa (Foerk 1915)

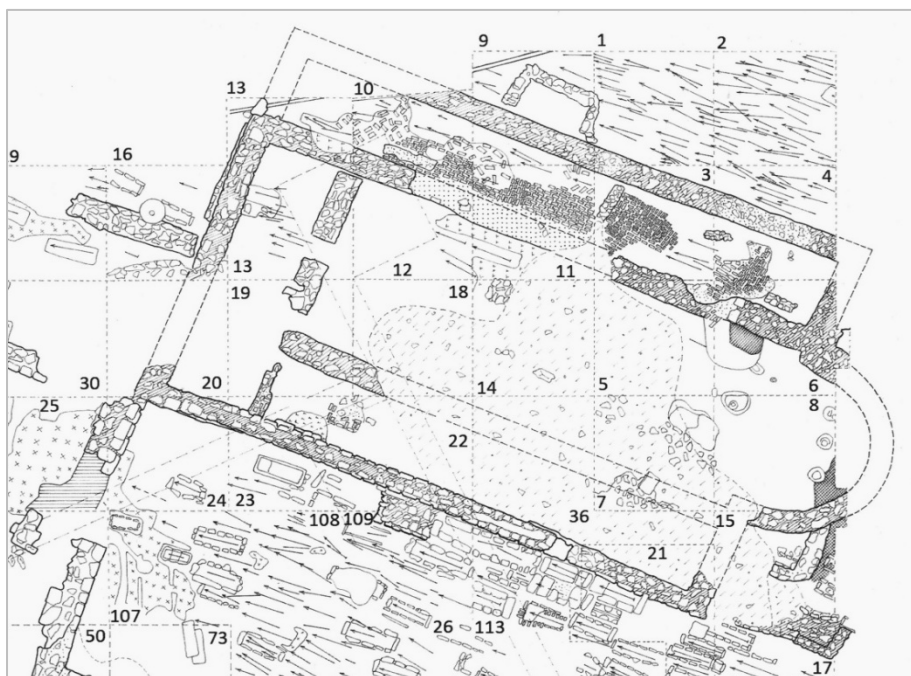


Fig. 5. Excavation plan of the of the nunnery church, Esztergom (Lovag 2014)



Fig. 6. Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), cathedral, timpanon of the inner side of the prince's gate (photo: A. Mudrák)



Fig. 7-8. Fragment of a curved cornice, Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), lapidary of the cathedral (photo: A. Mudrák)



Fig. 9. Capital of a half column, Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia),
lapidary of the cathedral (photo: A. Mudrák)



Fig. 10. Cubic capital, Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia),
lapidary of the cathedral (photo: A. Mudrák)



Fig. 11. Tarnaszentmária, detail of plinth decoration (photo: D. Horváth)



Fig. 12. Pilaster capital from Titel, Temesvár (Timișoara), Muzeul Banatului

CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE EARLY ÁRPÁD-PERIOD CHURCHES
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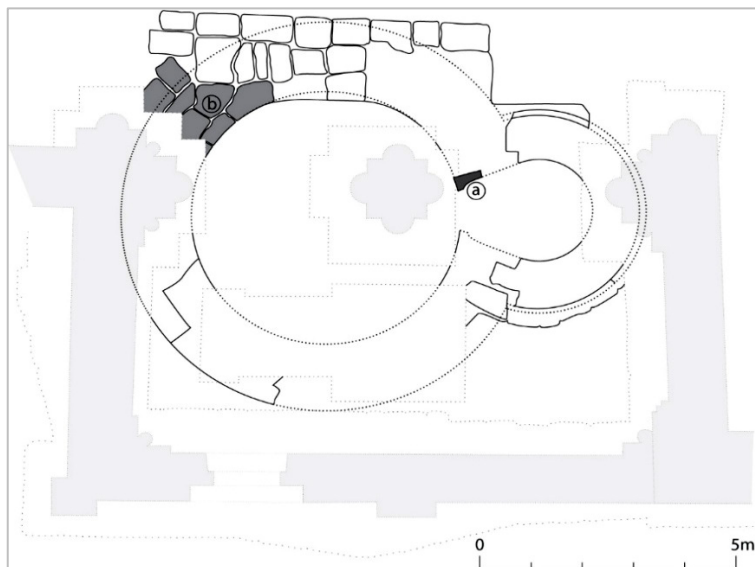


Fig. 13. Interpreted plan of the rotunda of Gyulafehérvár based on the survey of Sándor Fridli; a: curved cornice fragment; b: masonry stones belonging to the rotunda wall (drawing: Á. Takács)

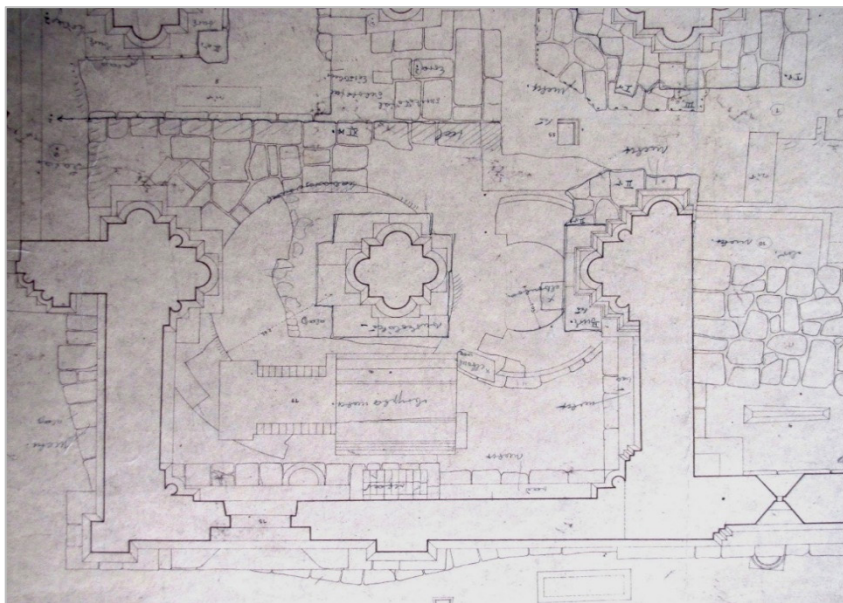


Fig. 14. Ground plan of the rotunda of Gyulafehérvár, Budapest, Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center (drawing: Sándor Fridli)

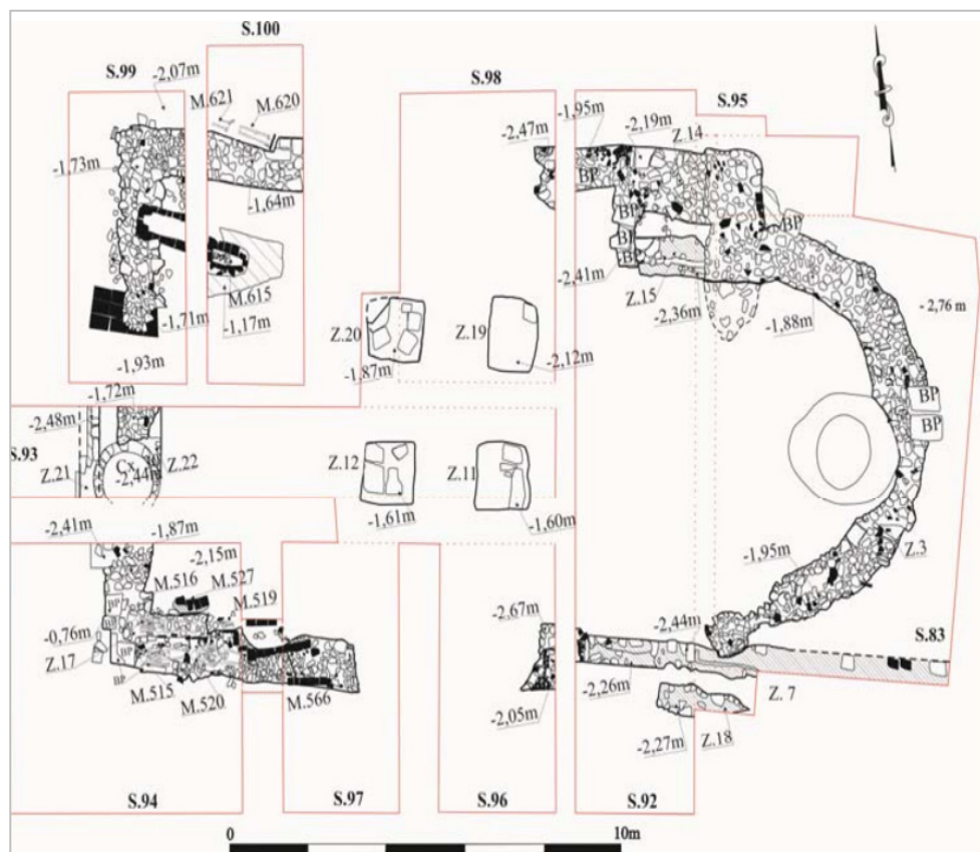


Fig. 15. Excavation floor plan of the church excavated in the foreground of the cathedral in Gyulafehérvár (Marcu Istrate 2014)

CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE EARLY ÁRPÁD-PERIOD CHURCHES
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Fig 16. Remains of the church excavated in the foreground of the cathedral in Gyulafehérvár
(Marcu Istrate 2014)

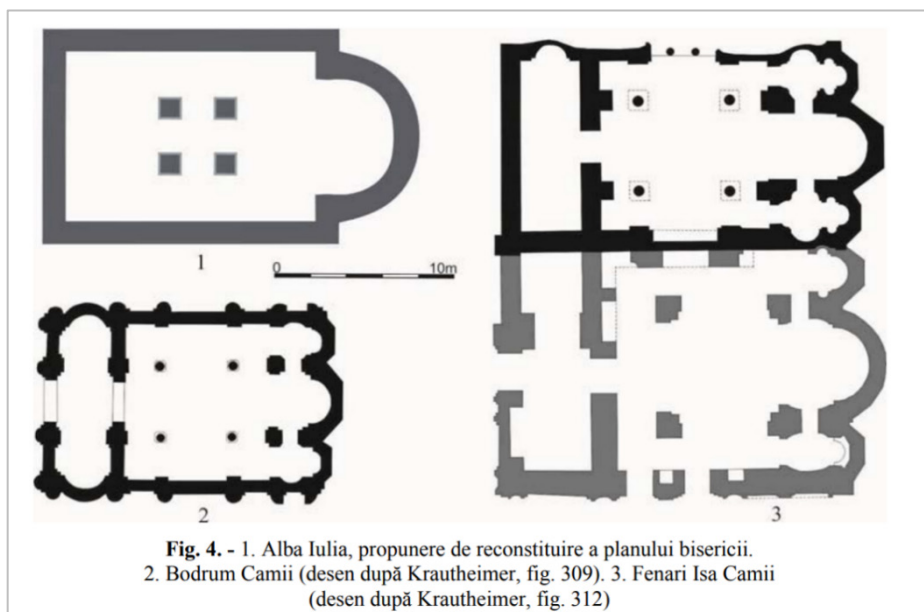


Fig. 17. Reconstruction of the floor plan of the church excavated in the foreground of the cathedral in Gyulafehérvár, using Byzantine “analogies” (Marcu Istrate 2014)

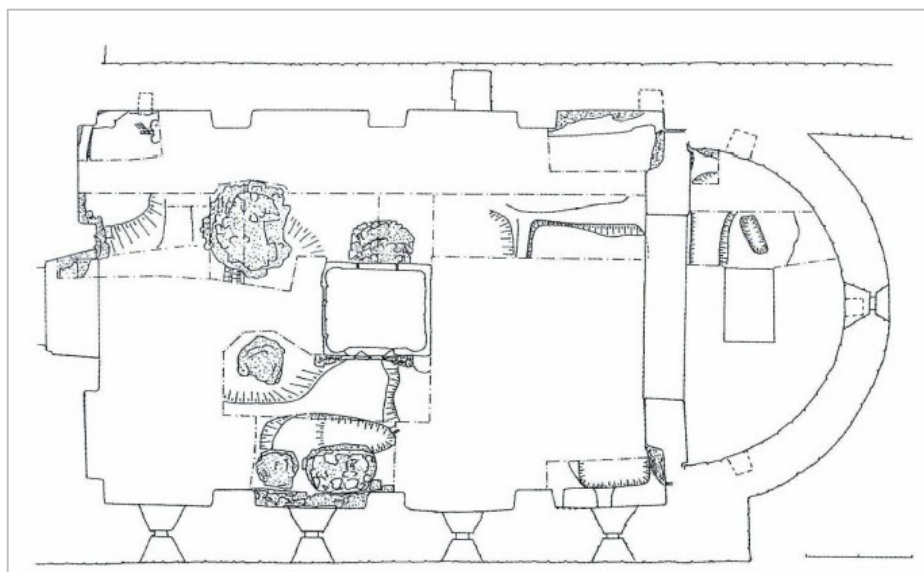


Fig. 18. Excavation plan of the lower part of the two-storey chapel in Pécsvárad (Bodó and Orosz 2003)

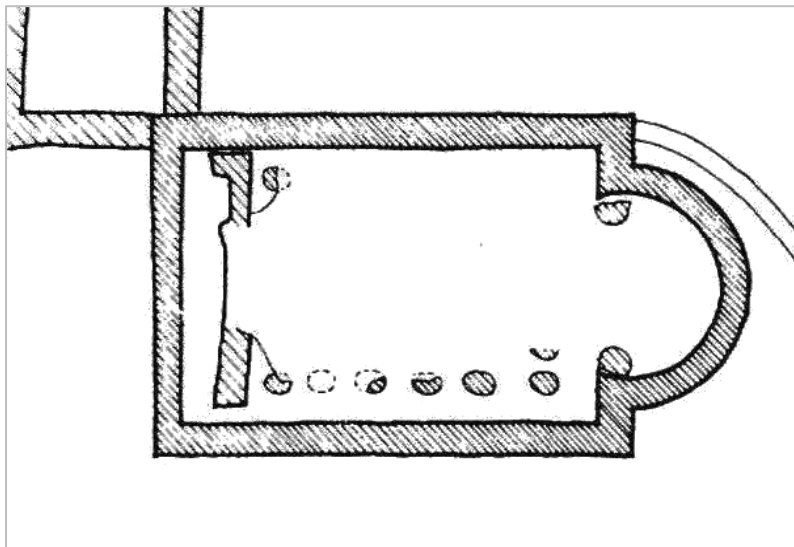


Fig. 19. Floor plan of the chapel of the Royal Mansion in Zirc (Koppány 1972)

Eve's Creation in the Mural Paintings Decorating the Church of the Apafi Family at Mălâncrav (Malmkrog, Almakerék) in Transylvania*

Anca GOGÂLTAN**

ABSTRACT. *Eve's Creation in the Mural Paintings Decorating the Church of the Apafi Family at Mălâncrav (Malmkrog, Almakerék) in Transylvania.*

Eve's creation image is one of the Genesis scenes in the iconographic program decorating the north wall of the nave in the fourteenth-century proprietary church belonging to the noble family Apafi in the village of Mălâncrav (Transylvania). Presenting a composition in which only Eve's head was shown, completely formed from Adam's rib, which was separated from his body and held by the Creator in his hand, this iconographic variant is seldom encountered in the medieval corpus of Genesis representations. Based on Baschet's serial method, the present article attempts to understand the origins of this representational choice and its possible interpretations suggested by exegetical texts and *exempla* literature, which are related in some cases to the Franciscans. It also aims to discuss the image's probable significance for a devout, arguably predominantly female, public.

Keywords: *Eve's creation, proprietary church, medieval wall paintings, Franciscans, Transylvania.*

* This work is a translated and slightly revised version of an article originally published in Romanian, in *Arte et ingenio. Tanulmányok Kovács András 75. születésnapjára*, eds. Gáfi Emőke, Kovács Zsolt, and P. Kovács Klára (Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület–ELKH Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont. Történettudományi Intézet, 2021), 253–266.

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Built sometime in the first half of the fourteenth century, the church of the noble family Apafi in the Transylvanian village Mălâncrav (Târnava Mare region)¹ displays evident stylistic differences between the architectural features of the basilical nave and the Gothic structure of the choir.² This explains why some specialists dated the nave and its wall paintings earlier than the choir,³ which was modified towards the end of the fourteenth century.⁴ The church's exceptionally rich interior decoration in Transylvania's case, made of wall paintings, sculpted reliefs, and the panel paintings of the fifteenth-century winged altarpiece, reiterate and nuance the interest in the same religious themes like the Passion of Christ,⁵ the glorification of the Virgin⁶ and a variety of saints, both masculine and feminine, intercessors and protectors of several generations of Apafi donors.

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- ¹ Anca Gogâltan, "The Church in Mălâncrav (Almakerék, Malmkrog) Sibiu District. A Historiographic Overview," *Apulum, Istorie – Etnografie – Conservare* XXXVII/2, (2000): 305–313. See also a thorough bibliography on the church and its decorations in the catalogue of Marie Lionnet's doctoral thesis, "Les peintures murales en Hongrie à la fin du Moyen Âge (v. 1300–v. 1475)" (PhD diss., University Paris X-Nanterre, 2004), 2: 5, <https://www.diffusiontheses.fr/46149-these-de-lionnet-marie.html>. See also Marie Lionnet, "Almakerék, Église Notre-Dame, peintures murales" in *Sigismundus Rex et Imperator: Art et culture au temps de Sigismond de Luxembourg, 1387–1437*, ed. Imre Takács (Philipp von Zabern, 2006), 424, fig. 4.147. A more recent presentation of the church and its mural decorations appears in Dana Jenei, "Les peintures murales de l'église de Mălâncrav. Notes avant la restauration," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art, Série Beaux-Arts* LII (2015): 47–76. For a thorough analysis of the church's architecture see Ileana Burnichioiu, *Biserici parohiale și capele private din comitatele Alba și Hunedoara 1200–1550* (Editura Mega, 2018), esp. 304–316. See also Viktor Roth, "Az almakeréki templom és műkincsei," *Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem és Régiségtárából* 3, no. 1 (1912): 128–184; Vasile Drăguț, "Picturile murale din biserica evanghelică de la Mălâncrav," *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei* 14, (1967): 79–93; Lionnet, "Les peintures murales," 1: 392–400.
- ² Vătășianu dated the church's architecture between 1350 and the end of the fourteenth century. Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române I* (Fundatia Culturală Română, 2001), 217–218. See also Dragoș Gh. Năstăsioiu, Ferenc Mihály, Lorand Kiss, *Monumente Medievale de pe Valea Târnavelor* (Editura ACS, 2018), 290–313 (esp. 296). Drăguț hypothesized that the church was built in the first half of the fourteenth century and „modernized” towards the end of the century. Drăguț, "Picturile murale," 80. Based on the observations during the restoration works carried out in 2001–2002 and 2013, Jenei endorsed the same hypothesis. Jenei, "Les peintures murales," 47.
- ³ Entz Géza, *Erdély építészete a 14–16. században* (Az Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület kiadása, 1996), 54.
- ⁴ Drăguț, "Picturile murale," 80.
- ⁵ Anca Gogâltan, "Passion Iconography and Narrative Strategies in the Medieval Frescoes Decorating the Church in Mălâncrav (Almakerék, Malmkrog) in Transylvania," *New Europe College. GE-NEC Program 2004–2007* (2007): 103–152.
- ⁶ Lionnet, "Les peintures murales," 1: 66–70; Mihnea Mihail, "The Hungarian Kingdom and Aspects of the Geography of Art from the Perspective of Iconographic Transfers in the Fourteenth-Fifteenth Centuries" (PhD diss., Bucharest National University of Arts, 2018), 1: 3–7, 201–202.

The murals in the nave illustrate the entire holy history of humanity from the moment of its Creation to Jesus' and the Virgin's death and Ascension.⁷ It also includes images of sacrifices suffered by some of those who died for their Christian belief. Dated on stylistic grounds around or after the middle of the fourteenth century,⁸ they occupy the whole northern wall of the central nave. They were organized in six tiers, out of which the first four follow the *bustrophedon* display, alternating the narratives' reading direction from left to right and right to left.⁹ In that way, the images could be seen in relation to each other, their significations combined to enhance their theological messages.¹⁰

The scene under study belongs to the Genesis cycle, which unfolds on the whole upper tier; it is located in the register's northwestern side between the moment of the fishes' and birds' Creation and God's Admonition to Adam and Eve concerning the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Adam's body appears on the composition's right side, probably asleep on a mound. The introduction or enlargement of a medieval window opening partly destroyed the area. For that reason, only the feet of the ancestor of humanity can be seen.¹¹ On the scene's left side, God the Father appears as an active agent of the creational event.¹² He was represented as an older man with long, curly hair

⁷ Lionnet, "Les peintures murales," 1: 188–190. On that occasion, a thorough visual documentation of the murals was produced, consisting of black-and-white photographs and watercolors painted by Zoltán Veress. This documentation is preserved in the Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center in Budapest. When compared to the current state of the wall paintings, the photos published by Éber work as more reliable visual sources, as they do not include additions by the painter. See Éber László, "Tanulmányok Magyarország középkori falfestményeiről. I. Újronnan fölfedezett falfestmények Almakeréken," in *Magyarország Műemlékei* 4, ed. Forster Gyula (A Franklin Társulat Nyomása, 1915): 71–86; Drăguț, "Picturile murale," 82. The northern wall in the central nave was the only one decorated, and the wall paintings were created at a later date after the construction. See Jenei, "Les peintures murales," 48–49.

⁸ The paintings were dated differently by specialists. Radocsay Dénes, *Falképek a középkori Magyarországon* (Corvina Kiadó, 1977), 121 and Prokopp Mária, *Italian Trecento Influence on Murals in East Central Europe Particularly Hungary* (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983), 141 (the first half of the fourteenth century). Drăguț believed that they were painted immediately after 1350 whereas Jenei dated them around 1350. Drăguț, "Picturile murale," 86; Dana Jenei, "The Church of Virgin Mary in Mălâncrav. The Mihai Eminescu Trust, Church Project in Mălâncrav," 2002, https://www.eminescu.org.uk/content/nd_standard.asp?n=136. Lionnet argued that they were made after 1350. See Lionnet, "Les peintures murales," 2: 3.

⁹ Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Place of Narrative. Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431–1600* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 53.

¹⁰ Jérôme Baschet, *L'iconographie médiévale* (FOLIO Histoire, 2008), 125–151.

¹¹ Adam's torso is supported by a partly preserved small-sized character with a halo.

¹² Johannes Zählten, *Creatio mundi. Darstellungen der sechs Schöpfungstage und naturwissenschaftliches Weltbild im Mittelalter*. Stuttgarter Beiträge zur Geschichte und Politik 13 (Klett-Cotta, 1979), 24, 104.

and beard,¹³ wrapped in a mantle over a long garment, and barefoot.¹⁴ He initiated the woman's formation by blessing the rib in his left hand out of which Eve's head emerges, with long wavy hair and eyes wide open, looking into the eyes of the Divinity.

In medieval artistic production, Eve's creation was represented in many iconographic variants.¹⁵ The image was attributed several meanings, illustrating more than a sequence in the Genesis narrative describing the apparition of the first woman on earth: it had the role to anticipate the original Sin, it prefigured the birth of the Church from Christ's wounded side, and it visualized the physical union between the ancestors of the humanity symbolizing the marital love sanctified by the Church.¹⁶ Considering the representations' diversity, the present analysis explores the symbolic significations of the iconographic variant in Mălâncrav. It searches the meaning of the fact that only Eve's head and not her torso or almost entirely formed body are shown, as she usually appears in most of the images depicting her creation. It questions the image's possible iconographic sources and discusses interpretations of the medieval exegesis and devotional literature, which could explain such a visual choice in a distant place like Mălâncrav. Further questions consider the image's public and the possible ideological connections with another meaningful scene in the iconographic program of the nave, which might have resonated with the message of the studied example.

The image's textual sources

The first two chapters of Genesis mention how God created humanity's ancestors in some contradictory statements.¹⁷ The detailed recount of the events related to Eve's creation from Adam's rib appears only in the second

¹³ God the Father was shown as the oldest principle of the Trinity, indicating his presence in the Creation process. See *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* (Herder, 1970, 1994), 2:165–170; 4: 99–123 (esp. 100).

¹⁴ The lack of footwear was considered a sign of divinity. Annegret Diethelm, "Die Beredsamkeit stummer Bilder. Auf den Spuren eines mittelalterlichen Alphabets der menschlichen Gestalt," in *Der Waltersburger Meister in seiner Zeit*, ed. Horst F. Rupp (Josef Fink Publ., 2015), 128–142 (here 135).

¹⁵ See for example Roberto Zapperi, *Geschichten vom schwangeren Mann. Männer, Frauen und die Macht* (C.H. Beck, 1979), 9–45; Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 298–341; Jack M. Greenstein, "The Body of Eve in Andrea Pisano's Creation Relief," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 575–596; Greenstein, *The Creation of Eve and Renaissance Naturalism. Visual Theology and Artistic Invention* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁶ Megan McLaughlin, *Sex, Gender, and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform 1000–1122* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23.

¹⁷ Gen. 1:26–27; 2:19–24 King James Version Bible, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/kjv/genesis/1.html>.

chapter of the Old Testament. According to Greenstein, in the Holy Text's wording, there are two distinct descriptions: the first, representing the voice of the author, focuses on God's actions, whereas the second one is an etiological explanation of the word woman (*virago* in Lat.) mentioning Adam's view on Eve being "bone from his bones and flesh of his flesh".¹⁸ Over time, theologians analyzed the story of Genesis in numerous literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical interpretations, generating a significant quantity of exegetical works.¹⁹ Moreover, the biblical text was enriched with new information provided by apocryphal writings like the Greek and Latin versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, which explored their fate after the punitive Expulsion from the Garden.²⁰ Their story was also the subject of the earliest medieval drama, the *Play of Adam*, which appeared in the twelfth century in the Anglo-Norman world. It made their story emotionally relatable to a larger public.²¹

The iconographic variety of Eve's creation images suggests that the artists' production resonated with a rich intellectual discourse emerging from the Old Testament narrative, the apocryphal *Vita Adae et Evae*, its theatrical variants, as well as from the exegetic interpretations. This explains why visual representations of Eve's creation could have influenced her perception, interpretations of Virgin Mary's role in religious history, as well as general views on women in medieval society.

How was Eve created in the view of medieval artists?

Iconographic studies that focused on Eve's creation emphasized its popularity, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.²² These mentioned two or three distinct representational types of Eve's creation, presenting many slightly different variants.²³ One of the oldest types appeared in the *Cotton* manuscript, now fragmentarily preserved (probably produced in

¹⁸ Greenstein, "The Body of Eve", 576–577; Greenstein, *The Creation of Eve*, 14–15.

¹⁹ Joy A. Schroeder, *The Bible in Medieval Tradition. The Book of Genesis* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 4.

²⁰ Gary A. Anderson, "Between Biblical Commentaries and Apocryphal Narratives: The Narrativization of Biblical Exegesis in the Life of Adam and Eve," *Jewish Studies* 36 (1996): 31–39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23382027>. See also Penny Howell Jolly, *Made in God's Image? Eve and Adam in the Genesis Mosaics at San Marco, Venice* (University of California Press, 1997), 3.

²¹ Jolly, *Made in God's Image?*, 3; Maureen Fries, "The Evolution of Eve in Medieval French and English Religious Drama," *Studies in Philology* 99, no. 1 (2002): 1–16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174716>.

²² See footnote 15. See also Zahlten, *Creatio mundi*, 218–222.

²³ Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 304; Greenstein, "The Body of Eve", 577; Greenstein, *The Creation of Eve*, 29.

Alexandria towards the end of the fifth century),²⁴ and in depictions of Genesis appearing in the Carolingian Bibles from the ninth century.²⁵ This first iconographic type, called narrative, depicts God's actions during Eve's creation in two or three scenes. On the Genesis frontispiece of the Bible of *San Paolo fuori le mura* (ninth century), for example, the first image from the series shows the moment of the rib extraction from Adam's body who has fallen asleep, followed by the depiction of God's 'work' in Eve's creation (her body appears already formed) and the third moment that illustrates her presentation to Adam.²⁶ The narrative type was the least spread, found in six Genesis cycles produced before the eleventh century, in five examples dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and disappeared by the fifteenth century.²⁷

The second iconographic variant, which, according to Baschet, was more interpretative than narrative, dated, apparently, from the second quarter of the eleventh century.²⁸ In Zapperi's opinion, this type visualized Eve's real 'birth' from Adam's body.²⁹ It presented the spontaneous emergence of the woman's torso or her almost entirely formed body from Adam's side without reference to the original rib.³⁰ This was the most widespread composition of Eve's creation, representing 90% of 275 images analyzed by Zahlten.³¹

The representation in Mălâncrav is very different from those already mentioned. It resembles singular images, considered by Baschet to be combined variants of the narrative type or intermediate/hybrids of the two previously described categories.³² However, although some synthesized compositions seem to blend the first two iconographic types, others, like the one under study, introduced certain twists in their "reading" because the roles played by its main protagonists, God and Eve, appear to have changed. Compared to the Carolingian Bibles, for example, in which the focus was on the way the Demiurge accomplished

²⁴ Kurt Weitzmann, Herbert Kessler, *The Cotton Genesis* (Princeton University Press, 1986), 3–7, 30–34.

²⁵ Herbert Kessler, "Hic Homo Formatur: the Genesis Frontispieces of the Carolingian Bibles," *The Art Bulletin* 53, no. 2 (1971): 143–160, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3048827>.

²⁶ Kessler, "Hic Homo Formatur," 148; Koichi Koshi, "Der Adam-und-Eva-Zyklus in der sogenannten Cottongenesen-Rezension: eine Übersicht über mögliche Mitglieder der verzweigten Cottongenesen-Familie," *Annual Bulletin of the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo* 9 (1976): 46–87 (esp. 67–70); Zahlten, *Creatio mundi*, 196; Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 308.

²⁷ Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 308; Greenstein, *The creation of Eve*, 32.

²⁸ Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 306–307.

²⁹ Zapperi, *Geschichten*, 11.

³⁰ Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 304.

³¹ Greenstein's observation, "The Body of Eve", 577; Greenstein, *The creation of Eve*, 38.

³² Baschet and Greenstein related this type to the artists' hesitation to renounce the Biblical text. Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 308–309; Greenstein, "The Body of Eve", 579.

the new being with his own hands, in images like the one in Mălâncrav, the emphasis seems to have been on the miracle of Eve's creation and her individuality as a separate being from Adam. Moreover, in the multi-scenic variants, Eve appeared to play a passive role, being entirely shaped and then led to Adam by the Creator, like in the mosaics decorating the cupola of the narthex in San Marco in Venice (dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century).³³ In contrast, in single representations of Eve's creation from the rib, she manifests herself as capable of recognizing and interacting with God even before being completely formed.

To understand the iconographic specificity of the image under study, I resorted to the serial method theorized by Baschet.³⁴ The French scholar based his analytic approach on the postulate that visual objects actively participated in the social world. Moreover, Western medieval art was not stereotypical and did not rigidly reproduce the Church doctrine, but demonstrated "extreme inventiveness." Baschet argued that by attentively studying a series of images on an iconographic theme or motif, paying attention to differences in artistic mediums, technique, context, visibility, chronology, place of origin, researchers could distinguish meaningful iconographic innovations by comparing the visual objects' similarities, variations, and singularities.³⁵ Although the specialist mentioned several examples of the rib type creation in his analysis of Eve's representations,³⁶ he focused less on them, probably because of their diminished quantitative relevance. Moreover, although Baschet described Eve's body shape, he based his image classification on Adam's rib configuration and the relation between the Protoplasts' figures.³⁷ The representation of Eve's body, her interaction with God, and the possible meanings of such iconographic motifs received scarce attention. The present analysis will consider, besides the representations' chronology, the cultural environments in which they appeared, the geographical mapping of their spread, the exegetic texts, and the discourses of church representatives attached to this theme. The intention is not to reduce the images to texts, but to suggest the modifications that occurred, especially

³³ Martin Büchsel, Herbert L. Kessler, and Rebecca Müller, eds., *The Atrium of San Marco in Venice. The Genesis and Medieval Reality of the Genesis Mosaics* (Mann Verlag, 2014), 186.

³⁴ Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 267–274.

³⁵ For a more detailed presentation of the serial method see Jérôme Baschet, "Inventivité et sérialité des images médiévales. Pour une approche iconographique élargie," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 51, no. 1 (1996): 93–133 (esp. 111–122), https://www.persee.fr/doc/ahess_0395-2649_1996_num_51_1_410835.

³⁶ Koshi, "Der Adam-und-Eva-Zyklus," 70–71; Zahlten, *Creatio mundi*, 196–197; Greenstein, "The Body of Eve," 579–580.

³⁷ See the classification in Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 309–310.

beginning with the twelfth century, in some theological interpretations, which could help us understand the particularity and significations of an image like the one in Mălâncrav.

Eve and Adam's rib

The corpus of presently known images belonging to the rib type (27), dated between the twelfth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, confirms Baschet's observation that it was the least preferred variant among the representations of Eve's creation. However, the range of possible compositions that included the rib in forming the first woman was pretty diverse and appeared, apparently, shortly before the middle of the twelfth century. One of the oldest examples is the marble relief on the facade of the Basilica San Zeno in Verona (Italy), dated around 1138 and attributed to Master Niccolò.³⁸ The image presents the Divinity extracting Eve's torso from Adam's side. The rib, which looks like a small appendix still attached to the first man, connects her to him. This depiction illustrates not only the tight link between the two beings, but also the secondary creational order of the woman from the sleeping man's body.³⁹

More than half of the studied images (18 out of 27) visualized Adam's essential role in this creation, depicting the rib still attached to his body. The bone appears in different ways: like a vertical or a horizontal one (a sort of revolving rib, according to Baschet)⁴⁰ or, quite often, like an umbilicus, sometimes of large dimensions. The firmly, vertically placed bone on Adam's body occurs in Eve's creation scene in the manuscript from the Benedictine monastery in Millstatt (1180–1200, Austria),⁴¹ as well as in the *Passional of Kunigunde*, the abbess of the Benedictine monastery dedicated to St. George in Prague (dated around 1312–1321).⁴²

Images in which the bone attached to Adam's body resembles a flexible umbilical cord from which Eve's body grows with God's assistance, who supports it with his hand, can probably be included in the same category. The producers of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* manuscripts, dated to the

³⁸ Greenstein, "The Body of Eve", 580, fig. 6.

³⁹ See similar examples in Zahlten, *Creatio mundi*, 196, fig. 56; Baschet, *L'iconographie*, fig. 42.

⁴⁰ Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 309.

⁴¹ Koshi, "Der Adam-und-Eva-Zyklus," 70. See also Greenstein, "The Body of Eve", 580. For the manuscript see Hella Frühmorgen-Voss, *Studien zur illustrierten Millstätter Genesis*, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 4 (Beck Verlag, 1962).

⁴² Koshi, "Der Adam-und-Eva-Zyklus," 71, footnote 79. For the manuscript, see Ferdinand Seibt et al., *Gothic Art in Bohemia. Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting* (Praeger Publishers, 1977), 42–43.

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, preferred this variant.⁴³ Similar to birth scenes, in Zapperi's opinion, in which Eve visibly emerges from Adam's body, the rib, shown like an umbilical cord, was probably chosen to illustrate the biblical text more accurately.⁴⁴ On the other hand, it could have been an acceptable solution to visualize an inexplicable physical phenomenon by referring to some aspects of the public's life experience. Some medieval writers searched for explanations, as for example Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), who had a theory that the production of Eve's entire body from a single bone was possible with the help of the humidity and heat produced by the rib of the first man.⁴⁵

The variant in which Eve's body trunk developed from Adam's (horizontal) revolving rib occurs in the manuscript *Antiquitates Judaicae* of the antique author Flavius Josephus (dated to the second half of the twelfth century),⁴⁶ and later on the *Genesis* panel from the Grabow winged altarpiece attributed to Master Bertram of Minden (before 1383).⁴⁷ Most probably, this variant served as a model for ensuing representations in which the horizontal rib was no longer connected to Adam's body, but appears in the Creator's hand. Eve's torso miraculously grows from it, presenting corporal dimensions comparable to Adam's. Shown in the so-called *Psautier glosée*, produced around 1190–1195 (probably in the Benedictine monastery in Tournai, Belgium), this variant was adopted in mural paintings from south-western Germany, such as those in Freudenberg and Oberschüpf (Baden-Württemberg), both linked with the same painterly workshop and dated around 1300.⁴⁸

In the manuscript *Hortus deliciarum* (1167–1185) attributed to Herrad of Hohenburg (1125/30–1195), the abbess of the female Augustinian monastery

⁴³ See *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* from Toledo (1320–1340, Chapter Archives, Ms. 10.8, fol. 3v), *Speculum* produced in England, dated to the end of the fourteenth century, (Paris, National Library, Ms. 400, fol. 1r). For more examples see the database of the Warburg Institute, London, https://iconographic.warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/subcats.php?cat_1=14&cat_2=812&cat_3=2903&cat_4=5439&cat_5=13111&cat_6=10590&cat_7=3782.

⁴⁴ Zapperi, *Geschichten*, 17. Baschet argued that in Eve's case, to be created did not mean to be born. Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 312–328.

⁴⁵ Gemma Louise Wain, "Nec ancilla nec domina: Representations of Eve in the Twelfth Century" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2013), 83, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/10526/>.

⁴⁶ Realized probably at the Benedictine monastery Saint Trond, Belgium, Ms. 1632, fol. 3, the Condé Museum, Chantilly, France. See Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 309, fig. 41.

⁴⁷ Martina Sitt and Stephanie Hauschild, *Der Petri-Altar von Meister Bertram* (Conference Point Verlag, 2008, 2016), 9, fig. 59.

⁴⁸ Matthias Klein, *Schöpfungsdarstellungen mittelalterlicher Wandmalereien in Baden-Württemberg und in der Nordschweiz*. Hochschulsammlung Philosophie Kunstgeschichte 4 (Freiburg [Breisgau] Hochschulverlag, 1982), 83, fig. 52, 307, fig. 164.

Mont Sainte Odile in Alsace,⁴⁹ the bone, depicted like a semi-circle generating Eve's miniature torso,⁵⁰ seems to be similarly separated from Adam's body in the Creator's hand.⁵¹ Baschet argued that this image represented a successful synthesis of the multi-scene illustration of the narrative type in one composition. Still, the scholar paid less attention to Eve's hand gestures. One notices that, despite her incomplete formation, Eve adopts the antique orans position, suggesting her active adoration of God from the moment of her creation.⁵²

Eve's head

The image under study is part of a narrow group (8 out of 27) that presents only Eve's head, partly or entirely formed, growing from Adam's rib. In Genesis cycles from the twelfth century, like the centrally staged composition in the antiphonary from the Benedictine Abbey in Zwiefalten (Baden-Württemberg, 1138–1147),⁵³ representing the first example of this type, and the similar one in the manuscript entitled *Liber Scivias* (1172)⁵⁴ attributed to Hildegard of Bingen, leader of the Benedictine monastery at Rupertsberg (Rhein-Pfalz, south-western Germany), as a second example, the generating rib appears like a thin bone still linked to Adam's body out of which Eve's head emerges with her modeled features and opened eyes.⁵⁵ In the already-mentioned representation in the Millstatt Bible (the third example), Eve's head is incomplete. It is noteworthy that whereas in the first two cases, apparently realized by the same scriptorium, the Creator's role was only suggested, the Millstatt manuscript visualizes the divine activity. God is shaping the woman, being assisted by a hallowed character, probably an angel, just like in the image at Mălâncrav. A similar representation, without the

⁴⁹ For the manuscript, see Danielle B. Joyner, *Painting the Hortus Deliciarum. Medieval Women, Wisdom, and Time* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

⁵⁰ The miniature size diminishes the suggestion of her sensuality.

⁵¹ Koshi, "Der Adam-und-Eva-Zyklus," 70, fig. 40; Greenstein, "The Body of Eve", 580.

⁵² Jean-Claude Schmidt, *Rațiunea gesturilor* (Meridiane, 1998), 31; Jolly, *Made in God's Image?*, 12.

⁵³ Ms. Cod. Hist. 2^o 415, Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek. This image exemplifies the austere style of the Zwiefalten scriptorium, consisting of drawings in black and red ink. Hermann Josef Pretsch, "Das Ende der Hirschauer Reformbewegung," in *900 Jahre Benediktinerabtei Zwiefalten*, ed. Hermann Josef Pretsch (Ulm Süddeutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990), 61–72 (here 63); Zahlten, *Creatio mundi*, 59; Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 44.

⁵⁴ Zahlten, *Creatio mundi*, 61. See also Rebeca L. R. Garber, "Where is the Body? Images of Eve and Mary in the Scivias," in *Hildegard of Bingen. A Book of Essays*, ed. Maud Nurnett-McInerney (Routledge, 1998), 132–162.

⁵⁵ *Liber Scivias*, University Library Heidelberg, Ms. IX, Room X, 16, fol. 2v. See Zahlten, *Creatio mundi*, fig. 61.

assisting figure, can be seen in the Passion of the Abbess Kunigunde (the fourth example), in which God's modeling effort was nuanced in a tender gesture of support and blessing Eve's face, whose features were already formed.⁵⁶

The differences between the aforementioned images and the one under study (the fifth example) are both chronological and compositional. The bone from which Eve's head emerges appears separated from Adam's body in God's hand. This variant eliminates the emphasis on the bodily connection between the two ancestors of humanity and underlines the direct relation between the Creator and his female creation.

An image resembling the one in Mălâncrav appears in an illuminated Bible from Bohemia dated to the beginning of the fifteenth century⁵⁷ (the sixth example). It resembles two other representations produced in Bohemia in the same period. One occurs in a sumptuous manuscript containing the work of the renowned scholar Peter Comestor (approx. 1110–1178), entitled *Historia Scholastica* (the seventh example), which belonged to King Sigismund de Luxemburg (1387–1437), according to Irina von Morzé.⁵⁸ The other, significant because of the popularity of the manuscript, is a *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (included in the miscellaneous work *Krumlovský Sborník* dated to 1417) (the eighth example) in which God holds the rib in his hand, like in Mălâncrav, out of which Eve's head emerges from it completely formed, while Adam sleeps nearby.⁵⁹ Destined for a nuns' convent, according to the specialists Jan Müller and Josef Krása, the manuscript was created as support for the preaching activity of Dominican and Franciscan brothers, not only for the *cura monialium*, but also *laicorum*, as stated by Daniela Rywiková.⁶⁰

In conclusion, this particular iconographic variant appeared initially in manuscripts related to the Benedictine monastic environment before the mid-twelfth century. They were most likely produced within an intellectual environment characterized by an intensification of women's participation in

⁵⁶ Prague, University Library, Cod. XIV A 17, fol. 4r. Koichi Koshi, *Die Genesis miniaturen in der Wiener "Histoire Universelle"* (COD. 2576), (Adolf Holzhausen, 1973), 10; Seibt et al., *Gothic art in Bohemia*, 42–43. See also Gia Toussaint, *Das Passion der Kunigunde von Böhmen. Bildrhetorik und Spiritualität* (Brill, Schöningh, 2003).

⁵⁷ Vatican Library, Reg. Lat. 87. Baschet, *L'iconographie*, 436, endnote 13.

⁵⁸ Vatican Library, Ms. Vat. lat. 5697, dated before 1437. See Irina von Morzé, "Eine Weltgeschichte für den Kaiser: Rom, BAV, Vat. Lat. 5697 (vor 1437)," *Das Buch als Medium – Mittelalterliche Handschriften und ihre Funktionen*. Interdisziplinäre Graduiertentagung in Wien, September 1–2, 2017, <https://rmbf.be/2017/07/21/colloque-das-buch-als-medium-mittelalterliche-handschriften-und-ihre-funktionen-interdisziplinare-graduiertentagung/>.

⁵⁹ Daniela Rywiková, "The Question of the Krumlov Miscellanea: The chalice as Utraquist Symbol?," *Umèni LVII* (2009): 349–363 (esp. 362), <https://www.academia.edu/36279716>.

⁶⁰ Texts destined for nuns were usually illustrated like the mentioned manuscript. Rywiková, "The Question," 350, 358.

the monastic movement.⁶¹ If, in the case of the Zwiefalten Antiphonary, the connection with the nuns of the double Benedictine Abbey in Zwiefalten is not certain,⁶² the manuscripts *Liber Scivias* and the *Passional of Kunigunde* were definitely related to respected women, leaders of female monasteries. Although their works had a different possible public (one recording the mystical visions of Hildegard of Bingen, the other being the property of an abbess belonging to the ruling dynasty in Bohemia and Moravia until the fourteenth century), the fact that they were produced in monastic environments of privileged women is significant. Although not exempt from male dominance,⁶³ these nuns lived separately, far from the social and political contexts that constantly reiterated the subordination of women to men within the framework of family and marriage.⁶⁴ It is common knowledge that their ideas did not remain isolated, although their persons were secluded. The writings attributed to Hildegard of Bingen, for example, were not only well known during her lifetime,⁶⁵ but also influenced fourteenth-century theologians and mystics like the Dominicans Meister Eckhart (approx. 1260–1329), John Tauler (approx. 1300–1361), Henry Suso (approx. 1295–1366), the nuns Margaret Ebner (approx. 1291–1351), Adelheid Langmann (approx. 1312–1375), and Christina Ebner (1277–1356).⁶⁶

The texts and the image

Since antiquity authors like Tertullian (c. 155/160–after 220), in his work *De anima*, correlated Eve's creation from Adam's side with the birth of the Church from the side wound of the crucified Christ.⁶⁷ Over time, this analogy was often repeated by exegetes of the Genesis.⁶⁸ In the attempt to explain why the woman was created from the rib, most theologians repeated Augustin's explanation that God chose that particular bone because of its location in the

⁶¹ Claudia Eliass, *Die Frau ist die Quelle der Weisheit. Weibliches Selbstverständnis in der Frauenmystik des 12. und 13. Jh.* (Centaurus, 1995), 31–32, 53–54.

⁶² In the Zwiefalten scriptorium, worked as well nuns from the parallel female monastery. Heribert Hummel, "Eine Zwiefalter Bibliotheksgeschichte," in *900 Jahre Benediktinerabtei Zwiefalten*, ed. Hermann Josef Pretsch (Süddeutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990), 101–121 (esp. 104).

⁶³ Eliass, *Die Frau*, 33.

⁶⁴ Eliass, *Die Frau*, 40.

⁶⁵ Hildegard of Bingen corresponded not only with the Abbots of the monasteries in Hirsau and Zwiefalten (1150–1170) but also with Bernard de Clairvaux (1146). Pretsch, "Das Ende," 61–62.

⁶⁶ Leonard P. Hindley, "Rhenisch Confluences. Hildegard and the Fourteenth-Century Dominicans," in *Hildegard of Bingen. A Book of Essays*, 206–220 (here 206).

⁶⁷ Thomas J. Motherway, "The Creation of Eve in Catholic Tradition," *Theological Studies* 1, no. 2 (1940): 97–116 (esp. 109). See Wain, "Nec ancilla nec domina," 84–85.

⁶⁸ *The Fathers of the Church. Saint Augustine on Genesis. Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 84: 132.

middle of the man's body.⁶⁹ The choice underlined that Eve was neither destined to be inferior nor superior to Adam. However, the order of their creation clearly showed the importance of each of them. Based on the Epistle to the Ephesians and the one to the Corinthians, the church fathers correlated this hierarchical relation with the classical opposition between spiritual/rational and carnal. Consequently, the general consensus was that men were designated from the beginning to be the "head." In contrast, women were seen as "body," which explained their exclusion from positions of authority in both the private and public spheres.⁷⁰ The woman was perceived as weak and needed protection from herself and the temptations of life in general.⁷¹ Even Peter Abelard (c. 1079–1142), who attempted to challenge the notion of women's inequality, blamed Eve for her poor moral judgment when she disobeyed God's commandment not to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Abélard concluded that "man was created in God's image, whereas Eve was created only in his likeness."⁷² Therefore, the images that show Eve's torso or her almost entirely formed body emerging from Adam's rib were perfect occasions to emphasize her sexuality. Depicting her long hair and breasts underlined her role as a seductress, explaining why the man fell into sin because of his love for the woman, as St. Augustine suggested.⁷³ On the other hand, by reducing Eve's visualization to the head, considered since Antiquity as the place of intellect by some authors,⁷⁴ this type of image eluded the body with which most medieval writers equated Eve. This visual choice could modify the message concerning Eve's capacity to interact with God and her essential role in the divine plan.⁷⁵

The images' suggestion correlates with isolated but not singular medieval discourses which appeared in the twelfth century at several authors from the Benedictine environment.⁷⁶ Abélard's work *Expositio in Hexaemeron*, written for his wife Heloise, the abbess of the female monastery Paraclete in Ferreux-Quency (France), contained a genuine apology for the idea that, despite her

⁶⁹ Evelina Miteva, "The Bodies of Adam and Eve: The (Missed?) Encounter of Natural Philosophy and Theology in the Account of Albert the Great," *Synthesis VI*, no. 2 (2019): 393–404 (esp. 403), <https://www.academia.edu/41450959>.

⁷⁰ Alcuin Blamires, "Paradox in the Medieval Gender Doctrine of Head and Body," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, eds. Peter Biller and Alastair J. Minnis (York Medieval Press, 1997), 13–29 (esp. 13).

⁷¹ Eliass, *Die Frau*, 54.

⁷² Jolly, *Made in God's Image?*, 34.

⁷³ Sf. Augustin, *Despre geneză în sens literal*, trans. Iuliu Popescu (Minerva, 2008), chapter XLII, 11: 417.

⁷⁴ For example, the pre-Socratic philosophers Plato and the representatives of Neoplatonism. See James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine. Philosophy and Medicine from Almaeon to the Alexandrians* (Routledge, 1993), 58–59.

⁷⁵ Eliass, *Die Frau*, 59.

⁷⁶ Blamires, "Paradox," 26–27.

wrongdoing, Eve became even dearer to God than many men who were free of sin.⁷⁷ Eve's transgression made the Incarnation and Resurrection necessary. The world could not have met Jesus if Eve had not fallen from grace. Defining sin, the author described virtue as an active attitude, as opposed to the lack of wrongdoing perceived as passive. Abélard believed that the human soul could engage in genuine love of God regardless of sex.⁷⁸

Contributions by female authors, or those explicitly addressed to women, emphasized the topic differently. The typological interpretation of the opposition between Eve and Mary, the "new Eve," which posits that Mary restored the first woman's transgression, seems to have played a lesser role in theological texts written by women.⁷⁹ Hildegard of Bingen argued instead that God created Eve with the same power with which he sent his son to the Virgin; she was created from Adam's tender flesh, whereas Jesus was born by Mary's virginal body.⁸⁰ This is not the sole medieval recuperative discourse on Eve. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, a more nuanced perception of her appears in *Miroir des bonnes femmes/ Speculum dominarum*, compiled by a Franciscan monk and copied around 1300. The manuscript proposes a collection of *exempla* of feminine characters, both negative and positive.⁸¹ Popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,⁸² the work was intended to be read and listened to, as well as used as parables in sermons primarily for women.⁸³ Eve was invoked both as a negative and positive example; she was a woman guilty of nine 'follies' and a human being whom God granted a series of honors.⁸⁴ The fact that the persons of the Trinity talked about her was an honor which no angel or archangel from heaven enjoyed. Her creation was an honor because she was the only one shaped from a man, but she became the origin of all the people in the world.⁸⁵

Blamires drew attention to the moment when the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) introduced mandatory confession, which challenged the traditional hierarchy between men and women. Consequently, many clerics became aware

⁷⁷ Wain, "Nec ancilla nec domina," 5. See Peter Abelard, *An Exposition of the Six-Day Work*, trans. Wanda Zemler-Cizewski, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievals in Translation*, CCCM 15 (Brepols, 2011), 8: 113.

⁷⁸ Wain, "Nec ancilla nec domina," 7.

⁷⁹ Garber, "Where is the Body?," 132–162 (esp. 132)..

⁸⁰ Eliass, *Die Frau*, 115.

⁸¹ John L. Grigsby, "Miroir des bonnes femmes," *Romania* 82, no. 328 (1961): 458–481 (esp. 461–462).

⁸² Bert Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction before the Council of Trent* (Brill, 2004), 394.

⁸³ Roest, *Franciscan Literature*, 388.

⁸⁴ Grigsby, "Miroir," 469.

⁸⁵ John L. Grigsby, "Miroir des bonnes femmes (suite)," *Romania* 83, no. 329 (1962): 30–51 (esp. 32–33).

that in some moral matters, the body, namely the woman, outshone the head, the man.⁸⁶ Therefore, the solution suggested by St. Augustine was that in families where the husband was corrupt, the woman should transfer her moral loyalty to the ultimate 'head,' namely, to God.⁸⁷

The iconographic source of the image in Mălâncrav and its public

As we have already seen, the great majority of representations that included Adam's rib in Eve's creation appeared in manuscripts (19 out of 27), whereas images showing only Eve's head occurred exclusively in manuscript illuminations (7 out of 8), except for the one from Mălâncrav.⁸⁸ Therefore, it is likely that the source of the image under study was not in the working repertoire of the nave painters because of their provincial style and the image's lack of popularity. However, the image may have been suggested to them or shown in a manuscript as an inspirational guide. Arguably, it must have been a well-known one like *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, similar to the copy mentioned above, included in the miscellaneous work *Krumlovský Sborník* from Prague. These works served didactic and devotional purposes, illustrating complex theological concepts for a literate audience of clergy and laypeople.⁸⁹ The large number of copies preserved (over 350, only in Latin), one-third illustrated with up to 190 scenes, indicates their popularity.⁹⁰ *Speculum's* notoriety owed a lot to translation into numerous vernacular languages like French, English, German, Dutch, and Czech, which made it accessible to a wide range of believers.⁹¹ The fact that they were treasured primarily in ecclesiastic libraries suggests that their content was spread mainly through clergy and mendicants.

⁸⁶ Blamires, "Paradox," 13–14.

⁸⁷ Blamires, "Paradox," 13.

⁸⁸ As previously shown among the twelfth-century manuscripts were the antiphonary from the Benedictine Abbey in Zwiefalten destined for the monks' usage in church rituals of the Prime, the work containing Hildegard of Bingen's comments and mystic visions (*Liber Scivias*) and a free translation of the Genesis in Middle High German (the Millstatt Genesis). The fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth-century images appeared in a collection of religious texts in Latin focusing on the Passion of Christ (the Passional of the Abbess Kunigunde), in Comestor's overview of the sacred history (*Historia Scholastica*), in an illuminated Bible and in *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*.

⁸⁹ Manuela Niesner, *Das Speculum Humanae Salvationis der Stiftsbibliothek Kremsmünster*. Edition der mittelhochdeutschen Übersetzung und Studien zum Verhältnis von Bild und Text (De Gruyter, 1995), 6–8.

⁹⁰ Evelyn Silber, "The Reconstructed Toledo *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*: The Italian Connection in the Early Fourteenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 32–51 (esp. 32).

⁹¹ Niesner, *Das Speculum*, 8.

Concerning the possible regions of iconographic transfer, it is noticeable that similar images appear mostly in German, Austrian, and Bohemian areas. However, an informed conclusion concerning the iconographic sources of the image in Mălâncrav will benefit more from correlations with iconographic and stylistic patterns found in the whole decorative program of the nave.⁹²

Despite its partial relevance, by intentionally eluding her body, the image of Eve's creation in Mălâncrav accentuates the creational process described in the Biblical text. The representation was probably meant to focus the interest on Eve's instrumental role in God's plan and in the history of humanity, played from the beginning. In the iconographic program of the nave in Mălâncrav, another strongly focalizing image at the start of the cycle, depicting the Childhood of Christ on the eastern side of the second tier, enhances this idea. The representation illustrates the moment when the Divinity, having Christ Child in his lap, who is blessing and holding the scroll of the new law, instructed Archangel Gabriel to announce to the Virgin that she was the chosen one to be the Savior's Mother. The motif itself was no iconographic novelty. Lionnet underlined that it emerged in the Franciscan environment at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in popular works such as *Meditationes Vitae Christi* or on the panel *Lignum vitae* created by Pacino di Bonaguida (1305–1310) for Convento delle Monache di Monticelli, the oldest monastery of the Poor Clares in Florence.⁹³ It emphasizes that humanity's creation and salvation were manifestations of God's will and power. The German mystic Meister Eckhart expressed a similar belief, which he apparently took it over from Hildegard of Bingen; in his writings, Eckhart argued that humanity was from the very beginning God's Creation and instrument.⁹⁴

Church rituals also implied relations of connectivity between these distinct periods in human history by establishing links between the Old and New Testaments. Notably, the texts read during Advent and on the seventh Sunday before Easter were selected from the Old Testament.⁹⁵ According to Hans

⁹² Lionnet argued that the frescoes in the nave presented a combination of South German, Austrian, and Italian models influenced by the Byzantine iconography. See Lionnet, "Les peintures murales," 1: 398–399.

