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REGNUM HUNGARIAE – REGNUM MARIANUM

by GÁBOR TÜSKÉS

In Hungary, like in many other countries of Europe, the figure of the Virgin Mary served as a basis of a complex cultural model and inspired several branches of arts for a long time.¹ On many occasions she came forward as an agent influencing history and even today she counts as a living force in forming tradition. The richness of the content elements and forms of her cult leaves far behind the worship of all other saints.

The first traces of Mary's cult showed up in the first decades of the 11th century, not long after the establishment of the Hungarian kingdom. Gerard, a Benedictine monk coming from Venice to Hungary in 1023, erected an altar dedicated to Mary and he also named her the patron saint of the monastery he founded as the bishop of Csanád. The feast of the Assumption had already been celebrated in king Saint Stephen's time (1000–1038), and in 1092, the Council of Szabolcs included two other feasts among public holidays, Purificatio and Nativitas. In liturgical manuals of the 11th and 12th century, first of all in the Codex Pray and the Codex of Hahót, there are several masses, invocations, prefaces, hymns, sequences, and offices in honour of the Virgin. The conception that the king offered the country into Mary's protection before his death was

¹ For the history of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Hungary is still indispensable A. F. Balogh, *Beatissima Virgo Maria Mater Dei, qua Regina et Patrona Hungariorum*, Agriae, 1872. – All references to the sources and to the special literature referred in the present paper are given G. Tüskés – É. Knapp, "Marianische Landespatrone in Europa unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Ungarns", *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 25 (2002), 77-102. – For the history and iconography of the Máriapócs icon see the papers in the following conference volume *Máriapócs 1696 / Nyíregyháza 1996: Történelmi konferencia a máriapócsi Istenszülő-ikon első könnyezésének 300. évfordulójára 1996. november 4-6*, (ed. by Gy. Janka), Nyíregyháza 1996. – For further details and bibliography see also the entries "Máriapócs" and "Ungarn" in *Marienlexikon*, ed. by R. Bäumer – L. Scheffczyk, St. Ottilien, 1992, vol. 4, 306-307, 1994, vol. 6, 532-542.

laid down first in the legends of Saint Stephen, which were written at the end of the 11th and at the beginning of the 12th century. Hereinafter, the history of the Hungarian cult of Mary was fundamentally determined by this idea.

In the last quarter of the 12th century, during the reign of Béla III (who had been grown up in the Court of Byzantium), there appeared two feasts of Mary that were of eastern origin (*Praesentatio Mariae* and *Conceptio Mariae*). Béla III was also the first king to stamp the picture of the Blessed Virgin on coins. Hungarian poetry on Mary starts with the sequence *Mira mater extitisti* standing in the Codex Pray (before 1210) and also with *Ómagyar Mária-siralom* (Old Hungarian Lament of Mary), which has been preserved in the so-called Codex of Leuven (ca 1260). This latest, which is an elegant, free-flowing translation of the sequence *Planctus ante nescia*, is the very first Hungarian poem that we know of. The first translations of medieval liturgical texts that glorify Mary are known from the second half of the 15th and first half of the 16th century. *Sermones Quinqueecclesienses*, a collection of sermons that was compiled by Dominican monks in the 13th century, contains in all eighteen sermons on the Holy Virgin. *Stellarium Coronae B. V.*, the collection of sermons of Pelbárt Temesvári was first published in Strasbourg, in 1496. The first sermons and hymns about Mary in Hungarian have subsisted from the first half of the 16th century.

The first relic of art to be highlighted is the coronation cloak prepared in 1031. In its complex iconographical program, the praying Mary (*Maria orans*) can be seen in the company of the victorious Christ. The Blessed Virgin had a permanent place in the picture cycles depicting the life of Christ. Good examples of this are the 12th century stone relieves decorating the southern entrance of the crypt in the Pécs cathedral. In the western portal of the archiepiscopal cathedral of Esztergom (*Porta speciosa*, ca 1190), the relief once filling the spandrel is the first representation of the offering of the country by Saint Stephen to the Virgin. The meaning of the scene is obvious from the Latin inscription of the scrolls held by the king and the Virgin: "Holy Virgin, please accept the reign over my countries" – "I accept the custody of your countries for the yours, if Adalbert will be the patron saint, as you ask it". The popular types of the 14th to the 16th-century iconography of the Blessed Virgin are the coronation of Mary, the Virgin of Mercy (the so called *Schutzmantelmadonna*), the Woman dressed in the Sun (*Mulier amicta Sole*), and the Immaculate Virgin triumphing over evil. The latest one is often the symbol of the fight against heretics and the Turk.

