



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation of

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on

**Eucharistic Imagery in the Late Gothic Wall Paintings of
Transylvania
(c. 1440-1530)**

will be held on

Tuesday, 30 June 2020, at 10:00 am

Examination Committee

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Members: Béla Zsolt Szakács, CEU, Department of Medieval Studies
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Justin Kroesen, University Museum of Bergen (present)

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Summary of the doctoral dissertation

Focusing on the Late Gothic wall painting decoration of Transylvanian churches, in this dissertation I explore to what extent and how images adorning liturgical spaces serving for mass celebration – the chancel area, sites of side altars, and chapels – were connected to the liturgy and cult of the Eucharist.

The analytical part of the dissertation is conceived as a series of case studies grouped into five thematic chapters focusing on different types of representations: the single Crucifixion, the Man of Sorrows, Veronica's veil, Passion cycles, and images of saints with sacramental allusions. In addition to an exploration of iconographic features articulating their Eucharistic meaning, visual strategies employed to engage the viewer, and compositional sources and analogies, wall painting compositions are analysed in the context of their placement within the church interior, in relation to other themes of the iconographic program and pieces of liturgical furnishing, as well as in the historical contexts of patronage and devotional practice, as far as they can be outlined based on available sources. The Catalogue part of the dissertation contains basic information on the fourteen wall painting ensembles under study, including their description, a discussion of their architectural context and dating, a compilation of relevant written sources, and a brief overview of earlier research.

While particular image types in the focus of each chapter could all be taken to refer to the body of Christ present in the sacrament, they display different patterns in their placement within the church interior, modes of representing the body of Christ and engaging the viewer, and potential meanings and associations.

The five surviving examples of single Crucifixions discussed in Chapter 1 show a remarkable iconographic variety and suggest the recurrence of this theme in the decoration of chancel walls or as the main image over an altar located in the nave or in a chapel. The analyses of Crucifixion scenes point to various visual strategies aimed at merging the boundaries between a biblical past and a liturgical present, and to a large variety of secondary figures associated with the Crucifixion in addition to participants described in the Gospel narratives. Both features

distinguish single representations of the Crucifixion within the material under study from Calvary scenes depicted as part of Passion cycles, which display less iconographic flexibility.

A study of surviving representations of the Man of Sorrows and the related image type of the *Notgottes* in Chapter 2 points to a frequent spatial association of these images with the altar and the sacrament niche, with representations of the Suffering Christ painted either directly above these structures or on a neighbouring wall section. Images of the Man of Sorrows – alive and atemporal, inviting the viewer to behold his wounds which he is displaying – present a different mode of representing the *Corpus Christi* than the Christ of the Crucifixion scenes or Passion cycles. The two different modes are sometimes contrasted within one ensemble through a juxtaposition of the Man of Sorrows with the Calvary (in the parish church in Sibiu) or a Passion cycle (in the Saint Michael's church in Cluj).

The act of display – this time by Saint Veronica or figures of angels – is also emphatic in depictions of Veronica's veil analysed in Chapter 3, with praying figures of identification sometimes providing an example for the viewer in the adoration of the Holy Face. The Veronica has been described in earlier research as a multivalent image; the analyses of case studies confirm its adaptability to various iconographic and functional contexts. Its recurring placement in a Eucharistic context – above the sacrament niche, or else in an association with the liturgy performed at the high altar –, its occasional formal resemblance to a host wafer, and the motif of angels clad in liturgical vestments appearing in some of the representations point to a conscious use of Veronica's veil as a Eucharistic theme in Transylvanian wall painting.

Passion cycles – placed typically on the northern wall, often in an association with the sacrament niche – were another recurring element of chancel decorations. While visual narratives of Christ's sacrifice in their entirety could have been seen as relevant to the mass celebrated in memory of the Passion, the examples analysed in Chapter 4 suggest – in line with the results of earlier

research on Passion cycles – that individual episodes differed in their potential to convey a Eucharistic meaning. The scenes of the Crucifixion and the Last Supper sometimes highlighted through their size and placement are at the same time the episodes most relevant to the mass sacrifice from a theological point of view. Representations of the Descent from the Cross and the Entombment centred on the helpless, tortured body of Christ stripped of his clothes and bleeding from his wounds also had an increased Eucharistic potential, their sacramental associations being sometimes underscored by specific iconographic solutions, as demonstrated in the case of the representations in Suseni and Mărtiniș, both known today from watercolour copies.