⁹³ See Lionnet, "Les peintures murales," 1: 397, with examples from Bohemian illuminated manuscripts and from Italian art like Giotto's Arena frescoes in Padua (1303–1305). See also Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ. An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1961), 15. For Pacino di Bonaguida and the Tree of Life see Raphaële Preisinger, *Lignum vitae. Zum Verhältnis materieller Bilder und mentaler Bildpraxis im Mittelalter* (Brill, 2014); Philip Esler, "Pacino di Bonaguida's Tree of Life: Interpreting the Bible in Paint in Early Fourteenth-Century Italy," in *Biblical Reception* 3, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines (Phoenix Press, 2015), 1–29 (esp. 3).

⁹⁴ Hindsley, "Rhenish Confluences," 208–209.

⁹⁵ Joanne M. Pierce, "Medieval Christian Liturgy," <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-84?mediaType=Article>.

Michael Thomas, such correlations became significant in the works of Franciscan theologians like Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202) and Ubertino da Casale (1259–c. 1329); they associated the idea of the human role and responsibility with a historically perceived evolution of humanity which stretched in an unfolding chronology from the Creation to the Last Judgement.⁹⁶

In conclusion, while not arguing that the image in Mălâncrav was addressed exclusively to women, one could suppose that, supported by a discourse that valued Eve's role in sacred history, such a representation could have been more meaningful for a devout female audience. Keeping in mind that this rare representation occurs in a proprietary foundation of a noble family in which, most probably, women were the ones who participated more frequently and in a larger number at church rituals and received the didactic and theological, visual and auditory messages of the Holy Liturgy, this hypothesis should be considered.

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⁹⁶ Ubertino da Casale divided the history of humanity into the time of the Father, that of the Son, and a prophesied period of the Holy Spirit or an epoch of slavery one of childish obedience and a future one of freedom. Hans Michael Thomas, *Franziskanische Geschichtsvision und europäische Bildentfaltung* (Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1989), 10–16 (esp. 13).

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EVE'S CREATION IN THE MURAL PAINTINGS DECORATING THE CHURCH OF THE APAFI FAMILY
AT MĂLÂNCRAV (MALMKROG, ALMAKERÉK) IN TRANSYLVANIA

Illustrations

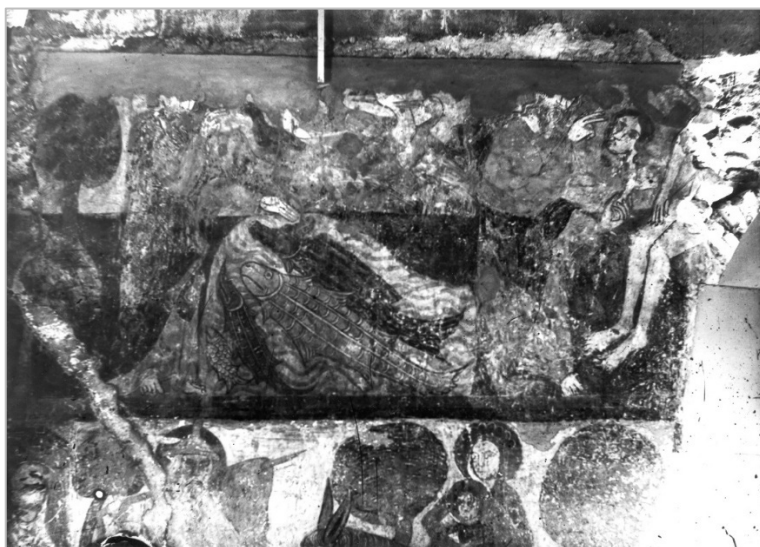


Fig. 1. *Eve's creation*, Mălâncrav (Éber, Tanulmányok. II. 136.)



Fig. 2. *Eve's creation*, Mălâncrav – detail

The Women in the Family: Behavioural Models and Gendered Social Roles in Transylvanian Medieval Mural Paintings

Maria CRĂCIUN* 

ABSTRACT. *The Women in the Family: Behavioural Models and Gendered Social Roles in Transylvanian Medieval Mural Paintings.* Using visual documents, primarily wall paintings in the churches of medieval Transylvania, this study has a three-fold purpose. It wishes to decode the messages transmitted by visual narratives and compositional types that decorate the northern wall of the nave in several Transylvanian medieval churches, it intends to identify their target audience and to discover the agency involved in their conception. The study relies on the depiction of the *Labors of Adam and Eve* in the church at Mălâncrav and several visual narratives representing the *Lives of Virgin Martyrs*, especially Catherine and Margaret, presented together with the story of St. Ladislav in the churches at Șmig, Ighișu Nou and Drăușeni. Approaching the visual documents by using iconography as the preferred method of analysis, while taking into account its relational and serial versions, the study will focus on the possible functions of these depictions, didactic, mnemonic and devotional, in an attempt to reconstruct the motives of their commissioners. Trying to disengage from the assumption that visual narratives dedicated to the Virgin Martyrs were addressing women, providing them with a devotional model, the study argues

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that the target audience were the secular clergy who were meant to model their behaviour on the chastity and intellectual prowess of these saints, particularly in the case of Catherine, and enthusiastically assume their pastoral duties, as also suggested by the presence in the program of the martyrdom of the apostles. By placing the Labors of Adam and Eve from Mălâncrav in a series that follows the development of this compositional type between the fourth and the fifteenth centuries, and by focusing on the changes in the meanings attached to them, the study advocates the importance of motherhood for the noble patrons of the church, as this can easily be connected to their concern for fertility, lineage and the self-reproduction of the group. The study ultimately posits that while St. Ladislav is undoubtedly the ultimate role model for men, especially for those with military careers, the three female characters, Eve and the two Virgin Martyrs, can become models of gendered behaviour for women and the constructed third gender of the clergy. Considered together, the two sets of images suggest that secular and ecclesiastical elites were equally invested in their conception: the nobility because they wanted to instill a chivalric spirit in the men of the family and commitment to motherhood in the women, while the higher and the regular clergy, most probably the mendicants, wished to shape the gendered identity of the parish priests.

Keywords: *visual narratives, iconography, gendered social roles and gendered behaviour, secular clergy, nobility, mendicants.*

The northern wall of the nave in the church of Mălâncrav (Malmkrog, Almakerék), property of the Apafi family, challenges the viewer with an exceptionally ample, well-articulated and fairly well-preserved pictorial program, which, paradoxically, has been insufficiently discussed in existing literature.¹ Its beginning, in the upper north-west corner of the church is dedicated to the *Genesis* and includes, as expected, the story of Adam and Eve. The narrative

¹ Although the mural paintings of Mălâncrav have been discussed in existing literature, notably by Vasile Drăguț, "Picturile murale din biserica evanghelică din Mălâncrav," *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei* 14 (1967): 79–92; Dana Jenei, "Les peintures murales de l'église de Mălâncrav: Notes avant la restauration," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art. Série Beaux-Arts* 52 (2015): 47–76; Anca Gogăltan, "Passion Iconography and Narrative Strategies in the Medieval Frescoes Decorating the Church in Mălâncrav (Almakerék, Malmkrog) in Transylvania," *New Europe College GE-NEC Program 2004–2005, 2005–2006, 2006–2007* (2010): 103–152; Anca Gogăltan and Dóra Sallay, "The Church of Mălâncrav/Almakerék and the Holy Blood Chapel of Nicholas Apa," in *Arhitectura religioasă medievală din Transilvania*, vol. 2 (Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, 2002), 181–210; Anca Gogăltan, "The Self: Religious and Noble Identity in Late Medieval Transylvania," *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Historia* 58, special issue (2013): 49–75, the focus has been on the pictorial program of the chancel while the painting in the nave has benefitted from less attention and the *Genesis* cycle, which culminates with the story of Adam and Eve, even less.

sequence comprises the usual episodes, the *Creation of Eve from Adam's Rib*, *Adam and Eve in Paradise*, the *Temptation*, *Adam and Eve Chastised by God*, the *Expulsion from Paradise* and the *Labors of Adam and Eve*.² The last episode, dedicated to the lives of the protagonists after their banishment from heaven is somewhat unusual, as it depicts Adam working the land, in the customary manner, while Eve is shown breastfeeding (Fig. 1),³ which is different from the, perhaps better-known, images where Eve is represented spinning.⁴ However, attributing the image of the *Labors of Adam and Eve* from the church at Mălâncrav to a specific compositional type can prove difficult because of the current deteriorated state of the image. Basing her assertion on the watercolour copy made by Zoltán Veres, where both the suckling child and the spindle are visible, Dana Jenei suggests that Eve is shown both breastfeeding and spinning.⁵ However, Vasile Drăguț, who has seen these images in a better state of preservation mentions only the breastfeeding.⁶ In this respect, he concurs with László Éber, who had seen the frescoes in 1915 and described them without mentioning the spinning.⁷

This observation focuses one's attention on the reasons for choosing a specific type of composition, leading one to ask whether the images conveyed gendered behavioural models to the men and women in the family of the patron of the church, investing them with gendered social roles. Therefore, starting from decoding the messages transmitted by these images to the lay men and women present in the church, this study will explore the issue of agency behind their conception, and identify the target audience as well as possible functions of these depictions, didactic, mnemonic and devotional. These are ultimately

² The sequence of episodes is mentioned by Vasile Drăguț, "Iconografia picturii murale gotice din Transilvania: Considerații generale și repertoriu pe teme," in *Pagini de artă veche românească*, vol. 2 (Editura Academiei, 1972), 61 and by Dana Jenei, *Goticul în Transilvania: Pictura (ca. 1300–1500)* (Oscar Print, 2016), 34. Neither comments on the choice of episodes or the manner of their rendition, the nature of the compositions and possible messages.

³ Jenei, "Les peintures," fig. 5, watercolour copy by Zoltán Veres.

⁴ A survey of existing images of the *Labors of Adam and Eve* suggests that images depicting Adam working in the field and Eve spinning became popular beginning with the twelfth century and include outstanding examples such as the mosaics in the Cathedral Church at Monreale, those in the Capella Palatina in Palermo, those in the church of San Marco in Venice, several illuminated manuscripts, such as the York Psalter and the Wenceslaus Psalter, as well as reliefs on the façades of several Italian churches.

⁵ Jenei, "Les peintures," 49.

⁶ Drăguț, "Iconografia," 66.

⁷ Éber László, "Tanulmányok Magyarország középkori falfestményeiről," in *Magyarország Műemlékei*, vol. 4, ed. Forster Gyula (A Franklin Társulat Nyomása, 1915): 71–90, especially 79, who mentions the *Labors of Adam and Eve*, attributing breastfeeding to Eve and tilling the soil to Adam. See images 139 and 140.

issues relevant for all images placed on the northern wall of the nave, in full view of the laity. One is thus led to consider whether the story of Adam and Eve could have been used to offer gendered behavioural models and attribute gendered social roles to the lay men and women who saw them in the church. As this program is unique in Transylvanian churches, this study will consider several examples of coherent narrative programs which feature men and women, for example, the lives of knightly saints and Virgin Martyrs, similarly placed on the northern wall of the nave, and thus able to convey gendered messages to the spectators below. Consequently, by focusing initially on the images of Adam and Eve living their earthly lives after their expulsion from Paradise, and then on the lives of knightly saints and Virgin Martyrs depicted in the churches at Șmig (Schmiegen, Somogyom), Ighișu Nou (Eibesdorf, Szászivánfalva), and Drăușeni (Draas, Homoródaróc), this study will explore gendered social roles and models of behaviour, forged with the help of the visual discourse, whilst it will also identify the individuals who conceived these visual narratives and the targeted audience for these paintings. These gendered social roles and behavioural models will be discussed primarily by focusing on visual evidence, using iconography as the preferred method of analysis.

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The Labors of Adam and Eve

In the first case, the *Labors of Adam and Eve*, the topic merits some attention as most art historians who have examined the *Genesis* sequence have focused either on original sin, the visual narrative dedicated to the *Temptation* and the first couple's *Fall from Grace*,⁸ or on *Creation*, on the making of Adam and Eve.⁹ For example, the visual narrative dedicated to the *Genesis* is present on the bronze doors of Hildesheim Cathedral (1007–1015), commissioned by bishop Bernward, where it's juxtaposed with New Testament episodes (Fig. 2). Analysing this program, Adam S. Cohen and Anne Derbes have argued that the depiction of the *Temptation and Fall* is a sexually-charged encounter that essentially blamed Eve for the dismal outcome of events. It is thus suggested that Eve's culpability, her sin and her nature as a temptress are strongly emphasized by the decorative program. Adam S. Cohen and Anne Derbes construct a persuasive argument by linking these messages to reform movements initiated within the Church during the eleventh century, particularly during the papacy

⁸ See for example Adam S. Cohen and Anne Derbes, "Bernward and Eve at Hildesheim," *Gesta*, 40, no. 1 (2001): 19–38.

⁹ Jérôme Baschet, *L'iconographie médiévale* (Gallimard, 2008), 298–343.

of Gregory VII (1073–1085), which emphasized morality, and tried to enforce clerical celibacy and chastity while turning Eve and, ultimately, all women into a threat to clerical virtue. However, no attention is paid to the protagonists' lives after the expulsion from Paradise. Although present on the bronze doors, the episode representing the *Labors of Adam and Eve* is not even mentioned in this analysis (Fig. 3).¹⁰ In contrast, by focusing on the strengthening of the Marian cult during the reform movement of the eleventh century, the authors further argue that Mary is the redemptive counterpart of Eve, who reopens the doors to Paradise. This is reinforced by the juxtaposition of the Old Testament episodes with New Testament ones on the doors at Hildesheim.¹¹ Thus, Eve is not just cast into an arguably gendered role but also drawn into an eschatological repertoire, which includes her in the story of salvation. She is the one who ushers sin into the world, while Mary acts as the ultimate Mediatrix in the story of redemption. Prioritizing Eve's role as an antitype to Mary rather than her activities in earthly life, along with the behavioural models she was likely to disseminate, may be considered persuasive proof that concern for gendered social roles was not always a priority of the art historical field and only surfaced after the meeting between art history and gender history.¹²

Turning to art historical literature on Transylvania, one has to remark that, despite the presence of this specific episode in the work of both authors who dealt with the *Genesis* sequence from the church at Mălâncrav, no attempt has been made to explain this particular choice. Moreover, the fact that there were alternative ways to represent the episode, which possibly rendered distinct or alternative meanings, is completely disregarded.¹³

This suggests that a first step in this analysis will be to consider the meanings of at least three compositional types prevalent in medieval context: (1) Eve depicted spinning, (2) Eve depicted breastfeeding, and (3) Eve depicted

¹⁰ Cohen and Derbes, "Bernward and Eve," 22–24, 26–29.

¹¹ Cohen and Derbes, "Bernward and Eve," 29–33.

¹² For example, Eve Borsook, *The Royal Programs of Norman Sicily (1130–1187)*, (Clarendon Press, 1990), although she discusses the number of episodes included (42 in Monreale and 32 in the Capella Palatina in Palermo), and their spatial arrangement, does not refer to the *Labors of Adam and Eve*. She does remark that the Monreale rendering is closer to the Biblical text and that a deliberate parallel is drawn between Eve and Mary: "The source of the original sin is contrasted with the Virgin as the means of salvation" (62). In contrast, Penny Howell Jolly, *Made in God's Image? Eve and Adam in the Genesis Mosaics at San Marco, Venice* (University of California Press, 1997) dedicates a chapter to the *Labors of Adam and Eve* (59–76) where she argues that Eve does not project a dutiful model of behaviour. Idle and enthroned, her hair uncovered, she does not embrace a submissive wifely role. The author concludes that Eve's postlapsarian nature is condemned by God to be ruled by her body and sexuality (60–64). Thus, submissiveness versus assertiveness seems to be the issue under discussion.

¹³ Drăguț, "Iconografia," 34; Jenei, *Goticul în Transilvania*, 34; Jenei, "Les peintures," 49.

spinning and breastfeeding, presuming that they advertised gendered social roles and encouraged gendered behavioural models. Bearing in mind these compositional types would lead to a better understanding of the gendered social roles and behavioural models attributed to Eve. After having determined the potential meanings of each type, the study will also attempt to understand the choices made by the commissioners of the frescoes from the church at Mălâncrav, and hence explore the messages they forged by choosing to depict the *Labors of Adam and Eve* in a specific way. Finally, the study will tentatively aim to identify the individuals who conceived the frescoes, at the same time considering the most likely intended recipients of these images. As the visual representation of the *Labors of Adam and Eve* developed and changed over time, one needs to decode the meaning of each specific type through a detailed analysis of its features.

The Labors of Adam and Eve are part of most *Genesis* sequences, because the way that Adam and Eve would spend their earthly lives was ordained by God before he expelled them from Paradise (Genesis 3:16–19). They first appear on fourth-century sarcophagi, for example on the sarcophagus of Adelfia,¹⁴ the so-called sarcophagus of Lot, the sarcophagus of Stilicho from the Basilica Sant’Ambrogio in Milan,¹⁵ and a sarcophagus from Arles.¹⁶ In these examples, Adam and Eve are depicted with the fruit of their labor, Adam with stalks of grain and Eve with a lamb.¹⁷ Thus, emphasis seems to be placed, not on the work itself, but rather on its results. Although obliquely, these recurrent symbols refer to the different nature of the work performed by Adam and Eve, or at least to their different responsibilities, as Adam provides nourishment while Eve provides nurture. One could also infer that Adam is destined to work the land while Eve is delegated to raising animals, which are of equal importance in the sustenance of the family. Consequently, in early Christian compositions, Adam and Eve are depicted performing different but equally-valued work.

¹⁴ The Sarcophagus of Lot (340), church of San Sebastiano, Rome. For the image, see <https://www.christianiconography.info/catacombs/adam.html> The object in Eve’s hand has been interpreted as a distaff.

¹⁵ Sarcophagus of Stilicho (late fourth century), Basilica of St. Ambrose, Milan. For the image, see <https://www.christianiconography.info/Milan/santAmbrogio/adamEveStilicho.html> Adam is shown bending over his work, hoe in hand.

¹⁶ Sarcophagus from Arles (330), Musée Réattu, Arles. For the image, see <https://www.christianiconography.info/Wikimedia%20Commons/sarcophagusArles2.adamEve.html> *The Labors* are not explicitly depicted but are alluded to by the presence of a sheaf of wheat near the Tree.

¹⁷ The Sarcophagus of Adelfia. For the image, see <https://www.christianiconography.info/sicily/sarcAdelfia.adamEve.html> The sheaf of wheat and the lamb are clearly visible on the sarcophagus.

The story of Adam and Eve is also told on an ivory casket dated ca. 900–1100, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On this occasion, however, Adam harvests wheat with a scythe, while Eve carries a cut shaft on her shoulder. On another panel of the same casket, Eve uses the bellows next to a forge, while Adam handles a hammer and an anvil to make an iron object.¹⁸ These examples are different from later ones, as they underline the distinct, yet complementary nature of the work performed by the two protagonists, who strove to achieve the same goal with different means. This type of cooperation is further emphasized by examples where the two protagonists dedicate themselves to the same activity. Thus, on the relief sculpted by Wiligelmo on the façade of the Cathedral of Modena (ca. 1100), Adam and Eve are both shown working in the fields (Fig. 4).¹⁹

A slight, but rather meaningful change of typology is highlighted by the mosaics produced during the twelfth century for Sicilian churches, such as the cathedral in Monreale (Fig. 5)²⁰ and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo (Fig. 6),²¹ which include the *Labors of Adam and Eve*, showing Eve spinning or at least holding the distaff, albeit without much enthusiasm, or just sitting on a rock, watching Adam work, propping her chin on her hand and looking exhausted. At San Marco in Venice, the mosaics in the atrium (1220–1290) show Eve seated on a throne, completely inactive, although she is holding the distaff.²² In the following centuries, the gendered nature of the activities performed by Adam and Eve, mainly expressed by the fact that Eve is shown spinning, while Adam is digging in the fields, became a recurrent pattern in various media, such as

¹⁸ Panels from an ivory casket, Constantinople (ca. 900–1100), Metropolitan Museum of Art.

For the image, see

<https://www.christianiconography.info/metropolitan/marchApril2018/adamEveConstantinople.html>

¹⁹ Another example is provided by Verónica Carla Abenza Soria, “Put the Blame on Eve,” in *L’esegesi in Figura*, ed. Fabio Scirea (Publications de l’École française de Rome, 2022), 439–66, especially 456 who mentions Eve holding a shovel in Aelfric’s *Hexateuch* (Cotton B IV fl. 7V).

²⁰ Eve is also holding a spindle in the paintings at Sigena. Abenza Soria, “Put the Blame on Eve,” 456.

²¹ In the Capella Palatina mosaics, Eve is not even holding the distaff or the spindle, she is just sitting, watching Adam work, chin in her hand.

²² Maria Da Villa Urbani, *Basilica of Saint Mark* (Edizioni Kina Italia, 2016), 39 considers the mosaics to be the work of local artists whose style evolved during the thirteenth century and dates them to 1215–1280. Jolly, *Made in God’s Image*, 5, 8 tends to separate the San Marco mosaics from other closely related images of the Genesis story and focuses on the thirteenth-century alterations and the intentions behind them. She dates the mosaics to 1220s–1290s, following Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice* (The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2: 4 and 2: 72 rather than Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, *The Cotton Genesis, British Library Codex Cotton Otho B. VI* (The Illustrations in the Manuscripts of the Septuagint, I) (Princeton University Press, 1986), 18, who suggest ca. 1220–1275.

manuscript illumination, for example in the so-called Hunterian or York Psalter, produced in England ca. 1170 (Fig. 7), the so-called Wenceslaus Psalter, made in Paris ca. 1250–1260,²³ as well as in Giovanni Boccaccio's book *Concerning the Fables of Illustrious Men and Women* (ca. 1413–1415), where the Boucicaut Master uses the same manner in depicting the two protagonists.²⁴ The same arrangement is present in the reliefs of the façade of the Duomo in Orvieto (1310–1330) (Fig. 8), sculpted by Lorenzo Maitani, and the reliefs on the Campanile in Florence, sculpted by Andrea Pisano (1334–1337), now in the Museo del Opera del Duomo (Fig. 9), those in the church of San Zeno in Verona (1138) (Fig. 10), and those of Jacopo della Quercia for San Petronio in Bologna (1425–1428) (Fig. 11).²⁵ Eventually, the theme is present in the relatively new medium of altarpieces, as illustrated by Master Bertram's Grabow Altarpiece (1379–1383) (Fig. 12).

As opposed to previous depictions, this new arrangement emphasizes the different and explicitly gendered nature of the work performed by Adam and Eve, which seems to be preordained by God's indictment, highlighting the ascribed gendered roles. Thus, in a manuscript illumination from the second half of the thirteenth century, the two protagonists leave Paradise holding a hoe and distaff on their shoulders, reinforcing the impression that the tasks they assumed were gendered and that God himself had attributed their roles (Fig. 13).²⁶ When analysing the mosaics in the atrium of San Marco in Venice, Penny Howell Jolly draws attention to a very similar arrangement in the scene of the *Expulsion*: the right hands of Adam and Eve hold the tools of their trade, a mattock in Adam's case and a spindle and distaff in Eve's.²⁷ Thus, in a manner similar to a hoe, which alludes to agricultural activities, the distaff and spindle refer to work that was associated with women in the household.²⁸ But there's more to it than that: on the one hand, spinning is not just a gendered activity but an auxiliary one that married women often performed when they had to contribute to the livelihood of the household.²⁹ In these circumstances women would work, either

²³ The Wenceslaus Psalter (Paris, 1250–1260), J. Paul Getty Museum. For the image, see <https://www.christianiconography.info/getty/genesisWenceslausPsalter.7v8r.html>

²⁴ Boucicaut Master, ca. 1413–1415. For the image, see <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/107RJE>

²⁵ This relief also shows two children, Cain and Abel at Eve's feet.

²⁶ See image at <https://www.christianiconography.info/e-Codices/bernBurgerbibliothekCod27/bibleBernBurgerbibliothek002r.illumination>. The manuscript was probably produced in France during the second half of the thirteenth century and is now in the Bern Burgerbibliothek.

²⁷ Jolly, *Made in God's Image*, 57.

²⁸ Jolly, *Made in God's Image*, 60.

²⁹ For a more recent discussion of this issue, see Sarah Randles, "When Adam Delved and Eve Span: Gender and Textile Production in the Middle Ages," in *Women and Work: Experiences*,

for their husbands or for other artisans in the trade, when they actually received a wage, without becoming weavers themselves. By representing Eve as performing an auxiliary activity, more precisely spinning, she is identified with the 'matron', who contributes to the prosperity of the household, albeit in ways deemed less significant.³⁰ It also suggests that women performed less-skilled work and were placed in a subordinate position to that of men.³¹ This ultimately raises the issue of the inferior position that was constructed for women in the realm of work and household.

In order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, one needs to consider what has been labelled in existing literature as 'women's work'. It has often been argued that 'women's work' during the Middle Ages was "low-skilled, low-status, intermittent, and typified by the simultaneous juggling of several occupations,"³² or "as requiring little training or initial capital", or that it "could be done in spare moments and was done by men only as a side occupation, carried low status, and was informally organized and badly paid."³³ Merry E. Wiesner makes a convincing case that "as in the division between guild work and domestic work, gender became a more important determinant in the division between skilled and unskilled than the actual difficulty of the tasks concerned."³⁴

Relationships and Cultural Representations, ed. Merridee Bailey, Tania Colwell, and Julie Hotchin (Routledge, 2018), 71–102.

- ³⁰ For the role of women in the workshop household, see Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household. Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Clarendon Press, 1991), 29–30. Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women in the Crafts in Sixteenth Century Lyon," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 1 (1982): 46–80, here 48–49 also points out that female work was seen as a necessary complement to male work.
- ³¹ For the discrepancies between man's and woman's work, see Merry Wiesner Hanks, "'A Learned Task and Given to Men Alone': the Gendering of Tasks in Early Modern German Cities," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1995): 89–106; Martha Howell, "Women, the Family Economy, and the Structures of Market Production in Cities of Northern Europe during the Late Middle Ages," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Indiana University Press, 1986), 198–222, here 201.
- ³² Maryanne Kowaleski, "Women's Work in a Market Town: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Indiana University Press, 1986), 145–164, especially 151–157; Maryanne Kowaleski and Judith Bennett, "Crafts, Guilds, and Women in the Middle Ages: Fifty Years after Marian K. Dale," *Signs*, 14, no. 2 (1989): 474–87, here 480 highlight that "women's work was in low-skilled occupations that did not form into guilds."
- ³³ Merry E. Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (Rutgers University Press, 1986), 192; Randles, "When Adam Delved," 76 argues that women dominated the various kinds of spinning.
- ³⁴ Merry E. Wiesner, "'Wandervogels' Women: Journeymen's Concepts of Masculinity in Early Modern Germany," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 4 (1991): 767–782, here 777; Randles, "When Adam Delved," 79 suggests that "documentary evidence, such as the *Livre de métiers* provide evidence of ordinary women earning or supplementing their living from textile production, often alongside men, in domestic or commercial setting."

Moreover, the functioning of the workshop/household has made historians like Lyndal Roper conclude that women had greater responsibility for domestic labor and child care, while Natalie Zemon Davis argues that, most of the time, women's work was seen as a necessary complement to men's work.³⁵ This conclusion brings to the fore not just women's subservient position within the household and more generally in the realm of work, but also their married status.

In Eve's case, her clearly defined married status is displayed by her costume. While in earlier images, Adam and Eve are shown with their nudity barely covered by makeshift clothing made from animal skins, in slightly later images (twelfth-century ones, for instance), they are dressed in rough materials, as one can see in the mosaics from the cathedral of Monreale and the Capella Palatina in Palermo. In other images, in manuscript illustrations and on the panels of altarpieces, dated between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, Adam and Eve are dressed according to the fashion of the time and Eve is depicted as a married woman with her head modestly and decorously covered. The images consequently convey not just Eve's gendered social role but also her status in society.

Her subordinate status, however, within the household and in wider social context was not always as clear. In this sense, the images in the cathedral of Monreale and in the Capella Palatina in Palermo suggest that her contribution to the conjugal endeavour was minimal, as she is not shown actively spinning but rather sitting with an anxious expression on her face while looking rather disdainfully at Adam. In this sense, Penny Howell Jolly's analysis of the mosaics in San Marco adds an additional layer of meaning. Howell Jolly suggests that Eve looks regal as she is enthroned and holding her distaff like a sceptre, occupying a position of power, enthroned and central. She further argues that the Labors at San Marco are an early example of the medieval misogynistic "Power of Women" tradition that ultimately exalts Eve as a Queen of Misrule, while "ridiculing the toiling Adam," thus reversing the divinely ordained hierarchy between man and woman.³⁶ In the same vein, Karen Winstead has astutely pointed out that the distaff, otherwise known as the 'woman's sceptre', "often associated with working women and shrewish wives who lorded it over their husbands and household, have become an emblem of disorder and misrule." She thus concluded that

³⁵ Roper, *The Holy Household*, 42; Zemon Davis, "Women in the Crafts," 49 argues that most of the time women's work was seen "as a necessary complement to men's work." A similar argument was constructed more recently by Corine Schleif, "The Many Wives of Adam Kraft: Early Modern Workshop Wives in Legal Documents, Art-Historical Scholarship, and Historical Fiction," in *Saints, Sinners and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jane L. Carroll and Alison G. Stewart (Ashgate, 2003), 202–222.

³⁶ Jolly, *Made in God's Image*, 59–60, 66–67.

women brandished distaffs when they flaunted their power over men.³⁷ In Eve's case, this impression is reinforced by her clothing, as she dons a fillet that ornaments her loose, uncovered hair, worn, one might add, in the style of an unmarried woman, while a blue belt fastens her garments below the breasts.³⁸ The entire composition suggests that women were not always depicted as submissive creatures who performed auxiliary duties to contribute to the prosperity of the household. Far from it, the twelfth and thirteenth-century compositions all seem to convey both attributed gender identities and functions and the ambivalent attitude of Eve, who only partly appropriates or simply rejects the roles centred on the duties of the woman as wife and co-worker. Consequently, Eve continues to be a negative character as she does not fully embrace her gendered, and one might add, submissive, social role.

At this stage, one must comment on one more interesting feature of these compositions. The theme of Eve spinning begins to emerge at the same time as the spread of chivalric culture, during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. In this context, Eve is depicted as spinning and her attire emphasizes her figure as mirroring that of an aristocrat, as can be witnessed in a copy of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* from Westphalia or Cologne, dating from 1360 (see link to image in footnote 47). Spinning thus becomes a gender specific activity, in other words, "woman's work" in a different way, as a status symbol for those ladies who embroidered clothes or wove tapestries and were praised for it in *Chansons de Toile*, the counterpart of *Chansons de Geste*.³⁹

Thus, when summing up the analysis of the first compositional type, the depiction of Eve and the spindle, one notices, first of all, its development in time and the slightly different messages that accompany these changes. In this sense, in the earliest examples, from roughly the fourth century, Adam and Eve are depicted as performing different, but equally-valued work; somewhat later examples, from the tenth and eleventh century show the protagonists engaged in distinct, yet complementary activities, while beginning with the twelfth century, Eve is consistently represented performing auxiliary and clearly gendered tasks, like spinning. Another layer of meaning is conveyed by these images, as Eve is also placed in a subordinate position by the low-skilled nature of her work and the submissive role bestowed on women as wives. Whether this role was appropriated by women or not is a question brought to the fore by the ambivalent symbolism of the distaff, signifier of lowly, subordinate work or the 'herald' of emancipation.

³⁷ Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs. Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Cornell University Press, 1997), 96.

³⁸ Jolly, *Made in God's Image*, 60.

³⁹ Lyle R. Polly, "The 'Chansons de Toile' and the 'Chansons de Geste': Reconsidering Some Considerations," *Romance Notes* 22, no. 2 (1981): 224–228.

A second type of image, also benefitting from a long history, is that depicting Eve as breastfeeding, while Adam is digging in the field. The image is present in the so-called Bible of Tours,⁴⁰ from which several frontispieces have survived, such as the Moutier-Grandval Bible (840), now in the British Library (Fig. 14), and the frontispiece of the San Paolo Bible, an illuminated manuscript produced during the ninth century, which shows Eve holding a child, while Adam is digging the field.⁴¹ The image is also present on the bronze doors of the Hildesheim cathedral (see Fig. 3), which according to Cohen and Derbes were inspired by the Cotton Genesis (fifth century).⁴² The theme of Eve's breastfeeding is also included in later works, such as the thirteenth-century relief at Saint Chapelle,⁴³ Heinrich Aldegrever's panel of 1540,⁴⁴ and the Nuremberger Chronicle, the *Weltchronik* (1493), highlighting the idea that her main role is that of mother.⁴⁵

Finally, the third type, showing Eve spinning but also breastfeeding, is present in a number of compositions which highlight her role as mother, signposted by the presence of the child, or children and the nature of her work, emphasized by the presence of the distaff and/or spindle. For example, in the wall paintings in the chapterhouse at Sigena (1188), discussed by Verónica Carla Abenza Soria, Eve is shown spinning while both children are included in

⁴⁰ Cohen and Derbes, "Bernward and Eve," 21. The so-called Bible of Tours is a ninth-century Bible copied in the scriptorium of Tours.

⁴¹ Cohen and Derbes, "Bernward and Eve," fig. 2 and 3. Bible from San Paolo fuori le Mura Codex Membranaceus (ninth century). For the image, see <https://www.facsimilefinder.com/facsimiles/bible-san-paolo-facsimile#&gid=1&pid=1>

⁴² Cohen and Derbes, "Bernward and Eve," 21; Herbert L. Kessler, "Introduction" in *The Atrium of San Marco in Venice. The Genesis and Medieval Reality of the Genesis Mosaics*, ed. Martin Büchsel, Herbert L. Kessler, and Rebecca Müller (Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2014), 9–20 is somewhat critical of Weitzmann's method, who always looked for an Urtext which served as a model for all other functions and of the sweeping assumption that manuscript illumination is most often the basis for all monumental art. Herbert L. Kessler, "Thirteenth-Century Venetian Revisions of the Cotton Genesis Cycle," in *The Atrium*, ed. Büchsel, Kessler, and Müller, 75–94 revises the opinion he had shared with Weitzmann that there was a direct connection between the Cotton Genesis and the mosaics in San Marco, Venice. He consequently suggests that the lacunae in the Cotton Genesis, which existed already in the thirteenth century, made it necessary to create new scenes whenever the Genesis cycle was represented.

⁴³ Sainte Chapelle, Paris (thirteenth century). For the image, see <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-adam-preparing-food-for-eve-who-is-in-bed-nursing-a-child-relief-13th-103876935.html?imageid=CCA93232-DEBE-4D96-8DC7-3E6746A878EB&p=191743&pn=1&searchId=7f1a4d265d180b8bf70436954a8d1d24&searchtype=0>

⁴⁴ For the image, see <https://www.alamy.com/adam-and-eve-at-work-1540-image-433080461.html?imageid=7B244D11-37B6-4BAB-8C29-15F4DFD41FCB&p=842179&pn=1&searchId=7f1a4d265d180b8bf70436954a8d1d24&searchtype=0>

⁴⁵ Nuremberg Chronicle. For the image, see https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_04108/?sp=3&st=gallery

the picture, gazing at their mother.⁴⁶ Moreover, a *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* of Westphalian origin, possibly from Cologne, made around 1360, introduces a child into the picture,⁴⁷ while an illustration produced in 1396 for Nicholas of Lyra's postil on Genesis shows Adam working with a hoe while Eve is spinning but also interacting with the baby standing on her lap.⁴⁸ A later, German edition of the *Speculum* from ca. 1430 shows Eve spinning, but both children are present, in fact Eve rocks the cradle containing little Abel with her foot while Cain is playing nearby.⁴⁹ This compositional type is replicated in some other images, for instance the relief from San Petronio, Bologna (1425–1428), which represents Eve spinning as two young Abel and Cain are depicted at her feet (see Fig. 11), thus emphasizing motherhood but not necessarily nourishment, while, at the opposite end of the spectrum, an image by Januz Kastov (ca. 1490) from the Church of the Holy Trinity from Hrastovlje, Slovenia, depicts Adam digging and Eve spinning at the same time as breastfeeding two babies (Fig. 15).

Thus, in these images, the gendered nature of Eve's work, her duty to provide nourishment and her social role as mother are all brought together. Among this group, the image by Rüdiger Schopf, illustrating the *Postil to Genesis and Exodus* of Nicholas of Lyra projects the most persuasive picture of domesticity (see link in footnote 48). The two protagonists are dressed as peasants, not in the rough garments made from animal hides, which they wore when they left Paradise. Meanwhile, Adam is gazing fondly at his wife and child, and Eve is apparently bouncing the baby on her lap. Eve's headdress is that of a wife, emphasizing her role and status, anchored in a domestic setting.⁵⁰

Further meanings of the different types of representation of the *Labors of Adam and Eve* can surface when one considers their chronology, or more precisely, the changes that can be noted in the type of work depicted and in the

⁴⁶ Abenza Soria, "Put the Blame on Eve," 456 and fig. 10.

⁴⁷ *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (1360), Westphalia or Köln. For the image, see <https://www.pinterest.com/gbertholet/ms-speculum-humanae-salvationis-ca-1360/>

⁴⁸ Rüdiger Schopf, Manuscript Illustration. Nicholas of Lyra, *Postil to Genesis and Exodus* (1396), Basel, Universitätsbibliothek. For the image, see https://www.christianiconography.info/e-Codices/baselUniversitaetsbibliothekA_II_1/adamEveAbel.html This type of composition also has a long life as it appears in Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death* (1540), where Eve is both spinning and breastfeeding.

⁴⁹ *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. For the image, see <http://virtuabis.free.fr/Speculum%20humanae%20salvationis.pdf>

⁵⁰ Gabriela Signori, "Veil, Hat, or Hair? Reflections on an Asymmetrical Relationship," *The Medieval History Journal* 8, no. 1 (2005): 25–47, especially 31–32 points out that married women covered their hair and wore the wimple. This type of headdress was associated with female honor. The prohibition to wear the wimple was a punishment for adultery supporting the idea that clothing was used to signify dishonor.

nature of the social roles constructed for men and women. While initially Adam and Eve were depicted with the fruits of their labor, later they were shown engaged in activities, such as tilling the land and spinning wool, while another type emerged almost simultaneously, depicting Eve breastfeeding. A mixed type, dated as early as the ninth century, represents Eve breastfeeding, while sometimes also holding a distaff. One is led to conclude that although the nature of Adam's and Eve's work is always gendered, the value of Eve's work decreases from being equally important to being complementary and, eventually, auxiliary. The status of Eve as mother, although present throughout the chronology considered here, is more strongly emphasized in later images where she is also more explicitly depicted as a wife, as signposted by the wimple covering her hair. Simultaneously, Eve is also shown as increasingly submissive and placed in a subordinate position, as earlier images represented her on a more equal footing with Adam, while later ones anchored her firmly in domestic settings and in her guises as wife and mother, outlining her specific gendered duties, related to her particular biological role of giving birth.

One is compelled to note that all these types depict the protagonists in social roles and that these roles, presented as ordained by God, apart from being assigned to them by society, were strongly gendered. They are also somewhat unequal, as Adam tends to be assigned consistently the role of provider, as his work amounts to nourishing his family, while Eve moves steadily from the role of provider towards that of nurturer. The presence of the baby in some of these images, anchors Eve even more strongly in the domestic setting, outlining, at the same time, her encasement in the stages of a woman's lifecycle, where maturity is associated with her reproductive mission. While anchoring Eve's femininity in the domestic sphere and associating it to childbearing and motherhood, these images also construct Adam as a model of masculinity, as he fulfils two of its essential features, reproduction and providing for dependents.

The text of Genesis 3:16–21 supports the gendered reading of the images by outlining the interaction between genders and the nature of the couple's relationship, more precisely, Eve's subordination to Adam. The text, particularly Genesis 3:16, suggests that the woman is relegated to domestic life and chores, while the man, by stepping outside the home and into the wider world, has to provide the necessities of life for himself, his wife and his family, while still playing his role in begetting children, preferably sons. If one considers the multiplicity of choices available, one is further intrigued by the alternative emphasis placed on Adam and Eve's life on earth, especially by the fact that Adam is generally cast as the same strongly-gendered character, in the perpetual role of provider with reproductive capabilities, while several distinct gendered roles,

that of helpful companion to Adam, in an equal or complementary position, or that of mother to his children, are bestowed on Eve.

There is, however, another angle of this analysis that also needs to be mentioned. One notices that, in some images, the intimate interaction between Eve and her baby is highly reminiscent of *Madonna and Child* renditions popular at that time, suggesting that these roles were approved by God.⁵¹ Domesticity and a slight reversal of roles is present in the relief at Sainte Chapelle (see link in footnote 43), where Eve is lying in bed and breastfeeding, while Adam is preparing to feed her from a dish. He is therefore not upstaged by Eve in her role of provider of nourishment as he provides for the entire family. Despite the differences in narrative details, the composition is reminiscent of Nativity scenes, subtly alluding to the comparison between Eve and Mary. The two images seem to suggest that Eve was constructed as Mary's antitype, a trope whose emergence has been placed by Cohen and Derbes in the context of the reform initiated by the papacy in the eleventh century. Moral reform and the promotion of chastity and celibacy for secular clergy developed at the same time as devotion to the Virgin, as intercessor on behalf of human kind and protector of souls.⁵² This association is further explored by Howell Jolly, who compares Eve's distaff and the throne she sits on with Mary's enthronement in some *Annunciation* episodes.⁵³ Moreover, Mary was spinning wool at the Temple when Gabriel visited her, and thus the presence of a distaff and spindle in *Annunciation* imagery is not unusual, particularly in Byzantine representations of the event. Howell Jolly further compares the image of Eve, enthroned and holding the distaff, with a fifth-century image of Mary in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, where the Virgin is also depicted enthroned and holding a distaff. Despite these compositional similarities, in Howell Jolly's opinion, Eve remains an antitype as she clings to pride, disobedience and carnal desire, as opposed to Mary, who humbly obeys God and conceives Christ miraculously.⁵⁴ Howell Jolly's viewpoint is further supported by Kessler, who agrees that, in the episode of the *Labors*,

⁵¹ One could mention paintings by Duccio di Buoninsegna (1280 and 1300), but such compositions became increasingly popular during the fourteenth and fifteenth century, with painters such as Fra Angelico, Giovanni and Jacopo Bellini, Antoniazzi Romano, Sandro Botticelli, Bicci di Lorenzo, Fra Carnevale and Cima da Conegliano.

⁵² Cohen and Derbes, "Bernward and Eve," 26–29. This trope was already present in the writings of the Fathers of the Church at least since early Christianity, being a recurrent theme in the re-evaluation of Mary's role in redemption.

⁵³ Penny Howell Jolly, "Gender, Dress and Franciscan Tradition in the Mary Magdalen Chapel at San Francesco Assisi," *Gesta* 58, no. 1 (2019): 1–25, especially 20 suggests that while Adam is an archetype to Francis, Eve appears opposite the Virgin Mary in *Annunciation* scenes. Portrayed in this manner, Eve is definitely a negative female model.

⁵⁴ Jolly, *Made in God's Image*, 61.

Eve can be recognized as a type of Virgin Mary, as the first woman is shown enthroned and holding a spindle and distaff. Kessler renders his argument even more persuasive by commenting on a connection between Eve and the Virgin, created by the mosaicists working in San Marco. This image is present above the adjacent Porta da Mar. To make matters clearer, an inscription pairs Eve, the “sinful first woman”, with the redemption offered through Mary.⁵⁵ Finally, in Abenza Soria’s reading of the paintings at Sigena, the triumph of motherhood helps Eve become a type of the Virgin as suggested by the medieval palindrome EVA/AVE.⁵⁶ One is consequently led to conclude that depictions of Eve, no matter what their compositional type might be, carry unfailingly loaded messages, associating women with sin and perceiving them as a potential threat. Although some of these doom-filled messages could be abated by bringing to the fore their gendered social roles and models of behaviour, addressed to women, danger still loomed large on the redemptive horizon.

Having discussed the issue in its more general development in time, at this stage in the analysis, one is compelled to assess the roles assigned to Adam and Eve in the frescoes from the nave in the church at Mălâncrav. The problems with the image at Mălâncrav arise from the fact that, due to the state of the fresco we do not know for certain whether Eve was depicted just breastfeeding or also spinning, creating difficulties for those who attempt to assign the composition to a specific type. In 1915, the description given by László Éber, who personally examined the frescoes, does not mention a spindle, while the watercolor copies made by Zoltán Veres include it in Eve’s hand. The current state of the frescos suggests that we will never know for certain. However, this uncertainty does not impact upon the image’s role in communication and on the nature of the message transmitted to the public. As the presence of the spindle is in question rather than that of the child, the image seems to be intended to emphasize Eve’s maternity, providing a model for noble women who were meant to be committed to childbearing and motherhood.

From this perspective, one needs to consider the possible commissioners, the messages conveyed by the image and the targeted audience. As far as the commissioners are concerned, one is led to believe that they are the members of the Apafi family. In her work dedicated to the analysis of the pictorial program in this church, Anca Gogâltan has reconstructed the genealogy of the family and identified three generations whose members were probably involved

⁵⁵ Kessler, “Revisions,” 83.

⁵⁶ Abenza Soria, “Put the Blame on Eve,” 457 suggests that the pain Eve suffers in childbirth is opposed to the Virgin’s conception through the mediation of the Holy Spirit and attests to the redemptive power of motherhood.

in commissioning work on the church, Nicholaus of Apa, who was probably responsible for the paintings in the chancel, and Johannes or Petrus as likely candidates for the patronage of the murals in the nave.⁵⁷ The approximate dating of the frescoes, based on stylistic criteria, combined with the scanty information concerning the two protagonists, does not allow firm and definite conclusions. However, even if it is impossible to certainly identify the person who commissioned the paintings on the northern wall of the nave, one is able to assert that, whoever these persons may have been, they were members of the nobility who owned the church. Their presence in the royal entourage, that of Louis I (1342–1382) and later that of Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437), together with Queen Mary (1382–1395), attested in 1366 for Johannes and in 1394 for Petrus reinforces this point.⁵⁸

In this instance, as in others, the commissioners of the frescos have forged specific messages by choosing to depict Eve primarily as mother, rather than just Adam's companion and fellow worker. One might even speculate that we are dealing with messages forged by men, and thus adjusted to their priorities, but also intended to model the behaviour of women in the family. Beyond the likelihood of this hypothesis, the complexities of the program suggest that other actors, with their own agendas, may have been at work in the conception of the visual narrative.

In order to fully comprehend these messages, one needs to return to the shift from representing Eve primarily as performing specifically gendered work, spinning, which was complementary to men's activity as providers, to her

⁵⁷ Anca Gogâltan, "Family, Patronage, and Artistic Production: The Apafis and Mălâncrav (Almakerék, Malmkrog), Sibiu District, in Transylvania," *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 39 (1998): 138–157, especially 140–141 reconstructs the genealogy of the family and their connection to the village. The author suggests that three generations of the family can be considered as patrons of the church (143–144). The idea is reiterated in Anca Gogâltan, "The Self," 51, 57, where the author attributes the painting of the chancel to the initiative of Nicholaus Apafi. Jenei, "Les peintures," 59 agrees with this conclusion. The frescoes in the nave, dated to 1350 in some opinions, and in the second half of the fourteenth century in others, may have been commissioned either by Petrus, Nicholaus' father, or by Johannes, the son of Gregorius or Gegus. Unfortunately, the lowest register of the paintings on the northern wall of the nave in the church at Mălâncrav, which may provide a clue to the identity of the commissioner of the program, has not been sufficiently analysed in the literature. Gogâltan, "Passion Iconography," 112–120 focuses primarily on the *Passion* narrative in order to unravel its subtleties, while Jenei, "Le peintures," p. 56 succeeds in deciphering the images in the fifth register and on the pillars below. She identifies some of the narrative episodes depicted there, such as the *Martyrdom of St. Catherine*, another martyrdom scene, the *Temptation of St. Anthony* and an image of St. Sebastian. She mentions that, in 1915, Éber had also been able to see the *Beheading of St. John the Baptist*, which is no longer visible today. An episode that can be seen on one of the pillars was identified by Jenei as St. Peter in prison who is saved by an angel. She does not however explore the reasons for this particular selection of episodes.

⁵⁸ Jenei, "Les peintures," 59.

role as mother. But why would one wish to portray Eve as a mother rather than a worker? One possible answer is related to status. When analysing the available images, one cannot help but notice that Eve breastfeeding or breastfeeding and spinning is first of all present in manuscript illumination. Expensive illuminated manuscripts were generally made for and used by members of the elite, who benefited from the means to commission them. This was also a group who valued motherhood as a means to an end. Within this context and encouraged by this frame of mind, Eve's depiction as mother was an unsurprising choice. The family from Mălâncrav fits this pattern, as the choice may be dictated by the concern for reproduction and the wish to perpetuate the noble lineage.⁵⁹ In this particular case, one is led to consider whether this manner of representing the episode may convey certain priorities of the nobility, such as the fertility of women, which was bound to ensure the transmission of property, of the name and lineage, as well as the prestige of the family. However, by encasing them in the role of mothers, the men in the family were still relegating women to the domestic sphere, but, in this case, it was a realm they dominated and ruled over, at least as long as they maintained their position as wives and widows.⁶⁰ Moreover, by ceasing to depict Eve in complementary or, one might say, subordinate roles, spinning wool, holding the bellows, or carrying the stalks of wheat, and by focusing on her motherhood, a role that places her center stage, the pictorial program from the church at Mălâncrav abandons the subordinate role of Eve as a woman in relation to the other gender, represented by Adam. As mother, she has an equally important role in reproduction, ensuring the perpetuation of the species and the survival of the family by bolstering its lineage.

Casting Eve, generally a character perceived as negative, as she succumbed to the temptation of the serpent and then proceeded to corrupt Adam by enticing him to eat the forbidden fruit,⁶¹ in the role of mother, bestows upon her and upon women in general a gendered social role and a definitely beneficial function within the family, at least partly compensating for the sin committed. Through the behavioural model offered, of an imperfect humanity, which redresses itself spiritually by embracing maternity, thus proving one's social worth, the protagonist of the frescoes turns into a character worthy of emulating, a character with whom the feminine side of the laity could identify. By privileging Eve and her depiction, the focus of this analysis has shifted away

⁵⁹ Erik Fügedi, *The Elefánthy. The Hungarian Nobleman and His Kindred* (Central European University Press, 1998), 24–26 argues that noble women were in a subordinate position even in the sphere of reproduction. They were subordinate to their fathers and then to their husbands as stated in ecclesiastical sources based on St. Paul's statements in 1 Cor. 11:2.

⁶⁰ Fügedi, *Elefánthy*, 25 emphasizes the woman's right to continue living in the house of her deceased husband as long as she remained a widow.

⁶¹ Cohen and Derbes "Bernward and Eve," 22–26.

from Adam and his role in this Old Testament drama. As he is consistently cast as the provider, his behaviour was easy to emulate by the nobility of the counties, whose wealth came from the land they succeeded in amassing. Presumably, the Apafi noblemen, as landowners, could identify with Adam, while the women in the family could embrace their role as mothers. Consequently, in this case, the pictorial program seems to have been used to disseminate behavioural models and gendered social roles prioritized by the nobility, who were the owners and patrons of the church. Moreover, even if Eve was also depicted spinning in the fresco from Mălâncrav, in the context of a noble household and within the chivalric culture that it embraced, spinning was not a low-skilled and lowly work. As mentioned earlier in this analysis, the *Chansons de Geste*, along with their counterparts, the *Chansons de Toile*, assigned roles that were completely acceptable and reflected higher social status to both the men and the women in noble families.

Consequently, is one to assume that the story of Adam and Eve after the Fall, centered as it seems to have been on the reproductive strategies of the nobility, was a generally-accepted manner to convey a didactic discourse concerning gender roles to the Transylvanian elite? Moreover, is one to surmise that the elite had a clear idea about the gender identities of men and women, tailored to societal needs and guided by their wish to reproduce themselves as a group?

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Knightly Saints and Virgin Martyrs

Unfortunately, the pictorial program on the northern wall of the nave in the church at Mălâncrav has no analogies in Transylvania. Consequently, in order to answer this question and test the implicit hypothesis, one could look at other visual narratives which decorated the walls of proprietary churches,⁶² where the choice of various themes was to a large extent the option of the secular commissioner, in close cooperation with the clergy. One's attention is thus channelled towards two groups of visual narratives which are the most persuasive candidates for the transmission and consolidation of gendered social roles: the frescoes that have St. Ladislav as their subject (Fig. 16),⁶³ and those representing

⁶² Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Enikő Rűsz-Fogarasi, "The Relationship Town-Church in the Seven Transylvanian Counties. From the Beginning to the Mohács battle. The Institution of Patronage," in *Church and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Maria Crăciun and Ovidiu Ghitta (Efes, 1998), 166–173, especially 167–168 takes her cue from the classic work of Ferenc Kollányi, *A magán kegyűri jog* (Athenaeum, 1906), 41–42, 73, 168–171.

⁶³ These frescoes have been discussed by Ernő Marosi, "Der heilige Ladislaus als ungarischer Nationalheiliger. Bemerkungen zu seiner Ikonographie im 14.-15. Jh." *Acta Historiae Artium*

the lives of Virgin Martyrs, the so-called *Virgines Capitales*, especially Catherine and Margaret (Fig. 17).⁶⁴

The narratives dedicated to St. Ladislav are rather numerous, 57 examples,⁶⁵ according to the latest accounts based on more recent restoration work, with a higher density in Upper Hungary, the Szekler Region, Central Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia, and, perhaps surprisingly, in Southern Transylvania, in churches used by Saxon communities, such as Ațel (Hetzeldorf, Ecel), Cricău (Boroskrakkó), Ighiu Nou, Șmig and Drăușeni. Their frequent presence in the churches, as well as their association with narratives dedicated to the Virgin Martyrs, thus devising a program that had both male and female protagonists, has been discussed in existing literature, especially by Zsombor Jékely, Dana Jenei, Dragoș Năstăsoiu, and, more recently, Daniel Gligan.⁶⁶

Although they had occurred earlier, during the Árpád dynasty (ca. 1270–1290), the visual narratives dedicated to St. Ladislav proliferated in the Angevin period, more precisely after 1308, and reached the highest point of their dissemination during the second half of the fourteenth century and the first decades of the fifteenth.⁶⁷ Interested primarily by their narrative structure and

Hungariae, 33 (1987–1988): 211–255; Kerny Terézia, “Historia Sancti Ladislai. A kerlési ütközet ábrázolásáról,” in *Történelem-kép. Szemelvények múlt és művészet kapcsolatából Magyarországon*, ed. Mikó Árpád and Sinkó Katalin (Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 2000), 188–195; Ivan Gerát, “Pictorial Cycles of St. Ladislav – Some Problems of Interpretation,” in *Slovakia and Croatia: Historical Parallels and Connections (until 1780)*, ed. Martin Homza (Department of Slovak History of the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University, 2013). They have also been discussed more recently, from new perspectives by Zsombor Jékely, “Narrative Structure of the Painted Cycle of a Hungarian Holy Ruler. The Legend of St Ladislav,” *Hortus Artium Medievalium. Journal of the International Research Center for Late Antiquity and Middle Age*, 21 (2015): 62–75. Zsombor Jékely, “Transylvanian Fresco Cycles of St. Ladislav in a New Light,” *The Hungarian Historical Review* (2014): 97–109, and Daniel Gligan, “Legenda Sfântului Ladislav în pictura murală din Regatul Ungariei” (BA thesis, Babeș-Bolyai University, 2024).