Offering a country into Mary's protection is, of course, not a special Hungarian feature. The concept of Mary as the patron saint of Hungary means a local adaptation of an idea known in several European countries from the 11th century onwards, e.g. as *Patrona Galliae*, *Patrona Bavariae*, *Patrona Poloniae*. Mary's patronage over huge territories is in close connection with the concept of Mary triumphing in fighting. In all these places Mary is the source and expression of the legal and political unity of a given community. Beginning with the 13th century, the *Patrona Hungariae* (Patroness

of Hungary) motif appears in chronicles and diplomas, and it became internationally known from the 14th century onwards. The motif played an important role in the royal representation of the Anjous of Naples who got to the throne of Hungary in 1308. The symbolic terminology in humanist chronicles—first of all of Antonio Bonfini—intensified the idea, which often appeared also in art and in religious literature. The idea of *Patrona Hungariae* was combined with new motifs, first of all with the collective cult of the holy kings of Hungary, Stephen, Ladislas, and Emeric, and it had a growing number of adaptations in different genres.

The reason for this, above all, is that the concept proved to be thoroughly usable in re-Romanization efforts, and it could be integrated with the new self-interpretation of the country that was formed in the fighting against the Turk. In the 16th century Mary became the symbol of Counter-Reformation and of the struggle against the Turk. In confessional debates the idea of *Patrona Hungariae* was combined with a notion according to which Protestantism was responsible for the disintegration of the country's territorial and confessional unity. Jesuits were the most determined propagators of this concept. While they repeatedly connected it with re-Romanization and liberation from Turk domination, the idea was transformed step by step into a productive literary and pictorial topos. Naturally, it was strongly criticized by protestant authors, who regarded the whole idea as a mere superstition.

In the church historiography of Jesuits, besides the idea of *Patrona Hungariae*, there emerged the notion "Hungary is Mary's country" in the first half of the 17th century. From that time on, this notion has been continuously presented in Catholic religious literature, and it also played an important role in the political and ideological propaganda of the period. This notion of *Regnum Marianum* infiltrated into the definition of history and nation, and it contributed to the deepening of the confessional identity of Catholics. Its spread and firm establishment was promoted by the collective desolation and feeling of threat, an important component of the country's self-interpretation that underwent a substantial transformation during the Turkish occupation. The idea of *Regnum Marianum*—together with other flourishing literary topoi of the nation's doom, like e.g. *querela Hungariae* and *propugnaculum Christianitatis*—expressed and compensated this constant feeling of threat, and meanwhile, it strengthened the impression of a celestial protection. This notion had not come to an end even with the expelling of the Turk; it was further nourished by the absolutistic government of the Hapsburgs and also by the country's still dependent position.

The worship of the Virgin and the stimulation of pilgrimages became effective means of the re-Romanization efforts. In consequence of the Turkish conquest and of the Reformation, the prevalent majority of medieval places of pilgrimage were destroyed. After the liberation of Buda in 1686, new places of pilgrimage were mushrooming. Their number may be put at approximately a hundred and forty in the 17th and 18th century. The majority of them came into being in the western and northern

part of the country. Catholic patrons and several religious orders (above all, Franciscans, Paulines, and Jesuits) played a prominent role in the initiation and maintenance of cults. In a few instances the support of the military also appears. In most cases, a painted image or a wooden statue of the Holy Virgin was in the focus of pilgrimages. Several copies of different types of cultic images from Ireland, Italy, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, and Bulgaria reached the country (e.g. from Genazzano, Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, Passau, Czestochowa). However, there are also many examples of the export of the images.

A diversified corpus of legends developed around shrines and devotional objects. In the 17th century, the weeping of Mary's images is a frequent motif in the legends that recount the origin and the history of devotional objects. The so-called weeping-miracles and their narratives provided an important ideological support for re-Romanization and for the fight against the Turk. A few of them meant an important basis for places of pilgrimage to come into being; some of them are still functioning today. Weeping was often connected with some kind of tragic military event.

In most instances, a regional or a local sphere of influence developed around shrines. Only a few places had an international influence that reached beyond the frontier. The most widely visited foreign shrine was Mariazell, in Austria.