From among the representations of saints depicted on the chancel walls within the material under study, nine compositions from five churches were selected for examination in Chapter 5 based on their sacramental connotations. The analyses demonstrated two patterns in which figures of saints were associated with the Eucharist in their iconography. Single figures of saints could acquire Eucharistic attributes based on their vita (Saint Paul the Hermit, Boian), their intercessory powers related to the Sacrament (Saint Barbara, Sighișoara), through a reinterpretation of a model (Saint Valentine, Sibiu), or an association presently unaccounted for (Saint Fabian, Cluj). In addition, some representations of saintly martyrdoms – most markedly that of Achatius and the Ten Thousand Martyrs – carried the potential to evoke Christ's sacrifice on the cross through specific iconographic details. As opposed to the other image types discussed in the thesis, these representations were less suited to connote the Eucharistic body of Christ in themselves; their sacrificial meaning would have been activated primarily through a typological juxtaposition with a representation of Christ's sacrifice and their spatial association with the altar.

In line with the results of earlier studies on medieval wall paintings in a liturgical context, the analysed examples confirm an evident interconnection between the function of spaces dedicated to mass celebration and the iconography of their wall painting decoration. Without reducing them to simple illustrations of

liturgical texts or theological concepts, the analyses suggest that representations comprising the visual environment of the Eucharistic liturgy often paralleled through pictorial means the words of the celebrant, or reflected essential ideas connected to the mass and salvation. In particular, it appears that wall paintings were well suited to represent concepts which, while evident theological truths and expressed in different prayers of the mass, were less palpable throughout the ritual, such as the true essence of the Eucharist as the body and blood of Christ, imperceptible under the species of the bread and wine, the identity between the sacrifice of Golgotha and that of the altar, or the connection of the earthly and the heavenly spheres throughout the Eucharistic ritual. Besides contributing to the structuring of liturgical space, distinguishing spaces serving for mass celebration, wall painting representations of the *Corpus Christi* conceived to resonate with the Eucharistic liturgy as a whole, or with its specific moments, were presumably a defining feature enhancing the experience of the mass.

The dissertation is a contribution to the study of Late Gothic wall paintings in Transylvania through their examination in the context of the ritual which was the primary function of the churches and chapels they decorated, and also to research on the visual culture of the Eucharistic cult and liturgy through the inclusion of lesser-known new material into its study. In addition to confirming connections between wall paintings adorning liturgical spaces serving for mass celebration and the ritual performed here, the research has yielded new insights regarding the potential of the various representation types to convey a Eucharistic meaning, the various ways wall painting was employed to visually enhance the immediate or broader environment of the altar, interconnections within the iconographic programs and patterns of decorating the church interior, and contributed to a mapping of the Central European connections of Transylvanian artistic phenomena.

Curriculum vitae

Education

- 2013– PhD in Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
- 2011–2013 MA in Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, with distinction
- 2008–2011 BA in Art History, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Scholarships and awards

- 2018/2019 DAAD Research Mobility Grant at Heidelberg University (ten days)
- 2017/2018 DAAD Scholarship at the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich (six months)
- 2016/2017 CEU Doctoral Research Grant at Heidelberg University (three months)
- 2016/2017 Award for Advanced Doctoral Students, CEU
- 2015/2016 OeAD Scholarship at the Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit in Krems (four months)

Conference papers relevant to the dissertation

- “Megjegyzések a medgyesi ún. Mária-torony kápolnájának falképeihez” [Observations on the Wall Paintings in the Chapel of the so-called Marienurm in Medias]. *A Magyar Tudomány Napja Erdélyben, 18. fórum – Művészettörténet szekció* [The Day of Hungarian Science in Transylvania, 18th Forum – Art history section], Cluj-Napoca (Romania), November 2019.
- “Artistic exchange and the use of models in late medieval wall painting. Case studies from Transylvanian towns.” *Urban Societies in Border Zones*, CEU, Budapest, October 2019.
- “A kolozsvári Szent Mihály-templom déli toronyaljának falképei: utóélet és kutatástörténet” [The Mural Paintings in the Southern Tower Base of the Saint Michael’s Church in Cluj: Afterlife and Research History]. *A középkor hagyatéka: Fejezetek a középkori emlékek utóéletéből és recepciótörténetéből* [Medieval Heritage: on the Afterlife and Reception History of Medieval Monuments], Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, June 2019.