⁶⁴ Dana Jenei, “The Newly Discovered Murals in the Church of Virgin Mary in Ighiu Nou, Sibiu County,” *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art. Série Beaux-Arts* 53 (2016): 47–62, especially 55–58 where she mentions the visual narratives on the northern wall of the nave, St. Ladislav, St. Catherine and St. Margaret. Besides Șmig, Ighiu Nou and Drăușeni, the legend of St. Catherine is depicted as a narrative at Ghelința, Suseni, Sâncraiu de Mureș and Florești, while that of St. Margaret is present at Mugeni and Mărtiniș.

⁶⁵ According to Daniel Gligan's estimation, based on extensive field work in both Hungary and Romania. Gligan, “Legenda”, 3–4. This has followed restoration work, which has uncovered new examples. Jékely, “Narrative Structure”, 62 mentions 45 visual narratives.

⁶⁶ Jékely, “Narrative Structure”, 70; Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu, Ferenc Mihály, and Loránd Kiss, *Monumente medievale de pe Valea Târnavelor* (Editura ACS, 2018), 122–130, 182–184, 321–326; Jenei, “The Newly Discovered Murals”, 54–58; Daniel Gligan, “Programul pictural din nava bisericii satului Șmig,” *Ars Transsilvaniae*, forthcoming.

⁶⁷ Gligan, “Legenda”, 9–11 suggests that several of these visual narratives were produced during the reign of king Louis I of Anjou (1342–1382) and Sigismund of Luxemburg (1387–1437), seventeen and twenty-five respectively. The visual narratives produced in this period are present in the

the cultural context in which they had been produced, Zsombor Jékely has come to the conclusion that these frescoes are the result of the influence of the chivalric spirit which penetrated Angevin Hungary from the French court, through the so-called 'crusader art'.⁶⁸ Previous literature, through the notable contribution of Gábor Klaniczay, without disregarding the role of the Angevins, has also considered the influence of the Byzantine court with which the Árpád kings had been in contact.⁶⁹

On the other hand, Jékely highlights the relevance of this narrative sequence in the context of the Cuman presence in Hungary, after the thirteenth century, a political development that anchored the confrontation between Christians and pagans in current concerns.⁷⁰ As added proof, one could consider that, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, ca. 1310–1320, the memory of the Mongol invasion (1241 and 1285) was still fresh in people's minds, strongly emphasizing the relevance of the conflict between Christians and pagans.⁷¹ Finally, one needs to remember a Franciscan rendition of the battle between the Hungarian army and the Tatars (1345), mentioned by Gábor Klaniczay, where, according to this legend, the relic of St. Ladislav intervened in the scuffle, ensuring the Christian victory.⁷² This text brings to the fore the interest in the confrontation with the pagans, which is increasingly manifest in the frescoes commissioned in the second half of the fourteenth century, ca.

churches of Lutița, Chilieni, Turnișce, Daia Secuiască, Drăușeni, Târgu Mureș, Rákoš, Kraskovo, Remetea Maghiară, Liptovský Ondrej, Necpaly, Rimavská Baňa, Velika, Bijačovce, Žehra, Ațel, Ighișu Nou, Șmig, Dârjiu, Mihăileni, Armășeni, Bisericiani, Kameňany, Slatvina.

⁶⁸ Jékely, "Narrative Structure," 72–74; Jékely, "Transylvanian Fresco Cycles," 99.

⁶⁹ Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses. Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 183–185 mentions contacts with Byzantium as Béla III spent time at the Byzantine court, where he encountered Byzantine chivalric tradition and the cult of the warrior saints that was encouraged by the Komnenos. All this may have influenced Béla's religious policies and his decision to elevate St. Ladislav and encourage a cult centered on his relics.

⁷⁰ Jékely, "Narrative Structure," 74; Jékely, "Transylvanian Fresco Cycles," 107 suggests that the first visual narratives were produced around the time of the feared second Mongol invasion (1270); Aleksander Paroń, *The Pechenegs: Nomads in the Political and Cultural Landscape of Medieval Europe* (Brill, 2021), 374–375 discusses the raids which took place during the reign of King Solomon (1063–1074) and comes to the conclusion that the nomads involved may have been the Cumans and not necessarily the Pechenegs, as suggested by most narrative sources.

⁷¹ Martyn Rady, "The Mongol Invasion of Hungary," *Medieval World* (1991): 39–46 argues that despite the devastation, the subsequent famine and the inevitable population losses, the Mongol invasion of 1241 also had some positive consequences for Hungary as it forced Béla IV (1235–1270) to strengthen its defense system, by building fortresses, allowing cities to erect walls and the aristocracy to build their own castles. Despite this, the invasion was perceived as a disaster by both contemporaries and historians. See, for instance, Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen. A History of Medieval Hungary 895–1526* (I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 98–100.

⁷² Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers*, 189.

1370–1390. All these observations represent solid arguments in favour of the use of visual narratives in order to consolidate the chivalric spirit and its ideologization through the combative appropriation of Christianity. Consequently, Jékely is right to suggest that, in the context of the Angevin court and its politics, Ladislás is revalued as a knightly saint, thus ensuring his popularity among the nobility, under whose patronage the visual narratives featuring the saintly king were often conceived.⁷³ This conclusion is valid in the cases considered in this analysis, Ațel (ca 1400), which in the fifteenth century belonged to the Thabiassy family,⁷⁴ Șmig (ca 1410–1420), which was the property of the Somogy family,⁷⁵ and Ighișu Nou (ca 1405–1420), which was one of the villages of the Apafi family.⁷⁶ Thus, the patrons of the visual narratives are likely to have been members of the nobility. Consequently, and contrary to the opinion expressed by Zsombor Jékely and Dragoș Năstăsoiu,⁷⁷ the presence of

⁷³ Jékely, "Narrative Structure," 74; Jékely, "Transylvanian Fresco Cycles," 104; Gligan, "Legenda," 12–13; Terézia Kerny, "Patronage of St. Ladislás Cycles during the Sigismund Period in Connection with a Contract of Inheritance," in *Bonum ut Pulchrum. Essays in Art History in Honour of Ernő Marosi on his Seventieth Birthday* (Argumentum Publishing House, 2010), 259–272, especially 263–265 lists the commissioners of visual narratives dedicated to St. Ladislás, suggesting that they were members of the higher nobility, close to the king or some of the most important prelates in the kingdom.

⁷⁴ Gligan, "Legenda," 12 mentions the military duties of the Saxons, established by the *Andreanum* in 1224 and reconfirmed by the king on several occasions. He particularly mentions the Saxons from Drăușeni and Ațel who had an important role in defending the southern, south-eastern and north-eastern borders. They often participated in campaigns, together with the king and in the wars against the Ottomans. Liviu Cîmpeanu, "Oșteni de nădejde și rebeli de temut. Rolul militar al sașilor în Transilvania medievală (secolele XIII–XV)," in *Institutul de cercetări socio-umane Sibiu (1956–2021). 66 de ani de provocări istoriografice și culturale* (Academia Română, 2022), 151–157. A fragment of a document shows that the Saxons from the seats of Șeica and Mediaș owed the king military service and possessed land: "...Et quia tunc ipsi Saxones de Medies et de Seelk cum domino rege erant, sub eodem monte, qui predictam possessionem detinebant," in *Documenta Romaniae Historica D. Relații între Țările Române*, ed. Mihai Berza et al., vol. 1 (Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1977), 41–42.

⁷⁵ Gligan, "Legenda," 13 suggests that the village belonged to the noble family of Somogy and considers the most likely commissioner to be a Ladislás, son of Nicholas; Cîmpeanu, "Oșteni de nădejde," 157.

⁷⁶ Upon its first mention, in 1305, the village was part of the estates of the Apa family and was eventually inherited by Gregorius. See *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, ed. Carl Zimmermann et al., vol. 1, 2, 3 (Hermannstadt, 1892, 1897, 1902), vol. 1, 229–30. Despite the fact that subsequent documents from 1359, 1391, 1392, 1394, 1403 (*Urkundenbuch* vol. 2, 158 and *Urkundenbuch* vol. 3, 599–600) mention count Valterus and count Johannes, Jenei, "Newly Discovered Murals," 48 concludes that it was a free Saxon community. As the village was part of the county of Alba and of the Șeica chapter, this conclusion seems improbable.

⁷⁷ Jékely, "Narrative Structure," 74 and Jékely, "Transylvanian Fresco Cycles," 104–106 mentions the interest of the nobility and particularly of the Szeklers in this story; Năstăsoiu, Mihály, and Kiss, *Valea Târnavelor*, 325.

visual narratives dedicated to St. Ladislav in these churches does not attest the enthusiasm of the Saxons for this particular subject, but rather the interest of families who pursued military careers.⁷⁸ One should include in this discussion the Saxons from villages that owed military duties as a consequence of the *Andreanum* (1224), for example, Drăușeni.⁷⁹

Consequently, it is tempting to assume that these visual narratives transmitted gendered messages and notions of masculinity to Transylvanian warriors, or more precisely, to individuals involved in the defensive apparatus of the Hungarian kingdom. A brief look at the structure of these narratives and the selection of episodes contributes to the consolidation of this conclusion. Art historians who have analysed these paintings, especially Zsombor Jékely, agree that the saint is portrayed as a knight and, consequently, his story is reduced to his participation in the battle of Chiraleș (Kerlés) and the acts of bravery highlighted by his confrontation with, and the beheading of the Cuman (Fig. 18).⁸⁰ In the more ample narratives, comprising at least six episodes, or the shorter ones, which only included three, the key events are the pursuit of the Cuman, the single combat of the prince with the Cuman warrior and the beheading of the enemy (Fig. 19). On the rare occasions when the narrative is reduced to a single episode, for example, in the matriculation book of the Hungarians from the University of Vienna (1453), the chosen scene is precisely the combat with the Cuman, which helps to identify the saint, acting as his attribute. Consequently, the visual document fortifies the impression that gendered messages were created for a public whose social aspirations included upward social mobility by means of a military career and whose values were courage in battle and engagement with the Christian cause, in agreement with the normative model of medieval masculinity.

Frequently placed on the northern wall of the nave, this visual narrative is often associated with *Christ's Passion* or the lives of Virgin Martyrs, such as

⁷⁸ Gligan, "Legenda," 11–16 discusses all commissioners with military careers throughout the kingdom of Hungary; Cîmpeanu, "Oșteni de nădejde," 151 focuses on the military role of the Saxons; Liviu Cîmpeanu, "Greavii, nobilemea germană din Transilvania medievală," *Alt Schässburg* 3 (2010): 33–42, especially 37–39 argues that the Graffen (counts) belonged to the elite. The Graffen possessed land both in the Fundus Regius and the counties, which they had received from the king, which made them *Servientes Regis*. As they also had to fulfil military duties, they possessed all the traits necessary in order to be part of the nobility. He concludes by suggesting that noble status was a prerequisite for being appointed as Graff.

⁷⁹ Gligan, "Legenda," 12; *Urkundenbuch*, vol. 1, 34–35 mentions the military duties to the king owed by the villages from "Broos bis Draas". In 1465, Laurentius Greb from Draas (*Daraws*) is mentioned as witness to a litigation. The title bestowed upon him, along with the military duties he owed suggests his noble status.

⁸⁰ Jékely, "Narrative Structure," 63, 71–72.

Catherine and Margaret, sometimes presented in parallel registers, for example at Ighișu Nou (Fig. 20), Șmig, Mugeni (Bögöz), and Mărtiniș (Homoródszenmárton), or on opposite walls of the nave, such as at Ghelița (Gelence) and Drăușeni (Fig. 21). As far as the motives for this association are concerned, Jékely suggests that the heroic representation of Margaret defeating the demon parallels Ladislav's victory against the Cuman. Despite implicitly allowing for a transgression of gender difference, by emphasising the brave nature and valiant actions of the female protagonists, Jékely reads Ladislav's visual story as a model for a group of warriors, particularly noblemen with military careers, while the Virgin Martyrs, whose legends emphasize death for the faith are seen as behavioural models offered to women because of their devotion to Christianity.⁸¹ Thus, in this particular reading, constructs of masculinity are centred around active participation in battle, while constructs of femininity imply steadfast devotion to Christianity.

If the suggestion that narratives having St. Ladislav as their subject acted as behavioural models and conveyed roles attributed to groups dedicated to military careers, whether noblemen, Saxon Gräffen or Szekler Primipili – a fact highlighted by the selection of episodes mostly depicting battle scenes and by the transformation of the combat between St. Ladislav and the Cuman into an attribute of the saint – is sufficiently convincing, the statements referring to the behavioural model offered to noble women by the lives of Virgin Martyrs raise a few questions and would benefit from further analysis.

One is consequently led to explore the messages transmitted by the legends of the two saints and by the visual narratives under discussion in this article, and identify possible gendered social roles and behavioural models. Secondly, the article wishes to identify the target audiences for these textual and visual narratives and, finally, to consider the individuals who conceived these pictorial programs and invested them with meaning.

In order to explore the messages conveyed by the visual narratives, one has to analyse the legends included in the collection compiled by Jacobus de Voragine.⁸² In reading the legends one is confronted with two different stories, each having a young girl as its protagonist. While both girls eventually qualify

⁸¹ Jékely, "Transylvanian Fresco Cycles," 107–108 considers this pairing a Hungarian phenomenon, stresses the similarities between the two narratives and argues that the Virgin Martyrs were presented to women who were meant to model their own piety according to their pious example.

⁸² Dorottya Uhrin, "The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Medieval Upper Hungarian Towns," *The Hungarian Historical Review* 5, no. 3 (2016): 557–586, especially 560–563 mentions the *Legenda Aurea* as the most popular collection of legends from the thirteenth century. This was the basis for the *Hungarian Legendaria*, the *Sermones Compilati*, the sermons of Pelbartus of Themeswar and Osvaldus of Lasko. Pelbartus' sermons were the source for the *Érdy Codex* and the *Codex of Debrecen*, and the vernacular verse legend from the *Codex of Érsekújvár*.

as Virgin Martyrs because of their death for the faith, their stories and the ideas they put forth, gender constructs included, are quite different.

According to her legend, St. Margaret contested paternal and secular political authority, refusing to abandon the Christian faith. She defeated and humiliated the demon, making him prostrate himself at the feet of a woman, while finally taking control of her own execution. The refusal of the marriage offered by the prefect before he learned that Margaret was a Christian is, in this case, implicit, because explicitly, the saint was merely refusing the idea of converting to paganism. The legend highlights the episodes of martyrdom in order to emphasize Margaret's fortitude as well as divine intervention through the miracles performed. Margaret is thus constructed as a model of femininity, but not the one generally espoused within medieval societies. Instead of being meek and submissive, she is the epitome of the unruly, disobedient daughter, defying paternal and political authority.

In Catherine's case, the legend highlights a militant spirit who initiates a dialogue with the emperor in order to prevent the forced conversion of the Christians. The rejection of marriage is, in Catherine's case, explicit and the idea of Christ as groom to whom she had pledged allegiance is introduced. Although the legend dwells on the details of the saint's martyrdom and the ensuing miracles, which act as proof of the divine favour bestowed on Catherine, the most interesting detail of the narrative is the erudition and eloquence of the saint highlighted by the dispute with Maxentius and the confrontation with the fifty philosophers. One is again led to conclude that Catherine defies the political and spiritual authorities and states her own position, commitment to Christianity, most clearly.

Thus, the legends of the two saints present the two young women as forceful protagonists, endowed with initiative, with clearly-formulated and publicly-sustained opinions, ready to contest the authorities in their lives. With Margaret presented as a victorious character, whose femininity and youth are juxtaposed with the 'malefic' forces represented by the demons, whom she ultimately defeats, a success clearly highlighted when the young woman treads on the demon under her feet, and with Catherine, who wins the intellectual confrontation with the pagan philosophers, whom she tames through conversion, using reason and persuasion, the legends bestow new content to the notion of femininity. The new concept is devoid of any trace of obedience, of humility or passivity when confronting the authorities.

On the other hand, the legend of St. Catherine brings to the fore an even more ambiguous gender construct. Several times during the course of the narrative the text highlights the fact that the philosophers, the wise men brought from all the corners of the Empire are confronted by a young girl who defeats them, converts them and instructs them in the Christian faith, before

her own martyrdom is ordered by the emperor. A first anomaly in this construct is Catherine's intellectual competence, which is heralded as being exceptional. Consequently, Catherine is excepted from the characteristics of her own gender, that generally do not advertise intellectual prowess, and invested with attributes that are not necessarily masculine, according to the norms of the moment, but rather typical for a specific construct of masculinity. In fact, in this legend, Catherine is attributed a clerical role, highlighted both by her remarkable education, by her eloquence, which proved impossible to compete with, and by the succinct instruction offered to the philosophers.

If one turns one's attention to visual narratives, one is led to consider the messages conveyed by the images. In this particular endeavour, one notices, first of all, that the association of St. Ladislav's legend with those of Virgin Martyrs is present in several churches in both southern and eastern Transylvania.⁸³ Moreover, if one looks at the structure of the visual narrative, one notices the similarities in the structure of St. Catherine's legend in the churches at Șmig and Ighiu Nou.⁸⁴ In the second example, the legend of St. Margaret also comprises several episodes that do not seem to be a random choice.⁸⁵ Interestingly enough, in all of these visual narratives, the emphasis is not placed on scenes of martyrdom, but rather on steadfastness in faith, or in Catherine's case, on the dispute with the emperor and the philosophers and on the effectiveness of the explanations of the saint, which lead to the conversion of the latter.⁸⁶ In both cases, martyrdom

⁸³ Jékely, "Transylvanian Fresco Cycles," 107 mentions the churches at Ghelintă, Mugeni and Mărtiniș to which one can add the narrative cycles at Șmig, Ighiu Nou and Drăușeni. At Dârlos, although the pictorial program contains a visual narrative dedicated to St. Catherine, it does not associate it with the story of St. Ladislav. St. Catherine's legend from the church at Dârlos has been discussed by Dragoș Gheorghe Năstăsioiu, "Narrative Strategies at the Crossroads," *Zograf. A Journal of Medieval Art* 45 (2021): 1–28, with the intention of highlighting the differences between the western and eastern narratives; Dana Jenei, "Dârlos: un ansamblu mural atipic în Transilvania catolică din Evul Mediu târziu," *Ars Transsylvanicae* XXX (2020): 5–32 also mentions the western and eastern origin of various compositions.

⁸⁴ At Șmig: the prayer of St. Catherine, the princess disrupts the sacrifice made by Maxentius to the pagan gods, the dispute of the young virgin with the fifty philosophers, the martyrdom of the converted philosophers, the martyrdom of the saint, the conversion of Faustina, Maxentius ordering the execution of Faustina, the miracle of the wheel destroyed by an angel. At Ighiu Nou: the conversion of Faustina and of the commander Porphyrius, the execution of the empress, Catherine's disputation with the fifty philosophers, the martyrdom of the converted philosophers and the martyrdom of St. Catherine.

⁸⁵ Margaret defending her faith, the meeting with the prefect Olibrius, the rejection of Olibrius's proposals, Margaret's imprisonment, Margaret's condemnation, the beheading of the princess and her burial.

⁸⁶ Năstăsioiu, "Narrative Strategies," 1, 8, 16, 24 when discussing the visual narrative at Dârlos argues convincingly that western cycles highlight wisdom and eloquence as Catherine's most

is suggested rather than explicitly described, by focusing the narrative on the miracle of the wheel destroyed by the angel in response to Catherine's prayers (Fig. 22). In the church of Drăușeni, although there are visual references to Catherine's martyrdom (Fig. 23), the emphasis is again placed on the dispute with the philosophers (Fig. 24). Consequently, visual narratives following in the footsteps of textual ones consolidate an atypical gender construct, marked by heroism, agency, eloquence and erudition. Again, Catherine, engaged in the instruction that led to the conversion of the philosophers and to that of the empress Faustina and the commander Porphyrios, seems to be the harbinger of the clerical estate.

This is often visually expressed in a rather imaginative way. For example, in one of the episodes from Drăușeni, Catherine makes a blessing gesture, with Christic references, which can also be construed as a clerical gesture (Fig. 25).⁸⁷ Another detail, which leads one in the same direction, is the presence of books. At Drăușeni, in the episode dedicated to the intellectual debate, both Catherine and her opponent hold books in their hands (Fig. 26). Behind the male character, probably one of the philosophers, who makes a rather didactic, slightly demonstrative, but potentially threatening gesture, pointing his index finger towards Catherine, there are several characters, possibly the other philosophers, who all seem to carry books (Fig. 27). Catherine is thus assimilated among those who used books and were familiar with them, a group who, in medieval Transylvania, were identifiable as the clergy.⁸⁸ Thus, one gets the impression that Catherine is visually presented as appropriating a clerical role.

If one considers the literature dedicated to the legend of St. Catherine, one witnesses a consensus concerning the fact that this saint represents the aspirations of the clergy, a clerical ideal, and is therefore depicted as a cleric and ultimately as a figure of authority. For instance, if one reflects on her wisdom, knowledge and eloquence, her ability to teach and persuade, Catherine does not seem to assume a feminine gender identity, but rather a clerical one.⁸⁹ In this sense, Catherine follows in the footsteps of Barbara who has also been discussed as

important virtues, while emphasis on her suffering is more common in eastern cycles, which relied mostly on *menologia*.

⁸⁷ Further comparative research could reinforce this suggestion as well as highlight its presence and use in other, secular contexts.

⁸⁸ Adinel Dincă, "Medieval Literacy from Transylvania. Selected Evidence from Parish Churches," *Transylvanian Review* XXIV, no. 1 (2015): 109–121; Adinel Dincă, "The University and the Parish. The Medieval Books from Cisnădie/Heltau," *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in the Humanities* XXIV, no. 2 (2019): 337–353.

⁸⁹ Maria Crăciun, "The Cult of St. Barbara and the Saxon Community in Late Medieval Transylvania," in *Identity and Alterity in Hagiography and the Cults of Saints*, ed. Ana Marinković and Trpimir Vedriš (Hagiotheca, 2010), 138–163.

appropriating clerical functions.⁹⁰ For instance, the latter began to be depicted with the attributes of chalice and host, an image that illustrates her privilege of dispensing the sacrament to those who died unexpectedly, suggesting that the very images of these saints were transformed in order to emphasize their clerical status.⁹¹

Reading this development as a masculinization of the saint, Carmen Florea has argued that this transformation was expressed, at least in Catherine's case, by her short hair. Starting from the premise that hair is a marker of identity,⁹² while engaging with conclusions reached by Karen Winstead,⁹³ Carmen Florea has suggested that Catherine was depicted with short hair in an attempt to make her resemble young male clergy.⁹⁴ Persuasive in its major articulations, this argument would benefit from further nuances. First of all, the short hair that allegedly resembles the tonsure sported by clerics could be read as a stylistic rather than ideological choice. This choice may simply convey that Catherine was susceptible to the styles of the moment, introduced by the elite and coveted by the rest of society. For instance, Evelyn Welch has argued that their hair style and accessories were a way for women to create public social identities that expressed their standing and displayed their connections to other women. Welch has analysed several case studies and used the example of Beatrice D'Este, who came to Milan as the bride of Lodovico Sforza, and created a distinctive look for herself, wearing a *coazzione*, a long false braid that ran down from a center parting.⁹⁵ In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, fashionable women wore chin-length hair, that framed their face in loose waves or ripples that covered their

⁹⁰ Carmen Florea, "The Universal Cult of the Virgin Martyrs in Late Medieval Transylvania," in *Les saints et leur culte en Europe Centrale au Moyen Âge (XIe- début du XVIe siècle)*, ed. Marie-Madeleine de Cevins and Olivier Marin (Brepols, 2017), 39–57, especially 44.

⁹¹ For Barbara's appropriation of a clerical identity, as she was granted the ability to dispense the sacrament to those whose souls were endangered by sudden death, see Maria Crăciun, "Moartea cea Bună: Intercesori și protectori în pragul mării treceri. Între discursul clerical și pietatea populară," in *Discursuri despre moarte în Transilvania secolelor XVI-XX*, ed. Mihaela Grancea and Ana Dumitran (Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006), 226–269; for the transformation of visual representation of St. Barbara in the context of the Eucharistic cult in German Lands, see Megan Cassidy-Welch, "Prison and Sacrament in the Cult of Saints. Images of St. Barbara in Late Medieval Art," *Journal of Medieval History* 35, no. 4 (2009): 371–384.

⁹² Robert Bartlett, "Symbolic Meaning of Hair in the Middle Ages," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4 (1994): 43–60 considers hair an outward marker of identity for various categories, such as status, age, sexuality, profession, or for various states of mind, such as grief suggesting that the meanings attached to hair were highly contextual.

⁹³ Karen Winstead, "St. Katherine's Hair," in *St. Katherine of Alexandria, Texts and Contexts*, ed. Jaqueline Jenkins and Katherine J. Lewis (Brepols, 2003), 171–200.

⁹⁴ Florea, "The Universal Cult of the Virgin Martyrs," 46.

⁹⁵ Evelyn Welch, "Art on the edge: Hair and Hands in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 3. (2008): 241–268, especially 245–249.

ears, creating the illusion that it was a radical haircut, or chose a style that resembled ear-phones, as the hair was coiled over the ears. In both these cases hairstyle was a symbol of social status rather than of gender. The fact that Karen Winstead's demonstration, which introduced the idea of Catherine depicted with short hair, relied on manuscript illustration produced in northwestern Europe in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, as a luxury product, suggests that it was mostly members of an affluent elite who would have access to these books and implicitly to these fashionable styles. One is thus witnessing a double process of imitation: the saints depicted in these manuscripts were designed to resemble fashionable women from the elite, while the latter, in their turn, may have been inclined to follow the lead of the saints depicted in these miniatures, at least in terms of the fashions they favoured. Moreover, Winstead does not refer particularly to the resemblance between Catherine's hairstyle and that of younger clergy, but rather younger men in general, who may have been equally tempted to follow the latest trend,⁹⁶ as the clergy expressed their status through tonsure, clean-shaven faces and specific vestments.⁹⁷

Moreover, even if one is tempted to concur with the idea that Catherine was depicted in a way that made her resemble the clergy, this development cannot necessarily be equated with a process of masculinization, simply because at this point in time, the clerical estate had begun to be perceived as a third gender.

It consequently becomes necessary to discuss the issue of a third gender, a concept that has been increasingly present in historiographical debates. While several authors, such as R. N. Swanson, Patricia H. Cullum and Jo Anne McNamara, advocated that the clergy could be perceived as a third gender,⁹⁸ Jacqueline

⁹⁶ Winstead, "St. Katherine's Hair," 185–189.

⁹⁷ Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe. New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 39–51, especially 44–45, sensing the connection between hair and virility, suggests that body and facial hair signaled masculinity and thus tonsure and a cleanshaven face represented not just monastic status, but also a change of gender; Robert Mills, "The Significance of Tonsure," in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Patricia H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (University of Wales, 2004).

⁹⁸ R. N. Swanson, "Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (Longman, 1999), 160–167 argues that medieval clergy as celibates were not meant to be masculine, discussing a societal concept of masculinity and a constructed third gender of the clergy. This brought about a constant tension between the wish that clergy be angels and their urge to be men. Patricia H. Cullum, "Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Late Medieval Europe," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, 178–196 distinguishes between secular masculinities, defined by fighting and reproducing and clerical masculinities, separating the gender characteristics of monks from those of the secular clergy. Medieval clergy needed to be real men as only men could be priests. The authority of the secular clergy was quintessentially masculine. Cullum thus argues for the

Murray argues that, in the absence of a medieval notion of absolute sex/gender alterity, a conceptual space was born in which a third gender could exist. She has equated this with a worldview that allowed for the “accommodation of multiple identities underneath a dominant discourse of binaries” and the emergence of a social space in which the individual could search for a new sex/gender identity. Murray thus concludes that the acceptance of fluid sex and gender systems provided space for a third gender to develop.⁹⁹ She further argues that religious people, saints and celibate monks may have acted like a third gender, creating a type of their own, a person in whom sex and gender binaries were erased. This process eventually brought holy men and women closer together by blurring the differences between them. This was achieved in both cases by renouncing sexual activity and embracing chastity. In this scenario, women became more masculine, while men became more feminine, rejecting the external signs of virile masculinity, such as waging war and engaging in sexual intercourse.

Murray’s remarkable analysis, however, still leaves open the question of the masculinization of saintly women and the depth of the feminization of the clergy. While accepting some of the ideology that has been associated with clerical masculinity, Ruth Mazo Karras contends that the clergy, both regular and secular, who did remain celibate and chaste, did not thereby abdicate their masculinity. Karras agrees that theirs was a distinct model of masculinity, free from sexual activity and aggressiveness. However, she does interpret the quest for chastity as a struggle, as a battle where the protagonist needed to manifest strength of will. Moreover, Karras draws attention to the bigger issue at stake, the purity of the Church and its independence from dynastic politics that was at the forefront of attempts to enforce celibacy for the secular clergy. Thus, emphasis on clerical celibacy, which Karras relates to the reform movement of the eleventh century, seems to have drawn a line between clergy and laity, which was in turn defined in terms of sexual activity. Karras further argues that clerical, monastic gender identity appropriated some of the positive aspects of femininity and ceased to model masculinity on secular behaviour.¹⁰⁰ A propensity to violence and the belligerent character were abandoned and, to a certain extent, replaced

existence of varieties of masculinity. See also Jo Anne McNamara, “Chastity as a Third Gender,” in *The History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours*, ed. Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Brill, 2002), 199–209.

⁹⁹ Murray, “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?,” 39–51. She ultimately agrees with Ruth Mazo Karras that, in medieval society, chastity is a distinct sexual orientation, eventually becoming a third gender. See Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe. Doing Unto Others* (Routledge, 2005), 40, 56; McNamara, “Chastity as a Third Gender,” 199–209.

¹⁰⁰ Ruth Mazo Karras, “Thomas Aquinas’ Chastity Belt. Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe,” in *Gender and Christianity*, 52–67, especially 53–60, 65–66.

by wisdom and erudition, by eloquence and reason. Thus, according to several authors, the construction of the clergy as a third gender was a process marked by the advocacy and embracing of celibacy and chastity, and by the renunciation of activities that were typical for the men of the period, especially war. Armed combat and a concern for reproduction were the identifiable traits of normative masculinity, while the assumption of intellectual endeavours, were the domain of the clergy, as suggested by Ruth Mazo Karras and Jacqueline Murray.¹⁰¹

Consequently, if one looks at the gender constructs present in these textual and visual narratives, one is led to conclude that, although masculinity is portrayed in rather traditional ways, femininity is not constructed in the standard manner, which glorified obedience and subservience. Besides portraying rebellious and willful female characters, the legends bring to the fore the third gender designed for and appropriated by the clergy. This distinct gender was masculine in its biology, but socially constructed as exempted from a number of overtly masculine traits.

At this point, one is led to inquire who was the target audience of these textual and visual narratives. Do they offer, as suggested by Zsombor Jékely, a behavioural model and a gendered role to the women in the commissioners' families? Taking into account the analysis undertaken so far, one is led to conclude that the visual narratives in these churches were intended to provide models for three genders, men, women and the clergy. The nobles who commissioned the frescos are presented with a model of traditional masculinity, belligerent and forceful, while committed to Christian ideals, epitomised by the figure of the knightly saint Ladislás. Examining the legends espoused by both textual and visual documents, one is led to conclude that the members of the nobility were offered a model of medieval masculinity, the knightly saint whom they venerated, as suggested by the episodes where a commissioner is depicted kneeling in front of Saint Ladislás, as illustrated by the frescoes of Ghelînța, Crăciunel, Mărtiniș, and Pădureni.¹⁰² Thus, one is led to presume that the legend of St. Ladislás was addressed to men, or more specifically, to Transylvanian nobles.

A detail of her legend suggests that Margaret could become a preferred subject of female devotion, because in the prayers recited during her martyrdom, the Virgin Martyr chose her domain of utmost effectiveness, stating that she wished to protect women during childbirth. It would therefore be obvious that in the environment of the nobility, who exalted fertility in order to reproduce itself as a group, women would be interested in the cult of St. Margaret.

¹⁰¹ Mazo Karras, "Thomas Aquinas' Chastity Belt," 53.

¹⁰² Jékely, "Narrative Structure," 74; Jékely, "Transylvanian Fresco Cycles," 104–105.

Catherine, on the other hand, is a completely different matter as her behaviour, refusal to marry, defiance of paternal, political and spiritual authority and her appropriation of intellectual endeavours completely disqualify her from being a role model for the daughters of the nobility. Thus, these legends and their visual renditions present a model of femininity that was not consonant with the wish of the nobility to control the women in the family from whom they expected obedience and humility.¹⁰³ One is thus led to conclude that this rebellious brand of femininity was probably not chosen by the commissioners of the frescos in order to transmit behavioural models to the women in their families. Thus, if one thinks of the target audience for these legends, it is difficult to imagine that these characters were deliberately offered as behavioural models for members of the nobility whose mission in life was marriage, because it ensured the perpetuation of the husband's lineage and cemented relations between clans.¹⁰⁴ If one looks at the matter from the clergy's point of view, daughters of the elite were expected to be obedient, fully appropriating the rules and roles cut out for them. In fact, it has been noted in the literature that Jacobus de Voragine's willful heroines do not portray the kind of behaviour that the clergy was expecting from the laity.¹⁰⁵ Thus, neither the clergy, nor the nobility seem to have been willing to present women with models of confrontational personalities, forceful tempers and disobedient behaviour.

However, this does not mean that, in yet another act of disobedience, women were not tempted to read or contemplate these stories. Caution should be exercised in thinking about this possibility because, as Karen Winstead has persuasively argued, although Virgin Martyr Legends may have been attractive to women, there is little evidence that their male authors were specifically writing for women or that they expected to have predominantly female audiences. In Winstead's view, the plausible explanation for the "emergence and apparent success of legends featuring aggressive, sharp-tongued martyrs" is that the authors saw the saints as "embodiments of clerical rather than feminine authority". The author concludes that the martyrs' legends were perfectly suited to meet

¹⁰³ Fügedi, *Elefánthy*, 24–25 argues that women were in a subordinate position even in the sphere of reproduction and when they left paternal authority, they were subjected to that of their husbands. Girls were married with the consent of the father or kinsmen. Even if a woman remarried as a widow, her former husband's family had a say in the matter.

¹⁰⁴ Fügedi, *Elefánthy*, 28, 45–49 mentions that the "primary duty of every male member of the kindred was to preserve the group by siring sons" thus ensuring the male line; he further argues that estates and noble status could be obtained through marriage and thus, quite often, noble women married commoners. Their nobility and their estates would however pass on to their children; Georges Duby, *Evul mediu masculin* (Editura Meridiane, 1992), 8–33, 52–78; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Les femmes et la famille," in *L'homme medieval*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Éditions du Seuil, 1989), 315–344, especially 318–323.

¹⁰⁵ Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 68–69.

the needs of clergy intent on educating the laity, affirming at the same time the superiority of clerical values, such as celibacy.¹⁰⁶

It is also important to note that, according to several scholars, at least Jacobus de Voragine, the most popular author of saints' legends, wrote primarily for preachers and the parish clergy rather than for lay readers, and although his stories may have appealed to women, they had not been written for the sole benefit of female audiences.¹⁰⁷

In Catherine's case, the saint's attributes, especially the book, transform her into a behavioural model more suited to the clergy than to women or men. Her propensity towards intellectual pursuits is synchronised with that of the parish clergy, who, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, increasingly attended universities, as demonstrated by the studies of Mária Lupescu Makó¹⁰⁸ and more recently of Adinel Dincă,¹⁰⁹ while emphasis on erudition and effective persuasion can be understood in the context of growing concern for pastoral work and for the internalization by the laity of the fundamentals of faith, as suggested by Marie-Madeleine de Cevins.¹¹⁰ Thus, Virgin Martyrs, particularly Catherine, could be the perfect model for the parish clergy when they considered and embarked upon the fulfilment of their duties. The clergy thus embraced their pastoral duties, in an effort to control the religious life of the laity more closely through their ability to preach and explain fundamental Christian tenets of faith.

Moreover, one is also tempted to conclude that one possible function of the Virgin Martyrs was to provide a model for the clergy when they constructed their gender identity. Similarly to the Virgin Martyrs, the medieval clergy refused marriage, assumed celibacy and embraced chastity, at least theoretically. The absence of sexuality from their lives separated them from men, as well as

¹⁰⁶ Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 101.

¹⁰⁷ Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 69–70.

¹⁰⁸ Mária Lupescu Makó, "În labirintul normelor ecleziastice. Relația dintre clerul secular și dominicanii din Cluj în secolul al XV-lea," in *Evul Mediu Neterminat. Omagiu adus profesorului Adrian Andrei Rusu cu ocazia împlinirii vârstei de 70 de ani*, ed. Gianina-Diana Iegar, Péter Levente Szőcs, Gabriela Rusu, and Florela Vasilescu (Mega, 2022), 151–171; Mária Lupescu Makó, "Egy konfliktus margójára: a világi papság és a domonkosok kapcsolatai a középkori Kolozsváron," in *Orășe și orășeni. Városok és városalakók*, ed. Ionuț Costea, Carmen Florea, Judit Pál, and Enikő Rűsz-Fogarasi (Argonaut, 2006), 404–416.

¹⁰⁹ Dincă, "The University and the Parish," 348–351 discusses the impact of university education on the development of an intellectual ecclesiastical elite, as well as the emergence of pastoral ministry under the influence of the Viennese School of Pastoral Theology.

¹¹⁰ Marie-Madeleine de Cevins, "The Influence of Franciscan Friars on Popular Piety in the Kingdom of Hungary at the End of the Fifteenth Century," in *Communities of Devotion. Religious Orders and Society in East Central Europe, 1450–1800*, ed. Maria Crăciun and Elaine Fulton (Ashgate, 2011), 71–90 argues that although the Franciscan order attempted to shape lay religiosity, it was not fully able to eradicate popular piety, in both beliefs and practices.

from ordinary women, bringing them closer to Virgin Martyrs, whom they valued for their virginity, which was the highest degree of chastity. The idea that the clergy were invited to construct their gender identities by appealing to the model offered by the Virgin Martyrs leads one to consider more closely the agency behind the conception of these programs.

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When one looks at all the visual narratives discussed in this article, one is intrigued by the fact that the program on the northern wall of the nave at Mălâncrav is so different from the programs in other churches and, in fact, unique. The other intriguing feature of the program is that the story of St. Ladislav, present in all other churches where the commissioners of the frescoes performed military duties, is absent from Mălâncrav, where the patron was definitely a nobleman. Anca Gogâltan and, more recently, Dana Jenei have shown that several members of the Apafi clan were connected to the royal court of Hungary, where they served as knights.¹¹¹ This makes it all the more surprising that they did not commission a visual narrative focused on St. Ladislav to adorn their church. If anything, the choice of pictorial program makes it all the more interesting and challenging to identify the commissioners of the frescoes and to understand their choices.

Although Nicholas of Apa, documented between 1396 and 1451, is generally acknowledged as the commissioner of the painting in the sanctuary,¹¹² the person responsible for the frescoes in the nave is less certain.¹¹³ However, as it has been suggested in this article, the image on the pillars representing

¹¹¹ Gogâltan and Sallay, "The Church at Mălâncrav," 184–195; Gogâltan, "The Self," 57–60 deals primarily with the career of Nicholas of Apa, one of the *familiars* of Nicholas Csáki; Jenei, "Les peintures," 59 mentions all the patrons of Mălâncrav beginning with 1258: Gregorius, documented in 1305 and 1340, Johannes (1345–1374), the first to become a knight of the royal court in 1366, Petrus who became a royal knight in 1399 and Nicholas who most probably commissioned the paintings in the sanctuary.

¹¹² Jenei, "Les peintures," 59.

¹¹³ Pending on the dating of the frescoes, the most likely candidates would be Johannes (1345–1374) and Petrus, who is mentioned as late as 1399; Anca Gogâltan, "Maria, Iosif și Isus. Modele vizuale ale salvării divine în nava bisericii medievale din Mălâncrav (Malmkrog, Almakerek), Județ Sibiu," in *Istoria ca interogație. Mariei Crăciun la o aniversare*, ed. Carmen Florea and Greta-Monica Miron (Argonaut/Mega, 2020), 163–178, here 163 follows Drăguț, "Picturile murale," 80 and Jenei, "Les peintures," 56 in dating the paintings in the nave between 1320 and 1350, which would not allow Peter as a possible commissioner of the frescoes in the nave. In an older article, Gogâltan, "Passion Iconography," 105 dates the paintings in the nave to 1350 or the second half of the fourteenth century, which would allow Peter Apafi to be their commissioner.

Peter liberated from prison by an angel may provide a clue in this respect. Unfortunately, Petrus Apafi's biography does not provide the necessary details to turn this hypothesis into a certainty. Even if Petrus was the commissioner of the frescoes in the nave, it is unlikely that he was the person responsible for the conception and articulation of the program. Given the complexity of the messages the program conveys, a knight, a man of arms, is not a plausible candidate for this role. One is thus led to attempt to identify the individuals responsible for the conception of the program, not just for its actual production.

In this particular endeavour, the most important suggestions are provided by the images themselves. The program on the northern wall of the nave has four tiers which associate the Genesis, focused primarily on the Fall, with the *Childhood* and *Passion of Christ*, culminating in the *Resurrection*, and selected episodes from the life of the Virgin, focused on four events related to her *Dormition* and Assumption. This association suggests the link created between Adam as the prototype of Christ and Eve as the antitype of Mary. Because of the Fall, humanity was tainted by sin, only to be redeemed by Christ's sacrifice and Mary's purity. As this idea was championed by the Franciscans,¹¹⁴ one is led to conclude that the program in the nave may have been devised by representatives of this order. This idea is not entirely new in existing literature, as several authors have detected and discussed a possible Franciscan influence on the choice of episodes.¹¹⁵ Although Anca Gogâltan proves skeptical about the possible Franciscan impact on the pictorial program at Mălâncrav, because nothing is known about the relationship of the Apafis with the order prior to the second half of the fifteenth century, she does admit that this is a highly individual program, which includes four episodes of *Christ's Hearing* and four events related to the *Crucifixion*. By analysing the images in the context of devotional literature produced in Franciscan milieu, the author concludes that the story of the Passion is informed by Franciscan ideology, including the antisemitic sentiment suggested by the multiplication of

¹¹⁴ Jolly, *Made in God's Image*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Marie Lionnet, "Les peintures murales en Hongrie á la fin de Moyen Âge (1300-1475)," PhD diss., Université de Paris Nanterre, 2004, vol.1, 100; Mihnea Alexandru Mihail, "Regatul maghiar și aspecte ale geografiei artei din perspectiva transferurilor iconografice secolele XIV-XV," PhD diss., University of Bucharest, 2018, vol. 1, 119-121; Gogâltan, "Maria, Iosif și Isus," 170-175 detects the influence of Franciscan spirituality in the nave at Mălâncrav. The author argues that Joseph is a suitable model for the nobility as protector of his family, while establishing links between the lives of Adam and Eve and the childhood of Christ where Joseph protects his family as a provider while Eve is shown breastfeeding parallels Mary's role as *Salvatrix Mundi* as she intercedes with her son. Moreover, Gogâltan, "Passion Iconography," 114, 126-133 focuses on Franciscan devotional themes in the same church. For specific Franciscan themes, see Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy. Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideology and the Levant* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Hearings and by the Order's devotional concerns, as heralded by the focus on Christ's suffering. Thus, the main motifs of Franciscan spirituality, poverty, humility, and the physical suffering of Christ are all present and indicative of Franciscan devotional patterns.¹¹⁶

I have argued elsewhere that the Apafis' connection with the Franciscans was longstanding and manifest in the program of the chancel, where depictions of St. Francis and St. Anthony of Padua are placed in the vicinity of the Archangel Michael. Moreover, other images, such as *St. Anne Trinity*, a compositional type intended to give visual expression to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, a theological tenet much favoured by the Franciscans, and the *Coronation of the Virgin*, which renders visible the Bodily Assumption of the Virgin, another doctrine supported by the order, became emblematic for the owner's devotion, in this case, for Nicholaus of Apa's preferences.¹¹⁷ One further clue for the continued interest of the Apafis is the depiction of Klára Macedonai, Mihály Apafi's wife, with her patron saint, Clare of Assisi, on the central panel of the polyptych placed on the main altar of the church.¹¹⁸ Finally, some of the Apafis, notably Mihály Apafi, were close to Franciscan convents where they wished to be buried and where they expected the friars to pray for the salvation of their souls. Again, Mihály Apafi also wished to be buried in the Franciscan convent at Târgu Mureş.¹¹⁹

It thus stands to reason that Franciscan discourse would inform the opinions of the laity who maintained a close connection to the order. However, if one focuses on the depiction of Eve from the *Genesis cycle*, as the analysis in this article has done, one also has to unravel the connection between the type chosen for this program and its presumed 'authors', the Franciscans. Studies dedicated to St. Francis have emphasized the equalitarian spirit of the original rule that encouraged men and women to live together. It has also been noted that Francis was instrumental in founding the feminine branch of his order, the Poor Clares, and that women featured prominently in his audience.¹²⁰ It has also been pointed out that after embracing chivalric ideology and lifestyle and immersing himself in courtly culture, in the later part of his life, Francis underwent a feminization, portraying himself as mother, thus subverting social, cultural and

¹¹⁶ Gogâltan, "Passion Iconography," 105, 113–114, 120, 122–123.

¹¹⁷ Maria Crăciun, "Mendicant Piety and the Saxon Community of Transylvania ca. 1450–1550," in *Communities of Devotion*, ed. Maria Crăciun and Elaine Fulton, 29–70, especially 32, 44.

¹¹⁸ Crăciun, "Mendicant Piety," 29–30.

¹¹⁹ Zoltán Soós, "The Franciscan Friary of Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely) and the Franciscan Presence in Medieval Transylvania," *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 9 (2003): 249–274, especially 261.

¹²⁰ Jacques Le Goff, *Sfântul Francisc din Assisi* (Polirom, 2000), 142–144.

sexual categories, while emphasizing the educational component of his mission.¹²¹ Consequently, the figure of the mother, dominating Francis' ideology and imagination, was something that Franciscans could share with a nobility concerned with its reproduction as a group. If this message was addressed not just to the laity, men and women, but also to the clergy, it was yet another encouragement that the secular priests would assume control over pastoral work and provide intellectual nourishment to the laity.

In other churches where an extended pictorial program was preserved on the northern wall of the nave, the association of St. Ladislav with Virgin Martyrs, such as Margaret and Catherine, also brings to the fore the agents involved in its conception. If the visual narrative dedicated to St. Ladislav was a natural choice for individuals engaged in military service, the lives of Virgin Martyrs did not provide models of behaviour solely, if at all, for the women in those families. The emphasis placed within these visual narratives on wisdom and eloquence, on teaching and persuading, as well as chastity, suggests that these young women were models intended for the parish clergy, who, after the Gregorian reform of the eleventh century, was increasingly encouraged to embrace celibacy and to engage more actively with their pastoral duties.

A further argument in this direction is provided by the martyrdom of eleven apostles depicted at Șmig in the lower registers of the pictorial program. Attempts to interpret this specific program have suggested that, by mirroring the ordeals of the Savior, these martyrdoms drew the faithful present in the nave of the church into a devotional exercise of *Imitatio Christi* meant to illustrate how redemption could be achieved through suffering.¹²² This persuasive conclusion can be enriched by considering the nature of the apostles' mission in the world, spreading the message of the Gospel. In this sense, they became models for the parish clergy, who at this point in time were invested with the duty to preach in order to deepen the laity's appropriation of the Christian message.

Recent research on the cult of saints in medieval Transylvania has contextualised interest in the Virgin Martyrs within a broader feminization of the cults of saints. Integrating interesting suggestions from existing international literature, Carmen Florea considers the cult of the Virgin Martyrs in Transylvania a part of the "feminization of sainthood emerged in the cathedral of St. Michael" and, as such, a devotion stimulated by the clergy, beginning with the bishop of Transylvania. This is suggested by the churches dedicated to these saints, located in territories that belonged to the bishopric of Alba Iulia, by the founding of altars

¹²¹ Jacques Dalarun, "Francis and Clare of Assisi. Differing Perspectives in Gender and Power," *Franciscan Studies* 63 (2005): 11–25.

¹²² Gligan, "Programul pictural".

dedicated to these saints in the cathedral at Alba Iulia and by the emergence of confraternities at the behest of the local elites in cooperation with the parish clergy. The author suggests that the impulse came from clergy who had previously been affiliated with the bishopric of Oradea where the cult of St. Catherine in particular was also strongly supported by the bishops, in order to reflect the ideals of a male ecclesiastical elite, “who maintained a professional interest in the intellectual abilities” of these young women.¹²³

One is thus led to conclude that the clergy, together with the nobility, provided models of masculinity for the commissioners of these visual narratives. The clergy, albeit in a different guise, provided a gendered role model for women by emphasizing motherhood through the breastfeeding Eve in depictions of the *Labors of Adam and Eve* and as a protector of women in childbirth, by including St. Margaret’s life in the pictorial program of the nave. Finally, the clergy offered a distinct gendered model for the parish clergy by building St. Catherine as the erudite Virgin Martyr committed to pastoral endeavours. The three genders were thus offered distinct messages forged by clerical agency. Although these conclusions seem to eliminate the devotional component, it is important to understand that this was not entirely absent, as nobles sought the protection of St. Ladislav, women in the family could place themselves under the care of St. Margaret, who watched over the safe delivery of their children, while both genders were interested in the aid offered by St. Catherine to departed souls, suggested by the confraternities dedicated to the saint, which often had a funerary purpose.¹²⁴ Finally, the messages of the visual narratives could be read by those who saw them in very different ways. The parish clergy could appropriate or reject the celibate, chaste model, married women could embrace or reject maternity, while young girls could find the rebellious and confrontational nature of the Virgin Martyrs appealing. In all three cases, meaning is bestowed on the programs by the receptors as well as by the individuals who conceived the narratives. This leads one to conclude that gender norms were not always enthusiastically appropriated, they could also be rejected or adjusted.

¹²³ Carmen Florea, *The Late Medieval Cult of the Saints. Universal Developments within Local Contexts* (Routledge, 2022), 85–92. The author mentions the founding of altars dedicated to Virgin Martyrs in the cathedral church of St. Michael at Alba Iulia. Moreover, the cults of Margaret and Catherine benefited from the support of the Arpadian and Angevine dynasties.

¹²⁴ Florea, *Medieval Cult of the Saints*, 89–91.

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Illustrations



Fig. 1. *The Labors of Adam and Eve* in the church at Mălâncrav



Fig. 2. *Genesis cycle on the bronze doors at Hildesheim Cathedral (Web Gallery of Art)*



Fig. 3. *The Labors of Adam and Eve* at Hildesheim (Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 4. *The Labors of Adam and Eve on the façade of the cathedral at Modena (Web Gallery of Art)*

THE WOMEN IN THE FAMILY: BEHAVIOURAL MODELS AND GENDERED SOCIAL ROLES IN
TRANSYLVANIAN MEDIEVAL MURAL PAINTINGS



Fig. 5. *The Labors of Adam and Eve*
in the cathedral at Monreale
(Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 6. *The Labors of Adam and Eve*
in the Capella Palatina in Palermo
(Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 7. *The Labors of Adam and Eve*
in the York Psalter
(Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 8. *The Labors of Adam and Eve*
on the façade of the Duomo in Orvieto
(Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 9. *The Labors of Adam and Eve* sculpted by Andrea Pisano for the Campanile in Florence, now in the Museo del Opera del Duomo (Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 10. *The Labors of Adam and Eve* at San Zeno, Verona (Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 11. *The Labors of Adam and Eve* at San Petronio in Bologna (Web Gallery of Art)

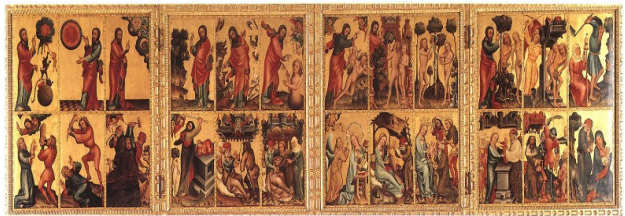


Fig. 12. *The Labors of Adam and Eve*, Bertram's Grabow altarpiece (Web Gallery of Art)

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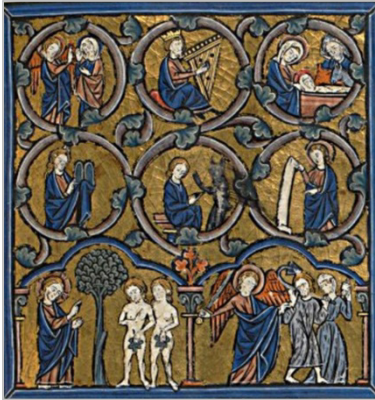


Fig. 13. *The Labors of Adam and Eve* in a French manuscript illumination from the second half of the thirteenth century (Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 14. *The Labors of Adam and Eve* in the Moutier-Grandval Bible ca 840 (Web Gallery of Art)



Fig. 15. *The Labors of Adam and Eve* painted by Januz Kastov in the Church of the Holy Trinity from Hartselle, Slovenia (Web Gallery of Art)

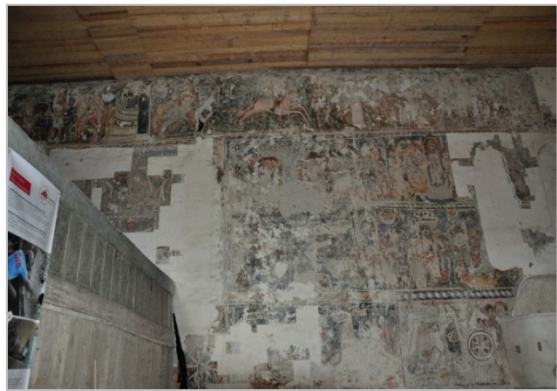


Fig. 16. *The Story of St. Ladislav* in the church at Šmig (Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 17. The legends of Catherine and Margaret in the church at Ighișu Nou
(Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 18. *The Story of St. Ladislav* in the church at Șmig (Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 19. *The Story of St. Ladislav* at Dârjiu (Photo Daniel Gligan)

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Fig. 20. Virgin Martyrs in the church at Ighișu Nou (Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 21. Parallel narratives dedicated to St. Ladislav and St. Catherine in the church at Drăușeni (Photo Maria Crăciun)



Fig. 22. *The Miracle of the Wheel* in the church at Ighișu Nou (Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 23. *St. Catherine's martyrdom* in the church at Drăușeni (Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 24. *St. Catherine's dispute with the philosophers* in the church at Drăușeni (Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 25. *St. Catherine's gesture* in the church at Drăușeni (Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 26. *St. Catherine and a philosopher hold books* in the church at Drăușeni (Photo Daniel Gligan)



Fig. 27. *Philosophers* at Drăușeni (Photo Daniel Gligan)

Terrestrial Laser Scanning for Geometry-based Building Genealogy Research: Landshut, St. Martin's and Two Transylvanian Saxon Churches

Eszter JOBBIK* 

ABSTRACT. *Terrestrial Laser Scanning for Geometry-based Building Genealogy Research: Landshut, St. Martin's and Two Transylvanian Saxon Churches.*

Despite the abundance of literature on the construction and building methods of late Gothic net vaults, the most influential works still date back to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the use of terrestrial laser scanning enables researchers to gather precise geometric data that may challenge our current understanding of these vaults. This article presents a point-cloud-based geometric description of the nave vault in the St. Martin church of Landshut. This goes beyond the generally accepted literature on the topic of late Gothic net vaults. Based on the description, we categorise the vault into the geometric typologies of the net vaults' rib-web connections and their rib systems' global geometry, which we established during our earlier research. The literature has long discussed the guild connections between Landshut and the South-Transylvanian Saxon churches with masonry-ribbed vaults. Therefore, we present a comparative analysis of the St. Martin's vaults and those in the naves of the churches in Mediaş (Medgyes/Mediasch) and Sighişoara (Segesvár/Schäßsburg), two important examples of this group, based on the same geometric typologies we set up. Through our comparative analysis, we aim to address the question of how building genealogies should be approached. This section discusses the uncertain nature of deductions based solely on plan views of rib systems, how remnants from earlier building periods influence the construction method of net vaults, and the concept of centre and periphery in net vault construction.