Places of pilgrimage and devotional objects were important ideological factors in the fight against the Turk. The Loreto-cult spread primarily to dynastic inspiration in the regions bordering the territories of the Ottoman Empire, and after the expulsion of the Turk, several types of Mary's devotional pictures became an anti-Turkish symbol. Hapsburg emperors regularly showed up in bigger places of pilgrimage in time of important military actions and events concerning the government of the country. This fact shows the significance of these places in the legitimizing efforts of the monarch. The re-Romanization function of pilgrimages came across with different intensity and with major differences in time and place.

The devotional picture of Máriapócs and the cult that developed around it illustrates what has been said so far. The place is one of the most important places of pilgrimage of the Greek Catholic Church in Hungary, and the only one of documented international reputation in Europe. In the 17th century, it lay in the estate of the Báthory family, in the northern east part of the country, in the zone where the three parts of Hungary adjoined (namely the occupied territories, the royal part, and Transylvania). The inhabitants of the area lived under permanent military threat because of the Turkish conquest. After 1685, when the Thököly-uprising against the Hapsburgs was driven back, the imperial army was commanded there. Supporting the military made great demands on the inhabitants (who were anyway extremely poor) and partly compelled them to migrate. An important military event of 1696 was a failure to relieve the not-so-far town of Temesvár (now: Timișoara, Rumania) by imperial forces from Turkish occupation.

From an ecclesiastical point of view, the region was part of the Roman Catholic bishopric of Eger and that of the Uniate bishopric of Munkács, but the Calvinists dominated the confessional scene. A permanent disorder was symptomatic of the episcopal nominations in the last third of the 17th century. The real carrying out of the Union of the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church of 1646 broke down, the religious and moral life of the clergy and of the people sank very low. Being a village of diverse confessions, the settlement of Pócs also had an independent Calvinist congregation.

In Pócs, the local judge, according to his vow, got the younger brother of the local parson to make the icon of Mary for his liberation from Turkish captivity. The image was kept in the Uniate wooden church of the village. Between the 4th of November and 8th of December of 1696, residents saw the image weeping for several times. Immediately a conflict had aroused between the Uniate parish-priest of Pócs and the Roman Catholic parson of the neighbouring city, Kálló, for the possession of the picture. The latter one approached the archbishop of Esztergom and the bishop of Eger with the request to place the image in his own church, against which the parish-priest of Pócs naturally protested. The bishop of Eger ordered an investigation of the events. Altogether 36 witnesses were asked, among them four Calvinists. According to the record of evidence, no witness doubted the authenticity of weeping. Meanwhile Count Corbelli Lieutenant General, the commanding officer of an imperial unit stationed nearby, investigated the case as well, sent a report with the result to Emperor Leopold I, and sent a replica of the image to Empress Eleonore. Three years before the miraculous events at Pócs, in return to the liberation of Vienna and Hungary from the Turkish occupation, Leopold I offered Hungary into Mary's protection again, alluding to, or, so to say renewing the legendary offering of the country by king Saint Stephen.

Till March of the next year, the image had a constant military custody in the church of Pócs. Then it was taken over to the Roman Catholic Church of Kálló, from where it was carried further on to Vienna on the Emperor's command, after a few months trip all over the country. The image arrived in Vienna on the 4th of July 1697, where the Empress had it richly decorated. The inhabitants of Vienna were paying constant public veneration to it, and the image was being carried on from one church to the other. Sermons were delivered and also printed in honour of the image. Finally, on the 1st of December it was placed on the main altar of Saint Stephen's cathedral. Today it can be seen in a silver frame, under a Gothic canopy, on the first side-altar, right of the portal. After the battle of Zenta (11th September, 1697), which was of major military importance, the image was strongly associated with the triumph over the Turk. Soon it became not only the first and probably most venerated cultic object of Vienna, but it also became the imperial symbol of the fight against the Turk.

Carrying the image over to Vienna and raising the cult to an imperial level shows clearly how the cult of Mary was little by little predominated by dynastic interests. The

very same step prevented the image from becoming a national symbol. After the expelling of the Turk the image became associated with the restoration of the country's territorial unity, with the idea of uniting Hungary and Transylvania. This is proved by the joint representations of the sacred images of Pócs and Kolozsvár-Clausenburg (now: Cluj, Rumania) that are set in an allegoric composition.