- “A Veronika kendője mint eucharisztikus képtéma erdélyi falképeken” [Veronica’s Veil as a Eucharistic Theme in Transylvanian Wall Paintings]. *Mű és megrendelő. Kutatások a középkori művészet és fogadtatása köréből*. [The Artwork and its Comissioner. Research on Medieval Art and its Reception], Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, June 2018.
- “Ikonográfiai problémák erdélyi késő gótikus falképeken” [Iconographic Problems in Transylvanian Late Gothic Wall Paintings]. *A Magyar Tudomány Napja Erdélyben, 16. fórum – Művészettörténet szekció*. [The Day of Hungarian Science in Transylvania, 16th Forum – Art history section], Cluj-Napoca (Romania), December 2017.
- “Fájdalmas Krisztus-ábrázolások erdélyi késő gótikus falképeken” [Representations of the Vir Dolorum in Transylvanian Late Gothic Wall Paintings]. *Fiatal Művészettörténészek VI. Konferenciája* [6th Conference of Young Art Historians], Esztergom, October 2017.
- “Reprezentări hagiografice cu sens euharistic în bisericile parohiale din Transilvania (sec. XV)” [Hagiographical Representations with Eucharistic Meaning in Transylvanian Parish Churches (15th c.)]. *The Medieval Parish as a Place of Convergence: Institution, Community, Cult and Monument. A Workshop on the Perspectives of Research on the Central-Eastern European Region*, Romanian Academy – Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca (Romania), October 2017.
- “Eucharisztikus motívumok szentek ábrázolásain az erdélyi késő gótikus falképfestészetben” [Eucharistic Motifs in the Representations of Saints in the Late Gothic Wall Painting of Transylvania] *Muralia. Kutatások a középkori falképfestészet köréből* [Muralia. Research on Medieval Wall Painting], Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, June 2017.
- “From Copying to Adaptation. The Uses of Prints in Transylvanian Wall Paintings from the Late Gothic Period (c. 1450-1520).” *Supposed Models, Identified Models: Their Uses in Gothic Art*, University of Geneva, November 2016.
- “Illuzionisztikus építészeti elemek a késő gótikus falképfestészetben. Erdélyi példák és közép-európai párhuzamok” [Illusionistic Architecture in Late Gothic Wall Paintings. Examples from Transylvania and Central European Analogies]. *Monument Protection in Transylvania VII*, Sovata (Romania), April 2016.
- “Decorating the Sanctuary. The Iconography, Function and Reception of Eucharistic Imagery in the Late Gothic Wall Paintings of Transylvania.” *21st Annual Medieval Postgraduate Student Colloquium: The Medieval Viewer*, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, February 2016.

“Eucharisztikus motívumok erdélyi késő gótikus falképeken” [Eucharistic Imagery in the Late Gothic Wall Paintings of Transylvania]. *Fiatal Művészettörténészek V. Konferenciája* [5th Conference of Young Art Historians], Cluj-Napoca (Romania), October 2015.

Publications relevant to the dissertation

“From Copying to Adaptation. The Uses of Prints in Transylvanian Wall Paintings from the Late Gothic Period (c. 1450–1520).” In *Les modèles dans l’art du Moyen Âge (XIIe-XVe siècles). Models in the Art of the Middle Ages (12th-15th Centuries)*. ed. Laurence Terrier Aliferis and Denise Borlée, 43–53. Turnhout: Brepols, 2018.

“Eucharistic References in the Representations of Saints: A Case Study of Late Gothic Wall Paintings in Transylvania.” *Acta Historiae Artium* (2017): 85–113.

“Eucharisztikus motívumok erdélyi késő gótikus falképeken” [Eucharistic Imagery in the Late Gothic Wall Paintings of Transylvania] In *Képváltás. Tanulmányok a Fiatal Művészettörténészek V. Konferenciájának előadásaiából* [Proceedings of the 5th Conference of Young Art Historians], ed. Klára P. Kovács and Emese Pál, 7–24. Kolozsvár: Entz Géza Művelődéstörténeti Alapítvány – Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2017.