Keywords: *geometry-based vault analysis; late Gothic net vault; comparative vault analysis; geometric net vault typology; masonry ribbed net vault*

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1. Introduction

1.1. General introduction

The building and construction techniques used for late Gothic net vaults have long been the focus of scientific attention. However, the relevant literature on the topic was written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the original construction methods were not used anymore, and the survey techniques were not precise enough to reveal the exact geometry of these structures, especially their vertical dimensions. However, with terrestrial laser scanning, an immense amount of new geometric data can be gathered about these vaults.



Fig. 1. Nave vault of St. Martin's in Landshut: an example of the rib pattern of 'Parleresque' vaults.
(Photo: Jobbik Eszter)

The significance of the exact, three-dimensional data is that it allows for reconsidering certain generally accepted claims about late Gothic net vaults. Precise geometric descriptions of these structures could lead to the theoretical reconstruction of the underlying construction principles, which could, in turn, lead to a reevaluation of what we know about building genealogies and interconnections.

In the 'traditional' literature on the topic, such connections were most often deduced from the identical rib patterns¹ of the net vaults,² however, the vaults' overall geometry may prove to be a better base for such analysis.

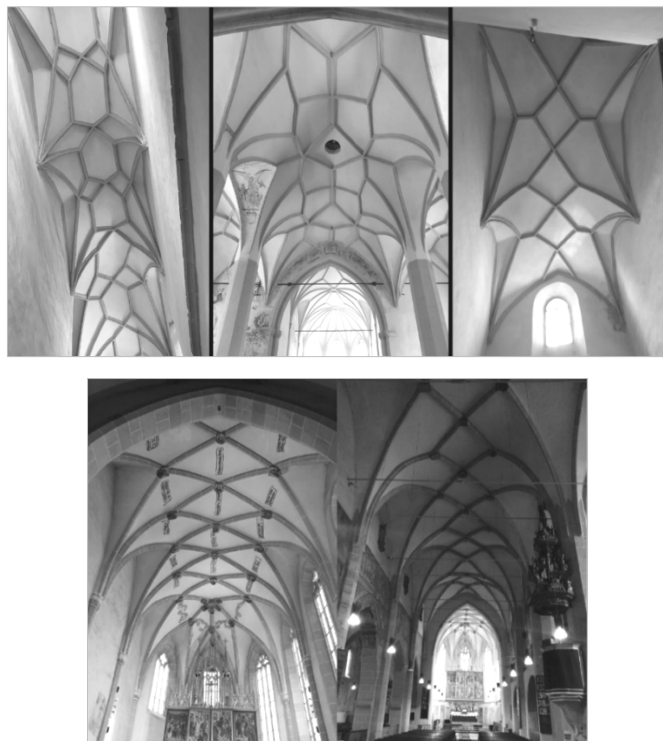


Fig. 2. The three nave vaults in the Church on the Hill in Sighișoara (upper row left to right). Apse and nave vaults in the fortified church of Mediaș (lower row left to right). (Photo: Jobbik Eszter)

The present article focuses on the example of the St. Martin's church in Landshut that has a "rib pattern" characteristic to the "Parleresque" vaults (Fig. 1). In this case study, we present the geometric analysis process of the point cloud

¹ In this context the complete accordance of two rib patterns generally means that all the junction points and ribs in a given bay of one vault have their counterpart in a given bay of the other vault and vice versa.

² Hermann Fabini, *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen*, 1–2 (Monumenta Verlag Hermannstadt and Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, 1999); Guzsik Tamás, *A pálos rend építészete a középkori Magyarországon* (Mikes, 2003); Szőke Balázs, "A Wechselberger-Harperger motívum Délkelet-Erdély késő gótikus építészetében," in *Tanulmányok a székelység középkori és fejedelemség kori történetéből*, eds. Sófalvi András and Visy Zsolt (Pro Énlaka Alapítvány and Haáz Rezső Múzeum, 2012).

to provide a precise geometric description necessary for a comprehensive comparison of two net vault structures. Additionally, it further supports the classification of such a vault into the geometry-based typologies set up in our earlier research. The Landshut vaults, the net vaults in the apse and nave of the fortified church in Mediaș (Medgyes/Mediasch) and the nave vaults in the Church on the Hill in Sighișoara (Segesvár/Schäßsburg) will be presented in a comparative analysis. The vaults in Mediaș show the same “Parleresque” pattern as the vault in Landshut, while the vaults in Sighișoara could derive from the same pattern as well (Fig. 2). Since the supposed connections between these buildings already appear in the secondary literature (see below), we try to prove how the geometry-based comparison relates to previous claims of the “classic” literature. Finally, based on our comparative analyses we claim the importance of examining the net vaults as three-dimensional structures and we discuss the varied factors that may affect the construction techniques of the late Gothic net vaults.

1.2. History of St. Martin’s in Landshut

Construction of the Gothic masonry church started around 1385,³ prompted by spatial limitations of the earlier church, as documented in mid-fourteenth century sources.⁴ The new church was built with a floor level of approximately four meters higher than of its predecessor.⁵ According to a document issued in 1389⁶ and confirmed by a 1392 inscription on the choir’s façade,⁷ “maister Hanns pawmeister zw sand martein” worked on the church. The sources refer most likely to the master builder of the choir: Hanns der Krumnauer.⁸ (Previous studies have suggested that “maister Hanns” refers to Hanns von Burghausen as master of the building works from start to finish.⁹) Nonetheless, the architect of the nave was beyond doubt Hanns von Burghausen, one of the best-known

³ John W. Cook, “A New Chronology of Hanns von Burghausen’s late Gothic Architecture,” *Gesta* 15, no. 1/2 (1976): 97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/766755>.

⁴ Jos Werner, *Geschichte der Pfarrei St. Martin in Landshut mit XXVI. Tafeln Abbildungen* (Reitsch, 1854), 9; Friedrich Haack, *Die gotischen Architektur und Plastik der Stadt Landshut* (Wolf & Sohn, 1894), 23.

⁵ Haas, Walter, “The Presentation of Research in and Under Existing Buildings,” *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 3, no. 1–2 (1999): 77. <https://doi.org/10.1179/135050399793138635>.

⁶ Cook, “A New Chronology,” 97.

⁷ Spörl claims 1392 as the commencement of the building works. Johann Spörl, “Der Bau und die Erbauer des Chors zu Sct. Martin in Landshut,” *Verhandlungen des Historischen Vereins für Niederbayern* 5, (1857): 263–279.

⁸ Cook, “A New Chronology,” 97.

⁹ Haack, *Die gotischen Architektur*, 21–22.

masters of Bavarian and Austrian hall churches. A 1432 plaque commemorates his involvement in this building site.¹⁰ Based on archival and structural evidence, it is known that he only became active in Landshut at the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹¹ His works showed a close connection to the Parler school.¹² By the time Burghausen started his work on this church, the choir had already been vaulted. The proportions and geometry of the nave and tower relate to those of the earlier building parts. The width of the nave and aisles equals the length of the choir, and the width of the main nave equals that of the choir.¹³ The western portal was finished in 1432.¹⁴ In the same year, Burghausen passed away, leaving the vaulting of the nave and the tower still incomplete.¹⁵ Hans Stethaimer, Burghausen's nephew,¹⁶ and the latter's son, Stefan Purghauser, further led the construction works. The addition of a musical gallery to the choir was Stettheimer's contribution.¹⁷ According to dendrochronological evidence, the tower's foundation dates around 1445 – thus, it can't be attributed to Burghausen.¹⁸ The nave was completed around 1475 and the tower around 1500.¹⁹

In 1945, the church was damaged by bullets, requiring structural reinforcement of the walls and inner pillars. Thus, the pillar foundations were fortified, and wires were installed above the vaults for support.

1.3. History of the fortified church in Mediaș

The construction of the present parish church in Mediaș began in the fourteenth century, replacing an earlier one.²⁰ Significant alterations were carried out during the Gothic period, including the demolition of the northern wall and the addition of a northern aisle in the late fourteenth century.²¹ A new

¹⁰ Werner, *Geschichte der Pfarrei*, 13; Cook, "A New Chronology," 97.

¹¹ Cook, "A New Chronology," 97.

¹² Cook, "A New Chronology," 98.

¹³ Cook, "A New Chronology," 99.

¹⁴ Haack, *Die gotischen Architektur*, 24.

¹⁵ Cook, "A New Chronology," 104, endnote 19.

¹⁶ Achim Timmermann, "Frau Venus, the Eucharist, and the Jews of Landshut," in *Judaism and Christian Art*, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and David Nirenberg (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 186.

¹⁷ Norbert Nussbaum, "Hybrid Design Strategies around 1300: Indications of a "Post-Classical" Gothic Architecture?" in *The Year 1300 and the Creation of a New European Architecture*, eds. Alexandra Gajewski and Zoe Opacic (Brepols, 2007), 145, <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.AMA-EB.3.12>.

¹⁸ Timmermann, "Frau Venus", 186.

¹⁹ Haack, *Die gotischen Architektur*, 24–25.

²⁰ Fabini, *Atlas*, 1, 467.

²¹ Fabini, *Atlas*, 1, 468.

apse was built in 1440, the choir and the main nave were rebuilt in the late fifteenth century, when a southern aisle was also added.²² The southern aisle and the main nave together form a hall church; however, the earlier northern aisle and the main nave together form a basilical space. Some researchers explain these changes with plan alterations and not different building phases.²³ First mentioned in 1452 as “fortified”, the church was completed in 1488.²⁴ The net vaults of the nave and apse date to the late fifteenth century. They are adorned with coats of arms featuring painted apostles and saints.²⁵

1.4. History of the Church on the Hill in Sighișoara

The nave’s net vault system in the Church on the Hill in Sighișoara originates from the Gothic rebuilding of the church’s western part between 1429 and 1525.²⁶ These works did not change the asymmetric, irregular wall contours of the Romanesque period.²⁷ The inner space was altered by building only three pairs of columns instead of the four Romanesque ones and creating a hall church instead of a basilica.²⁸ Following an earthquake in 1838, reconstruction was necessary.²⁹ Written sources do not clarify which part of the vault system was affected. Based on our geometric research, the overall geometry of the rib system is highly consequent, despite its seemingly haphazard appearance.³⁰ Therefore, we claim that the earthquake could not have significantly affected the nave’s vault system (additionally, neither source refers to a significant rebuilding phase).

²² Fabini, *Atlas*, 1, 468.

²³ Karl Werner, *Die Mediascher Kirche* (Druk von Theodor Steinhaußen, 1872), 25–26.

²⁴ Fabini, *Atlas*, 1, 468.

²⁵ George Opreșcu, *Die Wehrkirchen in Siebenbürgen* (Sachsenverlag, 1961), 34.

²⁶ Victor Roth, *Geschichte der deutschen Baukunst in Siebenbürgen* (Heitz&Mündel, 1905), 66.

²⁷ Daniela Marcu Istrate, “Voraussetzungen und Vorbedingungen für den Bau der Bergkirche in Schäßburg,” *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 41, (2018): 13; Daniela Marcu Istrate, “Entstehung und Entwicklung der siebenbürgischen Stadtkirchen im 12–15. Jahrhundert,” in *Sachsgeschichte(n). Beiträge zu einer interdisziplinär verstandenen Archäologie des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit. Festschrift für Barbara Scholkmann zu ihrem 80. Geburtstag*, eds. Dorothee Ade et alii (Tübingen Library Publishing, 2021), 457.

²⁸ Istrate, “Voraussetzungen”, 14.

²⁹ Friedrich Müller, “Die Schässburger Bergkirche in Siebenbürgen,” *Mitteilungen der K. K. Central-Commission* 1, (1856): 172.

³⁰ Eszter Jobbik and János Krähling, “Approaching Building Connections Based on Net Vaults’ Geometric Analysis. The Vaults of the Church on the Hill of Sighișoara and the Church of Băgaciu,” *Brukenenthal. Acta Musei* 18, no. 1 (2023): 49–68; Eszter Jobbik and János Krähling, “The Geometric System of the Nave Vault of the Church on the Hill of Sighișoara,” *Studia UBB Historia Artium* 68, (2023): 7–43, <https://doi.org/10.24193/subbhistart.2023.01>.

1.5. Building connections

The late fifteenth–early sixteenth century period of the Mediaş church was likely influenced by the guild of Sibiu (Nagyszeben/Hermannstadt), which was primarily connected to the guild of Vienna.³¹ In the broader context, late Gothic building techniques, including masonry ribbed net vaults, first appeared in Transylvanian Saxon architecture during the late Gothic building phase of the Church on the Hill in Sighișoara, spreading afterwards in the Sighișoara and Mediaş Seats.³² This building connects to the guild of Landshut directly via its master builder, Jacob Kendlinger.³³ Additionally, the pattern of the rib systems indicates a presumed connection with the St. Martin's church,³⁴ which was reconstructed by Hans Stethaimer after a conflagration.

2. Methodology

2.1. Survey method

To carry out the net vault analysis presented in this article, we used the data from a Leica BLK 360 terrestrial laser scanner. The point cloud data was processed in Leica 360 Cyclon Register.

It is important to consider the accuracy of the scanner when addressing the exact geometry of the vaults. Leica BLK 360 has a precision of 8mm at a distance of 20m.³⁵ Given the dimensions of the churches' spaces under investigation, potential inaccuracies of approximately 1–3 cm are anticipated. Considering the expected precision in the buildings' geometry, primarily influenced by the building technologies of the Late Gothic period,³⁶ we claim that these point clouds are well-suited for the intended analyses.³⁷

³¹ Hermann and Alida Fabini, *Kirchenburgen in Siebenbürgen* (Koehler&Amelang, 1985), 83.

³² Szőke, "A Wechselberger-Harperger motívum," 204.

³³ Fabini and Fabini, *Kirchenburgen*, 83; Szőke, "A Wechselberger-Harperger motívum," 204.

³⁴ Szőke, "A Wechselberger-Harperger motívum," 204.

³⁵ „BLK360 Frequently Asked Questions. 8. How accurate is the BLK360?" Leica Geosystem BLK, accessed 30 October 2023, <https://shop.leica-geosystems.com/leica-blk/blk360/blog/blk360-frequently-asked-questions>.

³⁶ Fehér and Halmos identify discrepancies in the geometry of vault rib elements, attributing some to the inherent inaccuracy in the original construction. These inconsistencies are presumed to extend beyond individual elements to impact the global geometry of the vault. Krisztina Fehér and Balázs Halmos, "Problems of Surveying Profile Shapes of Gothic Architectural Fragments," *Pollack Periodica* 13, (2017): 222.

³⁷ Not only our own experiences but also other research support this claim: e.g. Vidal proved by the experiential method, regardless of the deterioration, the curvature of the ribs can be found

It is important to acknowledge that inaccuracies may occur when we carry out measurements on the point cloud. However, similar inexactness may have been present in the original construction of these structures. Therefore, if such variability is considered acceptable during construction, it should also be accepted in the measurements.

2.2. Analysis method

2.2.1. Mapping

Our analysis method is based on the premise that the geometry of the vaults is determined by the original construction and building techniques, such as the geometry of the temporary supporting structure. Therefore, “reverse engineering” may be applied, and the geometry may be traced back. Another indication of the initial premise is that the more irregular the geometry of the vault, the more precisely the original methods can be deduced. This is because regular geometry can be achieved in several ways. However, “regular irregularities” limit the possibilities when trying to determine the original construction steps. It is important to note that examining net vaults using this principle requires an initial assessment of whether any geometric changes that may have occurred in the structures since their construction, thus involving studying the history of the buildings.

The analysis of net vaults includes two main steps: examination of the connection between the rib system and the webbing, and the overall geometry of the rib system. In practice, we analyse the “mapping” of the vaults and the geometry of their plan projections, cross-sections, and longitudinal sections.

By “mapping” we mean sectioning the vault with horizontal planes (Fig. 3). This provides information about the connection between the rib system and the webbing, as well as preliminary observations about the global geometry of the rib system. Regarding the former, three main theoretical outcomes can be expected.

Firstly, according to the literature, some net vaults can be classified as “pseudo net vaults” as some researchers argue that certain net vaults are structurally barrel vaults, with their rib system serving a purely decorative function and constructed after the webbing. Despite the existence of opposing

with a high probability. R. Maira Vidal, “The Evolution of the Knowledge of Geometry in Early Gothic Construction: the Development of the Sexpartite Vault in Europe,” *International Journal of Architectural Heritage* 11, no. 7 (2017): 1005–1025, DOI:10.1080/15583058.2017.1332254.

viewpoints,³⁸ this theory is quite common in the literature concerning masonry ribbed vaults³⁹ Secondly and thirdly, the more widespread theory suggests that most net vaults are “real net vaults”, with their rib system built first and the webbing built on the rib system.⁴⁰ The webs of the latter may be constructed with or without formworks. The former means that full-surface formworks were placed on the ribs, on which the webs were built,⁴¹ resulting quite flat web surfaces⁴² and the occasional sagging of the formwork may cause the introflexion of the webs.⁴³ The latter implies that either only a centring⁴⁴ was used or not even that.⁴⁵ Thus, each course of the web worked as a self-supporting arch after completion.⁴⁶ Voigts⁴⁷ also pointed out, that occasionally a combination of the two main methods was used, with each web using the more suitable method.

³⁸ Elena Pliego, “Georg Gottlob Ungewitters Lehrbuch der gotischen Constructionen,” in *Bautechnik des Historismus. Von den Theorien über gotische Konstruktionen bis zu den Baustellen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Uta Hassler and Christoph Rauhut (Hirmer, 2012), 220; Szőke, “A Wechselberger-Harperger motívum,” 207–208.

³⁹ E.g. Roth, *Geschichte*, 36; Fabini, *Atlas*, 1999; Harsányi István, “A szeged-alsóvárosi ferences templom gótikus szentélye csillagboltozatának helyreállítása,” *Műemlékvédelem* 45, no. 5 (2001): 302.

⁴⁰ As described first by Saunders in 1814 and specified later by Willis in 1842 (as quoted by Wendland [David Wendland, “Traditional Vault Construction without Formwork: Masonry Pattern and Vault Shape in the Historical Technical Literature and in Experimental Studies,” *International Journal of Architectural Heritage: Conservation, Analysis, and Restoration* 1, no. 4 (2007): 342, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15583050701373803>] and mentioned by Ungewitter [Georg Gottlob Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch der gotischen Konstruktionen. Neue bearbeitet von K. Mohrmann* (Chr. Herm. Tauchnitz, 1901) 37].

⁴¹ Clemens Voigts, “Vaults, Centring, and Formwork of the Late Gothic Period in Southern Germany,” in *History of Construction Cultures*, eds. João Mascarenhas-Mateus and Ana Paula Pires (CRC Press, 2021), 78.

⁴² Voigts, “Vaults, Centring, and Formwork”, 78; David Wendland, “Traditional Vault Construction without Formwork: Masonry Pattern and Vault Shape in the Historical Technical Literature and in Experimental Studies,” *International Journal of Architectural Heritage: Conservation, Analysis, and Restoration* 1, no. 4 (2007): 342, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15583050701373803>.

⁴³ Manfred Schuller, “Bautechnik,” in *Der Dom zu Regensburg 7/3*, eds. Achim Hubel and Manfred Schuller (Pustet, 2016), 474.

⁴⁴ Such a device is pictured e.g. in Viollet-le-Duc [Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e au XVI^e siècle*, 1–9, (Morel, 1854–1868), Tome 4, 106, Fig. 58]; Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch*, 117; Fitchen [John Fitchen, *Construction of Gothic Cathedrals. A Study of Medieval Vault Erection* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), 101, Fig. 40].

⁴⁵ E.g. Fitchen (*Construction of Gothic Cathedrals*, 69) – based on Lassaulx (1831) – pictures how a stone-weighted rope device can stabilise the unfinished courses.

⁴⁶ Voigts, “Vaults, Centring, and Formwork,” 79.

⁴⁷ Clemens Voigts, “Spätgotische figurierte Gewölbe in Bayern: Konstruktion und Herstellungsweise.” In *Koldewey-Gesellschaft Vereinigung für Baugeschichte Forschung e.v. Bericht über die 48. Tagung für Ausgrabungswissenschaft und Bauforschung vom 28. Mai bis 1. Juni 2014 in Erfurt*, eds. K. Tragbar and N-M. Bauers (Thelem, 2014), 250; Voigts, “Vaults, Centring, and Formwork,” 80–81.

Regarding the global geometry of the rib system in real net vaults, they may be either “linear net vaults”⁴⁸ or “centralising net vaults”.⁴⁹

These various geometric and structural solutions produce mapping projections of different natures. Pseudo net vaults have straight horizontal section lines of the webbing that do not reflect the position of the ribs. Real net vaults, on the other hand, have webs and rib systems that are interdependent, that is also reflected in the mapping. If a real net vault’s webs were built with formworks, the horizontal sections of the webs would be almost straight, slightly convex or concave. However, if formworks were not used, the horizontal section lines of the webs would be curved.

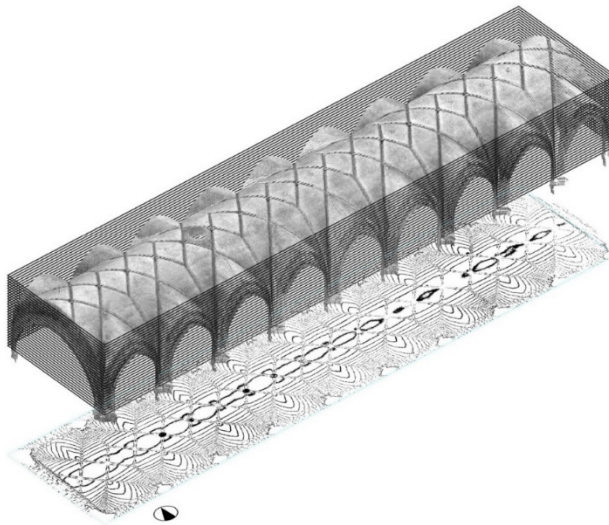


Fig. 3. Theoretical outcomes of the “mapping” of a net vault.

In the case of linear net vaults, the webs’ horizontal sections (or the lines connecting the crossing points, in the case of webs built without formworks) do not change directions when crossing the ribs. In the case of centralising net vaults, they do.

⁴⁸ In this article, we define linear net vaults as net vaults where the vertical disposition of the rib system and their junction points do not reflect the boundaries of the bays. It must be pointed out that our definition does not concern the pattern of the rib system, as we found that with the same pattern and in the same vault both of these characters may appear. (These geometric necessities may be seen as connected to the problem of distinguishing net vaults and stellar-net vaults. However, the difference between these two and their definitions is quite ambiguous in the literature and is not independent of the pattern of the rib system.)

⁴⁹ In this article, we define centralising net vaults as net vaults, where the vertical disposition of the rib system and their junction points reflect the boundaries of the bays.

2.2.2. Analysing the ribs' spatial positions

After analysing the “mapping” of the vaults, the next step is to examine the spatial positioning of the rib junction points. We do this in a Cartesian coordinate system fitted along the longitudinal, cross, and vertical directions of the vault (Fig. 4). While the older literature on the topic generally assumes that the construction of a rib system starts with its plan⁵⁰ our previous research showed that exceptions do exist.⁵¹ Therefore, our analysis aims to find the two coordinates defining the plane, where the projected picture of the vault was first constructed. Based on our earlier results and the geometric necessities of these structures, this examination may result in four different theoretical outcomes.

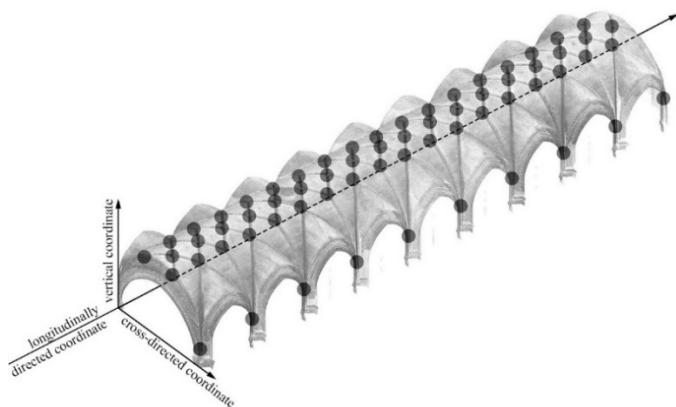


Fig. 4. Theoretical Cartesian coordinate system for analysing the global geometry of a net vault's rib system.

In the first case, the three coordinates of the junction point's spatial positions can be constructed independently of each other. In other words, a construction method can be reconstructed for any one of them without knowing the other coordinates. Consequently, these vaults are of a very regular

⁵⁰ Bartel Ranisch, *Beschreibung aller Kirchengebäude der Stadt Dantzic...* (Raths und Gymnasii Buchdruckern, 1695); Friedrich Hoffstadt, *Gothisches ABC-Buch: Vorlegeblätter zum gothischen A-B-C-Buche...* (Frankfurt a. M., 1840); Warth, *Die Konstruktionen*; Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch*.

⁵¹ Eszter Jobbik and János Krähling, “Late Mediaeval Net Vault Construction Method Rediscovered by Geometric Analysis. A Case Study of the Fortified Church of Băgaciu (Bogeschoorf),” *Brukenenthal. Acta Musei* 17, no. 2 (2022): 179–202; Jobbik and Krähling, “Approaching Building Connections”; Jobbik and Krähling, “The Geometric System”; Eszter Jobbik and János Krähling, “A Methodological Approach and Geometry-Based Typology of Late-Gothic Net Vaults’ Rib Systems. Presented on Case Studies from Historic Hungary,” *Nexus Network Journal* 27, (2024): 95–117, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00004-024-00780-1>.

geometry. As a result, only vague statements can be made about them (as explained in section 2.2.1.). One should note that in such cases, although any plane of the visionary coordinate system could have theoretically been primary during construction, the primacy of the plan is the most plausible and simplest method of execution.

The second theoretical outcome occurs when the geometry of the rib system shows that the plan view must precede the vertical dimensions. In other words, to determine the vertical coordinate of a rib junction point, one must first know its projected position on the plan. Previous literature points out several principles that may characterise the underlying construction principles of such a plan view. These are methods based on quadrate nets (e.g. Schulze's method as quoted by Müller⁵²), rotated inscribable quadrats,⁵³ triangulation, and circle-based constructions.⁵⁴ Adding the vertical dimension to these systems, multiple geometric solutions are described in the literature: projection-based approaches, such as net vaults deduced from cross-vaults⁵⁵, from fan vaults⁵⁶ and barrel vault-like net vaults⁵⁷ (the junction points fit on a cylindrical surface) or "linear approaches" such as the "principle of the longest route."⁵⁸

The third theoretic outcome on the construction sequence of the different planes on the visionary Cartesian coordinate system is when the cross section was first constructed, and the longitudinal dimension was added subsequently. We first described this possibility when examining the nave vaults in Băgaciu (Szászbogács/Bogeschdorf) and Sighișoara.⁵⁹ In these cases, the plan

⁵² Werner Müller, "Die Zeichnungsvorlagen für Friedrich Hoffstadts 'Gotisches A.B.C.-Buch' und der Nachlass des Nürnberger Ratsbaumeisters Wolf Jacob Stromer (1561–1614)," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 28, (1975): 45, <https://doi.org/10.7767/wjk.1975.28.1.39>.

⁵³ Hoffstadt, *Gothisches ABC-Buch*, XIV. A. board, as quoted in Müller, "Die Zeichnungsvorlagen", 52; Jean-Marie Guillouët, *Flamboyant Architecture and Medieval Technicality (c. 1400–c. 1530)*, (Brepols, 2019), 63.

⁵⁴ Arnold Pacey, *Medieval Architectural Drawing: Geometry and Medieval Drawing*, (Tempus, 2007), 73–74.

⁵⁵ Otto Warth, *Die Konstruktionen in Stein*, (J. M. Gebhardt, 1896), 254–55; Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch*, 63.

⁵⁶ Warth, *Die Konstruktionen*, 257; Philibert De l'Orme, *Le quatrieme livre de l'architecture de Philibert de l'Orme...* (Paris: Morel, 1567), 108.

⁵⁷ Warth, *Die Konstruktionen*, 258; Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch*, 64–65.

⁵⁸ Bucher, François, "Medieval Architectural Design Methods, 800–1560," *Gesta* 11, no. 2 (1972): 47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/766593>; the treatise of Lorenz Lechler - as quoted by Leon. R. Shelby and R. Mark, "Late Gothic Structural Design in the 'Instructions' of Lorenz Lechler," *Architectura* 9, no. 2 (1979): 125; Hoffstadt, *Gothisches ABC-Buch*, XIV.A/5; Ungewitter, *Lehrbuch*, 67–68; Carl Anton Meckel, "Figurierte Gewölbe der deutschen Spätgotik," *Architectura: Jahrbuch für Geschichte der Baukunst* 1, (1933): 107–121. <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.19241#0011>.

⁵⁹ Jobbik and Krähling, "Late Mediaeval Net Vault"; Jobbik and Krähling, "Approaching Building Connections"; Jobbik and Krähling, "The Geometric System".

view of the vault appears irregular, as rib junctions of the same type and located on the same side of the vault align along straight lines. While these lines may not appear parallel in the plan view, they do run parallel in the longitudinal sections. Based on the case studies examined, it is likely that the longitudinal positions of the junctions were determined by the lengths of the rib chords. The fourth theoretical outcome refers to the primacy of the longitudinal section over the cross-direction coordinate. Thus far, there are no known real examples or descriptions in the literature of this possible case.

One should note that theoretical figures in the literature usually only show rib systems (and net vaults in general) with outlines. The construction steps described in the literature lead to a single point as the “position” of a given rib junction element. This point is presumed to be on the lower surface of the rib system, as it can be positioned most easily with the help of temporary supporting structures. Hontañón’s drawing⁶⁰ also supports this idea.

3. Results

3.1. Mapping of the nave vault in St. Martin’s in Landshut

The mapping of the nave vault of St. Martin’s Church in Landshut displays very regular features. Most horizontal section lines of the webs are close to straight or slightly convex. Occasional introflexed lines occur. The web section lines do not change directions at the ribs. It is worth noting that the “lunettes” are not vaulted as those of a regular barrel vault, as the higher junction points of the lunettes’ ribs are not at the same height as the transverse arches between the main nave and the aisles (Fig. 5).

Based on the geometric description, we concluded that the nave vault of St. Martin’s in Landshut was probably built as a real net vault, with webs built using formworks. Regarding the overall geometry of the rib system, the vault seems to be a linear net vault, according to the definition given above.

⁶⁰ As presented in Pablo Moreno Dopazo, “Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón and 16th-Century Building Techniques: The Cimborio Vault of Archbishop Fonseca College Chapel in Salamanca (Spain),” *International Journal of Architectural Heritage* 10, no. 8 (2016): 1110–1124, doi.org/10.1080/15583058.2016.1187778.

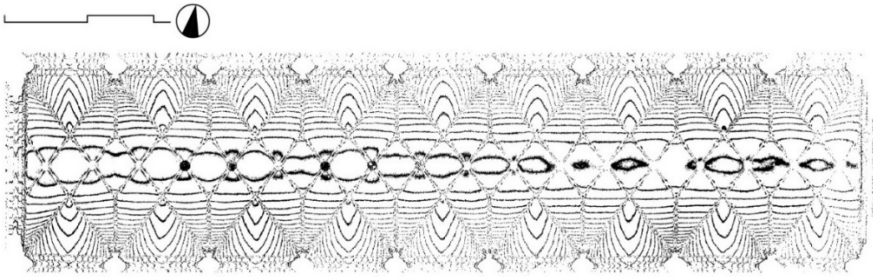


Fig. 5. Mapping of the main nave vault of St. Martin's.

3.2. Global geometry of the rib system of the nave vault in St. Martin's in Landshut

The rib system of the nave vault has very regular features. The preliminary examinations of the point clouds resulted in the following observations: the diagonally directed ribs fit on an even surface; however, the cross-directed ribs don't. On the individual geometry of the ribs, we found that both the curvatures of the diagonally directed ribs and the cross directed ribs are uniform, although the values of the curvatures of the two groups differ.

An important feature of the analysed space is that the length of the bays is equal to half of the width of the main nave. Analysing the coordinates of the rib junction points, we noted the following results: firstly, the diagonally directed ribs on the plan view fit on lines that connect the opposite corners of rectangles, which have a width equal to that of the main nave and a length of 1.5 times the bays' length. Let the length of such a line be "D". Based on these pieces of information, the plan projection of the vault (longitudinal and cross-directed coordinates of the rib junction points) can be reconstructed (Fig. 6).

Secondly, the same D value is the radius of the circle the curvature of which equals to the inner curvature of the diagonal ribs (Fig. 7). Therefore, the vertical coordinates of the junction points can also be constructed in the same underlying geometric system as the coordinates of the plan view. As the diagonal section of this part of the rib system fits on a circle segment, the cross section must be elliptic.

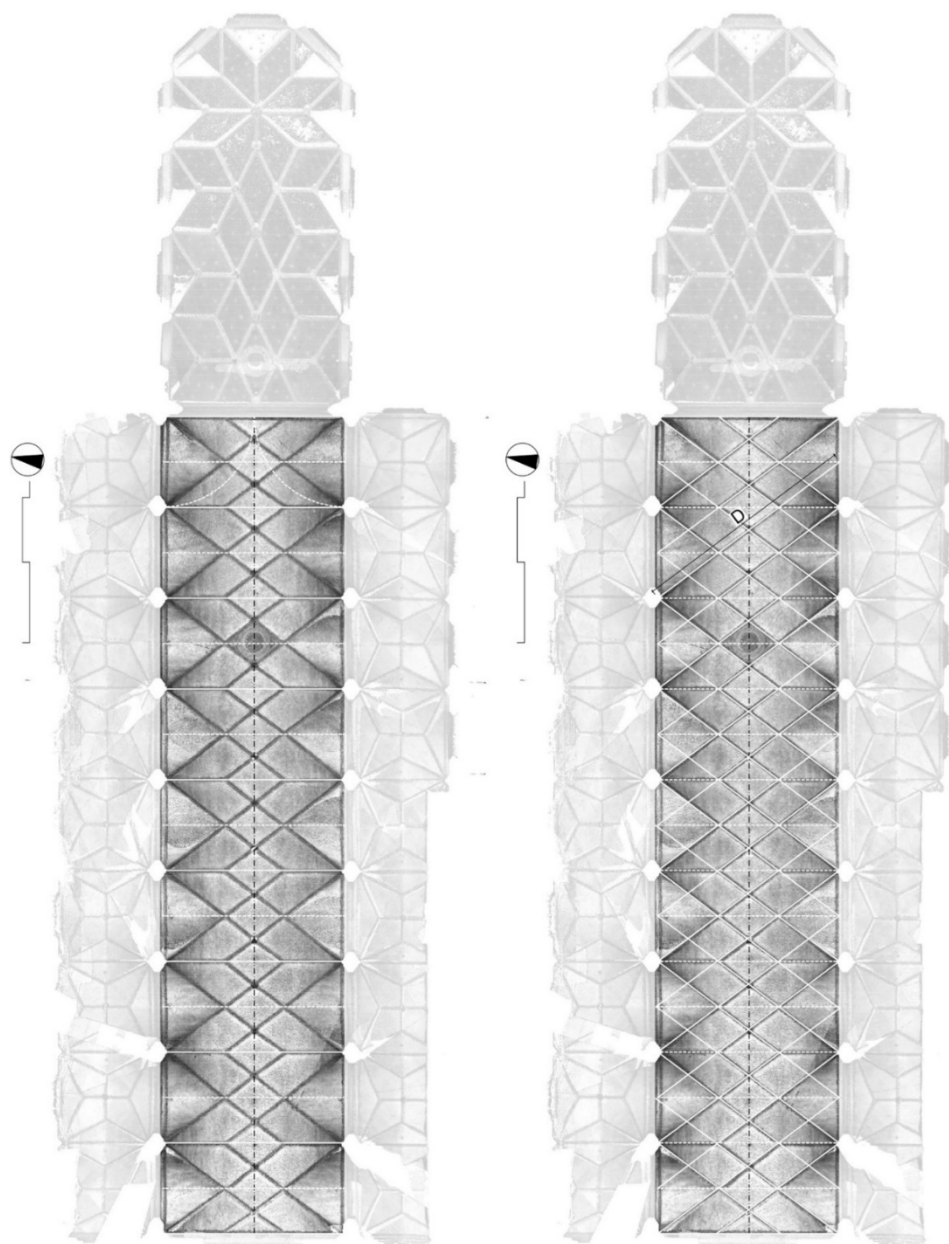


Fig. 6. Theoretical construction principles of the plan layout of the main nave vault of St. Martin's.

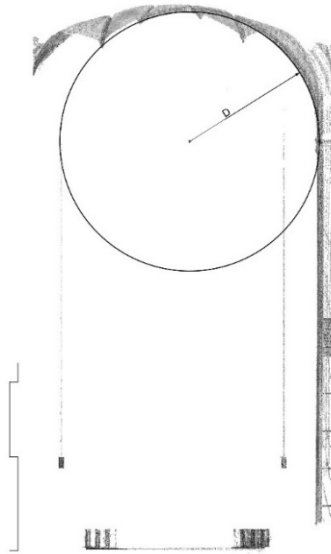


Fig. 7. Diagonal section of the main nave vault of St. Martin's.

Projecting the plan's hypothetic construction net on the cross-section, we found that the geometric interdependence of the building's rations seems to be present in the height of the space (the distance of the lower surface of the junction points composing the crown line and the floor level) and even in the height of the ribs as well (Fig. 8). Based on this construction net, further height values are constructible as well, such as the crown point of the transverse arches between the nave and the aisles.

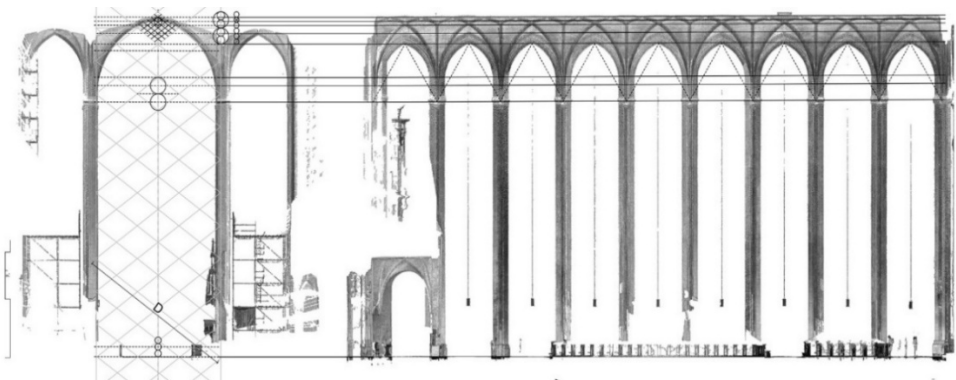


Fig. 8. Theoretical construction principles of the cross- and longitudinal sections of the main nave vault of St. Martin's.

However, due to the highly regular spatial positions of the rib junction points, it is impossible to figure out the exact underlying construction idea followed by the original builders. The presented construction sequence is just one of the possibilities.

Nonetheless, it has been proven that the spatial positions of the junction points were indeed constructed. Additionally, it is quite likely that the longitudinal and cross-directed coordinates of the rib system were constructed prior to the vertical coordinates, as the value D depends on the plan layout.

Similarly, the original building techniques are probably not identifiable either. We would like to add that, although a surface-like temporary supporting structure could be conceivable in this case, such a solution is less beneficial economically and in terms of workload. Thus, we claim that linear supporting structures are more plausible (Fig. 9).

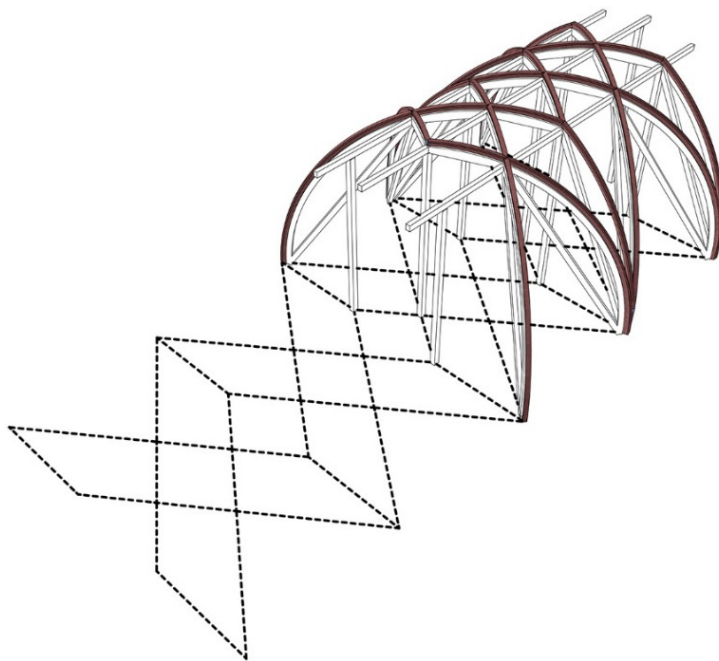


Fig. 9. Theoretical reconstruction of the Landshut vault's building technique. The figure focuses on the logic and nature of the supporting structure and does not aim to reconstruct the exact structural solutions of the wooden elements.

4. Discussion

As already mentioned, when discussing the net vault genealogies in the literature, the “pattern” of the rib system frequently played a central role. The presented vault from the St. Martin’s church in Landshut has the same “pattern” as the nave and apse of the fortified church of Mediaș, according to the above definition.

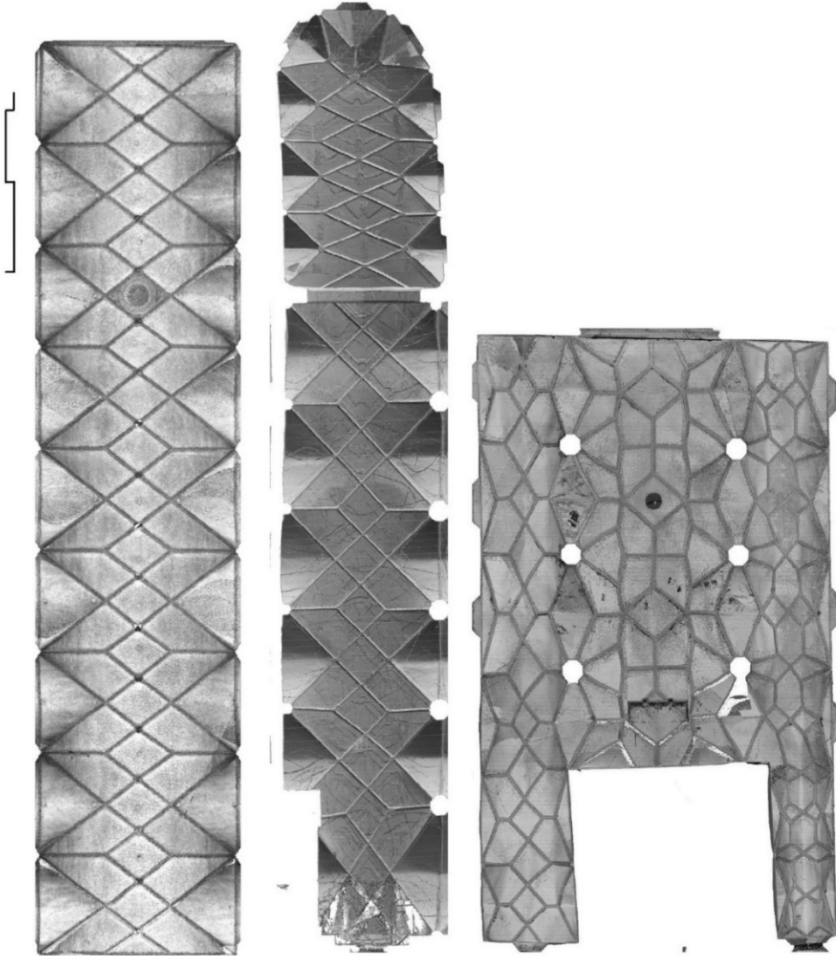


Fig. 10. Rib patterns of the analysed buildings: nave in St. Martin’s in Landshut, apse and nave in the fortified church of Mediaș, nave vaults in the Church on the Hill in Sighișoara (left to right).

Secondary literature suggests that the two vaults could have a genealogical connection as well. The same is true of the nave vaults of the Church on the Hill in Sighișoara. The pattern of its northern aisle vault is very similar to the examined vaults in Landshut and Mediaș. The only difference is the presence of “additional” cross-directed ribs between the lunettes’ ribs and the ribs of the crown line (Fig. 10). Therefore, it could be interesting to compare the geometric descriptions and presumed building methods of these structures.

4.1. Comparative analysis: Landshut–Mediaș

As already mentioned, the Landshut vault displays highly regular features. Despite its slightly distorted outlines, the apse vault of Mediaș is also very orderly.

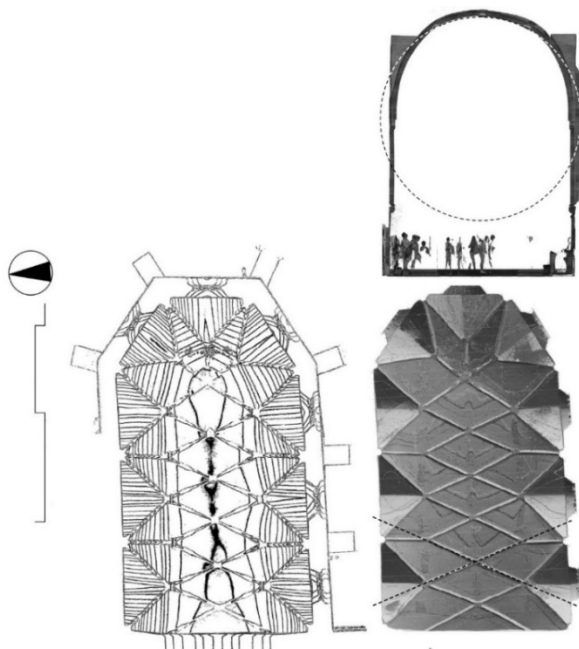


Fig. 11. Plan and cross-section of the apse vault in the fortified church of Mediaș.

Based on the mapping, this structure is also a real net vault with webs built using formworks. The linear net vault features also apply.⁶¹ The spatial arrangement of the rib junction points in this case also appears to be regularly

⁶¹ Eszter Jobbik, “Linear and Centralised Net Vaults: Geometry-based Building Archaeology Presented on the Net Vaults of the Fortified Church of Mediaș,” *Építés-Építészettudomány* 52, no. 1–2 (2024): 32, <https://doi.org/10.1556/096.2024.00118>.

constructible. However, unlike in Landshut, the positions of the ribs in the plan view do not align along straight diagonal lines. While the vertical coordinates of the rib junctions can be constructed using the same fundamental dimensions as those used for the plan, they are not arranged along a cylindrical surface based on a regular circle segment (either on the diagonal or on the cross-section⁶²), as in the case of the St. Martin's (Fig. 11).

On the other hand, the nave vault in Mediaș depicts an even more irregular picture. Nevertheless, it exhibits characteristics of real net vaults with webs constructed using formwork.⁶³ For the present comparison we only discuss its easternmost four bays, as the westernmost bays are quite distorted because of the tower's position.

The cross and longitudinally directed coordinates (plan view) of the vault are very regular, and in this case, the diagonal-dominant feature of the Landshut vault also appears. However, an obvious change in geometry appears in the mapping in the second bay from the east: the easternmost part displays features of centralized net vaults, while the westernmost parts seem closer to linear net vaults (Fig. 12).⁶⁴ Additionally, the vertical coordinates of the nave vault's junction points are not uniform, similarly to the above-discussed vaults, but they show a tendency to adjust to the neighbouring spaces: the vertical coordinates of the apse on the eastern side and those of the southern nave's westernmost bays on the western side. Between the two "endpoints", they follow a sloping line connecting them (Fig. 13).

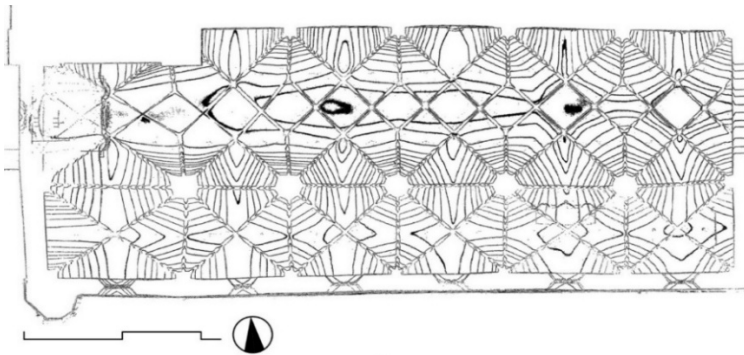


Fig. 12. Mapping of the main nave vault in Mediaș.

⁶² Jobbik, "Linear and Centralised Net Vaults," 33–35.

⁶³ Jobbik, "Linear and Centralised Net Vaults," 35.

⁶⁴ Jobbik, "Linear and Centralised Net Vaults," 36–38.

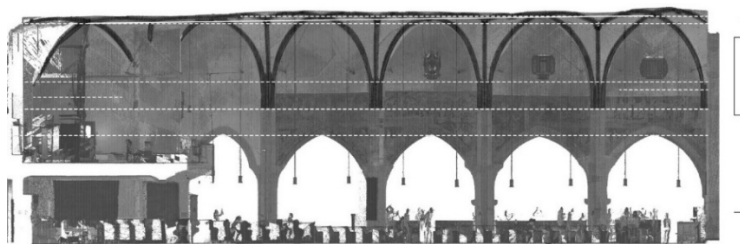


Fig. 13. Longitudinal section of the main nave vault in Mediaș.

Overall, despite the identical rib patterns, the overall geometry of the rib systems in the nave of St. Martin's in Landshut and the apse and nave of the fortified church in Mediaș differ significantly. The very regular and clear system of Landshut is not reproduced in Mediaș.

4.2. Comparative analysis: Landshut–Sighișoara

In the case of Sighișoara, the rib patterns are not identical to the above-discussed vaults. However, existing literature indicates that this church is directly analogous to Landshut due to guild connections. Therefore, the underlying logic of the structures may be worth analysing.

The connection between the ribs and webbing may also be described as a real net vault with webs built using formworks. However, the centralising and linear net vault features are mixed: the lower parts of the vaults are centralising, while the upper parts are linear⁶⁵ (Fig. 14). Additionally, the identified underlying construction technique of the rib system in these vaults displayed sharply different features than in former cases. Based on the global geometry of their rib systems, these vaults can be classified as examples of the third theoretical outcome. Thus, the construction of the cross-directed and vertical coordinates (cross-section view) preceded the construction of the longitudinal coordinates. The latter were likely added using the chord length of the individual ribs—as those are very regular within a given rib type⁶⁶ (Fig. 15). Since the nave vaults in St. Martin's and in Mediaș can be regarded as examples of the second theoretical outcome, and the apse in Mediaș may be classified as the first theoretical outcome, the nave vault in Sighișoara is very distinct in this respect.

⁶⁵ Eszter Jobbik and János Krähling, "Mapping Rib-Webbing Connections in Late Gothic Net Vaults: A Geometry-Based Typology," *Digital Applications in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage* 35, (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.daach.2024.e00388>.

⁶⁶ Jobbik and Krähling, "Late Mediaeval Net Vault," 186–187; Jobbik and Krähling, "The Geometric System," 29.

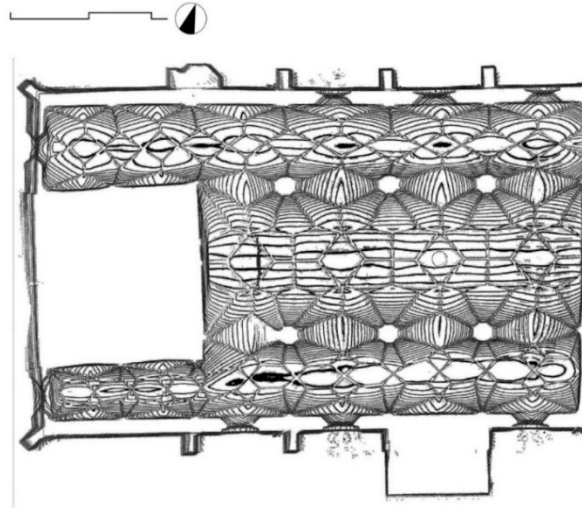


Fig. 14. Mapping of the main nave vaults in Sighișoara.

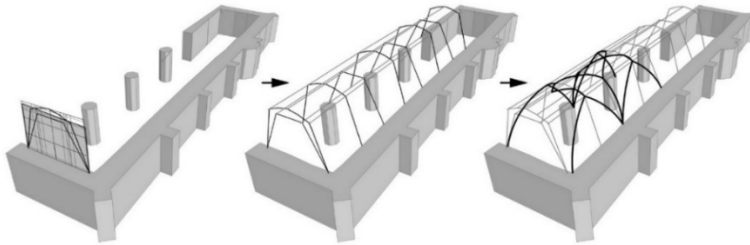


Fig. 15. Theoretical reconstruction of the Sighișoara vaults' building technique. The figure solely shows the logic and nature of the supporting structure and does not aim to reconstruct the exact structural solutions of the wooden structures.

4.3. Evaluation

Based on the findings of the comparative analyses, we argue that the rib pattern, which has traditionally been considered the primary basis for establishing genealogical relationships among net vaults, is insufficient for identifying two structures as identical. Laser scanning allows us to examine underlying construction methods and design principles in unprecedented detail. Therefore, the global geometry of net vault structures should not be overlooked when researching architectural interconnections during the Late Gothic period in Europe. To further emphasize the importance of the vertical coordinate and the global geometry in

this regard, we would like to point out that no measuring device is needed to sketch the rib pattern of a net vault. Any master visiting foreign churches must have been able to do that. In other words, rib patterns are quite easy to copy. Nonetheless, the production of the same global geometry or even of the same underlying construction principles required a deeper knowledge of the sample structure. This kind of knowledge may have been transferred when a guild or a master builder moved to a new building site. However, when a less experienced participant in the original construction—or even an external observer—attempted to replicate it at a new site, the resulting details were unlikely to align precisely.

Another issue pertaining to the discussed question concerns the circumstances of each construction project. In Landshut, for example, the nave was built “from scratch,” and, although multiple masters worked on it, no previous building phases restricted the geometry of the vaults. In the case of Mediaș, the position of the tower clearly affects the ground plan of the nave, and the distortion of the apse’s layout might have been caused by the adaptation to a previous apse. Nonetheless, these slight distortions did not necessarily imply significant changes in the construction methods. The case of Sighișoara is different due to the distorted outline of the Romanesque church, which was influenced by the position of a former rotunda and the load-bearing characteristics of the hill.⁶⁷ The Gothic phase followed the outline of the Romanesque one,⁶⁸ resulting in a highly irregular plan to vault. The peculiar vault construction strategy identified in this case presumably served to mask the irregularities in the church’s space.⁶⁹ This suggests that the given circumstances (former construction phases) may have had a considerable effect on the construction and building strategies, therefore even the global geometry of the vaults is to be considered carefully when discussing building genealogies. The case studies presented in this article naturally prompt reflection on the relationship between center and periphery. The comparative analyses reveal that the construction strategy employed at St. Martin’s represents a far more coherent and self-contained system than those observed in the two Transylvanian churches. Of these, Sighișoara—long regarded as the Transylvanian “place of origin”—exhibits the most irregular structural system. The concept of center and periphery can be interpreted in terms of the expertise of the involved craftsmen and guilds involved, as well as the financial resources available to communities undertaking construction projects. These factors may also intersect with the existence of previous building phases.