In 1701, Leopold I handed out a supporting letter to a representative of the community of Pócs, in which he allowed to collect donations on behalf of the renovation of the church in the village and also asked for the assistance of the authorities. The church was soon renovated. In 1707, the bishop of Eger had a copy made from the prototype kept in Vienna, and placed it in the church of Pócs. In a few years time, between the 1st and 8th of August in 1715, the copy was weeping as well. After an investigation the bishop of Eger permitted public veneration, and pilgrimages began.

In 1731, the monks of the order of Saint Basil the Great became the custodians of the place. Then the foundation stone of the present-day church was put down, consecrated in honour of the archangel Saint Michael. The building of the church and of the monastery was completed in 1756. In 1905, the image was weeping again, which can be associated with the role of the place in the introduction of the Hungarian liturgy and the fight for the establishment of an independent Uniate diocese. Till 1946, the image was hanging above the royal door of the iconostasis, thereafter it was removed to the side-altar on the left, where it can be seen today. From 1950 onwards, secular priests were taking care of the place, but today the basilites are performing the task again.

Till 1920, Máriapócs played an important role in the notion of confessional approach and in the integration of nationalities. Besides the Hungarian, also Slovakian, Ruthenian, Polish, Rumanian, and German pilgrims; besides the Uniates, also the Roman Catholics, the Greeks and the Protestants visited the church especially from the Upper-Tisza region, Northern Transylvania and Galicia. The church regularly received papal indulgences. In the 19th and 20th century, the number of pilgrims often reached the quantity of thirty thousand persons on major feasts dedicated to Mary. The two major patron feasts are the Assumption and the Birth of Mary. The wide spread of the cult is shown by Hungarian and foreign copies of the image (among them Austrian, German, Swiss, and Italian ones), a part of which became the target of independent pilgrimages likewise.

From the folk customs cultivated by the pilgrims the following ones are worth mentioning: choosing a spouse during the pilgrimage; placing votive offerings near the picture; and the so-called baptizing of those visiting the place for the first time. Several copperplate devotional pictures (*kleine Andachtsbilder*) were engraved both from the prototype in Vienna and also from its copy in Pócs. The iconography of these representations is extremely varied. The history and the material remains of the pilgrimages and of the shrine are exhibited in a museum established a few years ago.

Considering the significance of the place, Pope Pius XII raised the church to a rank of basilica minor. On his “grand tour” to Hungary in 1991, Pope John Paul II visited the church and celebrated a mass in Byzantine ritual with some ten thousand pilgrims present.

The iconostasis was made between 1785 and 1788, but the original icons were changed to new ones in the second half of the 19th century. The main altar was carved of red marble in the middle of the 18th century. The elaborate carvings of the two side-altars and of the pulpit deserve particular attention. The altar containing the devotional image was built in 1943–1944 together with the two steps that make advancing possible. The frescos were painted in 1946, for the 250th anniversary of the weeping, and the glass windows illustrating the history of the place were made in 1947.

The eponym of the prototype of the icon is the most important Byzantine representation of Mary, the so-called *Hodegetria* (Guide). It was originally kept in the monastery of Hodegon in Constantinople and for centuries it was venerated as the palladium of the empire. The Mother of God points at the infant Jesus with her right, who is a little turning towards Mary, and gives a blessing with his right. In his left, he is holding a stylized flower. The icon has several versions with the same iconography that are known in the region of the Eastern Carpathians. It directly joins with the Post-Byzantine, mainly Greek iconographic type, the so-called *Rhodon Amaranton* (unfading rose or flower). In this, the Mother of God appears as a celestial queen, wearing usually a crown on her head, holding a rosebud in her right, while there is a sceptre and a blossoming twig in her left, which is also embracing the infant Jesus. Examples of this type outside the Eastern Carpathians appeared in the second half of the 17th century and became common in the first half of 18th century on the basis of the activity of Greek icon painters. They are also known in Serbian and Bulgarian icon painting.

The rose refers to the 1st verse in the 3rd strophe of the *Acathistus*-hymn: “Hail, O Tendril whose Bud shall not wilt! Hail, O Soil whose Fruit shall not perish!” A similar poetic figure is to be found in the 1st verse of strophe 7. It is probable that a literary source of the icon of Pócs (painted in remembrance of a liberation from Turkish captivity) is the *Acathistus*-hymn, in which strophe 7 mentioning the rose praises Mary also as the liberator of the imprisoned. On the other hand, composed after The Song of Songs (2,1) the motif of the flower hold by Jesus or by the Virgin appears in late Gothic and early Renaissance panel painting in Italy, and in the Litany of Loreto as well. That is why the iconography of the original picture of Pócs serves as a good example for the literary, spiritual and artistic interrelations of the region that connects the East and the West.