⁶⁷ Istrate, “Voraussetzungen”, 9.

⁶⁸ Istrate, “Voraussetzungen”, 13; Istrate, “Entstehung und Entwicklung,” 457.

⁶⁹ Jobbik and Krähling, “The Geometric System,” 29; Jobbik and Krähling, “A Methodological Approach,” 109.

Ultimately, we believe that examining additional case studies from both central and peripheral contexts is necessary to determine the significance of this issue.

5. Conclusion

This article discussed the new possibilities offered by terrestrial laser scanning in building archaeology. Through the presented case studies, the scope of the discussion was extended to include the analysis of building connections.

First, we had to summarize the geometry-based typologies established during our previous research on construction strategies for connecting rib systems and net vault webs, as well as the global geometry of rib systems in such vaults. This was a necessary methodological prerequisite. The scanning provided a geometric description of the main nave vault of St. Martin's Church in Landshut. Furthermore, we identified the categories within the presented typologies to which this structure may belong. We also examined the potential temporary supporting structures that could have been employed during the construction process. The analyzed net vault was found to be highly regular in its construction, a characteristic that extends not only to the vault itself but to the other architectural elements of the main nave as well.

Another step in the present inquiry was conducting comparative analyses of the net vaults in St. Martin's Church and two South Transylvanian churches: the apse and main nave vaults in Mediaș and the three nave vaults in Sighișoara. Of the Transylvanian examples, the construction principles of the apse vault in Mediaș were found to be the most regular. However, this structure still exhibits less self-consistency than the vault in Landshut. The nave vault in Mediaș displays distinct and varied characteristics. The nave vaults in Sighișoara, on the other hand, exemplify a particularly unique construction principle, especially in relation to the overall geometry of the rib systems. This feature distinguishes them from the other case studies discussed here. Overall, the comparative analysis primarily highlighted significant differences in the underlying construction principles and strategies. Based on the results of the comparative analyses, we discussed two key aspects of using global vault geometry as the foundation for discussing vault genealogy and building interconnections, rather than focusing solely on the plan layout or rib pattern. First, we considered how specialized knowledge was required to "replicate" the global geometry, particularly the vertical dimensions of a net vault, in contrast to simply "duplicating" the rib pattern. Second, we considered the site-specific circumstances that might influence decisions during the construction of net vaults. We argue that the presence of previous building periods can significantly limit available options or necessitate

unique solutions. Our three case studies support this conclusion. Additionally, we explored how a building's location in the center or periphery in a given era might impact the outcome of the construction process.

Overall, the accurate data and geometric analysis of late Gothic net vaults offer valuable insights into their structural design and geometry-based typology. When examined across multiple buildings, the geometric relationships among their net vaults can significantly enhance our understanding of architectural genealogies and interconnections in late Gothic Europe.

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Il caso Sonia Kalogeropoulou nell'arte greca della seconda metà del Novecento

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ABSTRACT. *Il caso Sonia Kalogeropoulou nell'arte greca della seconda metà del Novecento [The Case of Sonia Kalogeropoulou in the Greek Art of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century].* Gli avvenimenti artistici greci del secolo scorso vanno collocati nel quadro di un modernismo periferico. Nel secondo dopoguerra la pittura figurativa rimase una pratica piuttosto diffusa in Grecia, nonostante l'affermazione parallela dell'astrattismo e di nuovi linguaggi visivi. Numerosi artisti adottarono diversi modi di figurazione espressionista, nonché un modernismo evocativo dell'ideale della tradizione culturale nazionale. Tra gli anni Settanta e Ottanta emerse una tendenza riconducibile all'espressionismo gestuale, in parallelo al Neoespressionismo internazionale dell'epoca. Tali tendenze si riscontrano nell'arte di Sonia Kalogeropoulou (1945-2003), pittrice e poetessa attiva tra la fine degli anni Settanta e la fine degli anni Ottanta. Il suo fu un cammino artistico piuttosto discontinuo e segnato da esperienze personali dolorose. Proveniente da un ambiente familiare colto e ben inserito nel mondo artistico-culturale dell'epoca, Sonia ha prodotto numerosi dipinti e disegni di stile espressionista. Ricorrendo ad elementi figurativi tradizionali e moderni, l'artista ha trattato soprattutto il tema della condizione umana, mediante la rappresentazioni di figure per lo più malinconiche e sofferenti. Il suo caso, per quanto peculiare, apre interessanti prospettive di ricerca per l'arte e la cultura di un periodo recente e poco studiato come quello della prima fase della Terza Repubblica Ellenica, dal 1974 fino alla svolta internazionale del 1989.

Parole chiave/Keywords: *art and suffering; contemporary Greek painting; Kalogeropoulou, Athena; Kalogeropoulou, Sonia; modern Greek art; Neo-expressionism.*

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Premessa

Il mio interesse per la storia dell'arte greca degli anni Ottanta è stato stimolato dalla recente ricerca dottorale condotta presso l'Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou custodito dall'Associazione degli Amici del Popolo (Εταιρεία των Φίλων του Λαού). Sonia Kalogeropoulou (1945-2003) fu attiva come pittrice autodidatta e poetessa tra il 1977 e il 1990. Il suo itinerario culturale, per quanto intermittente e individuale, si intrecciò con gli avvenimenti artistici e culturali del suo tempo. Sonia proveniva da un ambiente familiare colto di classe media-alta. Suo padre fu stretto collaboratore di un magnate bancario e armatore greco del secondo dopoguerra. Sua madre, Athena Kalogeropoulou (1920-2004), fu una nota archeologa classica e pubblicista, inserita in una cerchia sociale che comprendeva artisti, galleristi, critici e storici dell'arte. Athena depositò l'archivio della figlia, dopo la scomparsa di quest'ultima, presso l'Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, il quale conserva anche l'archivio personale dell'archeologa. Il materiale in questione è stato messo a mia disposizione dalla curatrice della Pinacoteca dell'Associazione, la professoressa dell'Università di Atene Efthimia Mavromichali, che è stata supervisora della tesi di dottorato per la quale ho anche ordinato e catalogato l'archivio dell'artista. La mia tesi di dottorato, intitolata *La rappresentazione della sofferenza nell'arte di Sonia Kalogeropoulou nel contesto del Neoespressionismo*, è stata discussa nel 2023 presso il Dipartimento di Storia ed Archeologia dell'Università di Atene.

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L'arte greca dal dopoguerra fino agli anni Ottanta

La produzione artistica della Grecia contemporanea risulta condizionata sia dalla posizione periferica del Paese rispetto ai centri internazionali che dalle diverse tendenze ideologiche contemporanee. Lo Stato fondato dopo La guerra d'indipendenza greca (1821-1830)¹ adottò un'ideologia estetica classicista. L'Accademia di Monaco di Baviera, centro di studi per gran parte degli artisti del Paese, esercitò un'influenza notevole sull'arte greca ottocentesca, orientata in senso neoclassicista e romantico.² D'altra parte, nella prima metà del Novecento

¹ Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

² Antonis Kotidis, *Ελληνική τέχνη. Ζωγραφική 19ου αιώνα* [Arte greca. Pittura del XIX secolo] (Εκδοτική Αθηνών, 1995); Miltiadis Papanikolaou, *Ιστορία της τέχνης στην Ελλάδα. 18ος και 19ος αιώνες* [Storia dell'arte in Grecia. XVIII e XIX secolo] (Εκδόσεις ΑΔΑΜ, 2002).

i paradigmi più innovatori vennero soprattutto dalla Parigi modernista.³ La cosiddetta “Catastrofe Microasiatica”, cioè la sconfitta militare inflitta dai turchi nella guerra del 1919-1922 con i suoi esiti disastrosi (tra cui il massiccio flusso di profughi), provocò una crisi culturale e suscitò il problema della ridefinizione dell'identità nazionale. Nel campo artistico si affermò un modernismo avente riferimenti e connotazioni nazionali⁴ (o modernismo ellenocentrico⁵), associato con la cosiddetta “generazione degli anni Trenta”.⁶ Tale tendenza, particolarmente importante nel secondo dopoguerra, fu caratterizzata dall'adozione di valori figurativi tradizionali (arcaici, bizantini, popolari ecc.) – in coerenza con la grande narrativa lineare della storia della civiltà greca⁷ – e quindi dall'idea di “grecità”.⁸

All'indomani della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, nel contesto internazionale della Guerra Fredda, la Grecia si schierò con l'Alleanza Atlantica in opposizione agli Stati del blocco socialista. L'influenza americana si stabilizzò con la sconfitta dei comunisti nella Guerra Civile (1946-1949), con il Piano Marshall e con l'adesione alla NATO nel 1952. Tale contesto politico e geopolitico determinò gli avvenimenti

³ Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos, «Εικαστικές τέχνες» [Arti visive], in *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας του 20ού αιώνα. Οι απαρχές 1900-1922* [Storia della Grecia del XX secolo. Gli inizi 1900-1922], a cura di Christos Hadziioissif, vol. A' 2 (Βιβλιόραμα, 2003), 311-351; Marina Lambraki-Plaka e Olga Mentzafou-Polyzou (a cura di), *Παρίσι – Αθήνα 1836-1940* [Parigi – Atene 1836-1940] (Galleria Nazionale – Museo di Alexandros Soutsos, 2006), catalogo della mostra.

⁴ Antonis Kotidis, *Μοντερνισμός και «Παράδοση» στην ελληνική τέχνη του Μεσοπολέμου* [Modernismo e “tradizione” nell'arte greca del periodo tra le due guerre] (University Studio Press, 1993); Efthymia Georgiadou-Koundoura, «Ελληνική τέχνη 1922-1940. Ιστορικό και ιδεολογικό πλαίσιο» [Arte greca 1922-1940. Contesto storico e ideologico], in *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού 1700-2000. Ο Μεσολέμος, 1922-1940. Από την αβασίλευτη δημοκρατία στη Δικτατορία της 4ης Αυγούστου* [Storia del nuovo ellenismo 1700-2000. Il periodo tra le due guerre, 1922-1940. Dalla Repubblica alla dittatura del 4 agosto], a cura di Vassilis Panagiotopoulos, vol. 7 (Ελληνικά Γράμματα, 2003), 301-322; Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos, «Εικαστικές τέχνες» [Arti visive], in *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας του 20ού αιώνα. Ο Μεσολέμος 1922-1940* [Storia della Grecia del XX secolo. Il periodo tra le due guerre 1922-1940], a cura di Christos Hadziioissif, vol. B' 2 (Βιβλιόραμα, 2003), 401-459.

⁵ Antonis Kotidis, «Η μεταπολεμική νεοελληνική τέχνη» [L'arte neogreca del dopoguerra], in *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους. Σύγχρονος Ελληνισμός. Από το 1941 έως το τέλος του αιώνα* [Storia della nazione greca. Ellenismo moderno. Dal 1941 alla fine del secolo], vol. 16 (Εκδοτική Αθηνών, 2000), 571-585.

⁶ Dimitris Tziouvas, *Ο μύθος της Γενιάς του Τριάντα: νεωτερικότητα, ελληνικότητα και πολιτισμική ιδεολογία* [Il mito della generazione degli anni Trenta: modernità, grecità e ideologia culturale] (Polis, 2012).

⁷ Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos, “Art History within National Borders,” in *Art History in Greece. Selected Essays*, ed. Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos (Association of Greek Art Historians, Melissa Publishing House, 2018), 17-72.

⁸ Si veda Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos, “Grécité et modernisme dans l'art grec du xxe siècle,” *Histoire de l'art: Grèce(s)*, n. 86 (2021): 43-58.

culturali ed artistici.⁹ In particolare, il dibattito intorno all'arte astratta, affermatasi tra gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta nell'opera di artisti pionieri come Jannis Spyropoulos (1912-1990), rifletteva lo scontro ideologico.¹⁰ Nel contempo si diffuse il fenomeno della diaspora artistica greca. Tra i casi più noti vanno menzionati quello di "Chryssa" (Chryssa Vardea-Mavromichali, 1933-2013), attiva a New York dal 1955, e di Jannis Kounellis (1936-2017), stabilitosi a Roma dal 1956 e dal 1967 fautore del movimento dell'Arte Povera. Dagli anni Sessanta si assistette allo sviluppo dei nuovi linguaggi artistici (installazioni, ambienti, performances ecc.). Emblematica in questo senso fu la mostra del 1964 *Tre proposte per una nuova scultura greca*, curata dal critico francese Pierre Restany, con la partecipazione degli artisti Vlassis Caniaris (1928-2011), Danil (1924-2008) e Nikos Kessanlis (1930-2004),¹¹ tenutasi al Teatro La Fenice di Venezia in concomitanza con la Biennale dello stesso anno.¹²

⁹ Martha Christofoglou, «Η μεταπολεμική τέχνη. 1949-1974» [L'arte del dopoguerra. 1949-1974], in *Ιστορία του νέου ελληνισμού 1700-2000. Νικητές και ηττημένοι, 1949-1974. Νέοι ελληνικοί προσανατολισμοί: ανασυγκρότηση και ανάπτυξη* [Storia del nuovo ellenismo 1700-2000. Vincitori e vinti, 1949-1974. Nuovi orientamenti greci: ricostruzione e sviluppo], a cura di Vassilis Panagiotopoulos, vol. 9 (Ελληνικά Γράμματα 2003), 275-290; Areti Adamopoulou, *Τέχνη & ψυχροπολεμική διπλωματία. Διεθνείς εικαστικές εκθέσεις στην Αθήνα* [Arte e diplomazia della guerra fredda. Esposizioni internazionali d'arte ad Atene, 1950-1967] (University Studio Press, 2019); Kostas Christopoulos, *Ο εθνοκεντρικός λόγος στη νεοελληνική τέχνη* [Il discorso etnocentrico nell'arte greca moderna] (Ασίνη, 2022).

¹⁰ Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos, «Η πρόσληψη της Αφηρημένης Τέχνης στην Ελλάδα (1945-1960) στο πεδίο της κριτικής της τέχνης» [La ricezione dell'arte astratta in Grecia (1945-1960) nel campo della critica d'arte], in *Προσεγγίσεις της καλλιτεχνικής δημιουργίας από την Αναγέννηση έως τις μέρες μας* [Approcci alla creazione artistica dal Rinascimento ai giorni nostri], a cura di Nikos Daskalothanassis, Atti del 2° Convegno di Storia dell'Arte (Atene, Scuola di Belle Arti, 25-27 novembre 2005), Atene: Εκδόσεις Νεφέλη, 2008, 67-108.

¹¹ Si veda Polina Kosmadaki, «Pierre Restany, Nikos Kessanlis et le mec'art: "un engagement théorique et pratique commun,"» in *Le double voyage: Paris-Athènes (1945-1975)*, édité par Lucile Arnoux-Farnoux (École française d'Athènes, 2021), 227-246.

¹² Le nuove pratiche coinvolsero artisti come: Dimitris Alithinos (1945), Achilleas Apergis (1909-1986), Bia Davou (1932-1996), Diohandi (1945), Niki Kanagini (1933-2008), George Nikolaidis (1924-2001), Leda Papaconstantinou (1945), Theodoros Papadimitriou (1931-2018), Pavlos (Dionyssopoulos) (1930-2019), Costas Tsoclis (1930) ed altri. Si veda Areti Adamopoulou, *Ελληνική μεταπολεμική τέχνη. Εικαστικές παρεμβάσεις στο χώρο* [Arte greca postbellica. Interventi artistici nello spazio] (University Studio Press, 2000). Nel 1981 l'Associazione dei Critici d'Arte Greci organizzò ad Atene la mostra *Αmbiente - Azione*, la quale tentava di sostenere tale tendenza in termini teorici e storici. Irini Gerogianni, «Ιστοριοποιώντας την περφόρμανς: η έκθεση 'Περιβάλλον-Δράση. Τάσεις της ελληνικής τέχνης σήμερα'» [Storicizzando la performance: la mostra 'Ambiente-Azione. Tendenze nell'arte greca oggi'], *Ιστορία της Τέχνης*, n. 8 (Estate 2019): 82-103.

Gli anni Sessanta e Settanta sono stati caratterizzati dallo sviluppo economico ed urbano e dall'emergere di nuovi conflitti politici e sociali.¹³ Per un breve periodo (1963-1965) il potere parlamentare passò dalla destra di Konstantinos Karamanlis all'Unione del Centro di Georgios Papandreou. Il clima di liberalizzazione riaccese il dibattito artistico-culturale e fece emergere le culture giovanili e popolari.¹⁴ Una crisi nelle relazioni tra il governo di Papandreou ed il giovane re Costantino II, scoppiata nel 1965, inaugurò il biennio di instabilità parlamentare (1965-1967) concluso dal golpe militare del 21 aprile del 1967. Quest'ultimo instaurò un regime dittatoriale, presieduto dal colonnello Georgios Papadopoulos (e dopo il 25 novembre 1973 da Dimitrios Ioannidis). La dittatura, durata sette anni, abolì le libertà politiche e impose un'ideologia anticomunista e nazionalista fondata sull'ideale della civiltà "greco-cristiana". Nei primi anni Settanta, mentre il regime tentava un esperimento di "liberalizzazione" politica controllata, emerse il movimento studentesco di opposizione culminato nella rivolta del Politecnico di Atene (novembre 1973). Vari artisti, attraverso diversi media e diversi linguaggi, reagirono alle condizioni sociopolitiche e culturali tentando di ridefinire il ruolo dell'arte.¹⁵ Il ripristino della democrazia parlamentare nel 1974 inaugurò un periodo di stabilità politica e di ammodernamento socio-culturale, mentre nel 1981 il Paese aderì alla Comunità Europea.

In parallelo con l'affermarsi di nuovi linguaggi, la gran parte degli artisti proseguì le pratiche tradizionali della pittura e della scultura. La pittura figurativa della seconda metà del Novecento prese direzioni diverse, benché spesso intrecciate. Un tratto abbastanza comune è stato il riferimento a fonti

¹³ A. Rigos, S. I. Seferiadis, E. Hatzivasileiou (a cura di), *Η «σύντομη» δεκαετία του '60: θεσμικό πλαίσιο, κομματικές στρατηγικές, κοινωνικές συγκρούσεις, πολιτισμικές διεργασίες* [Il decennio "breve" degli anni '60: quadro istituzionale, strategie di partito, conflitti sociali, processi culturali] (Καστανιώτης, 2008).

¹⁴ Myrsini Zorba, "Conceptualizing Greek Cultural Policy: The Non-Democratization of Public Culture," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 15, n. 3 (2009): 245-59.

¹⁵ Bia Papadopoulou (a cura di), *Τα χρόνια της αμφισβήτησης. Η τέχνη του '70 στην Ελλάδα* [Gli anni della contestazione. L'arte degli anni '70 in Grecia] (EMST, 2005), catalogo della mostra; Lia Gioka e Panagiotis Bikas, *Οι τέχνες στη δικτατορία. Εικαστική και αρχιτεκτονική παραγωγή στην Ελλάδα κατά την επταετία 1967-1974* [Le arti durante la dittatura. Produzione artistica visiva e architettonica in Grecia durante il settennio 1967-1974], Atti del convegno scientifico (Salonicco, Museo Macedone di Arte Contemporanea, 28 aprile 2017), Atene: Associazione di Storici d'Arte Greci, 2021; Chrysovalantis Steiakakis, "The mobility of Greek artists during the Dictatorship (1967-1974). Their contribution to the formation of the modern Greek cultural identity against the dominant nationalistic aesthetic ideology", in *Human mobility and cultural identities through history*, ed. Umberto Mondini, Alina Dimitrova, Marios Kamenou, Papers from the 4th International Interdisciplinary Conference of the International Centre for Studies of Arts and Humanities (Luiss University, 19-20 May 2022), (Edizioni Progetto Cultura, 2023), 381-400.

artistiche del passato – peraltro una pratica ampiamente diffusa nel contesto postmodernista degli anni Settanta e Ottanta. A ciò contribuirono i paradigmi della Scuola Superiore di Belle Arti di Atene (ASKT), che fino al 1984 costituiva l'unica istituzione accademica del settore delle arti visive in Grecia. Ivi insegnarono, tra gli altri, i pittori Nikos Nikolaou (1909-1986) e Yannis Moralis (1916-2009),¹⁶ rappresentanti del modernismo ellenocentrico. Inoltre, un pittore esemplare della “generazione degli anni Trenta” è stato Yannis Tsarouchis (1910-1989).¹⁷ Tra i pittori più giovani si è distinta una tendenza alla figurazione evocativa-poetica,¹⁸ un realismo critico, di contenuto politico-sociale,¹⁹ un neofigurativismo spesso caratterizzato dall'applicazione meticolosa della materia pittorica²⁰ ed un espressionismo deformante o gestuale,²¹ che negli anni Ottanta si è sviluppato in parallelo al Neoespressionismo internazionale.²²

Sonia

In questo quadro generale va collocato l'itinerario di Sonia Kalogeropoulou (1945-2003). Nonostante ella sia stata un'autodidatta, l'ambiente sociale materno l'ha posta in stretto contatto con archeologi ed artisti riconosciuti. Tra

¹⁶ Moralis insegnò tra il 1947 e il 1983 e Nikolaou tra il 1964 e il 1974.

¹⁷ Si veda Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos, “Observations with modest audacity on the life and work of Yannis Tsarouchis,” in *Yannis Tsarouchis 1910-1989*, ed. Niki Grypari, Marina Geroulanou, Tassos Sakellaropoulos (Benaki Museum, 2010), exhibition catalogue, 17-60.

¹⁸ Questa categoria potrebbe includere i seguenti artisti: Rallis Kopsidis (1929-2010), Christos Caras (1930-2023), Alekos Fassianos (1935-2022), Phaedon Patrikakis (1934-2017), Vassilis Sperantzas (1938), Sarantis Karavousis (1938-2011), Nikos Houliaras (1940-2015), Michalis Makroulakis (1940), Achilleas Droungas (1940), Alexander Issaris (1941-2022), Pavlos Samios (1948-2021) ed altri.

¹⁹ Alla corrente del realismo critico appartiene il gruppo dei “Nuovi Realisti Greci”, attivo come collettività artistica fra il 1970 e il 1973 e comprendente cinque pittori: Yiannis Valavanidis (1939-2017), Chronis Botsoglou (1941-2022), Kyriakos Katzourakis (1944-2021), Yiannis Psychopedis (1945) e Cleopatra Dinga (1946). Peggy Kounenaki, *Νέοι Έλληνες ρεαλιστές 1971-1973. Η εικαστική και κοινωνική παρέμβαση μιας ομάδας* [Nuovi realisti greci 1971-1973. L'intervento artistico e sociale di un gruppo] (Εξάντας, 1989).

²⁰ Questa categoria potrebbe includere i seguenti artisti: Dikos (Constantin) Byzantios (1924-2007), Sotiris Sorongas (1936), Irene Illiopolou (1950), Stefanos Daskalakis (1952), Michalis Madenis (1960), Christos Bokoros (1956), Edouardos Sacayan (1957), Giorgos Rorris (1963) ed altri.

²¹ Questa categoria potrebbe includere i seguenti artisti: Makis Theofylaktopoulos (1939-2023), Triantafyllos Patraskidis (1946), Dimitrios Ratsikas (1946), Vana Xenou (1949), Yannis Kottis (1949), Manolis Polymeris (1951), Yannis Adamakos (1952), Pelagia Kyriazi (1954) ed altri.

²² Va sottolineato che le categorie sopracitate non corrispondono a gruppi ben precisi di artisti, ma a tendenze fluide e spesso sovrapposte, le quali determinarono in linea di massima la produzione pittorica greca degli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso.

questi ultimi vanno ricordati Tsarouchis, che nel 1976 le fece un ritratto (Fig. 1), Nikolaou (Fig. 2), che le impartì qualche insegnamento artistico,²³ e la pittrice espressionista Lidia Sarri. Sonia dipinge infatti figure umane archetipiche e anticheggianti, rese però con deformazioni drammatiche e con tratto espressionista, singole (Fig. 3) o in coppie (Fig. 4), riecheggianti il modernismo ellenocentrico e anche lo stile lineare di artisti come Giorgos Gounaropoulos (1890-1977).

Il suo vero nome di battesimo era "Sofia", che significa "saggezza"; un nome da lei percepito come troppo ingombrante e perciò, come racconta ella stessa, cambiato in "Sonia".²⁴ La famiglia risiedeva nel quartiere ateniese di Kolonaki, la zona urbana dell'alta società. Georgios Kalogeropoulos, suo padre, lavorava alla Banca Commerciale di Grecia²⁵ ed era un collaboratore stretto del banchiere Stratis Andreadis, uno dei più potenti imprenditori greci del periodo postbellico (fino alla caduta del regime dittatoriale). Il profilo ideologico della famiglia era dunque piuttosto complesso. La madre Athena, che in giovinezza aveva partecipato alla Resistenza,²⁶ fu poi una esponente della cultura postbellica²⁷ e collaborava con il giornale *Ελευθερία* (Libertà), sostenitore del partito di centrosinistra "Unione del Centro" di Georgios Papandreou e chiuso nel 1967, e – dopo il 1974 – con *Η Καθημερινή* (Il Quotidiano), che allora rappresentava la corrente liberale del centrodestra.²⁸

²³ Dal 1964 la casa di Nikolaou sull'isola di Egina divenne un punto di ritrovo di artisti ed intellettuali. Ioannis Giannoutsos, *Η παρέα της Αίγινας: Ν. Νικολάου, Ι. Μόραλης, Χρ. Καπράλος* [La compagnia di Egina: N. Nikolaou, I. Moralis, Chr. Kapralos] (Università Tecnica Nazionale di Atene, 2010). È probabile che durante i suoi soggiorni estivi sull'isola, la famiglia Kalogeropoulou frequentasse la casa del pittore. Peraltro Athena Kalogeropoulou pubblicò numerosi articoli dedicati al pittore (dando anche descrizioni di prima mano della famosa casa di Egina) e curò il suo libro di teoria artistica *Η περιπέτεια της γραμμής στην τέχνη* [L'avventura della linea nell'arte] (Atene 1986). Da parte sua Nikolaou dimostrava un forte interesse nei confronti dell'arte della Grecia antica.

²⁴ Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Note personali*, 5-6 gennaio 1984, *Documenti personali*, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Atene.

²⁵ Nel periodo 1971-1982 Athena Kalogeropoulou diresse le edizioni della Banca, dedicate all'arte e la cultura della Grecia.

²⁶ "«Έφυγε» η Αθηνά Καλογεροπούλου" ["È scomparsa" Athena Kalogeropoulou], *Ριζοσπάστης*, 25 agosto 2004.

²⁷ Vasilios H. Petrakos, "Αθηνά Γ. Καλογεροπούλου," *Ο Μέντωρ*, n. 72 (2004): 102–104; Vasilios H. Petrakos, "Αθηνά Καλογεροπούλου," *Ο Μέντωρ*, n. 110 (2014): 414–424.

²⁸ Iason Zarikos, "Η εφημερίδα Καθημερινή στην Μεταπολίτευση, 1974-1993. Ιστορική και συγκριτική μελέτη του ελληνικού φιλελευθερισμού" [Il giornale «Kathimerini» nella Metapolitefsi, 1974-1993. Studio storico e comparativo del liberalismo greco] (Tesi di dottorato, Università di Scienze Sociali e Politiche "Panteion", Scuola di Studi Internazionali, Comunicazione e Cultura, Dipartimento di Studi Internazionali, Europei e Regionali, Atene 2020).

Nel periodo 1965-1967 Sonia, che aveva frequentato la Scuola Tedesca di Atene e conosceva perfettamente la lingua inglese, firmò parecchi articoli su temi di attualità artistica e culturale internazionale, pubblicati sulle pagine di *Libertà*.²⁹ Tali articoli attestano l'interesse della stampa dell'epoca per gli avvenimenti culturali internazionali. L'artista, che precedentemente aveva fatto disegni autobiografici e d'arte – incluse alcune copie di opere di Auguste Rodin e di Vincent van Gogh – intorno agli anni Sessanta ha dipinto una serie di quadri, principalmente ritratti, di stile marcatamente espressionista (Fig. 5).

Dal 1977 fino al 1990 l'artista si è dedicata all'attività artistica e letteraria in maniera più sistematica esponendo dipinti e disegni in una serie di mostre personali e collettive, principalmente ad Atene. In parallelo ha scritto poesie e brevi prose, e pubblicato tre raccolte letterarie (1978, 1981 e 1987). La sua arte e la sua scrittura sono caratterizzate dall'espressione di stati d'animo dolenti. La sua produzione artistica, come anche quella letteraria, era di carattere immediato e a stesura rapida e corsiva. Nel biennio 1977-1978 ha iniziato a disegnare con materiali comuni a fini diaristici o per illustrare le proprie poesie (Fig. 6). Nel 1981, all'esordio come pittrice, espose disegni di figure dal contorno aperto e frammentato (Fig. 7) e alla sua prima mostra personale, nel 1983, presentò dipinti di figure deformate rese con un gesto espressionista (Fig. 3-4, 8-9). In seguito sviluppò uno stile caratterizzato da figure fluttuanti nello spazio (Fig. 10-11), che furono esposte negli anni 1986-1987. Negli anni 1988-1989 produsse serie di composizioni di contenuto enigmatico, prevalentemente in bianco e nero e a china (Fig. 12), che furono esposte un anno dopo. Dopo di che sparì dalla scena artistica e culturale.

A parte il significato culturale della sua tematica, la rappresentazione della sofferenza aveva per l'artista un retroterra esistenziale, in quanto rifletteva le proprie esperienze psichiatriche, alle quali potrebbe anche essere ricondotta la discontinuità del suo percorso artistico.

Come quello della madre, anche il profilo ideologico della pittrice è abbastanza complesso. Sonia fu circondata e sostenuta da persone di diversa appartenenza ideologico-politica. Per quanto riguarda la sua carriera espositiva risultò fondamentale il Centro Artistico Culturale "Ora", uno spazio culturale pluralistico di varia attività, diretto dal pittore-gallerista Assadour Baharian

²⁹ Numerosi articoli di Sonia presentarono mostre di arte moderna o simili eventi all'estero. Tra gli artisti ivi citati ci sono: Balthus, Naum Gabo, Oskar Kokoschka, Pablo Picasso, Marino Marini, Piet Mondrian, Georges Rouault, Vincent van Gogh e tanti altri. Si veda Alexandros Diamantis, "Η αναπαράσταση της οδύνης στο έργο της Σόνιας Καλογεροπούλου στο πλαίσιο του νεοεξπρεσιονισμού" [La rappresentazione della sofferenza nell'arte di Sonia Kalogeropoulou nel contesto del Neoespressionismo] (Tesi di dottorato, Università Nazionale e Capodistriana di Atene, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Dipartimento di Storia e Archeologia, Atene 2023), 52-61.

(1924-1990), un artista dalla lunga militanza di sinistra. Ella stessa, nonostante qualche rara manifestazione di simpatia per le tendenze intellettuali radicali (ma sempre avverse al modello sovietico), era sarcastica nei confronti della cultura populista progressista degli anni Ottanta e, in generale, aveva un atteggiamento di pessimismo distaccato e sfiduciato nei confronti delle grandi narrazioni ideologiche.³⁰ In complesso, la sua vicenda testimonia il clima di graduale indebolimento delle opposizioni ideologiche che caratterizza la sua epoca.

Le sue figure, principalmente femminili,³¹ sono rese in stati d'animo malinconici o angosciati. Nella sua opera ricorrono figure con la testa inclinata (Fig. 13) o sostenuta da una mano, con lo sguardo introspettivo o triste; oppure figure in posture contratte, che abbracciano se stesse in preda a tensioni drammatiche (Fig. 14). Dalla sua iconografia traspare la riappropriazione di modelli tradizionali: la figura malinconica, il nudo femminile, l'arte classica, rivisitati in chiave tragica. In alcuni scritti Sonia si riferisce esplicitamente alle stele funerarie antiche, oggetto di ricerca di sua madre³² – nonché tema d'ispirazione comune con artisti greci come Nikolaou, Moralis ed altri. Le sue composizioni con due figure (Fig. 4, 13, 15) richiamano il "dialogo" silenzioso nelle scene dei rilievi funebri (Fig. 16). Le sue figure solitarie sedute per terra riecheggiano la concezione esistenzialista dell'essere umano "gettato" nel mondo.³³ Peraltro, l'iconografia di figure umane dolenti si riscontra anche nell'opera di altri pittori greci contemporanei, come Chronis Botsoglou (1941-2022), Triantafyllos Patraskidis (1946) o Eleni Moraiti (1953). Commentando la prosa di Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965), da lei stessa tradotta in greco nel 1979 per la rivista *Εποπτεία* (Intuizione),³⁴ Sonia osserva che nel testo lo scrittore irlandese esprime l'idea di un mondo morente attraverso l'immagine del corpo umano piegato in posizione embrionale.³⁵ Anche nella pittura di Sonia si riscontra con frequenza un movimento introverso che riecheggia lo stato embrionale. Ad esempio un dipinto del 1983 rappresenta un bambino avvolto nell'abbraccio protettivo di una figura materna imponente e minacciosa. In un

³⁰ Si veda *ibid.*, 64-69.

³¹ Sulle questioni di genere e femminismo nell'arte greca del periodo in esame si veda Angela Dimitrakaki, "Gender, Geographies, Representation. Women, Painting and the Body in Britain and Greece, 1970-1990", (PhD diss., University of Reading, Department of History of Art, 2000).

³² Si veda ad. es. Athena G. Kalogeropoulou, «Αττικό Επιτύμβιο από τα Μεσόγεια» [Stele funeraria attica di Mesogeia], in *Πρακτικά Γ' Επιστημονικής Συνάντησης Ν.Α. Αττικής* [Atti del 3° Convegno Scientifico dell'Attica sudorientale], (Kalyvia Attica, novembre 1987), 1988, 107-118.

³³ Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Thrownness (Geworfenheit)," in *The Heidegger Dictionary* (A & C Black, 2013), 212-215.

³⁴ Sonia Kalogeropoulou-Kontzilelou, "S. Beckett, *Imagination Dead Imagine*", traduzione e postfazione, *Εποπτεία*, n. 33 (aprile 1979): 357-360.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 359.

altro caso, una figura fragile piega il braccio intorno alla propria testa in un gesto autoprotettivo e disperato.

Tra l'arte e la letteratura di Sonia si riscontrano corrispondenze significative. In complesso, la sua opera letteraria esprime sentimenti di profonda malinconia³⁶ di fronte alla vulnerabilità dell'essere umano e alla sua alienazione sociale, culturale e ambientale – elementi che la avvicinano alla cosiddetta “generazione poetica degli anni settanta”.³⁷ In alcuni suoi scritti ella rappresenta l'essere umano come una creatura angelica fragile e sperduta nel mondo.³⁸ Entità alate in condizioni simili appaiono anche nella sua arte (Fig. 17). Dai suoi versi emerge il senso della perdita irrimediabile di un'esistenza autentica. Quest'ultima consisterebbe nella vitalità dei sentimenti più profondi, del rapporto ingenuo con la natura e dell'eros puro e purificante. In effetti, una tematica prediletta della pittura di Sonia è stata proprio quella della coppia amorosa archetipica (Fig. 18-20). Nelle composizioni delle due figure nude, l'idea della complementarità degli amanti venne espressa anche in termini formali. Tale soggetto si ritrova anche nell'arte di Nikolaou. Ma mentre, ad esempio, Athena Kalogeropoulou complimenta Nikolaou per il suo approccio puramente sentimentale al rapporto erotico,³⁹ Sonia, nella sua opera visiva e letteraria, esalta proprio la sessualità come forza drammatica e vitale.

Infine, la serie di scene enigmatiche degli anni 1988-1989 configura un mondo inquietante. Si tratta di composizioni di figure frammentarie, spesso con l'aggiunta di brevi iscrizioni. Nelle scene del genere si possono individuare certi tipi ricorrenti di figure, come la donna sofferente, certe entità angeliche o volanti e una presenza cupa e misteriosa, con il volto coperto da una macchia nera. Il segno dell'artista suggerisce la sensazione generale – confermata anche da alcune scritte – di un mondo in fase di decomposizione e di dissoluzione. In un gruppo

³⁶ L'archivio di Sonia conferma che ella amava la poesia e soprattutto l'opera di T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), da lei letta sin da giovane nell'originale inglese, a cui ricorreva spesso citandone i versi a memoria (cioè con piccole alterazioni) nei propri disegni. Ella si immedesimava nell'atteggiamento malinconico del poeta di fronte alla crisi dei valori umanistici nel mondo moderno. Peraltro, tale idea appare ogni tanto anche nei testi di Athena Kalogeropoulou, nella forma di un lamento generale per la modernità e per la decadenza dei valori classici. È indicativo che in una sua intervista alla madre di Sonia, il pittore espressionista austriaco Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980), abbia difeso accanitamente la cultura classica, contapponendola alla decadenza della moderna società di massa. Athena G. Kalogeropoulou, “Ένας μεγάλος ζωγράφος μιλάει για την Ελλάδα... Ο διάσημος Όσκαρ Κοκόσκα ετοιμάζει ένα λεύκωμα για την Ελλάδα” [Un grande pittore parla della Grecia... Il famoso Oskar Kokoschka sta preparando un album sulla Grecia], *Ελευθερία*, 9 novembre 1961, 3.

³⁷ Si veda il n. 1875 (dicembre 2017) della rivista *Νεά Εστία*, dedicato alla “Generazione poetica del '70” (in greco).

³⁸ Si veda Diamantis, “La rappresentazione”, 246-247.

³⁹ A.K., “Ανθρώπινες μορφές του Νίκου Νικολάου” [Figure umane di Nikos Nikolaou], *Η Καθημερινή*, 28 dicembre 1983.

di disegni le figure femminili sembrano tormentate da un segno lineare (Fig. 21), rimandando così ad una situazione di intrappolamento dei corpi sofferenti, vincolati da strutture impersonali.

La gran parte della critica ha qualificato la pittura di Sonia come espressionista, inquadrandola così in una tendenza abbastanza diffusa di quegli anni.⁴⁰ Dal 1983 si è fatto cenno al suo segno gestuale per paragonarla⁴¹ ad esponenti dell'espressionismo astratto, come Willem de Kooning.⁴² Intorno alla metà degli anni Ottanta, alcuni critici l'hanno più o meno esplicitamente collegata al Neoespressionismo, movimento che si era affermato sulla scena internazionale e soprattutto in Italia, in Germania e negli Stati Uniti.⁴³ Nella bibliografia e pubblicistica del tempo si fa cenno all'estesa diffusione dello stile – o addirittura alla “moda” – neoespressionista in Grecia,⁴⁴ in linea con quello che pareva come il paradigma internazionale.⁴⁵ Introducendo la personale di Sonia nel 1986, il direttore della Galleria Nazionale di Atene, l'archeologo e storico d'arte Dimitris Papastamos (1923-2008),⁴⁶ inquadrò l'artista nel movimento dei “Nuovi selvaggi”

⁴⁰ La critica d'arte Eleni Vakalo attestò che dopo il 1974 gran parte degli artisti greci più giovani dell'epoca adottò il linguaggio espressionista. Eleni Vakalo, *Η φυσιογνωμία της μεταπολεμικής τέχνης στην Ελλάδα. Εξπρεσιονισμός-Υπερρεαλισμός* [La fisionomia dell'arte del dopoguerra in Grecia. Vol. 2: Espressionismo-Surrealismo] (Κέδρος, 1982), 61, 63-65.

⁴¹ In una sua poesia inedita dello stesso periodo (1983), Sonia crea un ritratto professionale ironico dell' “amico storico d'arte”, il quale, nel suo solito approccio superficiale ed arbitrario, paragona l'artista che sta esaminando con l'uno o con l'altro maestro famoso della storia dell'arte. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, “Ένα “dedicated” (Δευτέρα 18.7.83),” 20 luglio 1983, *Materiale letterario*, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Atene.

⁴² Si veda, ad esempio Chrysanthos Christou, “Σόνια Καλογεροπούλου: από την ποίηση της γραμμής, στη μαγεία και το εξπρεσιονιστικό περιεχόμενο του χρώματος” [Sonia Kalogeropoulou: dalla poesia del tratto, alla magia e al contenuto espressionistico del colore], *Ζυγός*, n. 61 (settembre-ottobre 1983): 40-43. L'articolo fu poi ripubblicato nell'edizione inglese di *Zygos*: Chrysanthos A. Christou, “From the poetry of line to the magic of colour”, *Zygos: annual edition on the Hellenic fine arts*, vol. IV (1985): 176-179, 232. Sull'espressionismo astratto americano del dopoguerra si veda Irving Sandler, *Abstract Expressionism and the American Experience: A Reevaluation* (Hard Press Editions, 2009).

⁴³ Benjamin Dodenhoff and Ramona Heinlein (Hrsg.), *Die Erfindung der Neuen Wilden. Malerei und Subkultur um 1980 / The Invention of the Neue Wilde. Painting and Subculture around 1980* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2019); Rosemary Cohane Erpf, *Painting in the 1980s. Reimagining the Medium* (Bristol Intellect Books, 2022).

⁴⁴ Manos S. Stefanidis, “Νέοι Έλληνες ζωγράφοι (1974-84) και η σχέση τους με τον εξπρεσιονισμό” [Nuovi pittori greci (1974-84) e il loro rapporto con l'espressionismo], *Εικαστικά*, n. 35 (1984): 26-33.

⁴⁵ Giorgos Graios, “Προλεγόμενα στη ζωγραφική του '80” [Prefazione alla pittura dell'80], *Εικαστικά*, n. 24 (dicembre 1983): 22-27; Andreas Ioannidis, *Γερμανικός Εξπρεσιονισμός* [Espressionismo tedesco], in *Giorgos Bouzianis*, a cura di Andreas Ioannidis e Olga Mentzafou-Polyzou (Atene: Galleria Nazionale - Museo di Alexandros Soutsos 1985), catalogo della mostra, 11.

⁴⁶ Si veda a proposito il riassunto storico della Galleria Nazionale (in inglese) nel sito ufficiale della fondazione: “History,” National Gallery - Alexandros Soutsos Museum, consultato il 18 agosto 2024, <https://www.nationalgallery.gr/en/istoriko/>.

europei.⁴⁷ Come risulta da un manoscritto di Sonia (una lista di domande riguardanti la sua arte), databile probabilmente intorno alla stessa epoca, all'artista fu chiesto di chiarire la relazione della sua pittura con il "Neoespressionismo".⁴⁸ Allo stesso modo, per esempio, il critico Haris Kambouridis qualificò il pittore Triantafyllos Patraskidis (1946) come esponente greco della "transavanguardia internazionale" e della "pittura selvaggia europea ed americana".⁴⁹

D'altronde, il nuovo espressionismo greco era piuttosto un proseguimento di ricerche pittoriche precedenti, e non tanto una rottura con linguaggi artistici diversi. Di notevole significato fu l'esempio di Georgios Bouzianis (1885-1959), un pittore che, stando in Germania nella prima metà del Novecento, aveva sviluppato uno stile espressionista.⁵⁰ Negli anni Settanta e Ottanta la pittura di Bouzianis costituiva un paradigma di riferimento per gli artisti più giovani.⁵¹ È molto probabile che ciò valesse anche per Sonia, a giudicare soprattutto dalle sue prime sperimentazioni pittoriche. Ad esempio nella *Ragazza* (1982, Fig. 22) il colore steso a macchie cromatiche fluide riecheggia gli acquerelli di Bouzianis, come quello che, sotto forma di copia, si trova all'archivio della pittrice stessa.⁵²

Tuttavia, è da ritenere che per la nostra pittrice la deformazione espressionistica sia stata più di una questione puramente stilistica. L'ipotesi sembra confermata anche da pochi cenni sparsi nei suoi scritti. In una nota inedita ella spiega che dipingeva "immagini mostruose, [perché] non c'è più

⁴⁷ Dimitris Papastamos, nota critica nel catalogo della mostra personale dell'artista organizzata nel 1986 nel Centro Artistico Culturale "Ora". *Σόνια Καλογεροπούλου. Έκθεση Ζωγραφικής* [Sonia Kalogeropoulou. Mostra di pittura] (Atene: Καλλιτεχνικό Πνευματικό Κέντρο «Ωρα», 13-31 gennaio 1986), catalogo della mostra, s.i.p.

⁴⁸ *Lista di domande* (s.d.), *Documenti personali*, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Atene.

⁴⁹ Haris Kambouridis, nota critica in *Τριαντάφυλλος Πατρασκίδης* (Atene: Καλλιτεχνικό Πνευματικό Κέντρο «Ωρα», 1985), catalogo della mostra, s.i.p. In certi aspetti, il caso di Patraskidis era analogo a quello di Sonia: anch'egli studente (accademico) di Nikolaou, l'artista dipingeva figure archetipiche, di stile rozzo e primitivista. La sua iconografia, come pure quella di Sonia, comprese figure sofferenti ed agonizzanti. Eppure, Patraskidis ebbe una carriera più fortunata: partecipò alla XVII Biennale di São Paulo (1983) e fu nominato professore della Scuola di Belle Arti di Atene (1984).

⁵⁰ Sul pittore si veda "Bouzianis Giorgos," National Gallery - Alexandros Soutsos Museum, consultato il 18 agosto 2024, <https://www.nationalgallery.gr/en/artist/bouzianis-giorgos/>.

⁵¹ Si veda la collettiva di nuovi espressionisti greci *Riferimento a Bouzianis* (1990). *Αναφορά στον Μπουζιάνη* (Galleria comunale di Atene, 1990), catalogo della mostra.

⁵² La famiglia Kalogeropoulou possedeva una piccola collezione di opere di artisti greci (originali e riproduzioni), ora raccolta all'Associazione degli Amici del Popolo. La collezione comprende una riproduzione litografica di un acquerello di Bouzianis. L'originale fu esposto nel 1977 alla retrospettiva del pittore nella Galleria Nazionale di Atene. Si veda *Γιώργος Μπουζιάνης* (Atene: Galleria Nazionale - Museo di Alexandros Soutsos, 1977), catalogo della mostra.

nulla di bello, de Kooning, dunque.”⁵³ In uno scritto letterario Sonia osserva che si parla tanto della simmetria sebbene, in realtà “una cosa del genere non esista nemmeno nella cellula”.⁵⁴

Per questo motivo si ritiene che le figure, così frammentate o con asimmetrie deformanti (Fig. 23-25), esprimano la condizione di Sonia, essere vulnerabile e traumatizzato, in un mondo segnato dall'assurdità dell'esistenza e dalla decadenza dei valori classici.

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⁵³ “Per lo storico postumo la mia arte, le infinite carte scritte o imbrattate – de Kooning il giovane, secondo Christou lasciatemi vomitare – fantasmi nudi, immagini mostruose, non c'è più nulla di bello, de Kooning, allora.” [«Για το μεταθανάτιο ιστορικό η τέχνη μου, τα άπειρα χαρτομάνια γραμμένα ή μουτζαλωμένα – νεώτερος de Kooning, κατά Χρήστου ας ξεράσω – γυμνά φαντάσματα, εικόνες τερατώδεις, τίποτα όμορφο δε στέκει πιά, de Kooning, λοιπόν».] Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Note personali*, 2 agosto 1983, *Documenti personali*, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Atene (traduzione mia). Qui Sonia si riferisce con sarcasmo al suo paragone, fatto da Christou, con de Kooning.

⁵⁴ «[...] όλα, όπως λένε, συμμετρίες κι όμως ούτε στο κύτταρο δεν υπάρχει κάτι τέτοιο». Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Του κλειστού χώρου* [Dello spazio chiuso] (Εκδόσεις Φυλιππότη, 2a ed., 1987), 55 (traduzione mia).

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Illustrazioni



Fig. 1. Yannis Tsarouchis, *Ritratto di Sonia Kalogeropoulou*, 1976. Matita e pastello su carta, cm. 31×24,5. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo. (photo: Efthimia E. Mavromichali)



Fig. 2. Nikos Nikolaou, *Ιώ* (studio di costume teatrale per il Prometeo incatenato di Eschilo), 1962. Inchiostro su carta. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. Anche Sonia ha disegnato figure anticheggianti a contorno aperto. Per l'attribuzione del disegno – trovato in una cartella di disegni di Sonia – ringrazio il Prof. Evgenios D. Matthiopoulos. (photo: A. Diamantis)



Fig. 3. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *I suoi capelli* (Autoritratto), 1983. Smalto e tempera, cm. 70 × 100. Ubicazione sconosciuta. Pubblicato nell'articolo di Chrysanthos Christou intitolato "Sonia Kalogeropoulou: dalla poesia del tratto, alla magia e al contenuto espressionistico del colore", apparso sulla rivista d'arte *Ζυγός*, (n. 61, settembre-ottobre 1983, p. 42, fig. 3)



Fig. 4. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *L'Ombra*, martedì 27 settembre 1983. Tecnica mista, cm. 98 × 68,5. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)

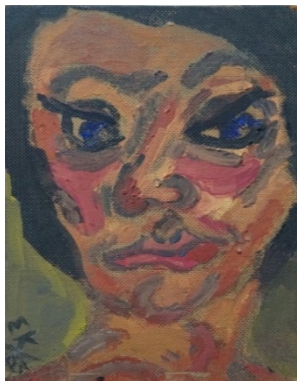


Fig. 5. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Volto di donna*, 1963. Olio su tavola, cm. 33,7 x 21,5. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)

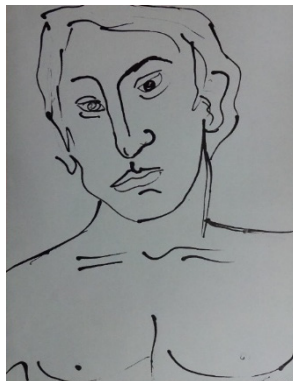


Fig. 6. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Il cavaliere*, 3 ottobre 1978. China su carta. La figura è un'illustrazione della poesia "Il cavaliere" e rappresenta un uomo visto come uno stanco cavaliere della notte e descritto come un amante miope. La poesia è pubblicata nel primo libro di Sonia Kalogeropoulou-Kontzilelou, intitolato *Diciannove poesie. Con 21 disegni o Diciannove poesie della solitudine e della morte* (p. 20). All'epoca Sonia firmava anche con il cognome di suo marito, da cui avrebbe divorziato poco dopo. (photo: A. Diamantis)



Fig. 7. Riproduzione di un disegno pubblicata sul giornale greco *Il Quotidiano*. ("Η Σόνια Καλογεροπούλου στην «Ωρα»" [Sonia Kalogeropoulou nell'«Ora»], *Η Καθημερινή*, 10 giugno 1981)



Fig. 8. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *La donna non più adolescente*, 1983. Acrilico su tavola, cm. 85 x 61. Atene, Galleria Nazionale, Π.6916. (photo: Galleria Nazionale di Atene)



Fig. 9. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Es regnet sparsame Wirklichkeiten*, 1983. Colori acrilici su tavola, cm. 100 × 69,5. Atene, Galleria Nazionale, Π.6917.

Il dipinto è citato con il titolo sopracitato nel fascicolo di una mostra collettiva (1987) della Galleria Nazionale di Atene: *Καλοκαιρινή Έκθεση 1987. Σύγχρονη Ελληνική Ζωγραφική* [Esposizione estiva 1987. Pittura greca contemporanea] (Atene: Εθνική Πινακοθήκη – Μουσείο Αλεξάνδρου Σούτζου, 1987). (photo: Galleria Nazionale di Atene)



Fig. 10. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Senza titolo*, 1985. Acquerello su carta, cm. 35×50 cm. Ubicazione sconosciuta.

Pubblicato nel catalogo della seconda mostra personale dell'artista nel Centro Artistico Culturale "Ora", intitolata *Sonia Kalogeropoulou. Mostra di pittura*. (13-31 gennaio 1986)



Fig. 11. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Senza titolo (Figura)*, 1985. Tecnica mista, cm. 70 × 100. Ubicazione sconosciuta. Pubblicato nel catalogo della mostra personale dell'artista nell'Athenaeum art gallery, intitolata *Sonia Kalogeropoulou. Pittura*. (23 novembre-14 dicembre 1987)



Fig. 12. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Senza titolo (Figure), 1988. China su carta, cm. 34,5 × 48. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)

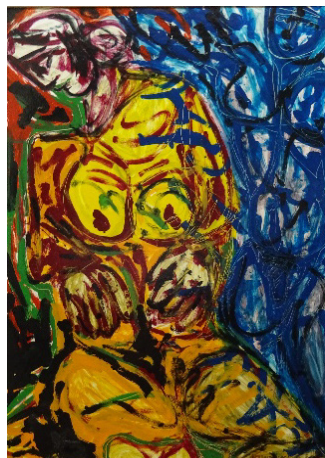


Fig. 13. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Senza titolo (Figure), agosto 1983. Tecnica mista su tavola, cm. 99 × 69. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. La parte destra è occupata da un nudo maschile etereo che fa da "sfondo" alla figura principale, una donna con la testa inclinata. (photo: A. Diamantis)



Fig. 14. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Senza titolo (Figura), 1985. Tecnica mista, cm. 35 × 50. Ubicazione sconosciuta. Pubblicato nel catalogo della seconda mostra personale dell'artista nel Centro Artistico Culturale "Ora", intitolata *Sonia Kalogeropoulou. Mostra di pittura*. (13-31 gennaio 1986)



Fig. 15. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Senza titolo (Due figure), 1983. Ubicazione sconosciuta. Pubblicato nel catalogo della mostra personale dell'artista nell'Athenaeum art gallery, intitolata *Sonia Kalogeropoulou. Pittura*. (23 novembre-14 dicembre 1987)



Fig. 16. Stele funeraria di Pausimache, 375-350 a.C. circa, Museo Archeologico di Maratona. Athena Kalogeropoulou ha dedicato uno studio archeologico alla stele di Pausimache. (photo: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/23/Archaeological_Museum_of_Marathon_BE_103_-_Grave_stone_of_Pausimache.jpg)



Fig. 17. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Angelo sul lastricato*, 1987. Pennarello su cartoncino, cm. 100×70. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)



Fig. 18. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Sua*, 1983. Acquerello su carta, cm. 34 × 24. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)

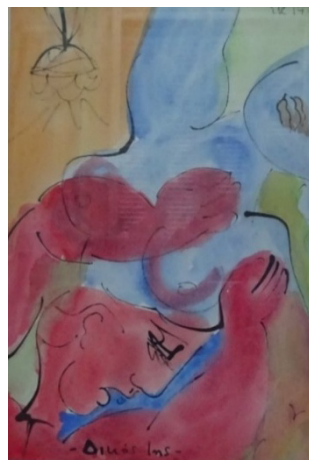


Fig. 19. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Suo*, 1983. Acquerello su carta, cm. 34 × 23,5. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)



Fig. 20. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Erotico*, 1985. Smalto, cm. 70 × 100. Collezione di Theodoros Venetsanos. Pubblicato in Συλλογή Σύγχρονης Τέχνης Θεόδωρου Βενετσάνου / The Theodore Venetsanos Collection of Contemporary Art, 1988, fig. 16.

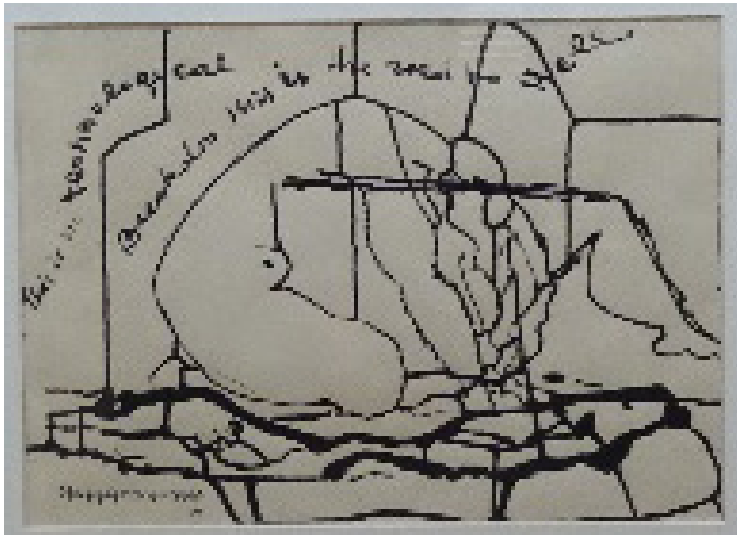


Fig. 21. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *"This ain't no technological breakdown, oh no, this is the road to hell"*, novembre 1989. China su carta, cm. 34 × 47,5. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. L'estratto proviene dalla canzone di Chris Rea, *Road to Hell* (1989). Nei suoi disegni Sonia aggiungeva spesso versi di poesie o di canzoni contemporanee tratte dalla scena musicale internazionale. (photo: A. Diamantis)



Fig. 22. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Ragazza*, 1982. Acquerello su carta, cm. 63,7 × 48,7. Atene, Galleria Nazionale, II.6438. Sonia rappresenta figure che, come questa, nascondono il loro volto. (photo: Galleria Nazionale di Atene)

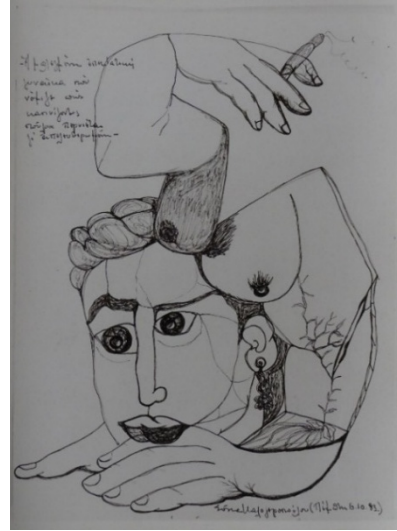


Fig. 23. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *“La donna espansiva e confusa che pensava di passare per emancipata fumando sigari”*, giovedì 6 ottobre 1983. Inchiostro su carta. Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)



Fig. 24. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, *Senza titolo (Figura)*, 1985. Acquerello su carta, cm. 48×33,5. Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)



Fig. 25. Sonia Kalogeropoulou, Senza titolo (Figure), dicembre 1989. China su carta, cm. 37,7×29 (ognuno). Atene, Associazione degli Amici del Popolo, Archivio di Sonia Kalogeropoulou. (photo: A. Diamantis)

EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER:

Romanian Women Artists: Artistic Consecration and Recognition from Communism to Democracy

Cristina ZAHA*

ABSTRACT. *Romanian Women Artists: Artistic Consecration and Recognition from Communism to Democracy.* In the same way as in other countries, the Romanian state, regardless of its form of government, contributes to the art world. The Romanian state has influenced the artistic recognition and consecration of Romanian women artists in the second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century, both in a beneficial and in a negative way. The Romanian state's involvement in the artistic process is evident in its establishment of certain conventions using legal means. The state's legislative and executive powers provide the legal framework for setting up regulations for participants in the art world. By comparing the most relevant aspects that define the socio-political framework of each period, this study aims to analyze how the state, as an actor in the network of cooperation of art world, influenced the artistic recognition and consecration of Romanian women artists in the Communist and post-December 1989 period.

Keywords: *Romanian women artists; artistic consecration and recognition; the cooperative network of the art world; Romanian state; twentieth century and twenty-firsts century.*

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Studying the conditions of artistic consecration and recognition of Romanian women artists in the second half of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first century can be considered another relevant point of view worth to be taken into account in the context of the tendency to recover, from a historical point of view, the presence and contribution of women artists to the Romanian art sphere, which is already an ongoing phenomenon.¹ Using as conceptual tools reference points from philosophy such as the *art world* outlined by Arthur Danto (1924–2013),² from the sociology of art such as *art as collective activity* and *the cooperative network of the art world* that produces the work of art as highlighted by Howard Becker (1928–2023),³ and also taking into account the specifics of the two political regimes, putting in comparison the most relevant aspects defining the socio-political framework for each one, in order to analyze how the state, as an actor in the network of cooperation of art world, influenced the artistic recognition and consecration of Romanian women artists during the Communist and post-December 1989 periods.

In 1982 the American sociologist Howard Becker outlined the concept of art worlds.⁴ His work reinforces and extends, from a sociological point of view, Arthur Danto's philosophical conception of the existence of an art world.⁵ Howard Becker affirms that art worlds involve a cooperative network made up of all the actors whose activity is necessary for the production of art. Thus, he defines the cooperative network as being made up of those members who oversee activities and actively participate in the art world, following certain conventions which may or may not make more efficient the realization, distribution and consecration of a work of art, an artistic creation, regardless of its form of expression. The sociologist also analyzes in the work referred to above when, where and in what way certain members, certain actors in society influence the final outcome of a work of art.⁶ In this regard, he refers to the state as an entity able to establish certain conventions and also able to intervene in the art creation process, exerting a certain degree of control that influences the way in which one of the most significant participants in the art world, the artist, acts.⁷

¹ Cosmin Năsui, *Artiste uitate din România: cercetări și studii despre contribuția femeilor la istoria artei românești* (PostModernism Museum, 2021).

² Arthur Danto, "The Artworld", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 61, no. 19 (1964), 571–584.

³ Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (University of California Press, 1982).

⁴ Becker, *Art Worlds*.

⁵ Danto, "The Artworld".

⁶ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 34–36.

⁷ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 38.

Howard Becker is of the opinion that the state, through the government, participates in the production and distribution of art, especially within its borders. The state's participation in the production of art is explained by the fact that it has a legal monopoly over legislative and executive power. This aspect provides the legal framework for regulating the activities of the population, including the activities of the other participants in the art world: artists, dealers, members of the audience, etc. Furthermore, the state, like other participants in the art-making process, acts in its own interests, which may or may not coincide with the interests of the artists.⁸ In addition, political leaders can influence the realization, consecration and promotion of art, choosing to support that art which suits their political beliefs. Therefore, it is concluded that the state pursues certain interests by both supporting and discouraging art.⁹

It is essential and relevant to this approach the analysis undertaken by the sociologist on how the state intervenes in artistic production. As has been pointed out, state intervention can be in various forms, ranging from direct support to censorship or even suppression, state action being most often legitimized by the general public's well-being and social order. Thus, by providing or withholding financial support, by granting or limiting access to distribution, or by depriving freedom or even life, the state, depending on the political regime, exercises its power as an active participant in the art world.¹⁰

Support is considered to be provided by the state when the final work of art maintains the social order or mobilizes the population for only those social causes that are regarded as noble. Art that is supported by the state must therefore conform to certain pre-established conventions, mostly based on laws and political discourse specific to the form of government. Other ways in which the state might support the art world include the preservation of art in museums and the granting of financial or material support to art institutions or various exhibition venues. Financial or material support can be conditioned by the specific subject matter of the art produced. Thus, as Becker also notes, art that reflects national identity is more likely to be supported by the state, both in totalitarian and democratic regimes. Another aspect related to the support given to the art world worth mentioning here is that the state can change its mind at any time about how much it is helping, with what it is helping or with whom it is helping.¹¹

On the other hand, the state is also the actor in the art world that has the power to censor. Intervention in artistic production through censorship has

⁸ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 165.

⁹ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 166.

¹⁰ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 180–181.

¹¹ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 181–183.

several dimensions: destruction of the result, imprisonment of the artist, interference in distribution, attacking the art or the artist, prohibiting the sale, exhibition or staging, and accepting exhibitions only in restricted groups or select clubs.¹²

Howard Becker's exploration of the role and involvement of the state in artistic production concludes the following: the state is a member of the cooperative network of the art world that regulates the working environment at a given moment in time, the state creates the framework for property rights, the state sets conditions for the support of the artists and art, the state limits what artists can accomplish when their art disturbs other citizens, the state especially supports art that contributes to the national image, the state puts limits on support when art can mobilize citizens in a way that is not desired. Therefore, all artists are to some extent dependent on the state regardless of the form of the regime, and it is their art that reflects this dependence.¹³

It is also relevant to mention here that the sociologist's ultimate concern, in the context of analyzing and outlining the art worlds in the paper mentioned earlier, highlights the way in which an artist's reputation is determined by the participants in the art worlds, by extension, determined by the participation of the state. According to Howard Becker, art worlds shape reputations repeatedly, deciding whether a work of art, an artist, an artistic school, a particular style or a particular form of expression is indeed worthy of being emphasized over other similar entities.¹⁴ Also, all participants in the art world are considered to be responsible for producing the circumstances, and the conventions in which art develops, thus contributing to the creation of a good or bad reputation.¹⁵ At the same time, the actors who create the reputation are also the ones who decide whom they take into consideration for it, and it is possible that, depending on certain particular interests such as the state supporting art that reflects national identity, certain artists may be deliberately overlooked.¹⁶ Therefore, it can be affirmed that the artistic reputation of an artist is closely linked to the conditions of artistic recognition and consecration, this being another aspect taken into account in the analysis carried out in this study.

Considering the framework outlined above and starting from Howard Becker's statement that the art world is a mirror of society, in the following I will outline some relevant aspects of the socio-political context of the two periods under analysis. More specifically, I will focus on the conditions of artistic

¹² Becker, *Art Worlds*, 185–190.

¹³ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 190.

¹⁴ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 351–352.

¹⁵ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 361.

¹⁶ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 367.

recognition and consecration of Romanian women in the second half of the twentieth century and in the first decades of the twenty-first century, especially through the way in which the state, as an actor in the cooperative network, contributed to and influenced these aspects. I will refer here to artistic recognition as the way in which the artist is identified as relevant in the artistic field, as seen as worthy and valuable. On the other hand, I will refer to artistic consecration as a way of acknowledging one's ability, and one's special merits in the sphere of art through various means.

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by tumultuous events that took place mainly on the European continent, producing rapid and major changes, especially in the context of the two world conflagrations. These changes were felt more strongly at the end of the Second World War, following the victory of the Allies over Germany on 9 May 1945.¹⁷ For Romania, the end of the war meant the gradual rise of the Communist Party to the leadership of the country, resulting in the forced abdication of King Mihai on 30 December 1947.¹⁸ In this political climate, the idea of recognizing the contribution of women to the effort of defending the homeland during the war years gained momentum, which determined the Romanian Communist Party to adopt a strategy in favor of the political and economic emancipation of women.¹⁹

In 1948, Romania adopted its first communist constitution, which stated in Article 21 that: "Women have equal rights with men in all spheres of state, economic, social, cultural, political and private life. For equal work, women have equal pay rights with men."²⁰ The post-war Communist regime creates equal educational and professional opportunities, giving women greater economic independence and full citizenship.²¹ Therefore, "the state ensured women's access to education on equal terms with men. The state guaranteed the right of women to exercise control over their personal property (e.g. savings accounts, apartment or car) and income, thus protecting their economic power."²²

Women were encouraged and promoted to participate in Romanian art education, which did not happen in the previous period. For example, in the

¹⁷ Alexandru Duțu, *România în istoria secolului XX* (Editura Fundației România de Măine, 2007), 157.

¹⁸ Virgiliu Țărău, "Instaurarea comunismului în România," in *Panorama comunismului în România*, ed. Liliana Corobca (Polirom, 2020), 62.

¹⁹ Virgiliu Țărău, "De la diversitate la integrare. Problema femeii și instaurarea comunismului în Europa Centrală și de Est. Cazul României," in *Condiția femeii în România în secolul al XX. Studii de caz*, ed. Ghizela Cosma and Virgiliu Țărău (Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002), 143.

²⁰ Ioan Muraru and Gheorghe Iancu, *Constituțiile române. Texte, note, prezentare comparativă* (Regia Autonomă Monitorul Oficial, 1995), 115.

²¹ Mihaela Miroiu and Maria Bucur, *Nașterea cetățeniei democratice. Femeile și puterea în România modernă* (Humanitas, 2019), 66.

²² Miroiu and Bucur, *Nașterea cetățeniei democratice*, 66.

study *Women Artists under Communism*, the art historian and critic Cosmin Năsui, after analyzing the degree of participation of female art teachers in the *Republican exhibition of painting, sculpture and graphics of the teachers of fine arts* in 1973 in Bucharest, concludes that art education in the Communist period shows a balanced percentage of women, 92 of them being included in this exhibition out of a total of 224 artists.²³

The state influenced the recognition and artistic consecration of women during the Communist period in Romania, especially through the establishment in 1950 of the Union of Fine Artists,²⁴ an organization that increased the Communist Party's control over artistic life, imposing creative themes and ideological debates in the branches.²⁵ However, it is worth noting the access of women artists to awards such as the UAP Prize, the State Prize or the Artist Emeritus Award: Zoe Băicoianu was Master Emeritus of Art in 1951 and in 1953 she received the State Prize Class I; Geta Brătescu receives the UAP Prize for Decorative Arts in 1965; the artist Eveline-Linica Călinel is awarded the Romanian Ministry of Arts Prize in 1950, while the artist Ligia Macovei is awarded the State Prize Class III in 1951, etc.²⁶ Thus, it can be noted that the Romanian state during the Communist period participated as an active actor in the cooperative network of the art world through the steps taken to recognize the merits and the contribution made to Romanian art by women artists in the form of national prizes. The state also contributes to the artistic consecration of women by facilitating a gender-balanced representation in the sectors of the Romanian artistic world, the gender equality policy of the Communist period being reflected as "an official direction taken into consideration in all fields, including the cultural and artistic ones."²⁷

Another way the Romanian communist state participated in the artistic recognition and consecration of women was by increasing requests for official commissions in various artistic industries, such as book illustration, magazine and publication design, graphic design, monumental sculpture, decorative art, and light industry elements, such as ceramics and textiles.²⁸ One recalls in this regard the work *Young Athletes* by Zoe Băicoianu (1910-1987) which was placed

²³ Cosmin Năsui, "Femei artiste în comunism," in *Centenarul femeilor din arta românească*, vol. I, ed. Adrian Buga and Cosmin Năsui, (PostModernism Museum, 2017), 104–105.

²⁴ Cristian Vasile, *Literatura și artele în România comunistă, 1948-1953* (Humanitas, 2010), 154–155.

²⁵ Vasile, *Literatura și artele*, 154–155.

²⁶ Năsui, "Femei artiste în comunism," 105–107.

²⁷ Cosmin Năsui, "Câteva considerații despre activismul artistelor în arta românească din perioada comunistă," in *Centenarul femeilor din arta românească*, vol. II, ed. Luiza Barcan and Cosmin Năsui (PostModernism Museum, 2018), 100.

²⁸ Năsui, "Femei artiste în comunism," 100.

at the Sports Hall in Constanța.²⁹ Other women artists who realized monumental sculptures were Ana Severineanu, Iulia Oniță, Ada Geo Medrea, and Lie Doina.³⁰

State involvement in the artistic sphere, in the art world, was also through the granting of certain social rights to women, such as the right to housing, workshops, pensions and social insurance.³¹ At the same time, the Romanian communist state “allowed an unprecedented mobility of women, an encouragement of their participation in the visual arts, so that—according to some estimates—about 850 women were working in one way or another in the visual arts and related fields”³² in the second half of the twentieth century.

The mobility of women, facilitated by state support, is also worth mentioning. This is reflected by the relatively high number of female participants in international exhibitions to which Romania was invited and at which it was most often present: Venice Biennale, Paris Youth Biennale or Sao Paulo Biennale.³³

Thus, artistic recognition and consecration were positively influenced by state participation and intervention, especially when the reflected national identity, being conditioned by the specificity of the artistic content, both in totalitarian and democratic states, and with state support being withdrawn at any time.³⁴ Therefore, the participation of women artists in international exhibitions during the Communist period was carefully supervised and controlled. Women artists who were able to exhibit were supported by the Romanian Communist Party, the nominations being made by the relevant institutions such as the Union of Fine Artists or the Council of Culture and Socialist Education.³⁵ It can therefore be stated in this context that the application of conventions established by the state were namely conventions relating to the form of production, the medium or the agreed theme.³⁶ The conventions imposed by the Romanian communist state were reflected in particular in the themes of the works presented at international exhibitions. For example, when Gheorghiu Dej was in power, the works exhibited abroad had the same theme as the works exhibited in the country and they followed the program of socialist realism, the only one approved by the state at that time.³⁷ A comprehensive analysis of the Romanian

²⁹ Năsui, “Câteva considerații,” 100.

³⁰ Năsui, “Câteva considerații,” 100.

³¹ Cristian Vasile, “Femeia – artist (de stat) în România comunistă. Câteva considerații,” in *Centenarul femeilor din arta românească*, vol. I, ed. Adrian Buga and Cosmin Năsui (PostModernism Museum, 2017), 132.

³² Vasile, “Femeia – artist (de stat),” 133.

³³ Năsui, “Câteva considerații,” 104.

³⁴ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 182–183.

³⁵ Năsui, “Câteva considerații,” 104.

³⁶ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 41–42.

³⁷ Năsui, “Câteva considerații,” 104.

official art from this period is outlined by Monica Oana Enache in her most recent thesis. The research outlines the context of the ideological dimension and the functioning of the communist art industry in Romania between 1944 and 1965, by exposing the institutional mechanisms through which the control and conditioning of artistic production was achieved.³⁸

In contrast, under Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, the distinction between art exhibited in the country and art exhibited abroad can be observed, the latter being "privileged in several ways (along with the artists): on the one hand, it had to resemble as closely as possible the art practiced in the West, to show the image of a prosperous Romania in tune with the times, on the other hand, after 1982, it was part of Ceaușescu's program to pay off his foreign debt, to which all industrial, cultural and artistic fields had to contribute."³⁹

The Romanian Communist Party not only provided benefits but also eliminated them, limiting the expression of artists. This fact is also noted by the historian Cosmin Năsui, who states the following:

"The Communist regime, like any totalitarian regime, on the one hand privileged a number of artists who put their talent at the service of the Party's orders and ideology, and at the same time purged and physically or symbolically destroyed creators who refused to do so and who had the misfortune of being put on the index by their more eager colleagues or the misfortune of being ideologically assimilated and served other political regimes".⁴⁰

For example, the artist Milița Petrașcu (1892–1976)⁴¹ who was quite appreciated in the early years of Communism, was sued in 1959 for her portrait of the collector Constantin Doncea, which was not approved by the Communist Party. As a result, the artist was forced to leave her home and was marginalized and under-appreciated for many years.⁴² In this context, it is once again highlighted the assertion that an artist's reputation is determined by the participants in the art world, by extension also determined by the state involvement, since all participants in the art world are considered to be responsible for producing the circumstances and conventions in which art develops, thus contributing to the creation of a good or detestable reputation.⁴³

³⁸ Monica Oana Enache, *Arta și metamorfozele politicului. Tematica istorică în arta oficială românească între 1944-1965 (pictură, sculptură, grafică)* (Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2018).

³⁹ Năsui, "Câteva considerații," 104.

⁴⁰ Năsui, "Câteva considerații," 96.

⁴¹ Magda Cârneci, *Artele plastice în România: 1945-1989. Cu o addenda 1990-2010* (Polirom, 2013), 30.

⁴² Vasile, "Femeia – artist (de stat)," 130–131.

⁴³ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 351.

Another important aspect to mention is that the Romanian communist state favored the recognition and consecration of female artists on the leitmotiv of motherhood, especially after the passing of the pro-natalist policy through the decree 770/1966 which was promulgated on 2 October 1966 which prohibited abortion, together with the amendment of the Labor Code in 1972 which introduced new forms of gender inequality, leaving women with the full responsibility for raising and educating children. In this way, the state was reintroducing traditional gender roles, which was not in accordance with Marxist notions of gender equality.⁴⁴

The leitmotiv of motherhood is especially visible in the themes of the exhibitions, because “the role of artists, once recognized as important by the communist regime, was to reflect and transmit the ideology of the party, through the institutions in which they worked and through their work, which became state property.”⁴⁵ A relevant example is the artwork *Spring of Life and Peace* made by the artist Lelia Zuaf in 1952, which was depicted on badges, diplomas, posters, and propaganda materials. The National Council of Women also considers the artwork to be representative of the image of their organization.⁴⁶ Hence, it can be said that Lelia Zuaf’s recognition and consecration are closely related to the intervention and to the participation of the state in a limiting, intrusive way, imposing its political ideology on the artistic theme at the expense of shaping a respectable artistic reputation.

The acknowledgment of the artistic prestige and consecration of Romanian women artists during the Communist period through various awards and their admission in international exhibitions, as well as the granting of a significant number of official commissions, for book illustrations, magazines, publications, monumental public sculpture or decorative arts, for different fields of the industries responsible with art, are clear elements through which the state contributed to the gender equality in the Romanian society, which until that time did not regard the presence of women artists as relevant. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the state in post-war Romania, even if expressed through a restrictive communist regime that conditioned artistic production by political-ideological interests, in the 1980s overlaid with a nationalist discourse, has contributed significantly to the promotion of women’s art and the presence of Romanian women in the art world.

In order to analyze the state’s contribution to the artistic recognition and consecration of women artists in Romania in the post-communist period, it is relevant to outline the socio-political framework as a first step in this incursion.

⁴⁴ Miroiu and Bucur, *Nașterea cetățeniei democratice*, 151.

⁴⁵ Nășui, “Câteva considerații,” 97.

⁴⁶ Nășui, “Femei artiste în comunism,” 111.

At the end of the twentieth century, radical changes on the international scene influenced the course of events in Romania, leading to a democratic reorganization in the social, political and economic spheres. This context is given by the accession to the lead of the Soviet Union of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, when the political discourse changed with the aim of revitalizing Communism by implementing new practices which had more democratic tendencies.⁴⁷ These new practices, however, paved the way for the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe from 1989 onwards, their implementation influencing the subsequent fall of the Berlin Wall, German reunification and, ultimately, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.⁴⁸

In Romania, the impact of the collapse of Communism in other Eastern European countries was reflected in the switch from a totalitarian to a democratic regime when the anti-Communist revolution ignited in December 1989. This was the climax of a paradigm shift in Romania, which led to the removal of the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu and the establishment of a democratic regime.⁴⁹

The international and national historical context required Romania to adopt a new constitution, this time a democratic one. Adopted by referendum on December 8, 1991, the new constitution is still in force today, having undergone only one revision in 30 years due to Romania's accession to NATO and the EU.⁵⁰ Romania began the process of democratization and alignment with the West by signing the Association Agreement with the European Union in 1993. The country also conformed to European standards by adhering to the United Nations Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, by starting the process of adherence to the European Union, which was successfully completed and materialized on 1 January 2007, and by joining NATO.⁵¹

From a social point of view, the post-communist experience represents a re-learning of the way of existing, a so-called "exit from state patriarchy", as the authors of the study *The Birth of Democratic Citizenship. Women and Power in Modern Romania* argue.⁵² Also, as Dan Eugen Rațiu points out in his study *The Arts Support System in a Society in Transition: Romania 1990-2006*, the artistic community after 1990 was strongly influenced by the previous communist model, identifying itself as a subject of public assistance and having a paternalistic-statist attitude that emanated a certain nostalgia for the previous period, especially

⁴⁷ Serge Berstein and Pierre Milza, *Istoria secolului XX. Vol. 3: În căutarea unei noi lumi (1973 până în zilele noastre)* (All, 1998), 154.

⁴⁸ Berstein and Milza, *Istoria secolului XX. Vol. 3*, 154.

⁴⁹ Keith Hitchins, *Scurtă istorie a României* (Polirom, 2015), 320–321.

⁵⁰ Daniel-Mihail Șandru, "Legislația din România după 1989," in *Panorama postcomunismului în România*, ed. Liliana Corobca (Polirom, 2022), 221.

⁵¹ Hitchins, *Scurtă istorie a României*, 331.

⁵² Miroiu and Bucur, *Nașterea cetățeniei democratice*, 252–253.

due to the condition of the state artist which ensured a social status and a decent life. While for some, the December 1989 Revolution and reluctance to change.⁵³

Therefore, the social status of artists is often uncertain in the post-December period. Their socio-cultural position is no longer as important as it was under the communist regime for ideological reasons. Many of these artists have reoriented themselves towards more secure professions. In this context, financial insecurity increases, and many artists, including women, decide to emigrate, some managing to continue their profession, others abandoning it.⁵⁴ In this way, a radical transformation can be observed in the way the state acts as a participant in the art world's network of cooperation. For example, after 1989, the Romanian state no longer orchestrated economic development and job creation as much as it did in previous periods. Instead, it mostly just collected taxes.⁵⁵

The economic difficulties of the transitional period and the incoherence of cultural policies after 1989 are two of the most relevant aspects that define the situation of artists. Insufficient financial resources, inadequate administration, and poor maintenance of public cultural infrastructure under the control of the Ministry of Culture and its subordinate institutions led to precarious conditions for artists during the first post-communist decade.⁵⁶

The diminishing role of the state in the art world after December 1989 is particularly noticeable in the context of the institutional development of the visual arts. State institutional actors, such as the Ministry of Culture and the Union of Visual Artists, were the most important landmarks in artistic recognition and consecration during the communist regime. However, they lost their influence and capacity to intervene in the art world at the expense of private institutions, which became increasingly prominent in the post-December period.⁵⁷

Therefore, in post-communist Romania, the state no longer plays a defined role in the process of artistic recognition and establishment. As the country has turned toward the West, the state's role has been replaced by international institutions, such as private galleries and auction houses: "The valorization of contemporary works and artists is based today more on the association between the international network of private galleries and the international network of cultural institutions, with art dealers and auctioneers, curators, critics, and art agents, collectors, investors, and spectators as the main actors."⁵⁸

⁵³ Dan Eugen Rațiu, "Sistemul de sprijinire a artelor într-o societate în tranziție: România 1990-2006," in *Politica culturală și artele: local, național, global*, ed. Dan Eugen Rațiu (Casa Cărții de Știință, 2012), 117.

⁵⁴ Cârneli, *Artele plastice în România*, 173-174.

⁵⁵ Miroiu and Bucur, *Nașterea cetățeniei democratice*, 256-257.

⁵⁶ Rațiu, "Sistemul de sprijinire a artelor," 126-127.

⁵⁷ Cârneli, *Artele plastice în România*, 171.

⁵⁸ Rațiu, "Sistemul de sprijinire a artelor," 132.

The exhibition sphere of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century no longer reflects the spotlight on women artists either. Their dispersion and assimilation in the various exhibitions organized at the initiative of independent groups can be seen in comparison with the famous state exhibitions organized during the communist regime. The groups *kinema ikon*, *Prolog*, and *9+1*, which were formed before 1989 and are still active, are worth mentioning here.⁵⁹ After 1989, the group *2 META* was also formed, where artist Maria Manolescu was active,⁶⁰ while the *Crinul* group, which was active between 1995 and 2000, included other women artists.⁶¹ The *Rostopasca Group* is also worth mentioning. Active from 1997 to 2001, the group was formed with the contribution of the artists Angela Bontaș and Alina Pențac, who were later joined by Alina Buga and Mona Vătămanu.⁶² One last relevant group is *Apparatus 22*, a multidisciplinary art collective founded in 2011 by several women artists, including Erika Olea, Maria Farcaș, and Ioana Nemeș.⁶³ Therefore, the recognition and artistic consecration of women through exhibitions in the post-December period is becoming increasingly independent from the state's contribution, especially due to the specific nature of their organization as private initiatives.

Several very recent initiatives demonstrate attempts to promote and honor women artists in the post-communist period, in which the state participates to some extent. One example is the organization of the exhibition *Seduction and Triumph in Art. Women Artists in Romania* which was held during the 8th edition of Art Safari Bucharest from 16 September to 3 October 2021 at the Dacia-Romania Palace.⁶⁴ The exhibition was curated by Elena Olariu, Angelica Iacob, Ana Maria Măciucă-Pufu, Cristina Ioniță-Măciucă, and Liana Ivan-Ghilia, and was an exhibition project realized in collaboration with the Bucharest Municipal Museum.⁶⁵

The Art Safari Bucharest initiative to promote women artists continued the following year when at the 9th edition the exhibition *Red, Yellow, and Blue* was organized, an exhibition dedicated exclusively to the work of a single woman artist, Irina Dragomir (b. 1983).⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Cosmin Năsui, "O privire retrospectivă asupra celor 30 de ani de artă românească de după 1989", in *Panorama postcomunismului în România*, ed. Liliana Corobca (Polirom, 2022), 772.

⁶⁰ Năsui, "O privire retrospectivă," 774.

⁶¹ Năsui, "O privire retrospectivă," 774.

⁶² Năsui, "O privire retrospectivă," 774.

⁶³ Năsui, "O privire retrospectivă," 775.

⁶⁴ "About the 8th edition of Art Safari Bucharest," Art Safari Bucharest Archive, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://www.artsafari.ro/arhiva/>.

⁶⁵ "About the 8th edition of Art Safari Bucharest".

⁶⁶ "About the 9th edition of Art Safari Bucharest", Art Safari Bucharest Archive, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://www.artsafari.ro/arhiva/>.

Another unique approach to promoting women artists in Romania has been initiated by the PostModernism Museum, which combines exhibition and research projects. For example, the *Centenary of Women in Romanian Art* project, which opened in November 2017 to celebrate the Centenary of the Great Union, featured an exhibition and an editorial publication realized by PostModernism Museum in collaboration with the Brukenthal National Museum, the Bucharest Municipal Museum and the Braşov Art Museum, in order to emphasize the art made by Romanian women.⁶⁷ Once again, state institutions are collaborating with the private sector, an increasingly accentuated aspect in Romania recently. As a result, support and contributions from non-profit organizations and private foundations have increased the diversity of Romanian cultural life in the post-December 1989 period.⁶⁸

The democratization of the artistic sphere also meant an impediment for women artists, not just flexibility, especially due to the privatization of art institutions and the liberalization of markets, as well as changes in art funding paradigms. Accordingly, the post-December state adopts a fluctuating policy as a participant in the art world's network of cooperation, which destabilizes and confuses the artistic sphere, mainly due to the traditional, individualistic cultural practices encouraged between 1990 and 1996 and 2001 and 2004, as well as the contemporary, universalist cultural practices sustained between 1997 and 2000.⁶⁹ In this climate, "contemporary art sector portraits of Central and Eastern Europe continued to ignore Romania, which remained a blank spot on the map of contemporary art in the first part of the second post-communist decade (2001–2005)."⁷⁰ Consequently, neither the art market nor prestigious international art institutions have become more accessible to Romanian women artists. The exceptions that stand out are mainly male artists such as Dan Perjovschi or members of the "Cluj school of painting" (Adrian Ghenie, Victor Man, Marius Bercea, Mircea Suciu, Şerban Savu, Radu Comşa, Ciprian Mureşan, Mircea Cantor, Florin Ştefan) promoted in particular by Galeria Plan B through personal effort or with the support of private and foreign institutions, in detriment of the support from the Romanian state.⁷¹

To provide a clearer overview of the issues discussed in this paper, it is relevant to briefly mention some aspects of the artistic career development of Geta Brătescu (1926-2018), one of the most famous Romanian women artists,

⁶⁷ Adrian Buga and Cosmin Năsui, *Centenarul femeilor din arta românească*, vol. I (PostModernism Museum, 2017), 7.

⁶⁸ Raţiu, "Sistemul de sprijinire a artelor," 131.

⁶⁹ Dan Eugen Raţiu, "Statul şi cultura: Concepte, valori şi justificări ale politicii culturale în România postcomunistă," in *Politica culturală şi artele: local, naţional, global*, ed. Dan Eugen Raţiu (Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2012), 88.

⁷⁰ Raţiu, "Sistemul de sprijinire a artelor," 126.

⁷¹ Raţiu, "Sistemul de sprijinire a artelor," 126.

who distinguished herself both during the communist regime and after its fall with support from the Romanian state. The communist state supported her through awards such as the 1965 Union of Visual Artists Award for Decorative Arts⁷² or through the support received in both group and solo exhibitions (Căminul Artei Gallery, Bucharest, 1947; Galateea Gallery, Bucharest, 1976, etc.). At the same time, Geta Brătescu was chosen to represent Romania at various international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale in 1960 or the Tapestry Biennale in Lausanne in 1965.⁷³ The artist is also featured in the specialized art history literature produced during the Communist period. Her artistic consecration is legitimized by her inclusion in Volume II of the synthesis work *Romanian Art*, published in 1982 by Vasile Drăguț and Vasile Florea, where Geta Brătescu is referred to as one of the “most often heard names when talking about graphic art.”⁷⁴

The state’s intervention as an actor in the post-communist art world’s network of cooperation is particularly noticeable in its support, recognition, and consecration of Geta Brătescu’s artistic career towards the end of her life. More specifically, the Romanian post-communist state contributes to the consecration and the shaping of a respectable reputation of Geta Brătescu by choosing her as the Romanian delegate at the Venice Biennale in 2017.⁷⁵ Other initiatives to recognize and promote Geta Brătescu’s art have included exhibitions organized by private entities in collaboration with the state, such as the Art Safari Bucharest exhibitions mentioned above. Therefore, through perseverance and talent supported by the Romanian state and private entities, Geta Brătescu succeeded in establishing herself internationally during the post-communist period. This aspect is particularly highlighted by the presence of her works in prestigious museums around the world, such as MoMA in New York, the Tate Modern in London, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the MUMOK in Vienna, and museums in San Francisco, Warsaw, and Bucharest.⁷⁶

Therefore, the state’s contribution to the artistic recognition and consecration of women in Romania in the post-communist period is visibly diminished compared to the Communist period. The emergence of a new democratic political climate in Romania after 1989 has led to an opening towards the West, towards an internationalized art world in which the Romanian state

⁷² Năsui, “Femei artiste în comunism,” 105–107.

⁷³ Constantin Prut, *Dicționar de artă modernă și contemporană* (Polirom, 2016), 79.

⁷⁴ Vasile Drăguț and Vasile Florea, *Artă românească*, vol. II (Meridiane, 1982), 375.

⁷⁵ Răzvan Theodorescu and Marius Porumb, *Artă din România: din preistorie în contemporaneitate*, vol. II (Editura Academiei Române, Editura Mega, 2018), 585.

⁷⁶ Elena Olariu and Angelica Iacob, *Seducție și triumf în artă. Femei-artist în România, catalog de expoziție* (Editura Muzeului Municipiului București, 2021), 9.

is giving up its previous role as exclusive advocate and director of Romanian art, in the detriment of new Romanian or foreign private actors, becoming, most of the time, only a co-sponsor of artistic production.

In conclusion, it can be pointed out that the Romanian state has influenced the artistic recognition and consecration of Romanian women artists in the two analyzed periods, both positively and negatively, as an actor in the art world's network of cooperation. The various forms of state intervention in the artistic recognition and consecration of Romanian women during the Communist and post-December periods closely align with Howard Becker's observations from 1982. As in other countries, regardless of its form of government, the Romanian state contributes to the art world. The state's involvement in the artistic process is evident in the establishment of certain conventions, mostly by the use of legal means. Through its legislative and executive power, the state provides the legal framework for setting up regulations for participants in the art world. Consequently, the state has the power to both help and jeopardize the realization, distribution and consecration of a work of art, of an artistic creation and, therefore, of an artist, regardless of the artistic medium of expression. Also, as this analysis reflects, the Romanian state intervened in the artistic recognition and consecration of women artists during the two scrutinized periods in the form of direct support, censorship, and suppression. The state's actions were most often legitimized by general welfare and social order, which often masked the particular vision of some political leaders. Thus, it can also be affirmed that the Romanian state pursues certain interests both by supporting and discouraging women's art. At the same time, it can be said that the Romanian state regulates the work environment of women artists, primarily within its borders. Therefore, all artists, including women artists, are to some extent dependent on the state, both during the Communist period and after 1989, their art reflects this dependence, the state being one of the actors responsible for producing the circumstances and conventions within which they express themselves.

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INTERVIEW:

An Art Historian Dedicated to Cultural Heritage and Vernacular Architecture. An Interview with Christoph Machat

by Ciprian FIREA* 



Esteemed Professor Dr. H.C. Mult. Christoph Machat, you are an internationally recognized figure who has been active in the field of material cultural heritage protection and conservation for over five decades. A brief biography should mention that you were born in Sighișoara in 1946 to a family of Saxon descent and attended school in the historic building at the end of the Covered Stairway, near the remarkable Gothic edifice known as the “Church on the Hill.” After obtaining your baccalaureate in 1964, you initially pursued studies

in industrial electronics at the Polytechnic Institute of Bucharest. However, you abandoned these studies in 1967, finding them unsuitable. Instead, you enrolled in the university program for art history at the National University of Arts in Bucharest (then the Institute of Fine Arts), completing your studies between 1967 and 1972. You subsequently worked as a referent for Transylvania at the

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Directorate of Historical Monuments (1972–73) while also serving as a guide for foreign tourists visiting socialist Romania during your student years.

You emigrated to West Germany in 1973, where you quickly earned your doctorate (1976) and secured a position at one of the most prestigious institutions dedicated to the study and protection of historical monuments—the Bavarian State Office for Monument Protection (Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege). There, you gained hands-on experience, and in 1980, you joined the Monument Protection Office of the Rhineland (Rheinisches Amt für Denkmalpflege), which is headquartered at Brauweiler Abbey near Cologne. With the expertise you gained, you became Secretary General in 1992 and, in 1995, you were elected President of the International Committee for Vernacular Architecture (ICVA) within ICOMOS, under the auspices of UNESCO. In this capacity, you closely observed the nomination and subsequent inclusion of significant Romanian sites and monuments on the UNESCO World Heritage List. These include the wooden churches of Maramureș, the historic town of Sighișoara, and the reclassification of Biertan from an individual monument to the larger category of “villages with fortified churches”.

After 1989, as Romania opened up to Europe, you frequently returned to the country. You designed and coordinated an extensive research project on Transylvania’s built heritage—the Inventory of Monuments in German-Colonized Settlements of Transylvania (1991–1998), as well as the ambitious restoration project of the much-loved and well-known “Church on the Hill” in your native Sighișoara. Another iconic building in your hometown, the “House with the Stag,” was also rehabilitated and revitalized with your significant contribution.

For your outstanding efforts in promoting and preserving the cultural heritage of the Transylvanian Saxons, you served as president of the Cultural Council of Transylvanian Saxons for many years (1992–2013). In recognition of your contributions, Babeș-Bolyai University awarded you the title of Doctor Honoris Causa in 2001. Since 1998, you have also been teaching courses in a postgraduate program on historical monument rehabilitation, covering topics such as the history of heritage protection in Europe, international conventions, and vernacular architecture.

Today, as we meet in Cluj for this interview, you have just finished teaching one of these courses. While it would be fascinating to discuss your experience as a lecturer at Babeș-Bolyai University, for this interview, I would like to take a journey into your past—to your formative years. Given the profile of the publication for which I am conducting this interview, as well as my personal interest, I would primarily like to ask you about your training as an art historian and how it has influenced your major projects.

What do you believe Sighișoara offered you in terms of your personal and professional development? Could you share some of your earliest memories of the “Church on the Hill,” a place you have returned to time and again?

My earliest memories are linked to a few visits I made to the crypt beneath the choir, where the niches for sarcophagi were open, and remnants of bones were visible (and tangible...). However, my hometown played a decisive role in shaping my professional path since after deciding to abandon my technical studies—realizing that I did not want to spend the rest of my life in the industry—I recalled the citadel, with its defensive walls and towers, and its unique atmosphere. At that point, I only had to choose between studying architecture or art history.

When did you begin to view the monument as an “object of study”? What about the old town? Did you write any academic essays on these subjects during your university years?

The Upper Town, meaning the Medieval citadel of Sighișoara, became an object of study and reflection during Vasile Drăguț's courses on medieval architecture in Central Europe, as well as through the comparative research he conducted. It gave me much to think about when he considered only the Upper Town as a historical monument—reflected in its inclusion on Romania's first published list of monuments (1955)—while the Lower Town, despite being founded and built simultaneously, was viewed merely as a nineteenth-century creation (due to the remodeling of its facades in line with the fashion of that era). I chose the “Church on the Hill” as the subject of my undergraduate thesis in 1972. This provided me with a solid academic foundation that later formed the basis of my doctoral dissertation, a topic suggested by my doctoral advisor, Professor Binding, at the University of Cologne.

What was the academic atmosphere like at the Institute of Fine Arts? Which courses and professors influenced you the most? What memories does Vasile Drăguț evoke for you, and how did he impact your career?

The academic atmosphere was very pleasant, especially since all the art history students were required to also learn artistic techniques such as painting, graphics, though less so sculpture. My interactions with colleagues from these departments, visits to studios and exhibitions, and discussions and debates on artwork convinced me to focus on historical monuments rather than art criticism, which also allowed me to integrate the technical knowledge I had acquired at the Polytechnic Institute.

The curriculum was also crucial. Unlike the German program, it covered all archaeological periods (including fieldwork on excavation sites) and the full scope of art history (under Professor Radu Florescu), with a significant emphasis on Byzantine and post-Byzantine art and architecture. Other important and fascinating courses included cultural history and civilizations (with Dinu Giurescu), comparative literature (with Dan Grigorescu), aesthetics (with Ion Frunzetti and personal interactions with Eugen Schileru), paleography, and foreign languages.

However, what truly shaped my career were the courses on medieval European architecture, as well as the influence of Vasile Drăguț. He was the head of the Directorate of Historical Monuments at the time, and he offered me a job after graduation. As the then-president of ICOMOS Romania, when I informed him of my plans to emigrate, he made me promise that I would join ICOMOS Germany as soon as possible (in order to explain to my Western colleagues how the Soviets and the Socialist Bloc were using the platform to further their own goals...). I kept my promise, by becoming a member of ICOMOS Germany in 1978 and joining the International Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture (ICVA) in 1984. I chaired the ICVA for nearly a decade, from 1995 to 2005. Later, I was elected to the ICOMOS International Executive Committee for nine years (2008–2017) and simultaneously served as vice president of ICOMOS Germany.

What defining experiences shaped your formation as an art historian in Romania before emigrating to Germany? What was the atmosphere like at the Directorate of Historical Monuments? Who did you collaborate with there? How fulfilling was that experience professionally? Were you disappointed by the way historical monuments were researched and documented at the time?

The atmosphere at the Directorate of Historical Monuments was very pleasant and collegial. However, I didn't have my own office outside the library's large reading room, nor did I have "permission slips" to conduct research at various libraries in Bucharest. I worked in the records section as a referent for Transylvania, focusing on monument lists and preparing intervention projects (for example for Drăușeni or Aiud). I maintained close ties with painting restorers (most of whom were former colleagues from the Institute of Fine Arts), accompanying them on various field visits as part of the preparation for future restoration projects. Although I didn't manage to participate directly in restoration sites during execution, I gained a solid understanding of the Directorate's structure, which included departments for archaeology, records and stratigraphic research, architecture, and project execution (including mural painting conservation), making it a remarkably modern structure for its time.

As an art historian, I should have been troubled by the restoration concept that exposed multiple historical layers of monuments, thus revealing phases that had never coexisted visually. Examples include the choir of the Prejmer fortified church or the southwestern entrance of the church in Sebeș. However, it was only after I gained deeper expertise in the field and returned to Transylvania that I did come to see the issues with this approach. That said, I also understood that it was (partly) a didactic method to justify interventions on churches and monasteries within the socialist state. Unfortunately, this mindset still persists among many architects active today – a particularly negative example being the completely stripped façade of the church in Drăușeni, where centuries-old layers of plaster once effectively protected the interior murals...

What studies did you pursue in Germany after emigrating?

From the beginning, I tried to continue the profession I had started at the Directorate of Historical Monuments. However, during a meeting at the Bavarian Monuments Office in Munich in 1974, I learned that I would need a Ph.D. in art history to work in the public sector. Consequently, I spent two years working in archaeological documentation – specifically aerial photography – at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Bonn, while simultaneously completing my doctorate at the University of Cologne.

For my PhD, in addition to art history as my main subject, I was required to choose two secondary subjects. Naturally, I selected archaeology (which in the Rhineland mainly meant Roman archaeology) and Eastern European history. For both, I was obligated to attend at least one semester of seminars, which included coursework. My doctoral advisor, Professor Binding, did not require my presence at any of his courses or seminars, especially after I presented him with my translated undergraduate thesis on the “Church on the Hill” in Sighișoara.

As for future career prospects, he frequently emphasized the importance of studying historical roof structures – an often-overlooked aspect of architectural history. I continued collaborating with him even after returning to the Rheinisches Amt für Denkmalpflege. In 1981, he offered me the opportunity to teach art history seminars at the university, focusing primarily on the Gothic period (though not exclusively) in Cologne.

How did you experience university education in Germany? Can you compare the offerings of the two education systems?

In Germany, the curriculum depends on the expertise of the faculty members, meaning that not all periods of art history are covered (and ancient art falls under archaeology) or required for the intermediate examination. From

the beginning, students must choose the specific field in which they wish to specialize. Professor Binding, being both an architect and an art historian, focused primarily on architecture – hence the seminar I previously mentioned. However, the German system lacks active engagement with works of art, such as the hands-on experience that students have in the fine arts sections at the Academy of Arts...

What did your collaboration with your doctoral advisor, Günther Binding, offer you? What opportunities did it open for you?

Professor Binding was already renowned in the field of monument conservation and protection, not only as an author but also for his active involvement in restoration projects and archaeological excavations inside churches. He was known for publishing results quickly, often with his own dating assessments, obviously. Earning my doctorate under his supervision essentially opened the doors to the monument preservation offices, particularly in Bavaria, where from July 1976 on, he regarded me as his “point of contact” ...

What were the most important formative experiences you had in Germany? What do you consider to be the turning point in your career path?

My career took a decisive turn when I spent three months (July, August, and September of 1976) at the Bavarian Monuments Office, where I was introduced to hands-on conservation and restoration work by Magnus Backes, PhD, head of the practical execution department. This period shaped my understanding of preservation philosophy and legislation (including practical training in the painting restoration section). Afterward, I was appointed as a regional heritage consultant for Upper Franconia, based in Bamberg.

How did your training as an art historian help in your work at the Rheinisches Amt für Denkmalpflege?

Even during my time at the Bavarian Monuments Office, art historical training was crucial. Each district had two art historians responsible for churches and palaces and two architects responsible for civil architecture. In the Rhineland region, my expertise became even more significant after I transitioned to leading the inventory and monument listing section for the entire region. My background in art history was essential in evaluating and arguing for or against a building's historical monument status.

How did your return to post-communist Romania happen? Who did you collaborate with in the years immediately following 1990?

In November 1990, I returned to Romania for the first time as part of an official UNESCO delegation, along with Șerban Cantacuzino, who was coming from England. Our mission was to assess the possibilities of international support for protecting Romania's historical monuments. Andrei Pleșu, my former university colleague, was the Minister of Culture at that time. During this visit, I met Peter Derer, the new director of The Directorate for Monuments, Ensembles, and Historic Sites (DMEHS), and I was able to reconnect with almost all my former colleagues from the former Directorate of Historical Monuments.

How did the idea for the major project of cataloging the cultural heritage of the German settlements in Transylvania come about? Could you briefly describe how the project was carried out? What methodology did you use, and how was it integrated with the experience of local researchers from Romania with whom you collaborated? What do you believe was achieved through this project and which objectives do you believe were not fully met?

The project for the comprehensive documentation of all former Saxon settlements in Transylvania emerged against the backdrop of the massive emigration of the Saxons starting in 1990. It was proposed by the Cultural Council of the Saxons in Germany (Siebenbürgische Sächsischer Kulturrat), which approached me for the general concept and implementation details. I designed it based on the model used for compiling monument lists in the Rhineland, which involved marking all heritage-worthy buildings on a 1:5000 map, photographing and describing them in individual records, combining these with aerial photographs of the settlements and descriptions of the cultural landscape, drawing up architectural surveys for key buildings (churches, fortifications, schools, etc.), and publishing the results in the *Topography of Monuments in Transylvania*, modeled after similar works from Rhineland.

One of the conditions for the German Federal Ministry to finance the project was that the work be carried out in collaboration with Romanian specialists. To familiarize them with the working methods, most of the Romanian colleagues involved were invited to complete internships at heritage offices in the Rhineland and Bavaria. Remarkably, all 247 settlements were documented and the first volume of the monument topography was published within a short period (1991–1998). Each year, we organized conferences and scientific sessions to analyze the results and clarify attitudes toward the documented heritage, its historical monument value, as well as the significance of historical ensembles, sites, and cultural landscapes.

Among other things, the results were used for the UNESCO inscription dossiers for the city of Sighișoara and for expanding Biertan's designation to include the surrounding fortified church villages (both inscribed in 1999). Unfortunately, the full publication of the *Topography of Monuments in Transylvania* series has not yet been fully published.

When did you become involved with the academic and university life of Cluj? Who did you collaborate with, and what were the outcomes of these collaborations?

One of the documentation teams was composed of colleagues from the Institute of Archaeology and Art History of the Academy in Cluj – Kovács András, Nicolae Sabău, and Marius Porumb. Szabó Bálint contributed to architectural surveys, and these connections led to collaboration for the *Tușnad* conferences on heritage conservation and rehabilitation. One key outcome of these experiences was the establishment of a postgraduate course on the rehabilitation of historical monuments at Babeș-Bolyai University in 1998.

I would also like to ask you to share some impressions about your most cherished project, the restoration of the “Church on the Hill” in Sighișoara.

When the Messerschmitt Foundation in Munich offered me funding for a rehabilitation project in Transylvania, I naturally chose the “Church on the Hill” because it was in a precarious state of conservation. In fact, it was only used by the Evangelical community during the summer since it had no heating. I designed the intervention project based on the principle of maximum intervention where necessary and as little as possible elsewhere.

Since Sighișoara is in a seismic zone, the inspection and restoration of the structure were top priorities. To avoid concrete reinforcements, I opted for a solution developed at the University of Karlsruhe—so-called “pre-tensioning,” which involved drilling longitudinally through all the walls at three levels and inserting cables that were connected at the corners and pre-tensioned according to seismic data. Naturally, obtaining approval from the technical commission of the National Commission for Historic Monuments was a challenge. The execution was entrusted to a company from Germany with experience in such drilling techniques. (After the project was completed, engineer Pavelescu adopted this drilling technique for other projects in Romania, such as Curtea de Argeș Monastery and the stabilization of Bran Castle.)

The complete restoration of the roofing reactivated Sighișoara's traditional brick and tile factory, while the wooden framework was repaired and made accessible, though not to visitors. A crucial aspect was the full re-plastering of

the exterior, which serves as a protective layer for the interior mural paintings (although, many locals were quite upset, feeling that I had “ruined” the “Medieval” look of the exposed stone walls).

The construction site was truly “European” in that it included craftsmen from Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Romania. In 1995, in collaboration with ICCROM in Rome, we organized a three-month workshop for mural painting restorers from across Europe. The church was re-consecrated in April 1999 and awarded the prestigious Europa Nostra Grand Prize for Cultural Heritage in 2004.

Finally, esteemed professor Christoph Machat, could you tell us a little about your sense of belonging? Where is “home” for you? Among places like Sighișoara, Bucharest, Cologne, and Cluj-Napoca, where would you place your homeland or how would you describe it through a personal filter? What are its “colors” and its traits?

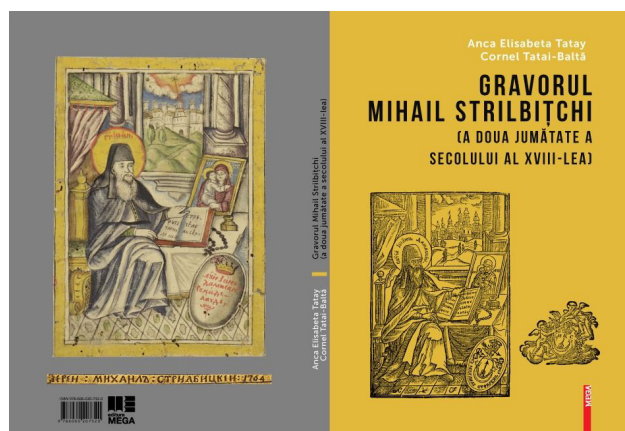
This is a difficult question to answer, but the fact that I immigrated to Germany in 1973, where I learned my profession and started a large family, and became involved in international activities makes it clear that, by 1980 at the latest, my homeland had become the Rhineland and Cologne. When the need arose to contribute my professional experience to the organization of the protection and conservation of historical monuments in Romania, I obviously accepted immediately. Since then, I have kept coming back. When asked by many colleagues if I would ever return to Romania, I always responded that I could act and help much more effectively from Germany. In fact, I represented Germany at the international level in ICOMOS, but it was never a secret, and almost all my colleagues knew that I was originally from Romania...

Thank you very much for your kindness in answering these questions and addressing the readers of the *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia Artium* journal!

Translated from Romanian by Voica Pușcașiu

BOOK REVIEW:

Anca Elisabeta Tatay and Cornel Tatai-Baltă, *Gravorul Mihail Strilbițchi (a doua jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea)* [Mihail Strilbițchi, *The Engraver (Second Half of the Eighteenth Century)*], Editura Mega, 2023, 345 p.



Anca Elisabeta Tatay and Cornel Tatai-Baltă are well-known researchers of the art and technique illustration of early Romanian book (1508–1830) and authors of reference books on the engravers who worked in the printing press of Blaj, Sibiu, Braşov, and Bucharest, and at the Romanian section of the printing house in Buda in the seven-

teenth-nineteenth centuries. Their recent book, published in 2023 by Mega Publishing House in Cluj-Napoca, is the first work in Romanian literature focused solely on Mihail Strilbițchi's engraving activity. The volume also builds upon the authors' previous contributions to this topic, which were presented in three articles published between 2021 and 2023. As pointed out by Anca Elisabeta Tatay and Cornel Tatai-Baltă in the introduction, while the works of the most important engravers who illustrated early Romanian books are well known, "the same cannot be said about the graphic works created by Mihail

Strilbițchi (...). That is why we considered it necessary to publish a comprehensive study dedicated to the most valuable and prolific engraver in Moldavia in the second half of the eighteenth century" (p. 10).

A complex personality, the priest Mihail Strilbițchi (about 1730–1805/7) occupies a special place in the world of book and printing during the Phanariot reigns. He was not only an engraver, but also a bookbinder, printer and owner of printing press and editor. Towards the end of his life, he contributed to the establishment of the Neamț Monastery printing press, to which he donated part of his own printing inventory. He was also a translator from Russian language, and, an intelligence agent for the Russian army commander. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, different aspects of his biography have been subjects of interest for researchers from various fields (history, art history, literary history, history of book and printing). The Romanian and foreign bibliographic sources, meticulously identified and critically analysed by the authors of the book, reveal that over time Mihail Strilbițchi has been investigated from various perspectives. However, his work as an engraver has been insufficiently and often superficially explored. During their research, the authors discovered that the exact number of Strilbițchi's engravings had never been determined, and that previous opinions in literature about their artistic value were conflicting. Some specialists, such as N. Iorga, Gh. Oprescu, G. Ștempel, and M. Tomescu, appreciated Strilbițchi's qualities as an engraver, while others, such as Gh. Racoveanu and Al. Busuioceanu, criticized his illustrations.

Was Mihail Strilbițchi a talented engraver or not? How many engravings did he actually produce, and what was his role in the history of Romanian book and printing? To find the answers to these questions, Anca Elisabeta Tatay and Cornel Tatai-Baltă conducted a thorough investigation of the thirty prints preserved in various libraries and published in Iași, Dubăsari, and Movilău, to which Strilbițchi contributed in various ways. The researched graphic material included all types of his illustrations: engravings, frontispieces, title page frames, the coat of arms of Moldavia, and his typographic mark.

The first part of the book contains a brief presentation of Mihail Strilbițchi's biography. Born in Ukraine into a family of engravers whose origins are still unclear, Strilbițchi was a graduate of the Kiev Theological Academy. The ambitious young priest came to Iași around 1755 and initially worked as a bookbinder and engraver. His knowledge (not only in the field of wood engraving but also in metal engraving, a technique rarely used by printers-engravers in the Romanian Principalities due to a lack of technical means), ensured him the goodwill and protection of the metropolitans of Moldavia. Between 1756 and 1800, Strilbițchi worked at the Metropolitan Printing Press in Iași, as well as at his own printing press which operated in Iași, Movilău, and Dubăsari. He illustrated, printed, or

edited religious and secular books, including textbooks, a calendar, a volume of poetry, a treatise on physiognomy, and more. Most of the latter were published in his own printing press.