All this shows that Máriapócs is not a simple place of pilgrimage, but also a living symbol of the Hungarian Catholic reorganization, of confessional unity, of liberating warfare against the Turk and also an embodiment of the concept of *Regnum Mari-*

anum. For three hundred years it functioned as one of the most important shrines and as a crossroad of various cultures in the Carpathian Basin. For a long time it influenced the religious life and the state representations in one of the power centres in contemporary Europe and it still keeps carrying on the impact of early modern Hungarian history.

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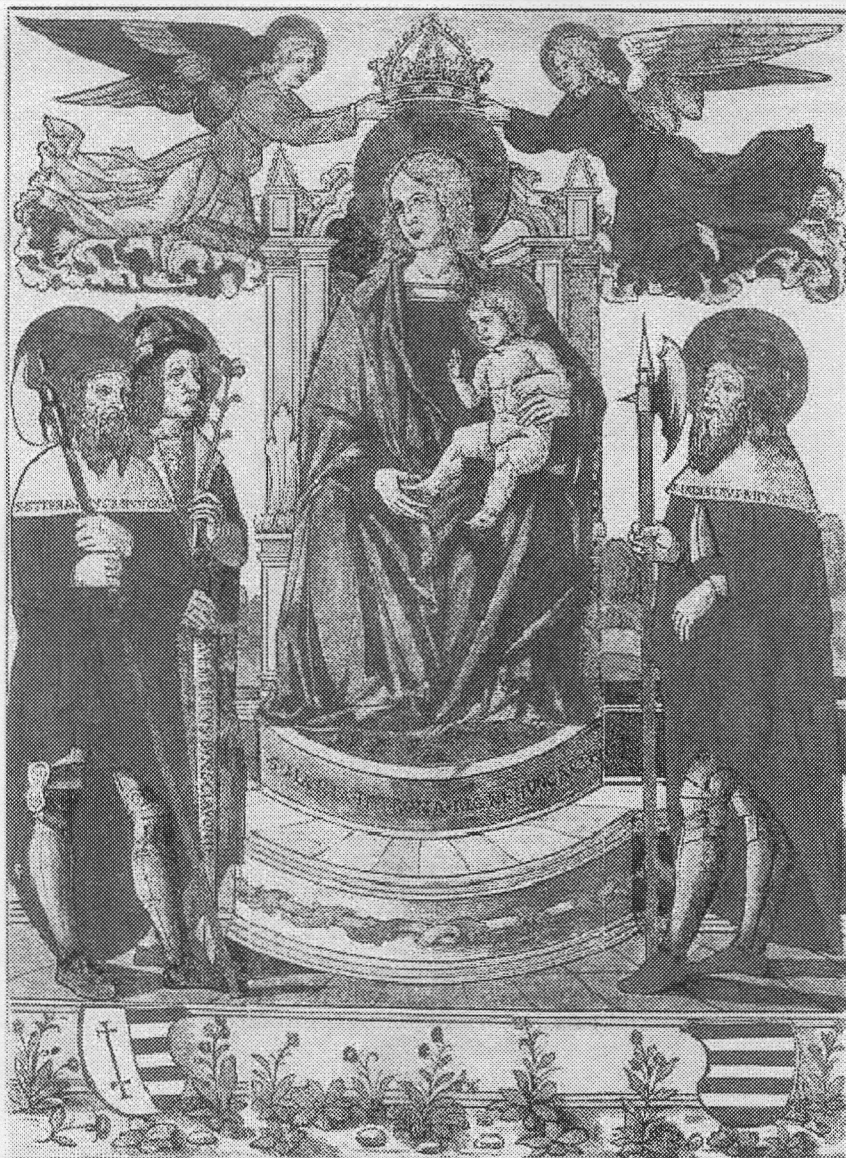
III. 1. St Gerard and king St Stephen, Hungarian Anjou legendary, 14th century



Ill. 2. The Woman dressed in the Sun, Pelbárt of Temesvár: Stellarium, Augsburg, 1502



III. 3. The “Madonna Báthory” from Nyírbátor, 1526



III. 4. Patrona Hungariae with St Stephen, St Ladislav, and prince St Emeric, Missale Kutassy, Venice, 1511



III. 5. The icon of Máriapócs, Vienna, 1675