In addition to what the authors have presented, we note that Strilbițchi's success as a private typographer was also facilitated by the historical context of the eighteenth century. During this period, some Phanariot princes, as well as many boyars, and high-ranking clergy hoped that Russia, an emerging European great power, would save the Romanian Principalities from Ottoman domination, thus asking for its protection and often collaborating with its representatives. The Russian-Turkish (1768–1774) and Russian-Austrian-Turkish (1787–1790) wars and the Russian military occupation of Moldavia gave to Strilbițchi the opportunity to put his knowledge and his enterprising spirit to good use. He knew how to take advantage of these turbulent times, offering his services as a translator, printer, and information provider to the Russian authorities in exchange for a series of benefits.

The second part of the book describes and analyzes 45 engravings made by Mihail Strilbițchi alone, as well as those he made in collaboration with his son, Policarp, and with the monk Teofan (43 woodcuts and two metal engravings). Several frontispieces and vignettes signed or attributable to Strilbițchi are also included. In analyzing the engravings, the authors sought to highlight the relationship between text and image in accordance with the stated principle at the beginning of the volume: "With regard to book engraving, it (the image n. n.) can never be separated from the text it accompanies (...), and inscriptions can be a key to decoding the message conveyed by the image" (p. 17). The iconographic and stylistic analysis is supplemented by an in-depth examination of the sources of inspiration and influences in Strilbițchi's woodcuts. In this regard, the authors outline numerous analogies and comparisons. Compared to other contemporary local engravers, Strilbițchi relies less on traditional Byzantine models. He is inspired mainly by woodcuts with Western influences from books printed in the Ukrainian area.

The third part of the book explores Mihail Strilbițchi's work as a bookbinder, "a craft in which he seems to have excelled before becoming a renowned engraver" (p. 16). Ten of Strilbițchi's leather-bound volumes and a few ornamental engraving plates he made to decorate the covers were identified and described.

In the final section, the authors conclude: "Mihail Strilbițchi was undoubtedly the most important editor, typographer, and engraver in Moldavia in the second half of the eighteenth century. Through his publication of numerous ecclesiastical and secular books, some of which were pioneering works, he made a substantial contribution to the modernization of Romanian culture. As an engraver, he abandoned the models of the Byzantine tradition, with a few exceptions, and

appealed to Western works, particularly German ones from the Polish, Ukrainian, or Russian regions that stemmed from the Late Gothic, Renaissance, or Baroque periods” (p. 104).

Four tables summarizing bibliographical data on the books to which Mihail Strilbițchi contributed were added at the end, along with rich illustrations. The reproductions include Strilbițchi’s engravings, as well as analogies with illustrations from books and manuscripts created abroad, but also in Moldavia and Wallachia. Some of these illustrations served as sources of inspiration for Strilbițchi. Others were created using his engravings as a model.

The book is written in a clear style, and the arguments are well-reasoned. The text’s comments are explained and nuanced in the footnotes, with the authors demonstrating an excellent knowledge of the field of study and related bibliography. The comparative approach benefits from an appropriate terminological and conceptual arsenal linked to the latest research in the field.

In this comprehensive monograph on Mihail Strilbițchi’s engravings, the authors shed light on the interplay between tradition and innovation in graphic art for printed books in the Romanian Principalities, particularly in Moldavia during the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Cosmin Năsui (ed.), *Artiști și istorici de artă în detenția politică a regimurilor totalitare din România (Artists and Art Historians in the Political Detention of Romania's Totalitarian Regimes)*, vol. I, PostModernism Museum, 2023, 208 p.



The scholarly bibliography regarding art history and historiography during the Interwar period and Communist regime was recently enriched with the volume *Artiști și istorici de artă în detenția politică a regimurilor totalitare din România*. This is the first of what should, in the future, be a series of three volumes dedicated to the topic. Eventually 168 artists and more than 10 art historians should be presented in these books.¹ This first volume comprises of an Introduction and chapters signed by Cosmin Năsui ("Honoriu Crețulescu și Vasile Hudici, artiști și cadre didactice ale catedrei de pictură a Academiei de Arte Frumoase din Iași, activi în timpul rebeliunii legionare din 1941", "Wilhelm Beneș, prozator, critic de artă, gazetar la ,Sfarmă-

¹ Cosmin Năsui, "Note asupra ediției – Artiști și istorici de artă în detenția politică a regimurilor totalitare din România," in *Artiști și istorici de artă în detenția a regimurilor totalitare din România/volumul 1*, ed. Cosmin Năsui (PostModernism Museum, 2023), 20.

piatră', ,criminal de război', agentul ,Bohumil'", "Vasile Ștefan. Profesor și rector al Academiei de Arte Frumoase din Odesa, în timpul ocupației românești, pictor în perioada comunistă", "Avatarurile lui George Tomaziu: Artist, poet, spion, deținut politic, agent de influență"), Cristian Vasile ("Oameni de artă în detenția regimurilor totalitare: cazul Barbu Brezianu"), and Luiza Barcan ("Constantin Calafeteanu – Pictura ca destin în infernul comunist").

The chapters are mainly descriptive in nature. This contributes to a deeper insight into the artistic life under the totalitarian regimes. In this form, the project promises to simultaneously examine the art publication network, art scene, and art academies of the times, pointing to the context and causes that led to the imprisonment of various artists and art historians. Moreover, the series promises to explore not only the art scene in Bucharest, but also developments in other parts of the country. The project is more than welcomed. As the editor observes in the introduction, those artists and art historians that ended in prison especially during the Communist era were not included in the main art historical narrative concerning the period.² Therefore, the book comes to expand the field.

From a methodological point of view, what all the chapters of the book have in common, regardless of their author, is that they heavily rely on the archive of Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (further on, CNSAS). For the researcher of the Communist regime, browsing the CNSAS archive is a *sine qua non* requirement, with all the challenges that this process imposes. As the experienced researcher knows, one cannot completely rely on the reports that can be found there. Petty, revenge, hatred, the desire for social advancement, or the wish to protect loved ones—among other motives—may lie behind false declarations, or, in some cases, useless declarations. The authors are well acquainted with these challenges, mentioning even in the Introduction that the research process had to consider, among other things, the compromising perspective of the Securitate.³ At the same time, authors like Cristian Vasile are among the most experienced researchers of these archives. As he accustomed his readers, in the chapter that he authored, he cross-checked information using other archival sources, periodicals, memoirs, and scholarly literature, a process that even allowed him to correct errors he identified in other publications.

Among other interesting methodological approaches, one may note that this book steps out of the mainstream narrative concerning the Interwar and the Communist regime, focusing on artists and art historians who are little—or not at all—known to the wider public. The reason stated is that the lack of access

² Năsui, "Note asupra ediției," 9.

³ Năsui, "Note asupra ediției," 12.

to archives prior to 2011 led to mystifications and gaps in the art historical narrative, and even to ideological instrumentalization.⁴ Therefore, the authors go beyond narratives of historical condemnation, denial, aestheticization, martyr-making, sanctification, and political correctness.⁵

The decision to end each chapter with an analysis of a work of art or of the whole oeuvre instead of conclusions was part of the methodological approach.⁶ This can be interpreted as yet another attempt by the authors to avoid a moralizing tone, that researchers are prone to have, given the historical context.

How are those methodological challenges actually resolved in the chapters of this first volume?

In line with the book's aim of focusing on artists and art historians from outside Bucharest, the first chapter examines two artists from Iași: Honoriu Crețulescu and Vasile Hudici. It is equally important that the narrative includes the Interwar period.⁷

Reflecting the aim of exploring artists and art historians who are not among the well-known actors of the art historical narrative, the second chapter focuses on Wilhelm Beneș, the author of a few popularizing volumes published during the Communist period on both Romanian and foreign artists.⁸ The last chapter, signed by Luiza Barcan, focuses on Constantin Calafeteanu, a lesser-discussed artist.⁹ Cristian Vasile manages to summarize the adventurous life of Barbu Brezianu, an art historian who, while not among the most well-known, is still more familiar to the public than many others. The task was challenging, especially due to the constant changes in the life of Brezianu, who was a translator, minister, magistrate, and art historian, going through imprisonment. Cristian Vasile manages to maintain an objective tone while interpreting the archival material.¹⁰

⁴ Năsui, "Note asupra ediției," 11–12.

⁵ Năsui, "Note asupra ediției," 12.

⁶ Năsui, "Note asupra ediției," 18.

⁷ Cosmin Năsui, "Honoriu Crețulescu și Vasile Hudici, artiști și cadre didactice ale catedrei de pictură a Academiei de Arte Frumoase din Iași, activi în timpul rebeliunii legionare din 1941," in *Artiști și istorici de artă în detenția a regimurilor totalitare din România/volumul 1*, ed. Cosmin Năsui (PostModernism Museum, 2023), 22–51.

⁸ Cosmin Năsui, "Wilhelm Beneș, prozator, critic de artă, gazetar la 'Sfarmă-piatră', criminal de război', agentul 'Bohumil'," in *Artiști și istorici de artă în detenția a regimurilor totalitare din România/volumul 1*, ed. Cosmin Năsui (PostModernism Museum, 2023), 52–71.

⁹ Luiza Barcan, "Constantin Calafeteanu – Pictura ca destin în infernul comunist," in *Artiști și istorici de artă în detenția a regimurilor totalitare din România/volumul 1*, ed. Cosmin Năsui (PostModernism Museum, 2023), 188–207.

¹⁰ Cristian Vasile, "Oameni de artă în detenția regimurilor totalitare: cazul Barbu Brezianu," in *Artiști și istorici de artă în detenția a regimurilor totalitare din România/volumul 1*, ed. Cosmin Năsui (PostModernism Museum, 2023), 166–187.

Besides enriching our knowledge on art between the 1930s and 1989, this book can serve as a valuable resource for researchers. In cases involving artists and art historians who collaborated with the Securitate, the chapters also include the names of individuals mentioned in the files.

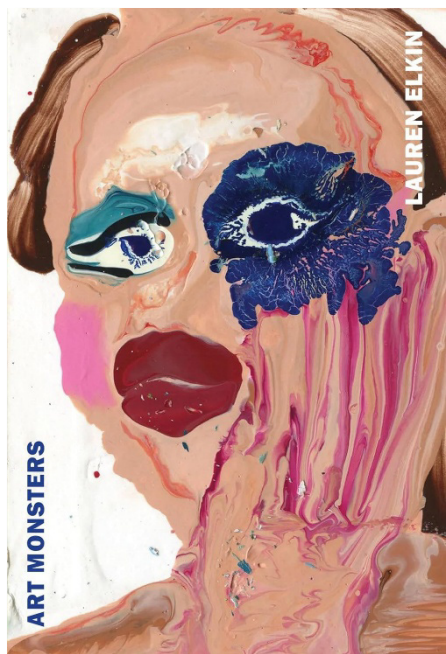
Most importantly, I would mention the fact that the book leaves the reader with the sensation that studying the Communist regime alone is not enough. A more comprehensive approach, starting at least with the Interwar period, would greatly enhance our understanding of the era for posterity.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Lauren Elkin, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art*, Vintage, 2024, 368 p.



Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met. Museum? asks, in 1989, one of the most representative posters of the feminist group Guerilla Girls (1985–present). The message, accompanied by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *Grande Odalisque* (1814), but with a gorilla mask covering the face, is meant to emphasize the hypocrisy of art institutions, such as museums, that have no problem with exhibiting thousands of nude paintings of women, but still shy away from promoting female artists.

The Guerilla Girls weren't the only ones, not even the first ones concerned with issues centered around female representation, but also POC (people of colour) representation, in the art world. Starting from as early as the 1960s, the second wave of feminism quickly began to spread its ideology regarding gender equality and the need to fight against discrimination—not only towards women, but also towards POC, the LGBTQ+ community, certain religions, disabled people, and so on. Feminism became the main topic of many theorists, such as Linda Nochlin (1931–2017), Luce Irigaray (b. 1930), Hélène Cixous (b. 1937), Catherine Clément (b. 1939), Griselda Pollock (b. 1949) or Laura

Mulvey (b. 1941), and it also inspired a significant number of female artists to create works based on their own experience as women—which leads us to the main topic of the book I am about to present.

Called the “Susan Sontag of her generation” by poet Deborah Levy (b. 1959), Lauren Elkin (b. 1978) is a French-American writer and awarded translator, known for her essays on themes such as culture, art, and literature. Her most notable book up until this moment, titled *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (2023), outlines a veritable anthology of feminist literature and art, with the main focus being on the way the female body is seen and represented. While the book itself is divided into three chapters (“monster theory”, “professions for women”, “bodies of work”), its structure doesn’t necessarily follow a linear or chronological narrative thread, a choice voluntarily made by the author: “For me, this book is as much an experiment in critical form as it is a feminist intervention in conversations about female embodiment and representation. [...] It is purposefully un-disciplined, anti-disciplinary ...” (p. 65). In my opinion, this decision, amongst others that I will present along the way, is one of the reasons why Elkin’s work opens a new page in the field of feminist criticism in our current era.

Because of how the book is organized, it would be difficult to give a proper summary for each chapter, which is why I think it would be more productive to highlight, instead, the main concepts and ideas that Lauren Elkin presents throughout her writing, starting with the one we can see in the main title and which represents the basis of the entire book—*art monster*. The use of Genieve Figgis’ painting *Blue Eyeliner* (2020) on the cover couldn’t be more fitting for this specific syntagma: an unconventional portrait of a woman, all smudged, as if she just pressed her entire face on the canvas; her makeup is everything but subtle—striking shades of blue around her eyes, a dark-toned red on her lips, and a Barbie pink blush on her cheeks. The contour of her face is imprecise and wobbly—she is, as Elkin would say, “uncontainable” (p. 15).

That being said, the *art monster* (which, in the author’s vision, can be used both as a noun and as a verb) is meant to guide us outside of what is considered to be the norm in a patriarchal society, and to teach us how to appreciate the beauty that is found within ourselves, even if it doesn’t fit in a specific mold (p. 14). This is the part where feminist art comes into play, more specifically the one from the ‘70s and the ‘80s, when women artists show no restraints or shame in portraying female bodies and everything associated with them and often stigmatized.

Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019), Ana Mendieta (1948–1985), Eva Hesse (1936–1970), Helen Chadwick (1953–1996), Hannah Wilke (1940–1993), and Kathy Acker (1947–1997)—all of them were *art monsters* that were no longer able to contain themselves, so they started to take up as much space as

they could. Whether we are talking about Mendieta marking the earth with the outline of her body and then setting it on fire, about Wilke flaunting her naked body in front of the camera, both before and after her cancer diagnosis, about Hesse handling large industrial material as a way to “retreat from language” (p. 221), what we are actually seeing is not only women artists acknowledging their presence in the art space, but also them making sure everybody else acknowledges it too.

Another element that profoundly inspired Elkin throughout the process of writing this book, and is mentioned recurrently up until the last page, is the work of novelist Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), whose speech from 1931, also known as *Professions for Women*, argued that, in order for a woman to make a name for herself in a world dominated by men, she must destroy, but also build. Connected to Woolf and also mentioned in *Art Monsters* are photographer Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879), her great-aunt, and painter Vanessa Bell (1879–1961), her sister, both great examples of modern women artists that deconstructed their works in a manner that turned them into true pieces of art.

As I have mentioned before, feminism doesn’t revolve only around women, and Lauren Elkin’s book makes no exception when it comes to the diverse groups that this ideology wants to represent. Kara Walker (b. 1969), Sutapa Biswas (b. 1962), Claudette Johnson (b. 1959), Betye Saar (b. 1926), and Lorna Simpson (b. 1960) are some of the artists that channel in their works both the hardships of their ancestors and their own struggles as women of colour in a society that sometimes seems to value a person less only because of the tone of their skin. Sculptor Judith Scott (1943–2005), on the other hand, was deaf and had Down Syndrome—after being outcasted by her own family for more than thirty years just because of her disability, Scott managed to transform her loneliness and pain into art, by creating textile sculptures where all the elements are tightly bound together, giving her the closeness she needed when she was a child.

Just like feminism in general, Lauren Elkin’s book might receive some raised eyebrows or even eyerolls, as it might be considered too “aggressive”, too “indecent”, because of the use of non-academic language and pictures of naked bodies—but focusing only on these elements would just oversimplify her work. *Art Monsters* touches on really serious topics, such as racism, assault, loss, sickness or death, all approached with nothing but respect by Elkin, who shows a deep connection with and understanding of each artist she writes about. More than that, as an author, she is not afraid to objectively present facts, but also express her own opinion, sometimes in a veiled manner, on the subject matter.

It’s safe to say that *Art Monsters* is not for everyone. First of all, I would say this book might be more fitting for those that already have some knowledge about contemporary art and are looking for a more in-depth analysis, especially about feminist art—after all, it is the main topic. Second of all, I advise anyone

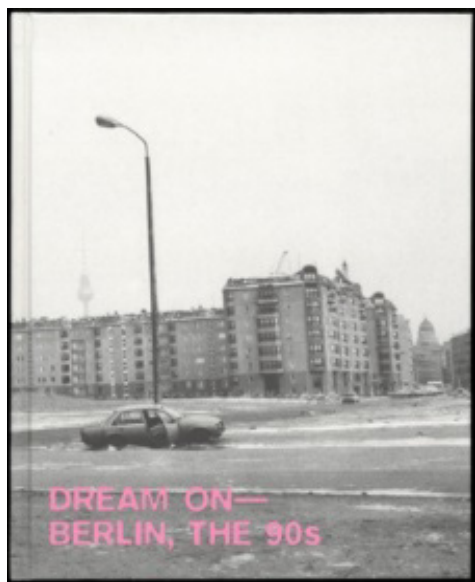
who is intrigued by this book and wishes to read it, to do it with an open mind and with respect for the women that were not afraid to be both art and artist. As for me, someone who is particularly interested in feminist art, I personally enjoyed Elkin's work—reading it was an immersive experience and it only made me more appreciative, but also more aware, of the way I am making my body my own.

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BOOK REVIEW:

***Dream On – Berlin, the '90s* edited by Boaz Levin for the C/O Berlin Foundation in collaboration with Annette Hauschild and Kathrin Kohle, Agentur OSTKREUZ, Spector Books, 2024, 343 p.**



Accompanying an exhibition, featured at the C/O Berlin from 14 September 2024 to 22 January 2025, this catalogue traces the radical transformation of Berlin in the 1990s, in the newly unified Germany, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In a sense, the catalogue and the exhibition that it tends to complement serves as a guide to the city engaged in discussing itself, questioning and rethinking its identity.

The exhibition shows the work of the Photo Agency OSTKREUZ, founded by a group of East German photographers who set out to document the changes in the city during that interesting decade. The photography itself qualifies as and has been dubbed social

documentary and/or journalistic photography, but the touch of nostalgia in many of the photographs hints at poetry. This is most obvious in Sybille Bergmann's series *Berlin 1990–1996*, especially pages 137, 140, 141, 142–143, 145 and 146–147, but also in Maurice Weiss' *Ciel de Plomb (Leaden Sky) – 1994–1996*, especially pages 159 and 165. In fact, the “humanist, poetic realism” of the OSTKREUZ group is noted by Boaz Levin in his introductory text, *Shot, Counter Shot*.



The photographs are arranged in four roughly thematic chapters, centered around a tension or contradiction ingrained in the topic: *Departure and Farewell*, dedicated to a new city and a new age ushered in by the fall of the Wall and to a society that would cease to exist; *A City Disappears, a City Emerges*, which looks at the urban landscape, particularly at debates on public and private space as well as commemoration; *New Liberties, Old Convictions*, which explores the rapidly changing social fabric, marked by diversity, commercialization and globalization, as well as the rise of the “newly empowered radical right wing”; *Welcome to Utopia?*, which addresses the colliding visions of a future society. Within these thematic chapters, the exhibition shows the work of four of the agency’s co-founders, Sybille Bergemann, Harald Hauswald, Ute Mahler, and Werner Mahler and some long-time members, Annette Hauschild, Thomas Meyer, Jordis Antonia Schlösser, Anne Schönharting, and Maurice Weiss. The photographs are arranged according to the logic of the sections created, at the same time keeping an eye on the chronology of events. While this makes sense for the exhibition as it helps its viewers focus on the events of 1989 and people’s reaction to them, the changing city, the evolving society, and the sometimes-unfulfilled dreams of the city’s inhabitants, it engages less successfully with the themes highlighted by the catalogue.

The catalogue, dedicated first and foremost to the metamorphosis of the city and tracing the relationship between humans and urban space, approaching the use of space, its reinterpretation and appropriation, is focused, like the exhibition itself, on details, on showing everyday events in the lives of Berliners during the 1990s. It also picks up the themes suggested by the photographers and frames them conceptually to facilitate the understanding of an era, that Boaz Levin, one of the curators of the exhibition, considers a time of “promise, uncertainty and contradictions”. In his view, it was a time when “the impossible became possible”, immutable truths—like the permanence of a specific political regime—had morphed into contingencies and competing visions for the future. This view consolidates the image of a city in flux, hovering between myths and dreams and the reality behind them. In this sense, the catalogue does not presume to offer a comprehensive history of the 1990s, it merely explores how events at that time are reflected by the work of nine photographers.

Boaz also points out that photographs are likely to become iconic, “shaping our collective memory and narratives of the past”. Thus, the exhibition and the catalogue are intended to link images to identity and memory, highlighting that perceptions of the past are informed by one’s view of the present, turning the past into a myth, a way of organizing the world, an assertion that every historian would do well to remember. It makes one aware that these images do not

provide a window into past realities but rather into the ways that individuals who had lived the events looked at the past, while adding their reading of these visual documents, their thoughts and emotions to the mixture.

Inevitably, the entire project focuses more on the East than it does on the West, as the DDR/GDR, the country that had taken shape after World War II gradually became the country that no longer existed. Most of the photographers came from the East while the land that was frozen in time, like Sleeping Beauty's castle, was located in this area. The themes that bring the project together seem to be the city landscape, the right to public space and the possibilities of re-shaping and re-appropriating it. These are all discussed from different perspectives in the three texts that conceptually frame the photographs and, in a sense, provide a code to deciphering, not just the images, but also the language created to designate the new realities of the 1990s.

Urban space is the main theme of Jens Balzer's text *In Transition – Zones of Freedom and Violence*, which deals with Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ) as contested terrains, but also as supposedly ahistoric worlds, understanding them, in the wake of cultural theorists, such as Hakim Bey/Peter Lamborn Wilson, as post-modern continuations of the Christian carnival, a suspension of societal rules and norms. These spaces disappeared before they had time to solidify into institutions, but, while they lasted, their strategy for liberation was permanent revolt or uprising that constantly changed methods, places, and forms of organization. In spatial terms, that meant a decentralized proliferation of experiments in living, where squatters, artistic nomads and techno DJs were the new actors of the early 1990s. They were all engaged in using the liberated space of the anarchic state of East Germany, transforming society and creating subcultures.

One prevailing phenomenon in the 1990s was squatting. This is well illustrated by *Mainzer Strasse, 1990* (Harald Hauswald), a section dedicated to events surrounding the thirteen buildings in Friedrichshain, occupied by squatters with dreams of a shared autonomous life. In November 1990 the buildings were raided as part of a large-scale police operation which led to major clashes and the downfall of the Green party government coalition. Squatting is also illustrated by Annette Hauschild's photographs in *Our House, 1992–1998*, which documents experimental ways of living and creating together in the derelict and deserted buildings of former east Berlin. In these areas, young people squatted, changing both culture and urban planning.

People in the 1990s also found ways of expressing themselves in the temporary open spaces, which led to a proliferation of techno clubs housed in the abandoned industrial buildings of former east Berlin, particularly in the now completely gentrified districts of Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg. One particularly

representative and perhaps influential club was *Tresor*, founded in 1991 and located in the former *Tresorraum* of the Wertheim Department Store, expropriated by the Nazis during World War II from its previous Jewish owners. These clubs turned Berlin into a major techno music scene throughout the 1990s. *Tresor* in particular continued to be part of Berlin's techno scene until it was replaced by a shopping mall. It was then that the endless party moved outdoors and became part of the Love Parade. This is conveyed by the photographs *Techno, 1990–1997* (Annette Hauschild), mostly taken in the abandoned buildings in east Berlin where several techno clubs were active. The subject of *Techno, 2000* (Anne Schönharting) is the music scene brought to the masses by the Love Parade, which transformed this particular trend from a subculture to a mass movement that influenced the ideas, habits and lifestyle of an entire generation. This is clearly shown by Annette Hauschild's photographs in the series *Tanzen* (Dancing) from 1996 but also by Thomas Meyer's *Tresor, 2000*.

A third temporary autonomous zone proved to be the internet. The intention at the time was to create a new digital future by linking information technology to political idealism. This also turned out to be a dream because, in Jens Balzer's opinion, it was turned into a "turbocapitalist machine" and "online shopping mall" by Amazon and e-Bay. Again, this is illustrated by Maurice Weiss's photographs in *Digitalize it, 1999* and Annette Hauschild's *Brave New World, 1998*, taken when it was still believed that the World Wide Web could be the site of a visionary start-up scene that would change everyday life.

These innovators were not alone in attempting to appropriate space, as far-right youths' subcultures including skinheads and neo-Nazis attempted to create zones of counter power and counter societies inspired by nationalist revolutionaries. These were more locally embedded, as neo-Nazi and skinhead cultures were prominent in Lichtenberg, where one of the photographers, Ute Mahler, documented the life of an activist nicknamed Bomber in 1993.

Social transformation within the two societies is also highlighted by a group of photographs focused on diversity. In the west, a multi-cultural society had developed in the wake of significant immigration caused by economic needs, when so-called guest workers were brought in, during the 1960s. This type of diversity however was completely unfamiliar in the east, as citizens from east and west had been socialized in completely different systems. This often led to individualized clashes between different societal groups, while some groups exploited social uncertainties, fomenting fears regarding the integration of foreigners. Integration is however bound to happen, albeit slowly, as Werner Mahler's series *S-Bahn, 1990* is attempting to persuade its viewers. This in an inspiring, if perhaps unrealistic, view of public transport as a socially integrative tool.

Space is also the subject of Janos Frecot's text, *An Empty Center- Notes from No-Man's Land*, which focuses on unbuilt spaces in the center, known as *Brachen* (fallow land), which mostly exist next to train tracks in west Berlin and which years of disuse have reverted to wilderness. There are also vast wastelands around west Berlin's train stations, which over the years have suffered significant metamorphoses. The text touches on several types of spaces, favouring squares as "rooms in which the city can be its ideal self", "places intended to impress and communicate" where "parades and markets are held". The social mixture in these spaces is reflected by the buildings, the front-facing buildings with *beaux étages* and the humble back buildings and attics, which housed the middle classes, the artisans, the artists and the workers.

Echoing the concern for space explicit in these texts, the photographs focus on border strips, also known as death strips, surrounding the Berlin wall, and their stories, the fate of derelict buildings, some destroyed during World War II, some left to decay in its aftermath. One of the most poignant stories, mentioned in the text but also represented in the images is the story of the "iconic squat" Tacheles, formerly a Jewish-owned department store called Wertheim, which became a space for creativity, for artistic and activist experiments, before they had to make way for new construction projects. Among other things, perhaps by way of compensation, the space now houses *Fotografiska*, a museum of photography, art and culture. As the OSTKREUZ artists were interested in the relationship between people and urban space, a number of photographs are devoted to the so-called Mauer Land (the Wall Land), neglected for decades, along with its surrounding neighbourhoods. This is best-illustrated by Thomas Meyer's *Mauer Land*, 1990 but also by the dystopic quality of Thomas Meyer's photos of former border strips.

In fact, a common theme of the texts and photographs on space is the divergent and increasingly commercial interests that have plagued Berlin's wastelands and even the new town center. In fact, undertones of outrage permeate the texts concerning the restructuring of Potsdamer Platz, an opportunity to re-think Berlin's city center, which has ended with turning public space into privately-owned territory, marking the shift towards unbridled capitalism. This has led to prolonged debates about the forms and uses of public space. While the transformation of Potsdamer Platz is the main subject of Maurice Weiss, *Ciel de Plomb*, a series that shows both the sky filled with construction cranes but also zooms in on the men working on the site. The outcome is presented in Anne Schönharting's series *A New Square*, 1999, remarkable through the stage-set quality of the space and the robotic appearance of its inhabitants. In the same vein, although the replacement of the Palace of the Republic, which housed the Volkskammer (the parliament of the GDR), with the Humboldt Forum, a

reconstruction of a former Prussian palace, is not explicitly criticized, the texts show awareness of the complexity of the issues involved in this decision, such as eradicating the built legacy of the past, the symbol of dictatorship, while recreating a space, potentially laden with national overtones and bring to the fore the problem of dealing with architectural heritage. This was intrinsically linked to Berlin's need to serve as Germany's capital. And this, in turn, implied that, in adjusting to the new political landscape, Berlin was meant to transform itself from a divided city into a metropolis. This is illustrated by Maurice Weiss' photographs, *The New Center, 1998–2001*. During this time, politics, power and media were concentrated in the new German capital, gradually changing Berlin's image and character.

The photographs also record people's reaction to change, in fact, to a succession of changes implied by the reunification. These include euphoria (Werner Mahler, *9 November 1989*), but also apprehension, an image of a police officer standing in the breach of the Berlin wall in Berlin Mitte in 1989 (p. 59), the expression on the workers' faces after finding out that the factory in Friedrichshain, where they worked, had closed (pp. 64–65). In this sense one of the most historically interesting set of photographs are those recording the withdrawal of the Allied Troops in 1994, which without verbal commentary manage to convey the very different mood in east and west and the misgivings people may have had about reunification (Harald Hauswald, *Of Departures and Upheavals, 1990–1995*; Harald Hauswald, *Hard Currency, 1990*; Ute Mahler, *Ibrahim Böhme, 1990–1996*; Annette Hauschild, *Do Swidanja/Farewell, 1994*; Maurice Weiss, *Beating Retreat, 1994*).

In order to capture the spirit of the times, between 1992 and 1998, Ute Mahler photographed a project called *Ratten 07*. This referred to the Volksbühne opening its rooms to a theatre group led by homeless individuals who sometime played themselves, while at other times they acted out roles, both in theatres and on the street. In similar manner and perhaps with similar intent, Ute Mahler illustrates further bottom-up attempts to use abandoned spaces in the city. By capturing the Summer of 1995, the photographer provides snippets of life in Berlin, such as Osman Kalim's two-storey garden house built on a squatted traffic island in the proximity of the wall in 1983. This further serves to show that the fall of the wall empowered a new generation to make the most of open spaces and lack of rules that were part of the aftermath.

The gentrification of neighborhoods was ushered in by the invasive presence of capitalism, captured in the image of a carousel with the buildings in Karl Marx Allee in the background (p. 57), but also by the transformation of neighborhoods, such as Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte, which were changed from socially-mixed city districts into gentrified neighborhoods (Sybille Bergmann,

Berlin, 1990). Another interesting example is Neukölln, a former working-class district which became highly distinct, defined as it was by the cultures that came together in this area, with potential for creativity and cultural exchange (Jordis Antonia Schlösser, *Neukölln, So Fern, So Nah, 2002*).

There is also an emphasis in this exhibition on the end of an era, the long 1990s. This sense of an ending is conveyed by images such as a photo of a Russian MiG fighter plane used as a scrap metal sculpture in Tacheles (pp. 60–61) and by the provocative, tongue-in-cheek attitude of Annette Hauschild's photos of the *Wrapped Reichstag – The final Night, 1995*, an installation conceived by Christo and Jean Claude, which involved the wrapping of the building in silver fabric. The ambivalence of its message is subtle, playing with the idea of wrapping up a spectacle, a performance, but also an era, a political system, a world. Equally moving is the focus on the Berlin Youth (*Berliner Jugend, 1999*). This is the story of people who only knew post-wall Berlin and had fallen prey to a globalized and commercialized youth culture.

This is perhaps the reason why the catalogue ends with an insightful text signed by Anne Rabe, *Berlin, Berlin, Berlin*, which amazes through the variety of viewpoints it brings to the fore and by underlining the importance of perception and the diversity of reception. The writer posits a personal point of view by stating that Berlin has been mythologized as a place which welcomes everyone with open arms, that the 1990s in Berlin were a better and more liberated era, a time of constant transformation and by confessing that, for her, the city was about being "whoever you wanted to be". The writer counters this by reminding readers that Berlin had nothing to do "with the province" while identifying herself as an East German, able to provide an East German perspective. In her view, the photographs in the exhibition speak of the transformation of Berlin and bring up a lot of unanswered questions, many of them 'what if' questions or, dare one name them thus, counterintuitive ones. One such question, and a particularly troubling one at that, is whether the reality that people lived, that people remembered and that people liked to remember ever existed. Anne Rabe reminds readers that the stories people tell leave out certain, less palatable parts like poverty rates in the 1990s that were high by all accounts, the experiences of migrants, who were not always made to feel welcome, the racism and violence in the 1990s, alluding to the political shift to the right, the stories of people who had to survive reunification, people who were not allowed into the clubs and parties so present in other people's reminiscences. The writer thus brings into question the nature of reality, of facts or events, the fragmented nature of recollections and the one-sidedness of reconstructions of the past. She ultimately links this to the struggle over space and built heritage, considering the latter the country's history etched onto the city's façades.

The concept of the exhibition does not nurture idealization or nostalgia as it points out that many current issues have roots in this much-discussed era, often portrayed idealistically or simply misrepresented, such as severe housing crisis, economic disparity, and social inequalities, gentrification, commercialization, nationalism, racism, and violence. The catalogue brings to the fore the heated debates that marked the era, particularly on urban renewal and use of public space and ultimately its significance for identity and memory.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Anca Bodea and Ioana Olăhuț (eds.), *Cealaltă față a lumii / The Other Face of the World*, Idea Design and Print, 2023, 184 p.



The volume *Cealaltă față a lumii / The Other Face of the World* highlights a small group of Romanian contemporary female painters who have been formed professionally in Cluj-Napoca at the University of Art and Design, between 2002 and 2015. Published with the support of the Hassium Cultural Association, it is edited bilingually, in Romanian and English, by Anca Bodea and Ioana Olăhuț, both artists and professors at the aforementioned university. The structure of the volume allows the reader to get acquainted with the state of the Romanian contemporary art world and with the works of nine Romanian women artists who have stood out in recent years through their relevant and constant activity in the competitive field of contemporary painting: Ana Maria Micu (b. 1979), Ioana

Olăhuț (b. 1979), Anca Bodea (b. 1982), Ioana Iacob (b. 1987), Mirela Moscu (b. 1986), Anca Brânzaș (b. 1986), Oana Năstăsache (b. 1991), Roxana Ajder (b. 1991), and Andrea Tivadar (b. 1991).

The volume challenges and attempts to answer questions regarding the relevance of painting and how it asserts itself in the diverse mediums of



expression of art today. It also raises the question of whether there is a women's perspective or not on the painting produced in Cluj in the last twenty years. The analysis has been emphasized by the inclusion in this book, in addition to a rich portfolio of the aforementioned nine Romanian women artists, of an interview and three studies that attempt to provide a deeper insight into the raised matter.

The interview, titled *The Other Side of the World*, stands for an introduction written by the editors of this volume, Anca Bodea and Ioana Olăhuț. It gives an accessible overview of how the two artists relate to the creative process, on what they think about painting now. Here, the reader discovers directly from the Romanian women artists the various and complex perspectives of their artistic process. For Anca Bodea, painting is a long series of decision-making, followed by a process of synthesis, concluded with the build-up of a visual language made up of the remaining elements. On the other hand, Ioana Olăhuț asks herself questions about what, why and how it is worth painting now, her art being a reaction to what surrounds her. Another relevant aspect brought to light is the way in which these Romanian women artists perceive gender identity in relation to the art they produced. The artists emphasize that they are not looking for identity art, which they perceive as limiting. More precisely, they just want equal opportunities, arguing that good art is legitimized only by itself, not by gender identity. The publishing of this volume can thus be seen as necessary to enrich the very vast cultural background of Cluj-Napoca, the range of Romanian women artists included here being a subjective yet pragmatic selection, as the editors attest and with which one can agree.

The next part of the book, and the most extensive one, is organized as an art album. For each of the nine women artists included, there is a photograph, a brief biography, a list of selected exhibitions, a statement, as well as reproductions of some of the artworks, accompanied by the title, technique, size, and year of production. Such a way of featuring the works is a well-chosen endeavor through which Romanian women's art asserts itself. It can be regarded as a way of discovering and engaging both the specialized and the broader audience with their works.

The main topics of the artworks range from still-life, landscape, scenes of figures in motion, collective portraiture, to the depiction of ideas, opinions and emotions. In particular, the works and manner of expression of each woman artist included in this volume are analyzed and contextualized from three perspectives that are reciprocally amplified and reinforced in the studies accompanying the book: *The Last Painting* (by Adriana Oprea, art critic and curator, museographer at the National Museum of Contemporary Art Bucharest), *Women's Work* (by Alexandra Chiriac, art historian) and *Color-Impasto-Shade-And Other Essentials* (by Liviana Dan, art critic and curator).

The first study, *The Last Painting* by Adriana Oprea, contextualizes and justifies the persistence of painting as a medium today, while offering a succinct analysis of the works produced by the nine women artists included in this book. The author starts by examining how the subject has been treated in previous art historiography, comparing the international discourse around the practice of painting and its so-called “death” with the situation in Romania. While Adriana Oprea points out that there have been some endeavors going on, in particular recalling the work of Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss or Barry Schwabsky, in the case of Romania, she remarks that there have been no art critics or art historians particularly concerned with this subject. Anca Oroveanu is the only Romanian art historian concerned to some extent in the 1980s with the practice of painting as a medium and the so-called death of painting, as she dialogued with the artist Horia Bernea on this matter.

Furthermore, Adriana Oprea delivers a necessary overview of what has been going on in Romanian art in the last few years in terms of an existing trend of recovery, confirmation and recanonization of women artists, but, from the author’s point of view, this fact is hardly visible in the Romanian painting. She argues that, unlike in other areas of artistic production where women played a more prominent role, there does not appear to have been a distinct female tradition in Romanian painting. Thus, the author concludes that there are relatively few women artists working within the traditionally male-dominated field of painting in Romania, and those who do stand out as exceptional precisely because they are the exception rather than the norm. Referring to the School of Cluj, the author believes that the painting of women artists, of female graduates, has not been properly recorded for reasons related both to the complex and contradictory condition of painting as a medium of expression today, and also due to the problematic condition of women artists in the history of art in general.

Another relevant and quite essential aspect stressed by Adriana Oprea deals with the distinction between feminist painting and simply overall painting. The reader thus learns that the nine women artists included in this selection do not wish to define themselves as feminist artists. Therefore, the painting of the artists featured in this volume is meant to be serious, professional, and valid, without the implications of feminist deconstruction. In this case, one can agree with the author of the study that there is nevertheless a feminist dimension, perhaps not in all of the artworks displayed, but certainly throughout the whole book, which paved the way for a discussion on the feminist implications in the Romanian world of art.

A great asset of this study is the additional stylistic analysis made by the art historian, which facilitates the reading of this book. Therefore, for Adriana Oprea, the painting presented in this volume is both a painting about painting

in the sense of its history as a medium of expression, as well as a painting immersed in a contemporary imagery, a painting that is immediate and relevant to our modern society. She distinguishes at least three ways in which the women artists included in this book paint: those who develop one and the same obsession with imagery from one work to the next over the years (Roxana Ajder, Mirela Moscu, Andrea Tivadar), those who create one cycle of works after which they begin another (Anca Bodea, Ioana Iacob) and those who create works with relatively similar themes, but who operate subtle shifts in technique, subject, format or genre (Anca Brânzaș, Oana Năstăsache, Ioana Olăhuț, Ana Maria Micu).

Alexandra Chiriac's contribution, the study entitled *Women's Work*, is a further addition to the already outlined art historiography discussed earlier. While Adriana Oprea's analysis examined painting as a medium of expression and the perception of women's art, this second study shifts focus to the historiography of how women artists have been integrated into the canons of art history. It explores the distinctions between the image of the woman as an artist and as a muse, and seeks to understand the broader female experience within the art world.

The author exposes the issue of the invisibility of women artists and their absence from the canons of art history by giving a brief retrospective of the art historians who have addressed this issue, among whom we can mention Griselda Pollock and James Elkins. In Alexandra Chiriac's opinion, the invisibility of women artists in Romania is due to the widely used strategy of aligning the geographical peripheries to the Western pre-established values, of trying to belong to the artistic narratives envisioned by a Vasari or Greenberg. This is exemplified by the recent events that took place in Timișoara, in the context of the celebration of the city as the European Capital of Culture in 2023, when a series of prestigious exhibitions were dedicated exclusively to male artists such as Constantin Brâncuși or Victor Brauner.

The text signed by Alexandra Chiriac takes a personal approach to the subject. One can even consider it an attempt to understand the female experience in general in the art world through a feminist perspective. The author directly embraces this aspect, while wondering whether the concerns she raises in this paper are necessarily shared by the artists featured in the book. This gesture is highly relevant to the foray. Upon a closer look, the reader finds that the author critically analyzes the way in which women artists are allowed to express themselves in the art world: both the artworks and the artists are good when they are doing well on their own, when they do not become obvious, they are present, yet mysterious. She argues that female artists who gain recognition in the art world often do so under the premise of exceptional or mitigating circumstances—such as dramatic life stories like those of Artemisia Gentileschi

or Frida Kahlo. The author also outlines a brief stylistic description of the included artworks that could be coded as female. One can consider this a useful addition to the stylistic description made by Adriana Oprea, as an additional way to perceive the art of those nine Romanian women artists. She concludes that the history of art looks different through female eyes. Due to the presence in this book of artworks depicting female figures made by women artists, the long tradition of paintings that served the male gaze is overturned. So it is no longer a question of who is watching who, the painting of these women being rather a powerful painting, which instead of being consumed can now consume the unwitting beholder.

The third and last study included in the book, titled *Color-Impasto-Shade-And Other Essentials* by Liviana Dan, briefly exposes the situation of women artists from the perspective of the philosophy of art. She discusses Immanuel Kant, who is considered to have been the most relevant figure in conceptualizing art and aesthetics, his approach changing the way of understanding and experiencing art by using concepts such as the artist's genius or the sublime experience. The author outlines the feminist approach stated in the 1960s and 1970s, highlighting how Kant's philosophical legacy was increasingly seen as problematic in the context of interpreting women's art. A revision of art history is also highlighted in the paper by mentioning Linda Nochlin's contribution to the field. Due to the fact that it is concise, and also the last to be included in this book, Lavinia Dan's paper serves as a conclusion piece that invites the reader to further reflect on the condition of art production and on how women artists are able to make art nowadays. As she emphasizes in the end, the problem of limitation successfully becomes a problem of choice, with which one can absolutely agree.

The inclusion of a comprehensive portfolio of the women artists, a proper art album, and an introductory interview offers readers a fresh opportunity to explore the Romanian contemporary art scene from the direct perspective of women artists. It also provides insight into the work of nine Romanian painters who have stood out in recent years through consistent and significant contributions to the competitive field of contemporary painting. The integration of the stylistic analysis and of the three historiographical perspectives also provides a better overview of the topic. Thus, both the specialized audience and the broader audience are invited to discover a painting that is extremely relevant today. Furthermore, the publication of this volume timely completes the very comprehensive cultural framework of the city of Cluj-Napoca, the artists featured here being a small group of Romanian contemporary female painters who have been professionally formed in Cluj-Napoca at the University of Art and Design.

Thus the question of whether there is a distinctly female perspective on painting in Cluj over the past two decades is addressed indirectly through the content of all three studies. While the women artists featured in the book do not

seek to align themselves with a specifically feminine or feminist viewpoint, their work aspires to be serious, professional, and legitimate on its own terms, and is intended to possess universal relevance, beyond the boundaries or limitations often associated with the feminist perspective.

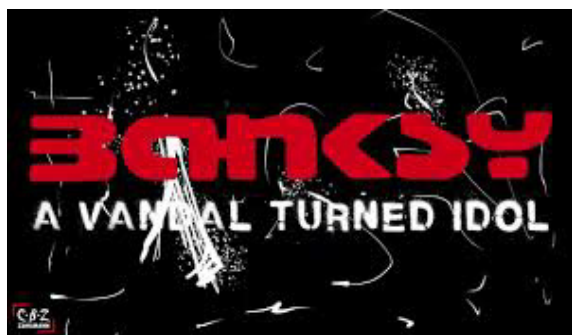
It can be reiterated here, once again, that one can also agree with all three authors of the studies (Adriana Oprea, Alexandra Chiriac, Liviana Dan) that in a certain way, the feminist dimension of this book is being highlighted partly through the artworks displayed, and most certainly through the very act of publishing it. This publication opens the door to a broader discussion about what it means to be a woman in the art today. Consequently, the volume *Cealaltă față a lumii / The Other Face Of The World* is certainly a great step forward in the Romanian art historiography, which has not properly recorded the painting of women artists, of the female graduates of the School of Cluj so far, for reasons related both to the complex and contradictory condition of painting as a medium of expression today, and also due to the problematic condition of women artists in the history of art in general.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Banksy – A Vandal Turned Idol. Berlin 2023/2024. **Official Exhibition Catalogue Concertbüro Zahlmann GmbH**



The purpose of this catalogue and, implicitly, of the exhibition it advertises, as it's briefly stated by its promoters, Burghard Zahlmann and Alexander Zahlmann, is to make known to a wider public a number of original works and prints by Banksy, formerly not shown in Germany. It also means to bring works out of

private collections and make them more accessible through the multimedia concept of the exhibition. Consequently, a discussion of the catalogue, cannot be separated from an assessment of the works presented, an analysis of the way they are presented and an evaluation of the audio guide provided in order to decipher the meanings of the works. The complementarity between the printed object, the catalogue itself, the spatial layout of the exhibition, the oral discourse and the visual element, provided by the artist's works, is as fascinating as the occasional discrepancies. It is perhaps fitting that one of the main features of the exhibition is a re-creation of the artist's studio. As Banksy is an elusive character, whose identity remains shrouded in mystery, the thirst for biographical details is quenched by the recreation of his studio from indirect visual evidence such as photos and videos. This suggests already that Banksy's artistic persona and his creative genius can be accessed primarily and almost solely from his works.

The spatial setting of the exhibition is dramatic, as well as evocative, as it attempts to recreate the roughness of the destitute urban landscape or the ominous feel of war zones.

One of the rather intriguing discrepancies between the catalogue and the layout of the exhibition, reflected by the audio guide is the absence from the catalogue of the introduction which wishes to emphasize the continuities between graffiti and forms of lampooning extant since Antiquity thus defining graffiti as closely related to protest and bringing to the fore its social and political concerns. Instead, the catalogue chooses to open with a brief discussion of printing and prints, inadvertently drawing attention to their commercial value on the art market. In certain ways, this is an astute choice as most of the works shown are prints, originating overwhelmingly from private collections. The catalogue, however, does emphasize the point that prints help the art travel across the world, making it less site-specific and placing it in global contexts. Moreover, if prints are made the traditional way, to a certain extent, they can be considered original as no two are identical. This inevitably limits the number of prints and establishes a hierarchy among them, as the first one is considered the best. This highlights the fact that controlling and limiting the edition of prints is a mark of commercialization.

In the wake of this discrepancy between exhibition and catalogue, the catalogue only partly follows the logic of the exhibition, dictated by the themes explored in Banksy's work, consumerism and consumer culture, police, as the catalogue dubs it, but, in reality, more of an engagement with the idea of authority, with an interesting twist concerning the lack of authority of those who work to enforce it, a provocative idea by all accounts, society, especially the carefully surveilled one, politics and war. The approach to all these themes is critical, mostly ironic. For instance, a discourse on contested authority is brought forward by works such as the *Di Faced Tenner*, a ten-pound note with lady Diana's face on one side, by a tiara-wearing *Monkey Queen*, by the *Monkey Parliament* or by the outrageous *Queen Vic*, portraying the venerable matron as a dominatrix, or *Grin Reaper*, a tongue-in-cheek image of death, winged and with a sunny face button for a face. One of the more interesting themes that Banksy engages with is the function of art and the workings of the art world, where auction houses bear the brunt of scathing criticism, as suggested by some works, such as *Morons*. Graffiti, on the other hand, and subsequently Street Art are appreciated as a form of protest, as a means to subvert rules in present society or at least, in Banksy's own words, "bring a smile to passersby". The theme of war seems to bring together the topics of politics and protest, making obvious the anti-militarist attitude present in the visual discourse.

Banksy, whoever he may be, is obviously an educated person, familiar with the visual media. This is particularly highlighted by the often-referential character of his works, which is not really commented on by the catalogue. One of these works shows a number of devotees adoring a sign proclaiming "Sale Ends Today", in a manner reminiscent of a *Sacra Conversazione*, obliquely suggesting that consumers are engaged in a devotional act. In another, Kipling's *Jungle Book* characters, albeit in their Disney guise, are easily recognizable in *Save or Delete*. Except, in this instance, they are tied up and blindfolded and set against a background of devastated forest land. *Stop and Search* features a likeness of Dorothy, with the face of Judy Garland from the Hollywood production, on her way to the Emerald City, having her basket searched by a security guard. Consumption and consumer culture are equally targeted, highlighting the pervasiveness of advertising. In this sense, one of the most relevant images is *Trolleys* where empty shopping carts are being chased by hunters set against an empty landscape reminiscent of Africa. Equally easy to read are the advertisements for gramophones, *His Master's Voice* and the logo of Paramount Pictures reinterpreted as *Paranoid Pictures*, complete with stars. *Napalm* shows a replica of the photograph of a young girl running away screaming from a war zone,¹ which has been used by the media until it acquired an almost iconic value. Except in Banksy's version, the girl is accompanied by a huge Mickey Mouse and a clown.

Other visual references are even more explicit, for instance, the portrait of Kate Moss produced in the manner that Andy Warhol used when he created the portraits of Marilyn Monroe. But there is more than a referential quality to this image. Banksy also seems to engage with Warhol's concern for anonymity, his behaviour when his face was hidden behind masks and thus rendered inaccessible to the world at large. One is led to speculate that anonymity is a concern that Banksy shares with Warhol, in his life, where he keeps his identity secret, and in his art, by replacing the singular individual image with a series of identical ones. The adoption of the rat from the work of the French stencil artist Xavier Prou, otherwise known as Blek le Rat, represents a more complex issue present in both the exhibition and its catalogue, as it brings not just inspiration, but also appropriation to the fore. Blek le Rat painted walls in Paris in the 1980s, inspired by what had been happening in New York in the late 1970s. In his turn, Banksy made the rat his own and portrayed it in various contexts, highlighting its survivor qualities and its adaptability to any situation.

¹ Roughly 50 years ago, Nick Ut photographed 9-year-old Kim Phuc burned by napalm. The headlight says *Napalm Girl. The Image of the Vietnam War*.

Some of the themes highlighted by the exhibition are provocative, such as *Dismaland*, which provides the opportunity for a stab at amusement parks in general and Disneyland in particular, aptly encapsulated in the pun that introduces the work. Inspired by the artist Jeff Gillette, this is, in a sense, an interactive project, an installation conceived by Banksy in 2015. In another project, the artist wished to bring the spirit of street art to the houses of ordinary people and thus graffiti was introduced in semi-private contexts.

Starting from the premise that Banksy understands graffiti as a form of protest (even his protagonist, the rat, is shown holding posters, suggesting that it is taking part in a protest march), one is led to see the city street as a space for public expression and engagement, and in certain ways as a highly contested space. This is very clear in *CCTV*, which hints at a culture of surveillance, where people live constantly under the watchful eye of cameras installed in public spaces. Their role in law enforcement and crime prevention is questioned by Banksy's images, such as *One Nation under CCTV*.

Conforming to their initial intent, the exhibition and the catalogue seem to capture the mood of the times and bring to the fore the fate of society and even humankind. Sometimes however, the coherence of the catalogue is likely to discard some of the complexity of the exhibition itself. For example, the catalogue does not insist on Banksy's indebtedness to rock, punk and hip hop even though several covers of Blur albums, to name just one band representative of British pop rock, are present in the exhibition as part of very interesting and thought-provoking compositions.

Aesthetically speaking, the exhibition creates a dangerous street mood, complete with dim lighting, exposed brick, concrete walls with an industrial feel to them and of course, graffiti. In lots of ways, this is mirrored by the catalogue. Its rectangular but wide shape is reminiscent of the surface of a wall, while Banksy's striking typeface is used throughout. The glossy black of the pages serves as a backdrop for the reproductions, while the dimly lit exhibition space frames the images, and the darkness of the city envelopes the graffiti.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Turner : le sublime héritage, Grimaldi Forum Foundation, Monaco, 06.07– 01.09.2024



We arrived in Monaco on August 15, just so I couldn't confirm all the prejudices about this concrete labyrinth squeezed between the sea and the cliffs. As it was a holiday, all public institutions were closed so it was very hard to find a printed map anywhere near us, as we switched to old-fashioned tourism. We did try to use the internet, although we knew it wasn't a good idea, but two minutes on Google maps and 50 euros later, we were back to default settings and ready to Richy Rich's city on foot. But that's not accurate, in Monaco one doesn't walk, one drives walk, you drive maybe, unless one goes up and down stairs. Lots of them. And driving, without Google maps, in Monaco is what you would call a rollercoaster on asphalt.

We easily found the Grimaldi Foundation though, most of the tourist attractions are on the seafront, where else, so down and down stairs we went, for half an hour to get to an oasis of art! The ugly pyramid that serves as the entrance to the Grimaldi edifice gave no hint of the treasures carefully gathered up in the Turner exhibition and his sublime heritage! As a painter in my 40s I had, of course, heard about the flawless watercolors of Joseph Mallord William Turner (23.04.1775–19.12.1851) but had never seen any. And it is indeed sublime and so is his legacy extended to the works of contemporary artists exhibited alongside the master! One cannot suspect how spectacular Turner's paste is, how vigorous the structure of the landscape, how deep the perspective of his work, until one breathes next to his works. Fragile and tumultuous, evanescent



but materialistic, these openings to infinity in Turner's painting carry you to places that exist only in the painter's mind. William Turner was an Impressionist before Monet and an abstractionist before Kandinsky, Mondrian or even the newly discovered Hilma af Klint.

How did this painter manage to see beyond depth? What pushed him towards the "non-antianticization" of the image? Certainly not the idea of abstraction, which is nonetheless as modern as it is possible to be, yet he saw through painting, through its limiting matter, an unlimited space. He saw a depth, an "inside" of phenomena, of the elements, an atmospheric interior that had escaped all artistic interest until then. Turner invented the pure gesture, the graphic expression that contains the idea. The gesture that contains. It contains life, mood, and energy. To put all this on canvas and have it lived on through the ages, well, that is the desire of any artist molded by endless search and wear, to the point of sacrifice. For what else can give meaning to a gesture, to an explosive brushstroke, if not life devoted to the pursuit of that very tension that holds existence together?

This was even more evident when the curator orchestrated works by contemporary artists into the exhibition space: Kate Paterson, Richard Long, Cornelia Parker, Peter Doig, Olafur Eliasson, James Turrel, Laure Prouvost, Howard Hodgkin, Roni Horn, Lisa Milroy, Jessica Warboys, Eduard Burtynsky, John Akomfrah, and Wolfgang Tillmans, artists with works as powerful and monumental as Turner's calligraphic gestures. The presence of contemporary works wove naturally into art history's loom, the silky thread of Turner's painting meticulously sewed into contemporary art. Nothing seemed contrasting or inappropriately dwelled; it was as if Turner had always been part of the language of contemporary art. This was most visible in the cohesion between Turner's painting and the chromatic spatiality of James Turrel's installations. That staged but palpable depth, ready to engulf you in a proximate nothingness. In fact, that's what Turner does, he materializes the nothingness and makes it immediate, brings it into the proximity of the eye that otherwise doesn't know how to grasp it. Turner turns painting into a tool through which the depths of the invisible become matter. This is why the perfectly curated exhibition ended with a somewhat announced union between Turner and Rothko. Two artistic consciences so far from each other in historical time, but so close in artistic time. An unsuspected brotherhood that places Turner's painting among the great abstracts of the twentieth century. So close, in fact, that Rothko, with his waggish irony, once remarked: "This man Turner, he learned a lot from me".

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Anselm Kiefer: *Angeli Caduti (Fallen Angels)*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 22.04–21.07.2024



After the Anselm Kiefer episode at the Doge's Palace in Venice for the 2022 Venetian Biennale, I knew what to expect when I arrived at the imposing Renaissance Strozzi Palace in Florence. An exhibition and an artist that stands its ground. Thoroughly prepared to clash once again with the 'better half' of art history: the Italian Renaissance. A German artist in the

heart of Renaissance art, already a good title to venture into a memorable visual experience. Because Kiefer's exhibitions are memorable, it's as simple as that. There are no positive or negative attributes, just memorable, because a mark remains a mark whether it's good for you or not. Kiefer's art is like a scar that is always ready to reopen and hurt. He is an artist who meticulously dissects pain and expects everyone to be his partner in this splitting in vivo. He comes from a nation that continues to bleed from the still-resurrected wound of Nazism. Perhaps that is why his interrogations of history and humans are returning to the forefront of contemporary art. History that refuses to die, a hydra of murder and a road of no return. These are Kiefer's desert landscapes: paths without horizon, where the line between sky and earth resembles a leaden rail—not dividing the two

realms, but bringing them mortally close, crushing every will and every action under their clash. A horizon that smashes thoughts until they crack, scattering their livid contents over sordid puddles and charred flora.

In the Strozzi palace, Anselm Kiefer was as strong as we know him. In the haste of a man who knows what he must do, he has built a labyrinth of spectral bodies, gold leaf and heavy lead objects. All on a grand scale, imposing, almost monumental but not quite, as the gigantic dimensions of the works do not always possess the gravity of monumental art. As in Venice, Kiefer tried again to create only iconic images. Each work was self-sufficient in symbol and material: descriptive objects enclosed in huge dioramas, large canvases with lots of gold leaf or bituminous gestures, black, white and reflections. All concerted to mythologically translated falls and damnations, recalling the irreconcilable condition with divinity.

Under all this existential weight, one cannot remain indifferent, even if all the grandeur of the tragic is on the verge of becoming grandiloquent. Because, in Kiefer's case, once you take the small step of evading the entanglements of large objects opulent in meaning, all of his construction becomes "construction." It becomes scenography. Maybe it should. Or maybe it doesn't have to, and then you realize that you are, in fact, stepping outside the object of artistic creation and you may wander, alongside the artist, into the territory of movie-set design. With Kiefer I saw firsthand how art can metamorphose into stage props and fall out of the "canon" of easel painting (whatever that means in Kiefer's case...) into the realm of scenography.

I have also seen scenography in Kounellis's work, but there the tragedy takes precedence, whereas in Kiefer's work the tragedy is lost and remains in suspense until the viewer aesthetically devours the artist's creation, so that later, perhaps, awakened from anamnesis, they may return to the great tragic questions. Kiefer must be understood with all the space in which his works unfold; the spacing between works and their proportions are part of their "scheme" of reading. It's pointless to look at Kiefer in art albums and imagine you know what his art is about, precisely because his work functions as a play, it has a "now and here" because it's on the borderline between art and drama. Whether you're trying to convince yourself that you like it or that you don't, you have to feel small in relation to his work, to witness textures and suspended volumes, to allow yourself to be overwhelmed. Only afterward, as if escaping from a claustrophobic dream, you realize that people will always be fallen angels.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

***Hip Hop: Conscious, Unconscious, Fotografiska.* The Contemporary Museum of Photography, Art & Culture, Berlin, 20.09.2024-26.01.2025**



Hip Hop: Conscious, Unconscious is an exhibition through which Fotografiska. The Contemporary Museum of Photography, Art & Culture and Mass Appeal (an American media and content company) celebrate 50 years of hip hop culture. Before discussing the exhibition, a few words should be dedicated to the museum. Versions of this museum exist in Stockholm, New York,

Shanghai, Tallinn, and Oslo, each offering unique experiences brought together by the same concept and the attempt to expose the public to astounding photography. More than a museum *per se*, Fotografiska is a concept and a space and, at least in Berlin, a place of memory and commemoration. The Berlin Museum is located within the space of the former Tacheles, an iconic squat and alternative creative space which was born in the 1990s in former East Berlin. The site had previously housed the Wertheim Department Store, confiscated from its Jewish owners during World War II. Thus, in time, the space has embodied three identities, which kept, in their own way, traces of their former selves. Even in its current metamorphosis, older parts of the building are integrated into the new structure and its overall vibe is kept alive by the abundance of graffiti covering the walls of the stairwell and hallways.

Curated by Sascha Jenkins (Mass Appeal) and Sally Berman (Hearst Visual Group) and showing 200 photographs taken by 50 artists (such as Martha Cooper, Jonathan Mannion, Janette Beckman, Campbell Addy), the exhibition invites its viewers to explore how collective expression connects to empowerment. In the intention of its curators, the exhibition traces hip hop's dynamic evolution from its underground origins in the Bronx to its status as a global phenomenon today. According to their presentation, its curators did not intend to offer a retrospective, a mere chronological account of events and emerging genres but rather to capture hip hop's "(r)evolution" from an "unconscious force into a conscious global movement, influencing music, art, fashion and language worldwide".

From a different perspective, the exhibition focuses on space, tracing a story that began on the gritty streets of the South Bronx in the 1970s—photographed by Martha Cooper—before moving from the East Coast to the West Coast, then to the South, and eventually spreading worldwide.

The global perspective is in this case provided by Germany, a decision doubtlessly inspired by the exhibition's location, which renders to the public a "unique Hip Hop in Deutschland chapter". Curated separately by a rather larger team (Yolandé Gouws, Davide Bortot, Miriam Davoudvandi, Ron Schindler (DJ Ron), Götz Gottschalk, Buyan Vit of the Freies Hip Hop Institute, Heidelberg, and Lina Czerny), this section intends to explore the cultural and political impact of rap in Germany, offering "fresh insights into Hip Hop's global reach". While the attempt is worthy of note and suggests new perspectives on the topic, this part of the exhibition is incongruent with the rest, giving the impression that two exhibitions were pasted together. By charting hip hop's move from an imported, American cultural genre to a locally embraced one, the section does raise important issues, such as imitation, appropriation, and adaptation, although they remain largely unexplored.

Given that the exhibition is a visual account of a cultural movement and, as such, intended to explore the many ways that hip hop has been captured through a photographic lens, surprisingly little attention has been bestowed on the photographers who first began to document this movement/trend, and their motives, although a photograph taken by Martha Cooper, a politically-conscious photographer, published in the *Village Voice*, is shown in one of the display cases.¹

¹ Martha Cooper is recognized as the photographer of Graffiti's golden age, a chronicler of Street Art, of early hip hop and breakdance, of children fashioning their own imaginative toys in a derelict urban environment, allowing one to glimpse a commitment to the pursuit of ingenious artistic expressions.

Another “road not taken” is the meaning of the changing context. Although photographers seem to have turned from a focus on the neighborhoods, the DJs, the street parties that were the original contexts for this movement, to the carefully-staged studio shoots and from the anonymous protagonists to the icons of the scene, such as Lauryn Hill, Tupac Shakur, Kendrick Lamar, the transformation of the genre from a mass-movement, where underprivileged and dissatisfied youths, members of the post-civil rights generation, were searching for new forms of expression, to the careful packaging of a cultural product of mass-consumption is not sufficiently addressed, although mention is perfunctorily made of the rise of high-production studio shoots. Another overlooked opportunity made worse by its primarily visual nature is the transition from the bold and individualistic aesthetics of the first generation of hip hop to today’s hip hop icons who double as initiators of fashion trends. Left equally unexplored is the specific cultural context of hip hop, rooted as it was in the multi-ethnic and culturally diverse communities of New York’s boroughs, such as the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem.

Beyond its effort to situate the German hip hop scene within a global movement, the exhibition pays little attention to the changes within the genre, as topics like the differences between rap and hip hop are hardly addressed. And finally, very little is said about the music itself, although the images are placed in the context of a soundtrack of the exhibition, which accompanies the public’s journey from room to room. In this context, the dance scene is quasi-ignored although visible in some of the photographs, for instance Martha Cooper’s images of the early days of hip hop. Equally little is said about the texts, the lyrics often spoken over the break beat of the music, the connections with the Graffiti genre, which was equally new at that time and the political undertones of hip hop. Silence also reigns when it comes to hip hop’s move from street and protest to the status of cultural artifact, deployed for different purposes or donned as needed according to prevailing trends. Much of this might have been avoided if the exhibition had been accompanied by a catalogue, able to put the movement itself and the photography dedicated to it in context. There is, in the end, a world of difference between a photographer like Martha Cooper, who created an interest where there was none, by documenting Graffiti and breakdance when few people were interested in these artistic expressions,² and someone hired by a studio to do “a job”. No matter how well-done, the latter will not replace commitment and a struggle to understand. However, the exhibition does much to create awareness

² Martha Cooper published *Subway Art* (Thames and Hudson, 1984) with Henry Chalfant, another photographer with an interest in Graffiti as a form of artistic expression.

of a multifaceted genre, encompassing music, art and dance, created from next-to-nothing with the help of turntables, spray paint, and linoleum and, sometimes, the surfaces of abandoned train carriages. It also suggests, however discreetly, that dangers may be lurking when all this has morphed into a global billion-dollar industry.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Adrian Florin Pop and Cătălin Regea: '35, Timișoara Garrison Command, 01.12.2024–30.01.2025, Curators Cristina Daju and Mihai Toth



With its suggestive title, the '35 exhibition by visual artist Adrian Florin Pop (b. 1978) and 1989 Revolution photographer, Cătălin Regea brings into focus the number of years that have passed since the fateful events, anticipating the idea of dividing time into 'pre-revolution' and 'post-revolution'. Given the fact that this event profoundly changed the fabric of Romanian society, I believe that this time division in the collective mind is more than justified. The commemorative and reflective concept of the exhibition fills and dominates the space of the garrison, extending into the cracks of the building, giving visitors the feeling that they have entered a complete space which ema-

nates, through every pore, strong feelings related to both the current political situation and meditating on the political and social events of the past.

The exhibition space was filled with a variety of pieces made in a multitude of media, from painting on and off canvas and photography to audio-visual installations and found objects, which brought a unique breath to the two collaborators' vision of a subject that has been hyper-discussed. Even if the predominantly approached aesthetic is one of thought chaos, where eclecticism, provocative colors, and paint splashes have a place of honor, the whole concept

was created on a well-documented archivist basis, where the photographs taken by Cătălin Regea, on which Adrian Florin Pop intervenes, often with tones of red, stand out and provide legitimacy to the entire manifestation.

I think the space fits very well with the idea behind the exhibition. The sheer size of the location allows artists to express their creativity without being constrained into a suffocating space. At the same time, the space allows the flow of multiple visitors without sacrificing the quality of their experience. Many of the pieces on display were completed within the building, they extend and bleed out on the walls and floor surrounding them. Adrian Florin Pop conceptualized and worked so that the space and location were an integral part of the exhibition, not just a simple anonymous support, a white cube...

I believe that the way the exhibition ironically portrays current political and social figures appeals to both a younger and an older audience. Young people can better understand the tragic events of the revolution when they are paralleled with the political absurdity of our times. It is difficult to choose a single favorite work from the exhibition, but the twenty canvases located on the wall in the stairwell had a rather strong impact. Only then did I truly understand the impressive display of artistic forces that I was about to witness on the upper floor of the building. Another thing that fascinated me was the way in which the concept of the exhibition transcended the limits set by the actual objects, transforming the entire garrison into a work of art. I don't think the exhibits would have the same impact if they were removed from this deeply interconnected relationship.

All in all, the exhibition was definitely worth seeing and it seems to me that it commemorates the Revolution of 1989 in a reverent way, while subtly criticizing politicians who have abused their power from then until now. At the same time, I think the exhibition also has a nostalgic side that appeals to individuals, especially since it is being shown in Timișoara.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

A Class Trip to the 60th International Art Exhibition, 20.04–24.11.2024

Like all respectable art historians (in training) with an interest in contemporary art, the students of the Art History specialization at Babeş-Bolyai University joined the artworld pilgrimage that transforms the already beyond picturesque Venice into a lagoon-wide venue for contemporary art. I will never stop suggesting this trip, not because of the Biennale shows' intrinsic value, because it can be hit or miss, but for the experience itself. Asides from the Serenissima, which rarely leaves someone unimpressed, the Biennale is simply a great opportunity to see contemporary art from the highly experimental to the deeply legitimized, from overly simplistic to profoundly conceptual, from sloppy to polished, presented both within white cube settings and in dialogue with Baroque churches, palaces, and other historic sites. This diversity extends not only to the artworks themselves but also to the wide range of curatorial approaches they reflect. This is the greatest advantage and disadvantage of this trip – it is an overdose, often of varying quality, of our drug of choice – art.

On my behalf, the 60th edition was pretty lacklustre overall, and even the major collateral shows, like Julie Mehretu's *Ensemble* at Palazzo Grassi, failed to pack a punch. The theme of foreigners often seemed to be translated as a strained relationship with institutions, demonstrated by the large number of works in mediums belonging more to the applied arts, as well as the obvious outsider art inspiration present at every step. This could be seen in national pavilions such as the Serbian one, or even the Romanian one to some extent, and in the wonderfully organic pavilion of Saudi Arabia, where it also took feminist overtones.

The more obvious reading of foreignness, a political and cultural hot topic currently, is that of immigration – this was present in the sensible Austrian pavilion and in two of the highlights of the Arsenale central pavilion: Bouchra Khalili's *The Mapping Journey Project* and WangShui's installation work across varying mediums. These works encapsulate what the Biennale sometimes is about



and what contemporary art *can* be about – from sociological methods connected to personal and group mythologies, the migration patterns, like an Odyssean trip (Khalili), to liminality, but one where each material and technical choice is steeped in symbolism (WangShui). That or just plainly weird experiences like this edition's Italian pavilion...

This being said, all the students' choices are their own, which is an interesting experiment in its own right, because no two sets of eyes can look at this overwhelming array of art and curatorial practices and lock on to the same thing.

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Aleksandar Denić: *Exposition Coloniale*, Serbian Pavilion, Curator Ksenija Samadržija



Exposition Coloniale in the Serbian Pavilion took full advantage of Aleksandar Denić's (b. 1963) background as a stage designer as the space was divided into several rooms and constructions, which invited us to meditate on the consequences of colonialism, that are not confined only to the sphere of politics and finance, but are also

found in human values and principles. What caught my attention in the first place was the familiarity of the space, which is quite specific to the Balkan area. The objects and decor had a connection to the not-so-distant past; each had a symbolism that urged the viewer to examine the current power structures, consumerism, and the state of affairs in a post-communist European country that is not in the European Union.

The structures in the rooms were quite crowded and could give the feeling of being overwhelmed, potentially causing a state of social anxiety, especially if there were many people around. Nonetheless, the space embodied one of the characteristics that I consider quite important in understanding contemporary art, which is establishing a connection with visitors. The artist

used his experience in theater, creating a real setting for a play whose main actors are the visitors. I came to this conclusion after capturing a rather funny scene. Two young people positioned themselves on either side of a shop window that was part of the decor of a convenience store, posing for a photo in which they pretended to be the seller and the buyer. Everyone around them had fun, and this episode certainly remained in their memory and made them see the exhibition and the theme of the Biennale in a different, more personal manner. We were all foreigners, watching an all-too-familiar and ordinary scene—the small talk prerequisite of a transaction, a longstanding genre scene in art history, now immersive (the impeccable craftsmanship of the set helped in sustaining the illusion) and Balkanised, transforming a Venetian exhibition space into a stage and visitors into actors.

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Inuuteq Storch: *Rise of the Sunken Sun*, Danish Pavilion, Curator Louise Wolthers



At the 2024 Venice Biennale, Denmark's pavilion perfectly captured the general theme of 'Foreigners Everywhere.' Artist and photographer Inuuteq Storch (b. 1989), through *Rise of the Sunken Sun*, exhibits some photographs from his life and also his journey to Greenland. Why Greenland? Because this territory, although autonomous, is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, which offers the citizens of *Kalaallit Nunaat*

(the Greenlandic translation) full Danish citizenship. The central idea, revolving around everyday life, the happy and spontaneous moments that he has experienced over the years, were easy to follow in his photographs; but more importantly he also conveyed the idea that although we can be strangers to each other, something or someone can bring us together in a natural way.

Although he travels and photographs different places like Nuuk, Qaanaaq or Sisimiut, the visitor is overcome by a unitary and deep sense of spiritual connection with nature and the artist's ancestors. Storch's photographs are deeply personal, creating a connection between the viewer, his own story, and those of his subjects. At the same time, he seeks to highlight the visual image as a historical document, striving to revive and transmit the culture of a people—and to honor those who sustain it.

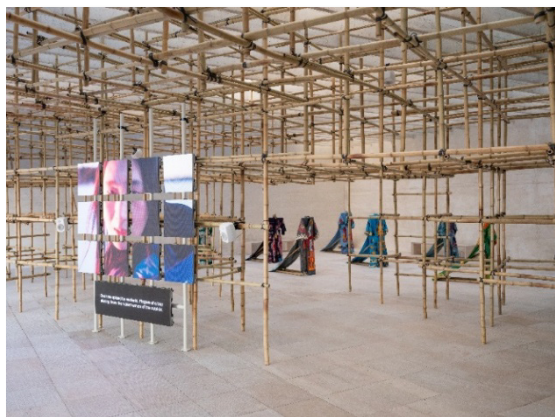
Looking at the artist's works, the feeling of tranquillity and peace gripped you more and more, creating a nostalgic and not at all disturbing atmosphere.

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Lap-See Lam, Tze Yeung Ho, and Kholod Hawash: *The Altersea Opera*, Pavilion of Nordic Countries (Sweden, Finland, Norway), Curator Asrin Haidari



Three artists were directed by curator Asrin Haidari in creating the audio-visual-textile installation for the Nordic Countries Pavilion at this year's Biennale: Swedish artist Lap-See Lam (b. 1990) conceived the project and led the collaboration with the Norwegian experimental composer Tze Yeung Ho (b. 1992), and the Iraqi-born Finnish textile artist Kholod Hawash (b. 1977). The pavilion

offered an experience that envelops visitors in the dramatic story of a sea voyage, which has as its main character the Cantonese mythological figure Lo-Ting—half fish, half man.

I found the pavilion fascinating as it managed, through music and the combination of technology and traditional techniques, to integrate the viewer into the story that speaks poetically about the problems of uprooting, displacement,

belonging, and identity. Approaching these themes through the prism of the fantastic and folklore offers a refreshing perspective on the theme of ‘Foreigners Everywhere’.

Visually, the textile works are delightful splashes of color in a neutral space, filled with dramatic music. The style employed by Kholod Hawash illustrates the scenes and characters through embroidery and different types of stitches in a bright way, giving a special breath of life to this pavilion. Exploring this installation—between craftsmanship and concept—was definitely a highlight of my trip to Venice.

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Wong Weng Cheong: *Above Zobeido*, Curator Chang Chan



Above Zobeide was a collateral event of the 60th International Art Exhibition, *La Biennale di Venezia*, inside the Istituto “Santa Maria della Pietà”. The exhibition, curated by Chang Chan and presenting the artworks of the artist Wong Weng Cheong (b. 1994), was inspired by Italo Calvino’s novel *Invisible Cities*, more precisely, by the fictional city of Zobeide. The

artist combined immersive installations and digital prints to construct a post-apocalyptic dystopia divided into two rooms.

The first room introduces the public to the dystopic world of the artist. In a peaceful, quiet atmosphere, the viewer can observe mutated herbivorous creatures of different sizes, their elongated bodies wandering among desolate ruins. Although the scene appears to be the aftermath of a catastrophe, the tower placed in the middle of the space, together with the surveillance cameras plastered all over the room, give the impression that those animals are not

alone. They are observed from afar. Thus, by entering this space, from a simple observer, the viewer becomes the one being watched along with the other animals. The ruins, the weird, mutated creatures, and the surveillance cameras, in the dim light sources and eerie silence, create an uneasy feeling, a surreal sense of oppression, and even apocalyptic anxieties.

In the second room, the viewer could see several screens that transmitted with a slight delay everything that was happening in the main space. Thus, you could observe your reactions for a short time. The televisions, arranged in two rows, emitted a tangle of cables that—along with the limited viewing time—intensified feelings of restlessness, anxiety, and self-awareness. The contrast between the two rooms, coupled with the artist's meticulous attention to detail, allowed visitors to engage deeply with the themes of the work, leaving a lasting impression.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

***Foreigners Everywhere:* Mural Art is No Longer a Stranger. The Integration of Mural Art into the 2024 Venice Biennale**

The Venice Biennale 2024 marks a significant moment in the ongoing redefinition of mural art within the framework of contemporary artistic discourse. Historically associated with political activism, social resistance, and alternative visual cultures, muralism has often occupied a liminal space between institutional recognition and underground artistic practice. However, its presence at this year's Biennale signals a paradigm shift, wherein an art form rooted in public, often unauthorized, interventions is now legitimized within one of the most prestigious platforms of global contemporary art.

This transition is not merely a matter of visibility but could reflect a broader reconfiguration of power structures in the art world. The incorporation of large-scale mural works—such as MAHKU's mythological retelling of migration, Aravani Art Project's exploration of gender identity through color symbolism, and Frieda Toranzo Jaeger's fusion of indigenous embroidery, queerness, and automotive iconography—underscores the capacity of muralism to articulate socio-political narratives that extend beyond the constraints of traditional gallery spaces. These interventions challenge the Eurocentric, object-based model of art consumption by emphasizing ephemerality, site-specificity, and collective authorship, thereby questioning the conventions of artistic value, permanence, and ownership.

At the same time, the Biennale's embrace of muralism raises critical questions: Does the institutionalization of an art form born from countercultural movements alter its radical potential? To what extent does the relocation of mural art from the street to the white cube or, in this case, the walls of the Biennale's pavilions, transform its function as a vehicle for dissent and community engagement? These tensions lie at the heart of this year's mural interventions, positioning them not merely as aesthetic contributions but as active negotiations of power, space, and voice in contemporary art.



The mural intervention by MAHKU on the façade of the Central Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2024 aligns with a tradition of muralism as a space for contestation and historical re-narration, challenging the Western artistic canon while asserting indigenous knowledge systems. By transposing the *kapewë pukeni* (the alligator bridge) myth into a large-scale, dynamic visual register, the work not only reclaims a Huni Kuin cosmology within an institutionalized art context but also interrogates the relationship between migration, spatiality, and cultural memory.



MAHKU, *Kapewë Pukeni*, Venice Biennale 2024, Central Pavilion, Giardini.
A visual narrative of Huni Kuin identity and migration.

Historically, muralism has served as a tool of identity assertion and political resistance, from Renaissance frescoes articulating theological and social hierarchies to post-revolutionary Mexican muralism and contemporary Street Art as a form of urban activism. In this tradition, MAHKU's work reconfigures the Neoclassical façade of Giardini's Central Pavilion, transforming it into a medium for a non-Western lexicon. The juxtaposition suggests that Greco-Roman mythology, the foundation of all classical art, is being superseded, perhaps awkwardly, by a myth largely unfamiliar, and consequently uncomfortable to the European culture. Its fragmented spatial composition, where time, space, and identity are fluid, still marks it as 'exotic'.

In this context, MAHKU's intervention raises a fundamental question for contemporary art history: to what extent does the integration of indigenous visual discourses into global art institutions genuinely reshape dominant paradigms, and to what extent does it risk neutralizing them through aestheticization? By its very presence at the Biennale, MAHKU's muralism is not merely an artistic gesture but also a form of visibility claim and a negotiation of the place of indigenous art within the international art landscape.

If MAHKU's intervention speaks to the politics of migration and ancestral knowledge, Aravani Art Project's *Diaspore* engages with themes of gender dysphoria, belonging, and the reconfiguration of identity. Spanning 100 feet along the Arsenale, this mural—the collective's first appearance at the Biennale—merges personal narratives with broader socio-political commentaries on trans visibility, acceptance, and resistance.



Aravani Art Project, *Diaspore*, Venice Biennale 2024, Arsenale.
Celebrating transgender identities through vibrant mural art.

At its core, *Diaspore* explores the concept of “foreignness,” not in a geopolitical sense but as an existential condition tied to gender dysphoria—the feeling of being exiled from one’s own body. By further framing trans experience through the lens of diaspora, the mural aligns gender transition with broader narratives of migration, adaptation, and cultural negotiation. In doing so, it challenges binary understandings of belonging and instead proposes a more fluid, evolving model of identity.

This theme is reinforced through the composition itself. Each trans woman depicted within the mural represents a different stage in the journey toward self-acceptance. Shanthi Muniswamy, painted in pale yellow and surrounded by pink flowers, is shown in a moment of transformation, symbolizing growth and

self-discovery. Jyoti H. Tirakanagowda holds a birdcage from which a geometric bird escapes, a potent metaphor for liberation from societal constraints and the anxieties surrounding transition. Karnika Bai, dressed in a striking sari, embodies confidence and self-assurance, standing as a beacon of pride for the queer community. Purushii, in deep blue, is depicted in a contemplative pose, reflecting on her personal evolution. Kanchana, from Aravani's Chennai team, is shown at peace within a garden of flowers, symbolizing harmony and integration.

For Aravani Art Project, colour is more than just an aesthetic choice, it is a political statement. Bright, saturated pigments evoke Indian visual traditions, referencing textiles, festivals, and architectural ornamentation, while also serving as a direct visual link to LGBTQ+ and trans activism. The blue and red rectangles within the mural symbolize the collective's core team, while the floral patterns represent the members who could not be present in Venice, further emphasizing the communal nature of their work.

The interplay between traditional Indian aesthetics and queer symbolism is crucial to the collective's approach. Their use of vivid, almost hallucinatory hues challenges the Eurocentric gaze that often frames trans narratives within discourses of suffering and marginalization. Instead, Aravani Art Project centres joy, celebration, and resilience, reclaiming the right to public space and self-representation.

The act of painting murals has always been inherently political, particularly for communities that have been historically excluded from mainstream art institutions. In the case of Aravani Art Project, muralism serves a dual function: it is both an assertion of presence and a tool for social change. By creating large-scale, public artworks, the collective disrupts the invisibility imposed upon trans bodies, making their existence not just seen but monumental.

At the Biennale, where the dominant art historical canon still largely prioritizes Western, cisgender, and male perspectives, the placement of *Diaspore* within the Arsenale is itself a radical gesture. It signals a shift in the way institutional spaces engage with trans narratives, not as peripheral concerns but as integral to contemporary artistic discourse. The mural's vibrant depiction of trans identities, intertwined with themes of displacement and belonging, reclaims public space as a site of affirmation and visibility. By doing so, it aligns with the broader curatorial framework of the Biennale, which foregrounds marginalized perspectives as central to the evolution of contemporary art.

Expanding on this discourse, Frieda Toranzo Jaeger's *Rage Is a Machine in Times of Senselessness* extends the challenge to dominant narratives by reconfiguring historically masculinized imagery into a vision of queer futurism and ecological harmony. Her modular paintings and installations merge the mechanical and the organic, incorporating embroidery traditions, mural aesthetics,

and religious iconography to construct a counter-narrative to colonial and patriarchal histories. The work's focus on automobiles, perceived by the artist as inherently feminine, subverts the aggressive masculinity typically associated with industrial design hailed by the machist Futurists, envisioning a speculative utopia where technology and nature coexist in fluid symbiosis. Together, these works aim towards redefining the politics of representation, positioning queer and trans identities not as exceptions within art history, but as active agents in reshaping its trajectory.



Frieda Toranzo Jaeger, *Rage Is a Machine in Times of Senselessness*, Venice Biennale 2024, Arsenale.

Positioned near the entrance of the Biennale's exhibition spaces, *Rage Is a Machine in Times of Senselessness* spans over 15 meters, its structure evoking a pre-Columbian ziggurat that rises in layers of intersecting canvases. Toranzo Jaeger creates a visual dialogue between automotive forms: exhaust pipes spewing crimson smoke, dynamic swirling lines, and intimate, lush landscapes, such as an erotic gathering of queer women enveloped in lush foliage. Indigenous Mexican embroidery techniques appear throughout, reinforcing the work's engagement with cultural continuity and resistance. The compositional density of her paintings recalls

the legacy of Mexican muralism, particularly Diego Rivera and Juan O’Gorman, yet her intervention is distinctly personal and radical, reclaiming historical visual languages for a contemporary, queer feminist perspective.

Her work also engages explicitly with political discourse, integrating references to Palestinian resistance within the broader framework of anti-colonial struggle. By reinterpreting Frida Kahlo’s *Viva la Vida, Watermelons* (1954), replacing its inscription with *Viva Palestina*, and stitching a heart from *The Two Fridas* (1939) alongside the phrase “Hearts that unite against genocide” Toranzo Jaeger foregrounds solidarity as an intrinsic part of her practice. These elements resonate throughout the Biennale’s thematic framework, addressing displacement, marginalization, and the fluidity of identity.

Together, these works exemplify the Biennale’s evolving engagement with narratives that have long been marginalized within institutional spaces. *Diaspore*, *Rage Is a Machine in Times of Senselessness*, and MAHKU’s monumental mural do more than assert visibility; they actively dismantle the hierarchies of power embedded in artistic traditions. While *Diaspore* reclaims public space through trans narratives and vibrant, identity-affirming imagery, and Toranzo Jaeger’s work subverts the hypermasculinity of industrial design, MAHKU’s mural bridges myth and geography, transforming Indigenous oral histories into visual cartographies of displacement and resilience. Each of these projects engages with a history of exclusion—whether through gender, colonialism, or Western art canons—yet they do not merely critique; they construct alternative frameworks for understanding contemporary artistic discourse. By reimagining public space, historical iconography, and technological symbolism through queer, trans, and Indigenous lenses, these works propose radical new possibilities for art as a way of resistance, transformation, and collective imagination.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Șerban Savu: *What Work Is?*, Romanian Pavilion – La Biennale di Venezia, 20.04–24.11.2024, Curator Ciprian Mureșan



In 2024 our country's pavilion was represented at the Venice Biennale through the exhibition *What work is?*, where visitors could enjoy the mastery of the internationally renowned Romanian artist Șerban Savu. The Venice Biennale is one of the most beautiful celebrations of contemporary art. Through this event, the artworld gains consensus because once every two years artists from different corners of the world have the opportunity to exhibit their works in the most important global festival. Therefore, both the exchange of ideas and the connection to new innovations are favored.

Venice in general is a place blessed with a variety of beauties that belong both to the uniqueness of its anthropic geographical features, given its picturesque canals, and the urban landscape

that is made up of pretentious architectural monuments, but during the Biennale, when the galleries welcome you at every corner, the city becomes a true hedonistic sanctuary. In addition to the exhibitions that can be found in the most spontaneous places of the city, two geographically peripheral areas are dedicated to the Biennale and thus become culturally-central, namely *Giardini*



and *Arsenale*. *Giardini* means garden, as the name suggests in Italian, but it is more of a park dedicated to the arts where one can interact with the national pavilions and exhibitions of different countries.

Șerban Savu, born in 1978, is one of the best-known contemporary Romanian artists active on the foreign art scene, able to convey particularities of the post-communist Romanian landscape with the help of old masters' techniques. The artist works primarily with painting and mosaic, favoring a classical, figurative approach to the autochthonous themes he explores. He also belongs to the famous group of artists, catalyzed around the gallerist Mihai Pop, referred to in historiography as the "Cluj School" or the "Cluj Phenomenon". The group includes other world-class artists such as Adrian Ghenie (who also represented Romania at the Venice Biennale in 2015), Victor Man or Mircea Cantor. Curator Ciprian Mureșan (b. 1977) is another significant member of the group, to whom we owe the core idea behind the exhibition. He is an artist recognized both in Romania and abroad for his neo-conceptual vision through which he perceives social vulnerabilities and criticizes or ironizes them through various artistic means.¹

The artist's affinity for Venice did not begin with the current show. He completed his university studies with a master's degree in this city. Venice is known to have a well-established tradition in visual arts since the time Titian inspired the whole of Italy with the skill of combining his lively hues, being a faultless colorist. Arriving here, Savu was seduced by the classical techniques of the Renaissance period, which he first contemplated at the Gallerie dell'Accademia, and then began to assimilate.² He could only choose the thematic orientation when he returned to Romania, realizing that in his native land every blade of grass inspires him,³ as he said in an interview. Thus, the real resources he uses to create have always remained at home, but it took several formative journeys to see his path clearly. At the moment, we are talking about a mature and very committed artist, who surprises us both with his elaborate methods, as well as with the power behind the chosen concepts.

The exhibition dedicated to Romania was impressive in 2024. The pavilion combines two exhibition styles that synchronize with the current period. First, we turn our attention to the overall atmosphere which is really inspired by the principle of the 'white cube', a manner of exposition typical of the modern period, but very successful today. Neutralizing the space's personality with

¹ Erwin Kessler, *X: 20. O radiografie a artei românești după 1989* (Editura Vellant, 2013).

² David Cohen, "Communism never happened: Șerban Savu and the Cluj connection," *Artcritical. The online Magazine of Art and Ideas*, October 13, 2011, <https://dawidradziszewski.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/communism-never-happened-serban-savu-and-the-cluj-connection-artcritical-artcritical.pdf>.

³ Adina Zorzini, *Cincisprezece conversații cu artiști contemporani* (Editura Trei, 2015), 284.

whitewashed walls suggests a purification of the cultural environment, set in contrast to mundane reality. It is an environment created specifically to delineate the sacred space dedicated to art, meant to take one out of the profane state and devoid of visual or intellectual ecstasy. A second method of display is inspired precisely from the medieval period, when polyptychs were often used to decorate church altars. However, in this particular case, the presented polyptych, and at the same time the theatrical hit of the exhibition, takes the form of a large-scale art installation that brings together 45 paintings made by Șerban Savu. Moreover, this generous secular iconostasis is in dialogue with four other exhibits in the form of buildings that can be interpreted like models or sculptures, each containing a mosaic of social realist inspiration.

As the title indicates, the exhibition aims to answer the question of what work is, visually defining this activity from several points of view, of course, through the typical filter of the Eastern European context. In addition to the actual work, the artist also considers the indispensable breaks from it, naming the polyptych as work but also leisure, alternating lucrative state with idleness.

To get into the content of this exhibition, it is essential to learn some of the particularities of the artist Șerban Savu. First of all, he lived his childhood in the shadow of the Romanian communist regime, witnessing the breakthrough marked by the 1989 Revolution from which the new liberal period was born. In his work he captures the chaotic transition from totalitarianism to a democratic world, paying attention to the social process. He is an observant artist who takes scenes from Romanian reality and transposes them into a painting or mosaic. His main environment of inspiration is on the outskirts of cities, on the border between urban and rural areas, places where the reminiscences of the Communist period are still very visible. He does not aim to criticize the country's shortcomings or fall into false nationalism, but rather remains objective, a mere witness to the scenes he depicts.⁴

His work can also be interpreted as anthropological study, because he is interested in understanding the current state of that new man, who, with the help of propaganda resources, was developed in the Communist laboratories. Currently, the social category in which communism invested so much has become a failure, also illustrating the failure of the Western regime. He investigates the present state of workers and farmers who have fallen exponentially in the social hierarchy and became marginalized in the urban suburbs.⁵ A feature present in Șerban Savu, which is clearly observable in this exhibition, is the pervasive passivity shared by his characters, captured in the most concrete way possible. It is a feeling that can indeed be observed among people who belong to the middle and lower classes in Romania, resembling a latent melancholy.

⁴ Ioana Chira, "Privirea lui Șerban Savu," *Bazar* 44, no. 6 (2015).

⁵ Șerban Savu, *Paintings 2005-2010* (Hatje Cantz, 2011).

The works selected for the polyptych depict individuals at work or ordinary people who are in a state of relaxation, spending the free time they have in various ways. In the first category, we can distinguish restorers, archaeologists, but also garbage collectors or plumbers, referring directly to occupations that require physical effort. For the second category, familiar leisure spaces and at the same time typical Romanian pastimes were chosen. Here we see people fishing, biking, or lounging and sunbathing by the lakeside.

The four models that complete the exhibition in a three-dimensional way embody typical buildings found in Romanian settings. The first represents the communist block of flats in the Mănăstur neighborhood of Cluj-Napoca, where the artist spent a significant part of his childhood. On top of this layout, there is a mosaic depicting the May 1st celebration on one side of the block's façade. The second model imitates the shapes of the former paintbrush factory that was converted into a cultural space, becoming an emblem of contemporary artistic movements in Cluj, even meanwhile it stopped functioning. The accompanying mosaic depicts a meal break. The third model, in the shape of an archaeological site, contains a detail from a Social Realist mosaic in Arad, from the wagon factory. In the last model, a church in ruins is represented, in the apse of which there is a mosaic with a sleeping worker.⁶

From my point of view, through this exhibition Șerban Savu demonstrated that painting has its well-defined place in the heterogeneous world of contemporary art. Our pavilion, made in the most classical manner, undoubtedly managed to shine, even when competing with contemporary artworks featuring audio, video or light art installations, so very modern innovations designed to catch one's eye. The visitors paid a lot of attention to our exhibition, meticulously analyzing the action involved in each work, an attitude that once again proves that Șerban Savu helps us see in an aesthetic light the images that evoke a dusty and monotonous past in the Romanian collective mindset.

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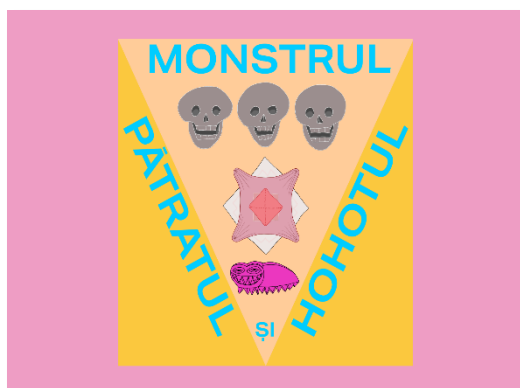
⁶ Daria Ghiu, "Arte frumoase. 23 martie 2024. Cu artiștii Șerban Savu și Ciprian Mureșan despre Ce este munca," *M-xcloud*, March 23, 2024, https://www.mixcloud.com/daria-ghiu/arte-frumoase-23-martie-2024-cu-arti%C8%99tii-%C8%99erban-savu-%C8%99i-ciprian-mure%C8%99an-despre-ce-este-munca/?fbclid=IwAR0B2o6hIqASVDSqxM0BAbOtRwFBper84CbpVJVVoGAlfDoOyO9GY0LjyKr4_aem_ASLLarr5pSj9oyY1UMfMm3PAIRTBjL_1HeZMgTmiWwi69RBX9zMl_JUmIbHcRK_4-SHQXHbjygAjogh3y1YS0Ug9z.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

***Monstrul, pătratul și hohotul*, Museum of Recent Art, Bucharest, 07.06.2024–31.01.2025, Curator Dan Popescu**



The exhibition *The Monster, the Square and the Laughter* is, in the words of its curator Dan Popescu, a temporary reconfiguration of the Museum of Recent Art collection of Romanian contemporary art—lasting from 06.2024 to 01.2025—but also a curatorial essay on its own. The theme is a strong one, laying the groundwork for a contemplative journey throughout the psyche

and thought process of contemporary Romania. Physically, each level of the building itself corresponds to a certain type of mood constructed entirely out of the artworks, their interaction with one another and their positioning in space. There are the “Black Cubes”, intermediary rooms situated between each level and painted entirely black, meant to convey a feeling of claustrophobia but also interconnectedness. Even though the levels themselves don’t have a strict theme, at times both humorous and solemn pieces hanging from the same wall, the atmosphere is intricately constructed to either pull you towards the dignified or towards the absurd. There are paintings, sculptures of all kinds, installations, readymades and video art.

As the title suggests, there are two major approaches to contemporary art in Romania: one is the humorous path, which is rooted in the interwar period, and the other is the sacred one, displaying Romanians’ complex relationship with

God and faith. The divine, here, can only be approached through the monster or the square (sacred geometry)—two sides of the same coin actually, as represented on the first level of the building. One of the highlights for me was certainly Marian Zidaru's (b. 1956) *Saint George*, which abruptly catches your attention as soon as you finish ascending the stairs thanks to its central placement and towering figure. This wooden sculpture, surrounded by paintings of the same nature, demands your full awareness and concentration. It's a swift motion, but frozen in time and space. Saint George, represented as the weapon and held up by light itself, is merely seconds away from slaying the dragon.

In the same room, once you look away from Saint George and turn around, you notice behind you a piece made from resin, EPS foam and cement. Carved into these solid and harsh materials are monstrous faces, or rather, as the title suggests, Masks which have no person behind to bear them. Expressionless figures are staring at you through cut-out eyes and, at times, mouths. Vlad Olariu (b. 1983), the artist, added very little color, and instead allowed the inorganic material to speak out through itself. There is sorrow depicted, amusement, suspicion, surprise, and even bewilderment, yet all these mean nothing but illusions of emotion.

Works such as *Judas' Dream* by Neculai Păduraru (b. 1946) and *Black Pieta* by Titi Ceară (b. 1957), both located in the same area, offer a moment of religious contemplation infused with a feeling of heaviness and solemnity. The first piece showcases a bound humanoid creature gazing into an extended body of itself, while the latter represents a mother's agony holding the lifeless body of her son through minimalist, androgynous and expressionless figures stuck in unnatural and tense positions. *Judas' Dream*, for me especially, felt absurd and on the brink of hilarity, yet as soon as I turned away from it, I felt a strange sorrow and guilt, emotions that accompanied me beyond the museum walls. It definitely left an impression.

There is also softness, pink bodies which seem to melt into one another and into the strident landscape behind them. Suzana Dan's (b. 1976) *L'amour c'est le cul* and *Sadness Is Looking at Me* offer us a reality outside of our grasp. The colors are saturated, and yet they remain gentle. This is a world far from natural, dream-like and irrational, but still desirable to most of us. The body itself becomes the main focus of these paintings with its pink skin and cotton candy-like texture, while the face is either turned away from us or completely missing from the composition.

For Romanians, life is a dark comedy, a view reflected across all forms of media: from literature, art and cinematography to reality TV shows, news and even politics. It's a coping mechanism developed to face the absurd reality we live in, and help us take ourselves a little less seriously at times. From a cardboard

Ceaușescu through various sexual organs to the sword of Stephen the Great made entirely out of Turkish delight, we see life as less intimidating and more indefinite.

This juxtaposition of humor and holiness can sometimes come off as overbearing, especially in parts where the transition is too harsh and unexpected. But perhaps that's the point of the entire exhibition: the constant switch between comedic relaxation and sacred tension, an illustration of the absurdity of Romanian society and, last but not least, the attempt at keeping you out of your comfort zone for as long as possible.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

**Geta Brătescu, Mircea Cantor, Alexandra Croitoru,
Ion Grigorescu, Cristi Pogăcean, and Arnulf Rainer:
In Their Own Image, PLASTIC, Cluj-Napoca,
19.09–10.11.2024**



Are you or are you not part of a specific circle? This is the first question the show poses when you enter the space, and your eyes fall on Mircea Cantor's 2006 photograph of a pile of white porcelain urinals heaped against an ordinary, industrial-looking fence. Do you get the reference? When it comes to contemporary art, *ceci n'est pas seulement un*

urinoir. Seemingly discarded, they mirror the fate of Duchamp's original submission of the *Fountain* (1917), which was treated as a crude joke and unceremoniously thrown out. At the same time, PLASTIC addresses a circle within a circle—if you are familiar with the history of contemporary art in Cluj, then you'll register the gallery's location on Einstein Street as a return of the slightly older kids on the old block, and *In Their Own Image*, in particular, feels like a door left open, through which you can overhear a long-standing conversation between palls. The works belong to the Mircea Pinte collection (an outstandingly rare treat); they were chosen by Norbert Costin (this might explain the predilection for photography) and Ciprian Mureșan (whose most recent curatorial project involved showcasing Șerban Savu's works at the Venice Biennale); the accompanying gallery text is shaped like a dialogue between the two. It all reads very *IYKYK* (in social media



speak), as it all ties back to Cluj's claim to international art scene fame—the Plan B Generation / the School of Cluj, both shifting and currently imperfect labels, but still holders of meaning. I am biased and thus unsure of how snobbish and hermetic this looks to a complete outsider, but the text itself is at least moderately accessible.

On the ground floor of a new building, the space is a respectable white cube, its crisp, uncluttered elegance suits the works well, and their display is clearly thought out. The reciprocal hanging of Ion Grigorescu's *The Neck: Self Portrait with Tutankhamun* (1975) and Arnulf Rainer's work stands out as particularly soothing. Both can be classified as interventions on photography – in Grigorescu's case, it falls within his expressionist exploration of his own body, narcissistic and self-mythologizing – here his throat is exposed and superimposed with the famous princely image of King Tut's gold and lapis lazuli mask. In the work titled *Charles Augustin Saint-Beuve* (1978), Rainer's ink gestures overwrite the French critic's portrait as an organic network. Essentially, we have two death masks facing each other in two mystical interpretations: the throat chakra is associated with self-expression, while the creative intrusion of an apparent doodle brings a further macabre quality to the disembodied head. In the first work, the dead, the historical is placed on top of the living, imbuing it with legitimacy, while in the second, the dead, the old is overcome by the new, by the lively, flowy lines. Thus, in the various tones of grey of the two pictures, there lies a whole narrative of acknowledging mortality and fighting it through art.

Also dealing with the idea of legacy, but this time in a decidedly political key, is another Romanian post-modern photography classic: Alexandra Croitoru's *Untitled (Prime Minister)* (2004). The ventriloquist-puppet interpretation of the power dynamics in the picture, as suggested by Norbert Costin, hits home and is still poignant 20 years later, especially since, as the show is on display, the Romanian electoral climate is terribly fraught. Except now, the handler behind the politician is a different kind of artist—a social media artisan, a PR guru, a wizard of the algorithm who wins votes for the mouthpiece candidate.

There are several themes connecting the works in the show, and they revolve around (self)portraiture and roles, around art about art and art about systems, as well as the negotiation of personal mythologies. In the case of Cristi Pogăcean's *2544* (2006), all of the above are contained. The different hats often worn by contemporary artists feature in this deadpan video showcasing the power dynamics of contractual obligations, fame, and mythmaking. The works that fit in least within the aforementioned themes are, however, Geta Brătescu's *Magnets* (1974–5). Conceptual proposals for monumental public pieces meant to disturb the urban fabric by drawing metals towards them, the pretense that the works in the show “can be considered self-portraits due to the magnetic

field produced by the artist's personality" is, at best flimsy, and corny at worst. This is not to detract from their intrinsic quality, but let's just say they are too abstract in an otherwise quite cynical show.

Ultimately, for a small show, of around ten or so works, *In Their Own Image* packs a ponderous punch. Maybe this is more strongly felt by those a little 'in the know', but I would say it makes for a great foray into Romanian contemporary art and its collectionism for any of those who appreciate the archaeology involved in uncovering layers of meaning and intention.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

***Unveiling the Traces of my Own Shadows,* Himera x Jecza Gallery, Timișoara, 28.08.2024–03.10.2025, Curator Moldovan Gabriela**



The exhibition titled *Unveiling the Traces of my Own Shadows* was opened on 28.08.2024, in Timișoara in the space of Himera Gallery in collaboration with Jecza Gallery. It follows an open call that resulted in the selection of ten artists, whose works were featured in this summer show. The exhibition harmoniously brings together different media, such as painting, ceramics and installation, the artists behind these works are Ana Maria Ștefan, Bandi Szidonia, Cristina Chirilă, Cristina

Dimuș, Diana Oană, Paul Darius Moldovan, Luana Cloșcă, Diana Popuț, Viktoriia Rozentsveih, Tania Șimonca, all under the careful curation of Gabriela Moldovan.

The linking element that coagulates the work of the artists, differing mostly in technique, is the idea of the “absent present”, a concept that originated from Sartre’s work *Being and Nothingness*, where the following phrase is mentioned, which would become the motto of the curatorial text: “The absent present is not merely an illusion or an effect of perceptual blindness, and materiality does not present the absolute truth”. In short, the exhibition itself creates a “portrait” of something that does not exist, the absence of the figurative creating an absent character, a metaphysical figure that challenges the viewer to go beyond the superficial barriers of reality and look around them for those aspects that can imprint the Self.

It is important to mention that this exhibition had as its starting point the rigorous process of selecting an appropriate title, with the curator emphasizing that the choice of a suggestive title had a significant impact on the entire creative process. It deliberately provided direction and coherence in the development of the theme and the reading of the works on display. She compared this process to that of an architect who systematically starts with the foundation of a structure and builds successively, with the ultimate goal of realizing a coherent and harmonious whole, in which each element integrates optimally into the whole. Thus, the name of the exhibition *Unveiling the traces of my own shadows* is relevant to the whole concept, referring to the idea of the rebirth of an almost mythical character, composed of several distinct fragments, this entity being captured by the use of the word "shadow". Further, the possessive pronoun alludes to the idea of individuality, through which each artist can find himself. In short, what is fundamental to this exhibition is the curator's incipient suggestion of where we should direct our perspective, that is, by finding the traces, that absent outline, that finds its contours in the human consciousness.

The exhibition space is industrial, but polished, deliberately left to remain so, the floor plan is trapezoidal, and the separation of the interior and exterior space is made through a stained-glass window. The scenographic element in this exhibition consists in the play of light, which is used to "separate" the works and give them a particular elegance. The refinement is also evident in the frames used for the paintings, made possible through the support of Rămăria.

One of the main challenges of this exhibition involves the different mediums of artistic expression and the initial difficulty of composing a conceptual map and answering how to bring together and balance such different works. However, it is precisely this variety that provides the pervasive dynamism in the space in which the exhibition took place.

Returning to the ten artists who have been selected there is no better way to illustrate how their work engages with the concept of the absent present than by quoting directly from the curator's text.: 'It (absent presence) is found in the assumed absence of the present figure, where the void is filled by geometric or vegetal motifs as in the series of works *Axis Mundi* signed by Ana Maria Ștefan, like the metaphor of the cactus by Szidonia Bandi. The void is also filled by the element of memory in the works of Tania Șimonca, Viktoriia Rozentsveih, and Cristina Dimuș. We see a timid trace of the figurative, a representation of human anxiety and alienation in the works of Cristina Chirilă, but the pinnacle of the representation of presence is seen in the "flight" of the characters identified in the works signed Luana Cloșcă, where the intense and fleeting cough is the outline of our mystical character. The magnetism rendered by Paul Moldovan through sculpture represents a force that is difficult for the eye to perceive, as he states or the phenomenon of perceptual blindness. The magnetic force manifests

itself as glue, water, and ashes of this recurring absence. Finally, the body of works is completed with the exploration of the phenomenology of absence, as Diana Popuț assumes in her works, the latter filling in the void that we feel as shadow throughout the exhibition.'

The exhibition succeeds in outlining its intended purpose—to challenge the viewer's imagination in the search for a 'presence' concealed within the works, a task made all the more difficult by its near-total absence, yet still possible by following the 'shadows' it casts throughout the exhibition path. In the end, I would consider the exhibition a successful one, clearly reflecting the dedication of the entire team—from the well-crafted and thoughtfully sustained curatorial text to the artworks and their inspiring arrangement. The challenges encountered along the way, mostly logistical in nature (as previously mentioned), were effectively addressed and, in fact, contributed to the unique character of space. Of course, the curator of the exhibition, Gabriela Moldovan, has a strong imprint on the whole exhibition, without which we would not be able to see the similarities and at the same time the uniqueness of each artist. She is a dedicated young art curator based in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, with a deep passion for scenography. Her work merges new media with traditional art to craft immersive aesthetic experiences through innovative scenography and production design. Gabriela is currently an independent curator and is also pursuing a PhD in Cinematography and Media. Professionally, she has curated several significant exhibitions that have been pivotal for her curatorial evolution and practice, including *Specular Interactions*, *Unearthed Echoes I*, *Looking Back*, *I Choose Future* and *Ceai în regim*. These projects have refined her skills in developing curatorial concepts, managing exhibition logistics, and engaging with audiences. Additionally, her research visits to Berlin and Paris have deepened her understanding of international art practices and broadened her curatorial perspectives. Currently she is working as a cultural manager assistant at Cluj Cultural Center, where she contributes to the production of cultural and artistic projects of The Academy of Change.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Ioana Olăhuț: *Fata docilă a lu' mama*, Meron Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 20.10–08.11.2023



A new exhibition space has opened in Cluj-Napoca, and it seems that its new appearance fits in very naturally. It came up in a junction place, specific to the new vibe of Cluj: at the café. And not just any cafe or coffee shop but at MERON. The old roastery Meron, but new in this form, on Horea street, nr. 5. It was to be expected that someone in Cluj would say at some point: “Well, while I sit here and drink my caffeinated ‘specialty’, I would very much like to find myself looking at something, but what? Ah yes, art!” and then Meron Gallery was made. In square meters, things are simple, half cafe—half art gallery. The design is semi-industrial, minimal but inviting, in which one visually interferes with metal, concrete, brick, level elevations, and chiaroscuro, in other words it appeals

to the art communities of Cluj, so it was only fitting that the gallery’s debut on the city’s cultural map was marked by a solo exhibition of the artist Ioana Olăhuț. As I expected, the literary-dramaturgic propensity of the artist is announced from the title, she has always been very inspired in “naming” cultural events: *Fata docilă a lu' mama* (*Mom’s Docile Little Girl*).

A personal and deeper title than you might be tempted to believe at first glance. Usually, I am not at all fond of psychological introspections to unravel the secrets of artworks, in this case linocuts, ceramics, and drawings, but this time the invitation is thrown out at the outset. It's about a girl and a mother, and the girl is docile and is mom's girl. A relationship as old as time and complicated even before that. Daughter and mother are two versions of the same being: woman. You are a daughter, then you are a mother, whether you have children or not. This frontal position with one's own mother into which life inevitably plunges us, transforms us, in the end, into mothers. Either into one's own mother as a mold in which we are placed willy-nilly, or into the mother who brings a daughter into the world, and the daughter who will end up being like the mother, who was like the grandmother in turn. I am not talking here about the much overused 'transgenerational trauma' but rather about this invisible and indestructible bond. There is no method or force that can break this bond that fulfills and destroys at the same time. Two identities that cannibalize each other through love or hate, in a cyclical current in which the two versions of a woman flicker like the flames of an eternal fire.

So here I am, giving in to the temptation to value the exhibition also in a psychoanalytic key. Being inevitably immersed in this duality, I looked at the works with increased empathy. A sincere exhibition, and like any sincere statement, you cannot argue with it, because what can you put in exchange for honesty? How can you argue with 30-something ceramic cocoons, wrapped in dough like souls, with stunted and inexpressive eyes, as first volumetric forms for first unexpressed or misunderstood desires? The whole visual theme of the exhibition develops around these seed loaves, seeds of doubt or hope, dough that has risen but not soaked, aspirations, frozen in the hard crust of terracotta. Backed with drawings glazed in black paste, black gesture on white canvas, struggles and repetitions to say as clearly, as densely, as acutely and rhythmically as possible, that the girl is docile, because she is her mother's, that if she were not docile, she certainly could not be her mother's.

Is a mother's soul a kind of Procrustes' bed for her own children?

All this was unsuspectingly going through my mind as I looked at the works in this new coffee-shop-gallery space. So, when you want to have a coffee in a coffee shop without knocking up your head on daily trepidations, you'll probably get more than a flat white at Meron Gallery. Just as it happened to me one fall Thursday, looking long and hard at artworks made as simply and as efficiently as hammering a nail into a wall.

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